

# **“IN THE MOOD”**

## **A HISTORY**



**Dennis M. Spragg**

**Updated March 2025**

## **“The Anthem of the Big Band Era”**

The origin of “In the Mood” appears to include several earlier works from which the tune was, in part, inspired. Once the music was composed, it remained a “work in progress” leading up to and following the recording by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra.

The first indication of anything with elements resembling what would become “In the Mood” was a tune titled “Clarinet Getaway” recorded by the Jimmy O’Bryant Washboard Wonders in 1925 for Paramount Records. This is matrix number P-2148 and was issued as Paramount 12287. It was paired with a tune titled “Back Alley Rub”. Jimmy O’Bryant was an Arkansas bandleader. This recording was made by a four-piece band, including O’Bryant playing clarinet, accompanied by a piano, cornet, and washboard player. Following O’Bryant, similar themes were evident in the Wingy Manone recording of “Tar Paper Stomp”. Manone’s recording is considered the genesis of “In the Mood” by many jazz historians. The recording is by Barbeque Joe and his Hot Dogs, the name under which Manone recorded at the time. The group was otherwise known as Wingy Manone and his Orchestra. “Tar Paper Stomp” was recorded August 28, 1930, for the Champion label (which was acquired by Decca in 1935). Reissues credit the record to Wingy Manone and his Orchestra. It is matrix number G16951 and was issued as Champion 16153. The tune was paired with “Tin Roof Blues,” recorded September 19, 1930.

Fletcher Henderson recorded elements of the “riff” heard in “Tar Paper Stomp” as “Hot and Anxious” for Columbia on March 19, 1931. This is matrix W 151443-1 and was issued as Columbia 2449D. Fletcher Henderson led the most popular African-American orchestra of the 1920s and early 1930s. “Hot and Anxious” was composed and arranged by Fletcher Henderson’s brother Horace Henderson. Don Redman and his Orchestra would also record “Hot and Anxious” for Brunswick on June 28, 1932. This is matrix B 12006-A, and was issued as Brunswick 6368. (Redman had played saxophone for Fletcher Henderson). There is “scat” singing to be heard in the Redman piece, but no lyrics per se.

Saxophone player Joe Garland wrote arrangements and played in the saxophone section for the Mills Blue Rhythm Band. This organization was led by Lucky Millinder and financed by Irving Mills. Garland composed and arranged a tune that he titled “There’s Rhythm In Harlem” for this band, which also included J. C. Higginbotham, trombone; Henry “Red” Allen, trumpet, and Edgar Hayes, piano. The Garland chart was recorded on July 9, 1935, for Columbia. It is matrix number CO 17797-1 and was issued as Columbia 3071D. The flip side of the record is “Harlem Heat,” recorded July 2, 1935.

When Edgar Hayes formed his band, Garland went with him. He composed and arranged the work that is essentially known as "In the Mood". Edgar Hayes and his Orchestra recorded the Garland chart for Decca Records on February 17, 1938. It is matrix number 63297-A, and was released as Decca 1882-B. The flip side of the record is "Star Dust", recorded at the same session. Before the Hayes' recording, only brief glimpses of the "riff" which would become familiar with "In the Mood" can be heard in the recordings. The Hayes recording is the first completely recognizable version of the future popular tune. Hayes performed it as an instrumental jazz composition. On March 16, 1938, Joe Marsala and his Chicagoans entered the scene with a recording titled "Hot String Beans," which featured a young Buddy Rich on drums. Although played at a much slower tempo, this tune bears a resemblance to Joe Garland's "In the Mood" and a future adaptation by Artie Shaw and Jerry Gray (see following). This is matrix number M781 and was issued as Vocalion 4168. At the time of the Hayes recording, Lyricist Andy Razaf added lyrics, a common practice of the time. Razaf was a protégé of Thomas "Fats" Waller, who wrote the lyrics for such Waller hits as "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Honeysuckle Rose". Joe Garland copyrighted "In the Mood" in June 1938.

The tune languished.

Joe Garland offered to sell "In the Mood" to white bandleaders.

Artie Shaw purchased the composition in November 1938. Shaw initially chose to handle it as a lengthy, six-minute instrumental arrangement, which was worked out by his then-arranger, Jerry Gray (also known as Generoso Graziano). The Shaw version was a much slower tempo than the forthcoming Miller adaptation. Shaw broadcast the chart several times over NBC remotes and the Old Gold "Melody and Madness" program, to a lukewarm audience reception. However, Shaw would shorten the piece and speed up the tempo after several performances. He did not record it. When Shaw quit and departed for Mexico in November 1939, Gray, ironically, joined Glenn Miller. Meanwhile, Wingy Manone went into the RCA studios on April 26, 1939, to record for Bluebird an essentially updated version of "Tar Paper Stomp". The tune was titled "Jumpy Nerves". It is matrix number BS-0036537-1 and was issued as B-10289. Glenn Miller purchased the composition in June 1939. He tasked arranger Eddie Durham to work it out with him. Durham was primarily employed by Jimmie Lunceford. Miller and Lunceford had worked out an agreement by which Durham was loaned to Miller, which helped Durham financially and Miller immeasurably. Durham penned most of the up-tempo, jazz-swing charts that propelled Miller to popularity at the Meadowbrook Ballroom in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, and the Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle, New York, as well as over NBC broadcasts. In the end, Miller, Durham, and Miller's pianist/part-time writer J. C. "Mac" MacGregor ended up editing "In the Mood" as a sort of committee. They trimmed the chart down to a four-and-a-half-minute instrumental broadcast performance length and a three-minute recording session length to fit one side of a 78 rpm record.

Neither Shaw nor Miller used the Andy Razaf lyrics.



Eddie Durham

Miller first broadcast "In the Mood" on a July 26, 1939 sustaining remote broadcast over NBC's Blue Network from the Glen Island Casino. This was the complete four and a half minute treatment of the tune. Miller performed it at a faster dancing pace, in keeping with the original tempo of the 1938 Hayes treatment, for jitterbugs. With added flourishes in the opening and false endings at the close, the tune became an immediate favorite among dancers at the Glen Island Casino and listeners of the radio broadcasts.

Miller recorded "In the Mood" for the RCA Bluebird label on August 1, 1939, at RCA Victor Studio #2, New York. It is matrix number BS-038170-1 and was issued as Bluebird B-10416, paired with "I Want to Be Happy," recorded at the same session.



Glenn Miller and Billy May, "In The Mood", Cafe Rouge, Hotel Pennsylvania, New York, 1941

"In the Mood" became score 248 in the Miller Library, and the Miller Orchestration was published. The tune would eventually be broadcast on 62 occasions by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra on their CBS commercial program "Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade", "Coca Cola Spotlight Bands" (Mutual and the Blue Network) and remote broadcasts for NBC and Mutual between 1939 and when Miller disbanded to join the Army in September 1942. Miller would take "In the Mood" with him and regularly perform it at live concerts with his Army Air Force Orchestra between 1943 and 1945 in the United States, the United Kingdom, and on the continent—the AAF Orchestra broadcast or recorded "In the Mood" for broadcast on 21 occasions.

Neither Glenn Miller and his Orchestra nor the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Orchestra recorded or broadcast "In the Mood" using the vocal lyrics. During 1941 and 1942, the Miller band altered the tempo and style of the tune, and soloists such as trumpeter Billy May introduced new twists to the performances. The Army Air Force treatment was also modified to accommodate soloists such as drummer Ray McKinley and pianist Mel Powell. Thus, "In the Mood" evolved, as did the content and style of the Miller library from 1938 to 1942, and beyond. Glenn Miller was not one to stand still. It is an urban legend that he required soloists to perform the solos on "In the Mood" and other arrangements in exactly the same manner every time the tunes were performed. Evidence of the "In the Mood" evolution and change in tempo can be found by listening to live performances issued by Sony (BMG, RCA) and independent labels. Examples include: "Sunset Serenade" (NBC Blue) November 22, 1941; Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade (CBS) December 31, 1941; "I Sustain the Wings" (CBS) July 17, 1943, and "I Sustain the Wings" (NBC) March 4, 1944.



Maj Glenn Miller and the American Band of the AEF, "Jazz Jamboree", London, October 1944

"In the Mood" was Miller's biggest instrumental hit and most-requested number. Per his original RCA recording contract, Miller received \$175.00 for recording "In the Mood". His contract was renegotiated, and he received retroactive royalties. In its original release and subsequent re-releases by RCA Victor, "In the Mood" would surpass one million copies of single record sales.

RCA Bluebird recorded a vocal version of "In the Mood" on November 13, 1939. The release was from The Four King Sisters, backed by a small group from Alvino Rey and his Orchestra, which was called the "Rhythm Reys". The tune was recorded at RCA Victor Studio, Hollywood, California. It is matrix number PBS-042247-3, and it was issued as Bluebird B-10545 paired with "Irish Washerwoman" recorded at the same session. Perhaps because two versions were issued by Bluebird, the RCA Victor label did not issue a cover version of "In the Mood" by another artist. Nor did the other, competing labels release strong competitive versions of the tune.

In addition to the two 1939 RCA Bluebird releases featuring Miller and Rey, and the then-circulating 1938 Decca recording by Edgar Hayes, "In the Mood" was recorded for Vocalion (Columbia) in New York, NY on November 8, 1939 by Al Donahue and his Orchestra with vocal by Paula Kelly. This is matrix number 25533-1, which was released as Vocalion 5238. It was paired with "Can I Help It," recorded at the same session. Decca issued a competing vocal version performed by the Merry Macs and recorded November 9, 1939. It is matrix number 66497-A and was issued on Decca 2842. It was paired with "Shoot the Sherbet to Me Herbert", which was recorded at the same session. Columbia also released an instrumental treatment of "In the Mood" by Teddy Wilson and his orchestra, which was recorded on January 18, 1940. This is matrix number WCO 26436-A, released as Columbia 35372. It was paired with "I'm Crying My Soul Out For You," recorded at the same session. Therefore, in 1940, there were six versions of "In the Mood" in circulation; two each with RCA, Columbia, and Decca. "In the Mood" was also performed on live radio broadcasts by several other name bands, including Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa. CBS and NBC broadcasts of these performances are held at the University of Colorado Glenn Miller Collections along with nearly all the surviving broadcast performances by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra, as well as the Glenn Miller Army Air Force Orchestra. A well-known vocal performance of "In the Mood" by the Andrews Sisters was not recorded and released until 1952. Oddly, reissues of this later recording are often mistakenly considered contemporaneous to the Miller recording or the period of the Second World War.

---

For further information, please visit:

<https://www.dennismspragg.com/glenn-miller>

Copyright © 2025  
Dennis M. Spragg  
All Rights Reserved