

# Gene Valentino

The Hidden Treasure of **America's Golden Hits**. (updated: 9/21/11)  
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A foremost indicator of culture is **classical music**, for which appreciation never fades. Since famous composers pre-date America's growth, classics were linked to Europeans like Beethoven, Verdi, Bach, Mozart, Puccini etc. Young America not only adapted, but prolific composers created indigenous forms of music- now our ever-popular heritage.

It's uncanny that our melting-pot could concoct so much music that vividly portrayed the plight and lifestyle of our people. Most popular is Country Western music. Devotees are all ages - even 'square-dance' together. Rural in lifestyle, it combines the 'Cowboy' and 'Hillbilly' music of the past. More mainstream, popular-music became our classic form. For years it depicted America's dramatic growth in tempo with the times. Many composers became famous - like Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern and Cole Porter. On Broadway, innovated-musicals were showcased by Rogers & Hammerstein; Lerner & Lowe and others. NY's Tin Pan Alley was replete with songwriters - the Brill Building alone was a music emporium. Hollywood too, flourished with music.

The idiom took seed prior but bloomed in the 1920s with radio's growth and Hollywood's talking-pictures. After the stock market crash in 1929, 'Brother, Can You spare a Dime?' mused sadly. 'If I had a Talking Picture of You', heralded Hollywood's sound-movies, while nostalgic music of WW2 chronicled the war-years and the mood of America-at-war. The 30s, 40s and 50s had a parade of hit songs - musical gems, now standards and perennial favorites. Bing Crosby led a line of crooners and singers. Many, like Frank Sinatra and Doris Day, sprouted from dance bands of the 30s and 40s, although bands existed before the 20s. All this great music was on-the-air when radio was alone broadcasting big-band remotes - and disk-jockeys played records that sold like hot-cakes. Americans everywhere danced to those great bands, prompting a prolific growth throughout the Big Band Era, which peaked from 1935 to 1945. Over 400 bands were playing America's best music from sweet to swing, from coast to coast. Popular-appeal was strong. Many big name bands appeared in films that are still seen on TV. An unwarranted decline began in the early 60s. Ratings-surveys favored the growing youth-audience and radio switched to rock-music. In so doing radio turned-off a rich heritage of American popular music. They once flourished together.

Recordings are plentiful of this great music with musicians who played flawlessly. Many still perform, as in southern California where the Johnny Vana Big Band reprises the best of their golden past. **Good music is perennial** - its correlation with history is classroom material. When music resonates to the times, it befits - like lyrics to a song. Good music never dies. Even Glenn Miller Bands are **still alive playing**, led by Gary Tole (US); Ray McVay (UK); Wil Salden (Germany); Jan Slottenas (Sweden) and Bill Baker (Holland). Our music also thrives in Japan, South Africa, Australia, Canada and Europe.

**Exemplary is the UK**, where Pete King publishes a widely-read 'big band' magazine for English-speaking countries. America's great music is chronicled, especially Glenn Miller

whose U.S. Army band was there during WW2. **They always remember** - even adopted his music. **Pete King's website** tells it all: <http://www.bigbandbuddies.co.uk> # # #