

Underneath the Arches

THE GLENN MILLER STORY

(Universal-International)

"JAZZ," said John Philip Sousa (and it is possible to detect an overtone of professional jealousy in his voice), "will endure just as long as people hear it, with their feet instead of with their brains." Now it is true that Sousa's own music has raised armies of falling arches in the past half-century, but all too often they have belonged to tired or aching or unwilling feet. The appeal of jazz, on the other hand, is to those glowing feet that (if one may get slightly out of step with Byron) chase the flying hours when Youth and Pleasure meet. You may find Sousa's tunes more acceptable or more comprehensible than jazz—I have usually found him easier to follow, in a literal, pedestrian sense—but there is no doubt that jazz belongs to happier and more care-free occasions. And on such occasions no music has more effectively got underneath the arches of the present generation than that of the late Glenn Miller.

Proof of the continued popularity of the Miller style (Miller himself was posted missing, presumed killed on

BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Glenn Miller Story,"
FAIR: "Genevieve."

Army duty in 1944) came towards the end of last year when he was elected to Downbeat's Music Hall of Fame—a form of beatification reserved for those who have made a major contribution to 20th Century popular music, and previously awarded only to the almost legendary Louis Armstrong. Now we have Hollywood's Technicolored tribute—which is probably even more solid evidence of Miller's *mana*, since Hollywood rarely risks its time and money on speculative ventures.

The Glenn Miller Story, I must confess, is not the sort of film that I would elect to see if I had the ordinary film-goer's freedom of choice. Generally I am allergic to what Hollywood calls biopics; I can't intellectualise about jazz, my arches are now irrevocably fallen, and my sense of rhythm is on a par with the tuatara's. Yet I found it, on the whole, a pleasant show. How true it is to Glenn Miller's own story, I don't know. The studio claims that it sticks to the facts, and as far as the broad outline of the story goes that is probably so. I found it more difficult to believe that Miller met with so many

dramatically useful setbacks in the earlier stages of his career (including the familiar one in which the hero has to burn the eleventh-hour oil to meet a musical deadline and pull off his first big success). But there is no doubt that James Stewart's artless and somewhat inarticulate acting, and his amiable rumpled sentimentality made the time pass pleasantly. And, I should add, too, that he achieves a remarkable resemblance to Glenn Miller. This may be primarily a picture for the jazz aficionado, but (like the music it celebrates) it is smooth enough for the ordinary cash customer to enjoy.

For the enthusiast the highlight of the film will undoubtedly be the jam session which introduces Louis Armstrong (playing and singing "Basin Street Blues"); Gene Krupa, Cozy Cole (drums), Barney Bigard (clarinet), Arvell Shaw (bass), Marty Napoleon (piano), and Ben Pollack. Trombone solos for Stewart are played here and elsewhere on the soundtrack by Joe Yukl. This sequence recreates, with a



KRUPA, ARMSTRONG, STEWART
The trombone's connected to the ankle-bone

raucous authenticity (and with particularly effective lighting) the frantic atmosphere of the late 'twenties. Frantic, in fact, is the only word for the drumming of Cole and Krupa. I haven't heard anything quite like it on the screen in

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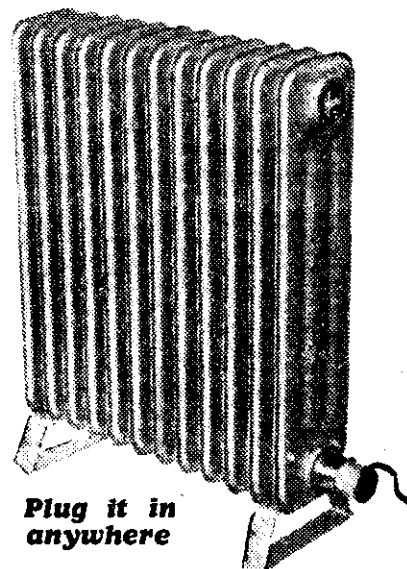
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