

A PORTRAIT OF TOMMY DORSEY



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THE TALENTED AND TEMPERAMENTAL T. D.

Thomas Francis "Tommy" Dorsey, Jr. celebrated his birthday on November 19, 1905, but Schuylkill County records indicate that he was actually born on November 27, 1905, in Mahanoy Plane, a small town near Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. He was the second son of Thomas Francis "Pop" Dorsey (born 1872) and Theresa "Tess" Langton, who married in 1901 and were of Irish descent. Their firstborn son, James Francis "Jimmy" Dorsey, was born on February 29, 1904. The couple had two additional children: Mary, born in 1907, and Edward, born in 1911, although Edward sadly passed away at the age of three.

Shenandoah was located in the heart of Pennsylvania's coal country. Pop Dorsey, a coal miner, once said, "I would do anything to keep my sons out of the mines." Both parents had a strong interest in music and wanted their sons to use music as a way to escape what they viewed as the "dead-end" future of coal mining. They instilled a love of music in their children. Pop Dorsey preferred the cornet, leading to friendly competition between his sons over who could play it better. Ultimately, Jimmy Dorsey was drawn to reed instruments, while Tommy Dorsey favored brass instruments.

As children, the brothers played in local parades and concerts. As they grew older, they took nonmusical jobs to help support the Dorsey family. Young Tommy worked as a delivery boy. In 1920, the family moved to Lansford, Pennsylvania, where Pop Dorsey became the leader of the municipal band and a music teacher. The young Dorsey brothers played in their father's band and began touring with other regional bands.

FORMATIVE YEARS (1920-1933)

In the early days of jazz, the talented Dorsey brothers began their musical journey together with a band they called "The Wild Canaries." They were heavily influenced by touring jazz groups like the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. However, The Wild Canaries were not successful and eventually broke up.

In 1921, Bill Lustig, the leader of the Scranton Sirens, hired the brothers, starting with Jimmy, who was 17 at the time, followed by Tommy, who was just 15. The Scranton Sirens gained popularity and were brought to New York to record for the Okeh label in 1923. The Dorsey brothers were starting to make a name for themselves as talented jazz musicians.

Eager to advance their careers, Jimmy Dorsey joined the Jean Goldkette band in Detroit, Michigan, and secured a position for his brother with the Goldkette band in March 1924. While working with Goldkette, both brothers participated in recording sessions for the Victor Recording Company. During their time in Detroit, they also met the women who would become their wives. Tommy Dorsey fell in love with Mildred Kraft, nicknamed "Toots." However, Mildred's mother disapproved of her daughter, then just 17, marrying an almost 19-year-old itinerant musician, which led the couple to elope.

On January 26, 1925, Bix Beiderbecke included Tommy Dorsey in his first recording session under his name for Gennett Records in Richmond, Indiana. During this session, Tommy named a song that Bix had written, entitled "Davenport Blues," after Beiderbecke's hometown of Davenport, Iowa. Meanwhile, Tommy's brother, Jimmy, had left the Goldkette band to join the New York-based California Ramblers, led by Ed Kirkeby. Jimmy extended another invitation for Tommy to join him. The California Ramblers included notable musicians such as Red Nichols and Adrian Rollini.

On April 11, 1925, Tommy and Toots welcomed their first child, Patricia "Pat" Marie Dorsey. Tommy then worked with various bands in New York before accepting an offer to return to Goldkette in Detroit in the spring of 1926, following a suggestion from Bix Beiderbecke. After an unfortunate confrontation with a wealthy patron, Dorsey was reprimanded by Goldkette and eventually returned to New York to work for Sam Lanin, where Jimmy Dorsey also joined the band.

In 1927, both Jimmy and Tommy made a significant career move by accepting offers to join the world-famous orchestra of Paul Whiteman, the most successful and popular band of the 1920s. "Pops" Whiteman led a lavish lifestyle, had expensive tastes, and was a brilliant businessman. His leadership left a lasting impression on Tommy Dorsey, who appreciated Whiteman's kind and caring approach, especially towards those struggling with drinking issues. With Whiteman, the Dorsey brothers had the opportunity to work with many talented musicians, singers, and composers, including Bing Crosby, Eddie Condon, and Hoagy Carmichael.

As radio became a readily available medium, steady and well-paying job opportunities became available for musicians at the radio studios in New York. The Dorsey brothers left Whiteman and worked in the studios. They also found well-paid work playing for society orchestras on a freelance basis. The infant talking-picture business also offered jobs with music being recorded for the new films. The Depression had set in, but Jimmy and Tommy had regular work. Tommy and Toots' second child, Thomas Francis Dorsey III, was born on September 9, 1930.

Following an attack of appendicitis and hospitalization in June 1933, Tommy vowed to stop drinking. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Dorsey brothers had occasionally recorded in their names. Among the musicians who worked with them were Bunny Berigan and Bud Freeman. They also recorded with up-and-coming female jazz singers from New Orleans, the Boswell Sisters. When Bing Crosby left Paul Whiteman for a solo career, the Dorsey brothers were members of the band that recorded with him. The Dorsey brothers would be relatively untouched by the infamous stock market crash of 1929 and always employed during the depths of the Depression. In 1934, they were confident enough to form their full-time orchestra.

THE DORSEY BROTHERS' ORCHESTRA (1934-1935)

The Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra was formed with essential support from the Rockwell-O'Keefe talent agency, which was managed by Tom Rockwell and Cork O'Keefe. Arranger Glenn Miller, who became the orchestra's musical director, encouraged Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey to start their band, utilizing the core of the Smith Ballew band and other musicians he recruited.

The Rockwell-O'Keefe agency also represented other artists, including Bing Crosby, the Boswell Sisters, and the Casa Loma Orchestra. Between January 9, 1934, and February 14, 1934, Miller led the Smith Ballew band at the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Denver. After their next engagement in Florida was canceled, the band returned to New York without any job lined up. Miller, along with musicians Roc Hillman, Skeets Herfurt, Don Matteson, Ray McKinley, and singer Kay Weber, drove from Denver to New York in several automobiles. They performed for one week at the Lexington Hotel in early March 1934.

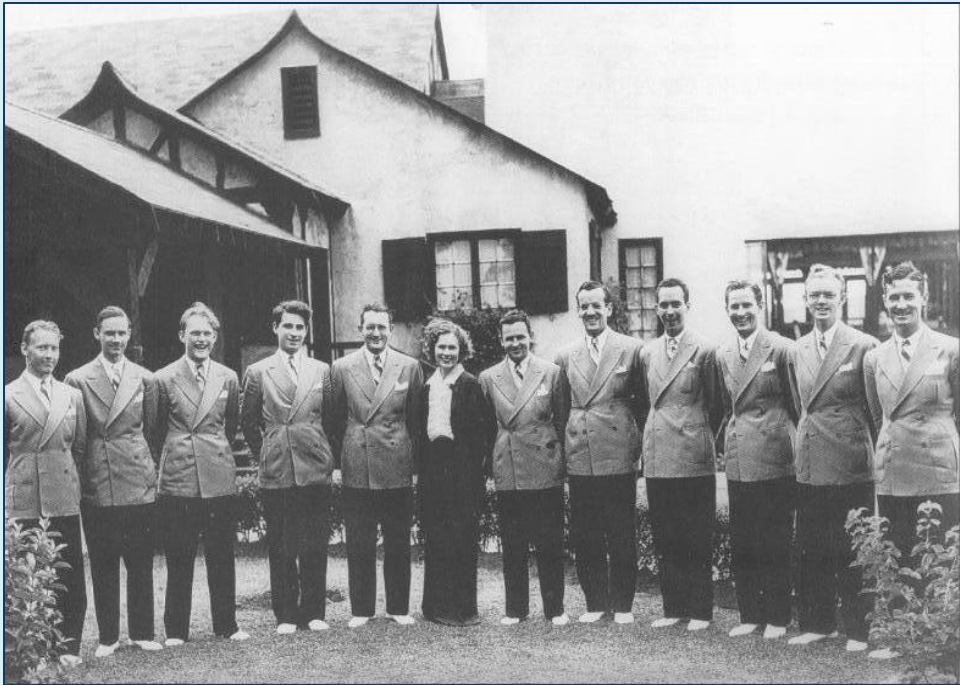
Tommy Rockwell hired Bob Crosby, Bing Crosby's younger brother, as the male vocalist for the band. They initially recorded for Brunswick Records and later for Decca Records, producing several popular songs, many of which were arranged by Miller, including "Stop, Look and Listen," "Dinah," "St. Louis Blues," and "Honeysuckle Rose." The band also appeared on various network radio broadcasts, significantly increasing their public visibility.

In the spring of 1935, Bob Crosby left to lead a new band organized by Rockwell-O'Keefe. While touring upstate New York, the Dorsey brothers found a replacement in Bob Eberly.

Tommy was the de facto leader of the band. He was basically sober while his brother was drinking. Tommy appeared to observers to be very motivated and handled all of the band's business arrangements. The brothers relied on Glenn Miller for musical direction and Jimmy essentially played his instruments. However, members of the band noted that the older brother "needed" the younger brother, and this was a toxic situation given Tommy's hair-trigger temper.

In April 1935 Tommy felt prosperous enough to purchase Tall Oaks, a 20-acre estate in Bernardsville, New Jersey. He remodeled the estate to accommodate weekend guests and members of the band.

The Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra opened at the Glen Island Casino, New Rochelle, New York on May 15, 1935. Many celebrities attended the successful opening night, and the band was in top form. All signs pointed to a successful summer season and further sales of more records. In addition, the Glen Island Casino was wired for numerous nationwide radio broadcasts. However, an undercurrent of tension existed between the brothers. On May 30, 1935, during the Decoration Day holiday weekend (now known as Memorial Day), the situation came to a head. As Tommy led the band into the tune "I'll Never Say Never Again," the vocal trio of Roc Hillman, Skeets Herfurt, and Don Mattison were approaching the microphone. They remembered hearing Jimmy say something like "Hey, Mac, that's a little fast, isn't it?" Tommy reportedly replied, "You want to take over? It's all yours" and he walked off the bandstand before the audience at the Glen Island Casino.



The Dorsey Brothers Orchestra
Sands Point, Long Island, 1934

The band was booked through September 21, 1935. Although several prominent trombonists substituted for Tommy during the coming days, his permanent replacement would be 16-year-old Bobby Byrne from Detroit. However, by late July Tommy reluctantly returned to finish the engagement with Jimmy and the band at the urging of Tommy Rockwell and a threat by Michael DeZutter, owner of the Glen Island Casino, to nullify the Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra contract for the remainder of the engagement. Cork O'Keefe unsuccessfully tried to reconcile the brothers. Their Decca contract was intact, and the band was being considered for the new Bing Crosby *Kraft Music Hall* program (Crosby was succeeding their old boss Paul Whiteman). Tommy refused to work with his brother and the Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra became Jimmy Dorsey and his Orchestra. Jimmy and the band were hired for the new Bing Crosby program and headed for California.

TOMMY DORSEY AND HIS ORCHESTRA (1935-1939)

During the summer of 1935, Tommy was already working to form his own band but had to temper his activities because of the ongoing Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra engagement at the Glen Island Casino. He essentially took over the band of Joe Haymes, who were performing at the McAlpin Hotel in New York. Dorsey hired singer Edythe Wright and musicians Pee Wee Erwin and Zeke Zarchy. There was no doubt the driven Tommy was intent on moving forward independently of Jimmy.

Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra made their debut on October 1, 1935, at the French Casino in New York. Much of the Haymes band remained intact, including arranger and Dartmouth graduate Paul Weston (who went by his birth name of Wetstein during this period). Wetstein, like George Gershwin and Glenn Miller, was a student of music educator Dr. Joseph Schillinger. Tommy signed a contract to be represented by MCA and Willard Alexander, who also represented the new band that had been put together by Benny Goodman. Tommy also signed a recording contract with RCA for its Victor label. Jimmy kept the Dorsey Brothers' Orchestra Decca recording contract. Tommy hired drummer Dave Tough, and from the Bert Block Orchestra, he brought in singer Jack Leonard, trumpet player Joe Bauer, and trumpet player-arranger Axel Stordahl. Later, he would add trumpet virtuoso Bunny Berigan, clarinetist Johnny Mince, saxophonist Bud Freeman, and guitarist Carmen Mastren. By early 1936 the band was starting to sell records and make a positive impression via radio and personal appearances. An NBC Blue program, *The Magic Key of RCA*, was specifically programmed to promote new RCA Victor and Bluebird records. Dorsey and the band received regular and prominent airtime on the series. By mid-1936, the band had recorded several 'number one' hits and received positive reviews by important critics such as George T. Simon of *Metronome* magazine. Dorsey hired Bob Burns as his manager.

During the summer of 1936, the band was featured on The Ford V-8 Review, a summer replacement radio program for the Fred Waring program, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company and broadcast from the Texas Centennial in Dallas. The series brought Dorsey and his band to the attention of the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Company (B & W). A comedian named Jack Pearl was a national sensation with a character known as Baron Munchausen. Dorsey was selected to join the Jack Pearl Show, which aired on NBC Blue on Monday from 9:30 to 10:00 p.m. (Eastern). The program was moved to Friday at 10:00-10:30 p.m. on March 19, 1937.

When Jack Pearl departed following the June 25, 1937 broadcast (the final program of the 1936-37 season), B & W decided to continue with the Dorsey band as the centerpiece of the program, starting Friday, July 2, 1937, in the same 10:00-10:30 p.m. time slot. The new *Raleigh-Kool Show* introduced Tommy as That Sentimental Gentleman of Swing. Starting Friday, October 15, 1937, the series was switched ½ hour forward to Fridays from 9:30-10:00 p.m. February 2, 1938, the *Raleigh-Kool Show* was moved to Wednesday evening at 8:30-9:00 p.m. on the NBC Red network. The commercial series gave Dorsey a serious financial boost and helped him to feature a new tune he had recorded titled "Marie" and what became another popular record, "Song of India." With the popularity of the two contrasting tunes, Dorsey would seek out ballads to fit the style of "Marie" and swing versions of classics to fit the style of "Song Of India." So by 1938, Dorsey would find continued success with the ballads "Who?" and "Yearning (Just For You)", and he would record a variety of instrumentals based on the classics such as Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Hymn to the Sun" and Liszt's "Liebestraum".

Tommy also formed a "band within a band" that he named the Clambake Seven to play small-group jazz instrumentals and novelty vocals featuring Edythe Wright. Dorsey's band was not known for one particular style of music but performed sweet ballads, novelties, classics and jazz in many styles. The band was competitive with both "swing" and "sweet" bands.

In 1937, when Glenn Miller was struggling with his first band, it appears Dorsey lent him \$5,000 and hired Miller as an arranger and sideman for the Tommy Dorsey Show. Although in 1938 Miller repaid the loan in full, Dorsey felt his assistance was an investment and not a loan and he had a right to a piece of Miller's future income. By 1939, Tommy publicly predicted Miller's second band was going to be a major success. Arranger Bill Finegan, who wrote a two-sided version of "Lonesome Road" for Dorsey, took a full-time job with Miller. Although Miller thought he handled Dorsey fairly, "T. D." retaliated by investing in the band of Bob Chester, which was programmed to somewhat imitate Miller's fresh new style. The Chester band had zero impact on Miller's ascendancy. However, while helping to set up the Chester band, Dorsey came across male singer Frank Sinatra, who had auditioned for the Chester band in August 1939.

By the summer of 1939 Dorsey was established with an engagement at the coveted Hotel Pennsylvania in New York and was positioned at the top of the band business along with popular leaders Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. By this time he had signed a new and more lucrative contract with RCA. Arrangements by Deane Kincaide such as "Boogie Woogie" and "Hawaiian War Chant (Ta-Hu-Wa-Hu-Wai)" kept Dorsey competitive with both Goodman and Shaw.

Tommy Dorsey was restless, and despite his popularity, he constantly sought new and challenging directions for his band. Being competitive was not enough; he wanted to be number one. He often placed second or third in "swing" and "sweet" music popularity polls, which fueled his desire to reach the top. Like nearly all band leaders, Dorsey admired the leading black bands, particularly those of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Jimmie Lunceford.

A key to Lunceford's success were arrangers Eddie Durham and Melvin James "Sy" Oliver. In 1939, Lunceford recommended Durham (who was also employed by Count Basie) to Glenn Miller, allowing Durham to earn extra money by writing charts for the up-and-coming Miller band. Durham's contributions were significant, as evidenced by important broadcasts from the Glen Island Casino, where Miller had secured a lucrative summer season. These contributions helped the Miller band rise to number one by 1940.

However, Tommy Dorsey would soon overshadow the collaboration between Miller and Durham. Music critics did not consider the 1939 version of Dorsey's band to be as good a "swing" outfit as those of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. Fair or not, this criticism troubled Dorsey. Listening to Dorsey's 1939 broadcasts today, one might find the criticism unjustified. Nevertheless, Tommy became seriously interested in Lunceford's musical presentation style (as had Miller), especially the arrangements of Sy Oliver.

Dorsey arranged to meet Sy Oliver and offered him \$5,000 more per year than Lunceford paid, to join him on a full-time basis. Miller had engaged Durham as a freelancer, allowing Durham the flexibility to continue working with Basie and Lunceford and others. Dorsey was willing to transform his "Dixieland-style" approach to adopt Oliver's "swing" style, rather than forcing Oliver to adapt to Dorsey's existing style. This represented a radical change, and not all of the personnel in Dorsey's current band would fit into the new system.

While Dorsey made plans for this overhaul, he faced an unexpected change regarding his personal life. Toots Dorsey discovered that Tommy was romantically involved with Edythe Wright, who had joined the band in 1935. Mrs. Dorsey demanded Wright's removal from the band, leading to her temporary replacement by singer Anita Boyer.

Beginning with the arrival of Sy Oliver in July 1939 the Dorsey band immediately sounded different and musicians noted the difference. In November 1939 when Artie Shaw was planning to walk away from his band, Dorsey approached drummer Buddy Rich and made him an offer to join his band, which Rich accepted. The addition of Rich would be a major factor in helping to take the Dorsey band in a completely new musical direction. Also in November 1939, while the band was playing in Chicago where Rich joined them, singer Jack Leonard left the band and was replaced for a few weeks by Alan DeWitt, who would go on to join Bob Chester. Meanwhile, Frank Sinatra had joined Harry James and was beginning to show some promise. Harry James and his Orchestra were appearing in Chicago at the same time. Dorsey arranged to meet Sinatra and offered him a job paying more than Harry James paid (\$125/week vs. \$75/week).



Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra
1936



Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra
1939

Although Sinatra was very fond of James, his wife Nancy was expecting, and Dorsey's band was more secure than the then-struggling James band. James graciously accepted Sinatra's decision. There was also the matter of Sinatra's contract with James, which was not properly set up. Frank's agreement with Harry was essentially null and void, amounting only to a verbal commitment. It was easy for Dorsey's attorney to remedy that.

In December 1939, Dorsey offered a job to a Southern California singing group known as the Pied Pipers, which included female singer Jo Stafford and male singers John Huddleston, Chuck Lowry, and Billy Wilson (soon replaced by Clark Yocum). With the addition of Sinatra and the Pied Pipers, the Dorsey band was poised to make history.

STARMAKER (1940-1942)

The newly revamped Dorsey orchestra returned to the East Coast and opened at Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook Ballroom in Cedar Grove, New Jersey, for the winter 1940 season. Brother Jimmy Dorsey and Glenn Miller had been among the bands preceding TD at the Meadowbrook in 1938 and 1939.

According to George T. Simon of *Metronome*, Tommy Dorsey, "was a fighter, often a very belligerent one, with a sharp mind, an acid tongue and intense pride. He had complete confidence in himself. He felt he could do so many things better than so many other people could. And so many times, he was absolutely right ... he set out to prove one specific thing ... that he could have an even more successful band than his brother Jimmy had and prove it he most certainly did. In retrospect and in big band history, Tommy Dorsey's must be recognized as the greatest all-around band of them all. Others may have sounded more creative. Others may have swung harder and more consistently. Others may have developed more distinctive styles. But of all the hundreds of well-known bands, Tommy Dorsey's could do more things better than any other could."

If Simon were correct, the period from 1940 to 1942 would arguably be the pinnacle of Tommy Dorsey's career, where he had his greatest public influence and, in retrospect, featured his most famous singers and musicians, including Frank Sinatra, Jo Stafford, the Pied Pipers, Buddy Rich, Ziggy Elman, Joe Bushkin and many others, including a young woman from Jacksonville, Florida, Connie Haines (Yvonne-Marie Antoinette Jamais).

The transition that began in June 1939 with the arrival of Sy Oliver was not easy. The *Raleigh-Kool Program* was not renewed for the 1939-1940 season, and the final broadcast was Wednesday, September 20, 1939, at 8:30-9:00 p.m. over NBC Red. The loss of the program forced TD to make more personnel changes than he had anticipated in accommodating his new direction in style. Dorsey cut salary and several high-priced sidemen left. Depending on who told the story, Sy Oliver was in the process of leaving Jimmie Lunceford when Tommy approached him. Whatever the circumstances, Oliver would immediately make his mark with Dorsey. Soon enough, recordings were made of Oliver's treatments of "Well, All Right! (Tonight's the Night)" (May 22, 1939) (even before Oliver joined), "Stomp It Off" (July 20, 1939), and "Easy Does It" (October 24, 1939).

Glenn Miller's band opened at the Paramount Theatre in New York on February 28, 1940, without their leader because Miller was hospitalized with sinus trouble the previous day. Paramount manager Bob Weitman asked Tommy Dorsey to substitute, and Dorsey immediately accepted. But since Dorsey was booked at the Meadowbrook in New Jersey, he could not make all of the theatre performances, so Charlie Barnet, Gene Krupa, and Dick Stabile also helped out. TD had apparently simmered down regarding his friend Glenn Miller.

Following the financial failure of his own band, jazz legend Bunny Berigan rejoined the Dorsey band in March 1940 and TD placed his friend in a featured role. For five months, Bunny made some memorable recordings and broadcasts with Tommy. Although worn down and not always reliably the same brilliant talent he once was, Bunny added a spark to the band. TD, a big fan, knew the public appreciated Berigan and, for a while, let Bunny lead the band during performances. Highlights of Bunny's 1940 tenure with Dorsey included, in addition to his numerous broadcast contributions, memorable recording solos with Frank Sinatra and the band on "East Of The Sun (and West of the Moon)" (April 23, 1940) and Sinatra with the Pied Pipers on "Whispering" (June 13, 1940). These performances featured The Sentimentalists, a small group within the band TD was toying with as a descendant of his Clambake Seven.

TD hired teenager Connie Haines, originally from radio station WJAX, Jacksonville, Florida after auditioning Dinah Shore, originally from radio station WSM, Nashville, Tennessee. Dorsey felt Haines would be a better fit for his band. Yvonne Marie Antoinette JaMais had come north chaperoned by her mother and appeared on several radio series before joining Harry James, who had changed her name to rhyme with his. She had left James (he could no longer afford two vocalists) and returned to radio staff work when TD summoned her. Connie Haines nicknamed TD "the Starmaker" for all the young vocal talent he would develop and feature.

Songwriter Ruth Lowe, formerly a pianist with Ina Ray Hutton, penned the tune "I'll Never Smile Again," which she offered to Dorsey, who agreed to publish the song via his own company. But he gave it to Glenn Miller to record for RCA Bluebird. Dorsey would then make three attempts to record a suitable version, and the fourth attempt, recorded on May 23, 1940, was issued by RCA. The first three attempts were made on April 23, 1940. The tune would be the first blockbuster hit for Sinatra (and the Pied Pipers) with Dorsey. The first three efforts were apparently recorded in a faster or more conventional Dorsey ballad style. The fourth and successful effort was recorded at a slower and more intimate tempo emphasizing the vocalists over the instruments.

Sy Oliver's influence made a distinct difference with pop tunes and jazz efforts with a two-beat Lunceford-like style, including "(What Can I Say) After I Say I'm Sorry" (February 1, 1940), featuring the Pied Pipers. An early Frank Sinatra vocal, "I'll Be Seeing You" (February 26, 1940), did not have a direct impact but became a best seller when it was reissued by RCA.

On May 21, 1940, Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra began a 14-week summer engagement at the Hotel Astor Roof in New York and received ample NBC airtime with numerous sustaining broadcasts over the NBC networks each week. In addition to the domestic networks, the band was broadcast via the NBC White, or international shortwave service, to Latin America from the Astor. The band also broadcast to the United Kingdom via the joint CBS-BBC program *America Dances*. The Astor radio appearances included a Saturday late afternoon matinee (5:00-6:00 p.m.). TD welcomed guests to the matinees including songwriters and other bandleaders. During the matinees, Dorsey introduced the concept of an “amateur songwriting contest.”

Tuesday, June 25, 1940, the Dorsey band appeared on their first commercial series since the *Raleigh-Kool Show*. The 1940 summer replacement series for *The Pepsodent Show* starring Bob Hope was *Pepsodent Summer Pastime*, running in the time period of 10:00-10:30 p.m. over NBC Red. The series ran for thirteen weeks featuring TD and the band, concluding September 17, 1940. The band recorded the frequently broadcast Sy Oliver originals “Quiet, Please! (It’s the Drummer in Me)” July 17, 1940 (there were two rejected attempts made on June 13, 1940) and “So What!” (also scheduled for recording on June 13, 1940, but no recording was actually made – BS 051281-1).

Bunny Berigan’s erratic behavior, driven by the cumulative effects of alcoholism, became too much for even TD to handle. Bunny was let go on August 20, 1940, and Dorsey plugged the brilliant former Benny Goodman star Ziggy Elman into the featured trumpet role. Ziggy was present for the Thursday, August 29, 1940, Victor recording session, which included the Axel Stordahl arrangement of “Our Love Affair” featuring Sinatra and two more Sy Oliver jumpers, “Make Me Know It” and “Another One Of Them Things.”

Ziggy Elman (Harry Aaron Finkelman) was a stalwart of Benny Goodman’s band and, in 1939, had a hit with “And The Angels Sing,” with Johnny Mercer’s lyrics (and a Martha Tilton vocal) added to Elman’s music and famous trumpet solo. Ziggy would lead the band in rehearsals and during sets of broadcasts and personal appearances. Dorsey can be heard asking Elman to count off the tempo on radio broadcasts.

Quoted in a September 1940 interview, Dorsey said he was “most enthusiastic about his children, Patricia, 15, ‘who keeps me almost broke buying the latest recordings of dance orchestras, my own included,’ and about ‘Skippy,’ who is 10 years old. With his boy, the orchestra leader enjoys most of his leisure time building and adding to the miniature railroad in the recreation room of their home in Bernardsville, New Jersey.”

Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra headed to the West Coast in October 1940 with several appearances and radio broadcasts en route. Arriving in California, the band visited the Victor recording studio in Hollywood on Wednesday, October 16, 1940, and among their recordings were Sy Oliver’s “Swingtime Up In Harlem” (with Connie Haines) and “Swing High.” As usual, both up-tempo jazz masterpieces featured Ziggy Elman’s trumpet and the drums of Buddy Rich. Slowing things down, the band also recorded Oliver’s eloquent treatment of Stephen Foster’s standard “Swanee River.”



Edythe Wright and Jack Leonard – Paramount Theater, New York – 1939



Frank Sinatra, Jo Stafford and the Pied Pipers – Hotel Astor, New York - 1941

Thursday, October 17, 1940, Dorsey and the band made their first broadcast of the new commercial program *Fame and Fortune* for the NR Tablets (Nature's Remedy) product of Tum's Remedies, St. Louis, Missouri. The program was broadcast twice each Thursday at 8:30-9:00 p.m. (Eastern) and 8:30-9:00 p.m. (Pacific) over NBC Blue. The new program was scheduled for half an hour following the *Tum's Pot O' Gold* program featuring Horace Heidt and his Orchestra. The format for *Fame and Fortune* was an amateur songwriting contest along the lines of the talent feature of Dorsey's 1940 Saturday late-afternoon matinees. The guests for the opening program were Horace Heidt and Ruth Lowe. NBC brought announcer Fred B. Cole to the West Coast from affiliate WBZ in Boston, Massachusetts, to host the series.

On October 31, 1940, Dorsey and his band opened at the new Palladium Ballroom-Café in Hollywood, which would soon be known simply as the Hollywood Palladium. During their time in California, the band filmed and recorded their parts for the Paramount motion picture *Las Vegas Nights*, scheduled for release on March 19, 1941. Louis Alter and Frank Loesser wrote the original music for the film.

On November 11, 1940, the band visited the Victor studio in Hollywood, where they recorded one of their most memorable performances: an intimate vocal rendition of "Star Dust," arranged by Oliver, featuring Sinatra and the Pied Pipers. While performing at the Palladium, the band broadcast several nights a week over NBC Red, typically during late-night slots for the Pacific time zone. They also had earlier broadcasts, such as at 8:30 p.m. Pacific time (11:30 p.m. Eastern time) for affiliates in the Eastern and Central time zones.

The band made their final *Fame and Fortune* broadcast from Hollywood on December 12, 1940. Artie Shaw opened at the Palladium on December 14, 1940. Shortly after, the band returned to the East Coast to open at the Paramount Theatre for the December 18, 1940 holiday season.

Acrimony between the radio networks and the music licensing giant ASCAP led to the creation of a competitor, Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI). Wednesday, January 1, 1940, all music licensed by ASCAP was banned from the airwaves and Tommy Dorsey thus had to forego the use of his theme "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You" until October 30, 1940, when the ban ended. January 6, 1941 the band recorded "Oh! Look At Me Now," promoted as "the hit contest winner of the *Fame and Fortune* program." The Oliver-arranged Sinatra, Haines and Pied Pipers tour-de-force may have in actuality been a "planted" tune and not a purely amateur effort. Amateur John DeVries appears to have received assistance from TD's pianist Joe Bushkin. This was perhaps a result of the TD and the Nature's Remedy advertising agency team who wanted to ensure one of the contest winners really became a hit. In fact, "Oh! Look At Me Now" turned out to be the only tune introduced on the program that became a hit. Dorsey only recorded two titles submitted during the run of the *Fame and Fortune* program.

On the January 16, 1941 broadcast, Fred Uttal took over from Fred B. Cole as the announcer for *Fame and Fortune*. Later, during the early morning hours of January 17, 1941, *Metronome* magazine sponsored an all-star recording session at Victor including the winners of their reader poll, produced by Leonard Joy and George T. Simon. Tommy Dorsey was voted the trombone winner along with J. C. Higginbotham. Ziggy Elman was in the trumpet section with Harry James and Cootie Williams; Buddy Rich was voted to be the drummer. Other winners included Benny Goodman (clarinet), Benny Carter and Toots Mondello (alto saxophone), Tex Beneke and Coleman Hawkins (tenor saxophone), Count Basie (piano), Charlie Christian (guitar) and Artie Bernstein (bass). The tunes recorded at the session were "Bugle Call Rag" (BS 060331-1) and "One O'Clock Jump" (BS 060332-1).

The band recorded the Oliver arrangement of "Without A Song" January 20, 1941, featuring Sinatra, which would be remembered by critics as one of Sinatra's best recordings with Dorsey. The band returned to the Meadowbrook in New Jersey, opening on January 21, 1941. The networks feeding the sustaining evening and Saturday matinee broadcasts were CBS and Mutual as opposed to NBC. At the end of the month, for whatever reason, Dorsey added novelty vocals by tenor saxophone player Paul Mason to the *Fame and Fortune* broadcasts. February 7, 1941, Sinatra recorded another elegant and critically appreciated vocal with "Everything Happens to Me," a Stordahl arrangement (the recording is notable for the absence of Dorsey's trombone). The same session produced Oliver's new treatment of "Whatcha Know Joe" featuring the Pied Pipers (with Jo Stafford). Stafford had recorded a solo vocal on January 20, 1941, on "For You" (also an Oliver arrangement).

The feud and competition between "the brothers" abated somewhat on Saturday, February 15, 1941, when Jimmy Dorsey appeared on the *Matinee at the Meadowbrook* sustaining broadcast over CBS. Two days later, the band recorded "Let's Get Away From It All," a two-sided Victor opus arranged by Oliver featuring the entire vocal department of the band. The exuberant piece was the creation of the songwriting team of Matt Dennis and Tom Adair who would contribute a series of songs recorded by Dorsey. The epic February 17, 1941 session also produced a wealth of memorable Dorsey records for Victor, including Oliver's "Deep River", "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Serenade to the Spot" and the big Dorsey hit "Yes Indeed! (A Jive Spiritual)," with Oliver appearing on the vocal with Stafford.

The final program in the *Fame and Fortune* series was broadcast April 10, 1941, following which the band set out on a series of appearances in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and North Carolina. Tuesday, May 20, 1941, TD and the band returned to the Hotel Astor Roof Garden for another summer engagement. The band was scheduled for five sustaining broadcasts per week from the Astor over NBC Blue and Mutual. May 28, 1941, what would become another Sinatra standard was recorded, the Stordahl arrangement of Frank Sinatra's composition "This Love of Mine," July 15, 1941, a sequel to "Yes, Indeed," Oliver's "Swingin' On Nothin'," was recorded, again with a vocal duet featuring Oliver and Stafford. Another Oliver treatment, "Blue Skies" (Sinatra vocal) was also recorded.

During 1941, Dorsey opened his own band booking and personal management business, Tommy Dorsey, Inc. (clients included Sinatra, Harry James, Connie Haines, Dean Hudson, Martha Tilton, etc.)

Throughout the 1940-1942 period, TD was in the habit of inviting guests, including sometimes essentially the whole band, out to Tall Oaks in Bernardsville. He welcomed guests and entertained them generously, sincerely, and lavishly. During 1942 several Sunday evening Treasury Department radio programs were actually broadcast from Bernardsville. An integral part of the Tall Oaks charm was TD's devoted wife Toots, who by all accounts was a charming and attentive host. However professionally successful Tommy Dorsey was by the summer of 1941, the year would turn out to be a personal disaster for TD. During a summer 1941 weekend, not only Toots but TD's mother Tess and sister Mary discovered Dorsey had remained involved romantically with Edythe Wright and Toots had actually caught them "in the act." The devotion and loyalty Dorsey's dignified wife had given to him was at an end and she divorced him on the valid and ultimately proven grounds of adultery.

The band closed at the Hotel Astor on July 15, 1941, and embarked on a series of "one-nighters". TD gave the band a two-week vacation the first two weeks of August 1941 (TD was hospitalized at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore for a tonsillectomy). Upon their return, the band opened on August 27, 1941, for three weeks at the Paramount Theatre. October 9, 1941, the band returned to Meadowbrook in New Jersey and was back on sustaining CBS and Mutual broadcasts. November 6, 1941, Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra appeared on the new *Coca-Cola Spotlight Bands* series over Mutual while appearing at an engagement in Cleveland, Ohio. The band spent most of the month of November 1941 with stints in Cleveland, Youngstown, Columbus, and Cincinnati. The band then traveled west for the second time to appear in their first motion picture at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio, *Ship Ahoy*, which would be released on June 25, 1942. The original script for the film included a title and song, "I'll Take Manila," involving a cruise ship journey to the Philippines, then a Commonwealth of the United States. Events would force M-G-M to alter the script to change the film title, plot, and song to *Ship Ahoy*, a Puerto Rico cruise, and "I'll Take Tallulah." The film starred Eleanor Powell and Red Skelton.

Sunday, December 7, 1941, before the band reported for work on the film, but after they had arrived in California, the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked the United States in Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines, thrusting the nation fully and formally into World War II. The war would change America forever, including the music business, the big bands, and the fortunes of Tommy Dorsey.

As the nation gathered itself from the shock of Pearl Harbor and the other simultaneous Japanese attacks, TD and the band began work on *Ship Ahoy* as the United States and United Kingdom declared war on Japan and, in turn, Japanese allies Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy declared war on the United States. After two weeks of studio work, the band appeared on December 20, 1941, on their second Coca-Cola Spotlight Band "Champion of Champions" Saturday night broadcasts. The best-selling tune featured during the program was "This Love of Mine" complete with Frank Sinatra's vocal. The record was recorded on May 28, 1941, and arranged by Axel Stordahl, although as was the case on these programs, it was promoted as a Frank Sinatra original songwriting effort, and Sinatra was credited with the lyrics with Hank Sanicola and Sol Parker was credited for the music. Whatever the particulars, "This Love of Mine" became a signature tune in Sinatra's career. The Victor record was on the market by December 1941 and doing very well.

Glenn Miller's commercial sponsor, Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company, had blocked their *Chesterfield Moonlight Serenade* star from appearing on the Coca-Cola program and as Saturday's "Champion of Champions" following the December 6, 1941 broadcast where Miller's current #1 hit, "Chattanooga Choo Choo" was the featured tune. The Miller hit would remain at the top of the charts for over a dozen weeks and likely would have put Miller on every Saturday evening for Coca-Cola during this time period. The effect of Miller's removal from the program created an opening for runners-up to be featured and "This Love of Mine" filled the bill nicely.

In a very strange episode, the Dorsey band was booked for an appearance on Christmas weekend in Fremont, Ohio. Due to bad weather, their chartered United Air Lines flight was forced to land at Moline, Illinois on Christmas Day, Thursday, December 25, 1941. They continued to Cincinnati the following day but returned directly for the December 27, 1941, Coca-Cola program ("This Love of Mine" won again). The band opened at the Hollywood Palladium on December 30, 1941 (setting a record for opening night at the Palladium with 4,800 admissions) and appeared on the NBC *New Year's Dance Parade* from the Palladium over NBC Red at 12:30 a.m. Pacific Time, January 1, 1942, with special guest Lana Turner. By January 17, 1942, the Dorsey band, Sinatra and "This Love Of Mine" would make their fifth consecutive appearance on *Coca-Cola Spotlight Bands*.

By order of the Federal Communications Commission, NBC was ordered to divest its Blue Network effective January 1, 1942. TD's ample Palladium airtime was now broadcast over the Blue Network, which continued to be operated by and from NBC's facilities until the sale of the network was completed.

TD set up Frank Sinatra with an RCA Bluebird recording session on January 19, 1942. Sinatra was talking about going out on his own, and Dorsey wanted to see if Sinatra could be viable outside the format of a big band and if the four tunes pressed on two 78rpm records would sell. Axel Stordahl arranged for and conducted the tunes recorded at the session. Dorsey would discover, to his satisfaction, that Sinatra was very viable.



1942 Raleigh-Kool Broadcast, NBC Radio City, New York
(Collection of the Author)



"Ship Ahoy" with Buddy Rich, Red Skelton and Eleanor Powell
(MGM Publicity Still)



Chicago Theater - 1942



Spotlight Bands - 1944

The band held sway at the Palladium until closing on February 23, 1942, and opened at the Golden Gate Theatre in San Francisco on February 25, 1942. At a Victor recording session in Hollywood on March 9, 1942, TD and the band waxed a version of "Blues in the Night (My Mama Done Tol' Me)", featuring a Jo Stafford vocal, although they often broadcast the tune featuring Frank Sinatra. For some unknown reason, the record was not released at the time. Reader's Digest eventually released it under license from RCA in the 1960s. But of great importance from this session was Sy Oliver's tour-de-force "Well, Git It!" (titled initially Bugle Blues).

The band headed east with a month of appearances across the country in diverse locations, including Sacramento, Houston, and several Midwest locations. The band opened at the Paramount Theatre in New York on April 1, 1942, for a month-long engagement ending on April 28, 1942. When the band left California, Connie Haines stayed behind to pursue a solo career as a network radio and film personality. Her departure was a preview of more dramatic changes to come. Connie's final record with TD was "Snootie Little Cutie," recorded February 17, 1942, and also featuring Sinatra, Stafford, and the Pied Pipers.

In May 1942, Tommy Dorsey added a nine-person string section (including a harp) to his orchestra. The first recording session, including the string section, was May 18, 1942. The tunes recorded at the session were "Just As Though You Were Here" and "Street of Dreams," both Stordahl arrangements featuring Sinatra, Stafford and the Pied Pipers. Some of the new "TD fiddlers" members had worked with Artie Shaw before he joined the Navy as a Chief Petty Officer. Tuesday, May 19, 1942, TD returned for his third consecutive summer engagement at the Hotel Astor Roof, although this appearance was only scheduled to run through July 2, 1942 (and closed on June 29, 1942 according to Heinie Beau's itinerary sheets), when the band would embark on an extended road tour.

Tuesday, June 2, 1942, the talented but tragic Bunny Berigan died and the band paid tribute to their friend and colleague during their sustaining Blue Network broadcast from the Astor Roof with a special performance of "Marie". Tommy Dorsey had been spending considerable bedside time with Berigan at the hospital and was there when Bunny passed away.

Tommy Dorsey returned to commercial radio with B&W and Raleigh-Kool Tuesday, June 16, 1942, as the summer replacement for the Red Skelton variety program. The new *Tommy Dorsey Show* was broadcast at 10:30-11:00 p.m. EWT (Eastern War Time). There was one broadcast aired coast-to-coast (7:30-8:00 p.m. Pacific War Time). This schedule continued to September 8, 1942. When Skelton's program returned, the Dorsey program would switch to a different time. During this period, Dorsey also began to broadcast a program for the United States Treasury Department over the Blue Network. The Dorsey Treasury programs were initially broadcast on Sunday evenings from 8:00-8:30 p.m. EWT. July 30, 1942, the Dorsey Treasury programs switched to Thursday evenings at 10:15-10:45 p.m. EWT.

The best-selling record "There Are Such Things," featuring Sinatra, Stafford, the Pied Pipers and arranged by Stordahl, was recorded July 1, 1942, as Dorsey and other recording artists rushed to make as many records as possible before the forthcoming American Federation of Musicians recording ban, which was scheduled to begin August 1, 1942. Dorsey's final recording session before the recording ban was July 2, 1942. TD would not make another record for Victor until November 1944.

Thomas Francis Dorsey, Sr. died July 12, 1942, following a series of strokes. Ziggy Elman directed the band during TD's absence for the funeral. The July 14, 1942 *Tommy Dorsey Show* was hosted by Frank Sinatra.

Frank Sinatra made his final broadcast appearance with Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra from the stage of the Circle Theatre in Indianapolis, Indiana, during the Dorsey Treasury Show on Thursday, September 3, 1942. Sinatra had informed Dorsey of his intention to go solo shortly after the January 1942 RCA Bluebird recording session TD had blessed.

Although Frank Sinatra was certain he would succeed on his own, most observers and advisors disagreed. During August 1942, the rest of the music business read trade press reports. Sinatra was going to leave TD in September 1942. Dorsey had perhaps been in denial about Sinatra's plans since January 1942 (although he had plenty of notice) and met the news reports with an uncharacteristically (for TD) stoic stance. Dorsey had created a star in Frank Sinatra. As the members of the band and others would remember, they had a "love-hate" relationship of professional respect but perhaps underlying tension as Sinatra became more popular in his own right and self-confident.

The three-year exclusive contract Frank had signed with Dorsey would terminate on December 31, 1942. To obtain his release from the contract, Sinatra entered into an agreement dated September 3, 1942 stipulating Tommy Dorsey, Inc., owned by TD and his manager Leonard Vannerson, owned 43.5% of Frank Sinatra when the singer left to go out on his own. Dorsey owned 33.5% and Vannerson had 10%. Vannerson negotiated a contract with Columbia Records for Sinatra. It appears Dorsey not only had notice of Sinatra's departure, but he had prepared for it.

However, Sinatra would later come to want his own agent and did not wish to be represented by Tommy Dorsey, Inc. He wanted a clean, if amicable, break. It has been reported Sinatra was anxious to get going before Bob Eberly went out on his own. Eberly was rumored to be leaving Jimmy Dorsey and eventually he did, but not to go solo. Bob Eberly joined the Army. Frank Sinatra went solo at the precise moment when band leaders could not make records because of the musicians' strike. But nothing prevented a vocalist from making records without musicians and only backed by vocal groups. Additionally, singers and musicians who were draft-eligible would enter the military and thus be temporarily, at least, removed from competition. Sinatra and other 4-F (draft ineligible) singers would thus have a head start over artists who would not be back in circulation until the end of the war.

Many exaggerated stories have been told about the circumstances of Sinatra's departure and the disposition of the business relationship between Sinatra and TD. Eventually, Sinatra, backed by his new booking agency, General Amusement Corporation (GAC) (Glenn Miller's agent), and a group of investors bought out the Tommy Dorsey, Inc. interest in him.

Frank Cooper of GAC initially managed Frank Sinatra and booked the singer into the Paramount Theatre with Benny Goodman and his Orchestra. The engagement was a smashing success. Tommy Dorsey was represented by MCA (Music Corporation of America). MCA wanted to represent Sinatra. Tommy Dorsey, Inc. held a piece of Sinatra that Frank wanted to buy out. A behind-the-scenes series of negotiations ensued. It turned out that in addition to the original contract and piece of Sinatra held by Tommy Dorsey,

Inc., the bandleader also loaned Frank \$17,000.00 to get his solo career going. In August 1943 attorney Henry Jaffe, representing Sinatra, negotiated a settlement with attorney Joseph Ross, representing Tommy Dorsey, Inc., and Dorsey. MCA settled with GAC and GAC paid part of the settlement with Tommy Dorsey, Inc. and Dorsey. Columbia Records also participated in the multi-faceted agreement, which freed Sinatra from Tommy Dorsey, Inc. and Dorsey on terms acceptable to all concerned.

Dick Haymes replaced Frank Sinatra. Haymes had been working for Benny Goodman and, before Goodman, worked for Harry James. Axel Stordahl left the full-time employment of Dorsey but continued to do free-lance work for TD. It made complete sense for the talented arranger to work primarily with the newly independent Sinatra since Stordahl understood better than anyone how to write for and present Sinatra.

From Indianapolis, the band traveled to California to begin work on their next M-G-M film, *Du Barry Was A Lady*, which would be produced from September through December 1942. The final program of the summer replacement series for Raleigh-Kool was broadcast on September 8, 1942, from NBC Hollywood. Tommy Dorsey started his new series, the *Raleigh-Kool Show*, Wednesday, September 16, 1942, with two broadcasts at 5:30-6:00 p.m. PWT (8:30-9:00 p.m. EWT) and 8:30-9:00 p.m. PWT, from NBC Hollywood. Truman Bradley would be the regular announcer for the program. A feature of the summer series, "Tommy Dorsey's Star In Uniform," saluting guest service personnel, was continued in the new series. Coincidentally, Red Skelton (of the Raleigh-Kool program) would star in the new film with Lucille Ball and Gene Kelly.

Du Barry Was A Lady might be appreciated in retrospect to be a very strange, if colorful, film. The character played by Red Skelton has a dream sequence where he imagines himself as King Louis XV of France. In the sequence, Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra are presented in eighteenth-century costumes in a recreation of the Versailles Palace. All wore white-powdered wigs. The sight of TD, Ziggy Elman, Buddy Rich, Dick Haymes, Jo Stafford, and the Pied Pipers in this setting is certainly the most unique presentation of big band jazz perhaps ever filmed. The film also contained lavish sequences set in contemporary settings.

As 1942 drew to a close, three important factors were affecting Tommy Dorsey and every other band leader. Dorsey was among the top-echelon leaders who could navigate a challenging business environment better than most. Indeed, TD would prosper during the war years. However, he was facing a serious personnel problem because of the military draft. During 1942 Dorsey would lose key personnel to military service and had to maintain the quality of his product as band chairs changed, and he did a superb job of doing so. TD still offered draft-ineligible musicians one of the best jobs in the business in terms of pay and exposure. He had a commercial program and a film contract, although the recording ban for the moment wiped out his income from records. Although travel was becoming difficult for bands because of wartime travel priorities and gas rationing, TD could and did command large sums for personal appearances.

In November 1942, the band toured the Pacific Northwest after completing *Du Barry Was A Lady*. Dorsey reportedly got into an argument with Clark Yocum of the Pied Pipers en route to Oregon, and TD abruptly fired him. The difference of opinion was serious enough to cause Jo Stafford, John Huddleston, and Chuck Lowry to all leave along with Yocum.

Returning to Southern California and M-G-M, Dorsey and the band began work on their third M-G-M feature film, *Girl Crazy*, starring Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland. During this period, M-G-M also shot scenes including TD and the band for the film *Presenting Lily Mars* between March 4, 1943, and March 7, 1943. The band had a secondary role along with Bob Crosby and his Orchestra in *Presenting Lily Mars* and not the central role and billing it received in previous and following M-G-M features. Dorsey also made a cameo appearance in brother Jimmy Dorsey's film *I Dood It*, starring Red Skelton and Eleanor Powell, who had earlier been paired with TD for *Ship Ahoy*. Dorsey and Harry James also made cameo appearances in the Kay Kyser film *Swing Fever*.

Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra opened at the Hollywood Palladium on Tuesday, December 29, 1942, for an eight-week engagement. Sustaining broadcasts from the Palladium were now handled by CBS.

As 1942 came to a conclusion, so did a golden era for Tommy Dorsey, who had nurtured, featured and now had to move forward without singing stars Frank Sinatra, Connie Haines, Jo Stafford, and the Pied Pipers, who had left and become solo acts. Others had been drafted into the military. Ziggy Elman would go into the Army Air Forces and Buddy Rich entered the Marine Corps.



1945 Rehearsal



RCA Victor Publicity Image

PINNACLE (1943-1946)

Although Tommy Dorsey had to handle major personnel changes, his prospects were excellent considering the wartime issues of the recording ban, travel restrictions, and the draft. He had shifted his attention to the West Coast as a result of his work for M-G-M. Southern California was a hub of defense industries and military personnel. The big bands were at their peak and predominant in public taste. With Glenn Miller entering the service in October 1942, TD found himself with the opportunity to be the number one band with the possible exception of a resurgent Harry James.

As work on *Girl Crazy* neared completion, Dorsey's personal life again interrupted his professional activities. His daughter Pat married Lester Hooker halfway through her college studies at William & Mary. The couple met at school although Hooker had left to enter the Army Air Forces. Since Pat was underage, the consent of both parents was required, and this brought Dorsey back into direct contact with Toots for the first time since their divorce. Alimony and child support payments remained an issue.

During this time period, the War Department formed a Special Services Division Radio Section (SSD) within the Army Service Forces. In 1941 the War Department Bureau of Public Relations (BPR) formed a Radio Branch. Among its activities, this office created the Army public relations program *The Army Hour*, which aired Sunday afternoons on NBC and became very successful. The program was produced in New York. In early 1942, the BPR also conceived a program for military personnel titled *Command Performance*, which was recorded for broadcast overseas via Office of War Information shortwave service (the military did not yet have radio stations in the field). After a half-dozen programs from New York, the production of *Command Performance* was moved to Hollywood. The west coast had been selected by the SSD as headquarters for a new global military radio service to transmit entertainment and information to the armed forces. Programs were recorded in Southern California and transmitted via shortwave and a network of stations operated by what would in November 1943 be renamed the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS). In early 1943, the fledgling service was producing several studio productions with audiences in addition to command performances, such as *Mail Call*, *G. I. Journal*, and *Jubilee*. The SSD Radio Section also produced numerous disc-jockey programs such as *Downbeat*, *G. I. Jive*, and *Melody Roundup*. The service also had its pick of any network programs with the condition commercials were edited out. Tommy Dorsey's Raleigh-Kool Program was a natural for the SSD Radio Section. Starting in January 1943 the NBC programs were edited and dubbed by the SSD Radio Section and distributed as the SSD *Tommy Dorsey Show*. The maestro also appeared on numerous SSD studio productions and disc jockey programs.

TD was in demand and as popular as ever, but he had a challenge in maintaining quality as he struggled to maintain qualified personnel. He essentially had to deal with a talent pool diminished by the draft and musicians of lesser skill demanding more money. It could be argued Glenn Miller was smart to join the military and, therefore, shrewdly escaped this challenge. Indeed, Miller as Capt. Glenn Miller would have his choice of the best musicians in the business for the Army Air Forces Radio Production Units located in New York and Hollywood. Among the Dorsey personnel Miller and the AAF would procure were Carmen Mastren (guitar), Joe Buskin (piano), and Ziggy Elman (trumpet and leader).

The band remained on the West Coast through April 1943. The Dorsey Treasury Department programs on the Blue Network continued but moved to Friday evenings at 9:30-10:00 p.m. EWT. Meanwhile, the band was appearing regularly on *Coca-Cola Spotlight Bands*, which had moved to the Blue Network in September 1942 and been rebranded the *Victory Parade of Spotlight Bands*. This series was among the network programs edited and rebroadcast by the SSD Radio Section. Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra were being heard around the world in real time although they and other bands were not making records. The Golden Gate Theatre in San Francisco and the Orpheum Theatre in Los Angeles were among the venues where the band was booked for personal appearances. Dick Haymes remained with the band during its west coast residence. TD found a replacement for Jo Stafford and the Pied Pipers in the persons of Barbara Canvin and a four-man vocal group TD named the Sentimentalists. To this point, Dorsey maintained the string section. For a while, bandleader Freddy Martin loaned vocalist Larry Stewart to Dorsey due to Dick Haymes being sidelined by an illness. Dorsey was scheduled to head east and opened on April 15, 1943, at the Orpheum Theatre in Denver, followed by appearances in Omaha and Minneapolis before arriving in Chicago. Haymes remained in California and was replaced by Skip Nelson, who was formerly with Chico Marx and Glenn Miller. On May 5, 1943, in Minneapolis, Liz Tilton replaced Barbara Canvin. The band remained in Chicago for the month of May 1943 with an engagement at the Panther Room of the Hotel Sherman and excursions to several surrounding locales for appearances.

There was a new member of the Dorsey troupe for the April 15, 1943 - June 1, 1943 Midwest road trip. Among the actors appearing in *I Dood It* in a supporting role was the attractive M-G-M starlet Pat Dane. It appears TD met Dane (born Thelma Pearl Pippin, a.k.a. Thelma Patricia Byrnes-Gray) at either the studio on the set of the film *I Dood It* (most likely) or, by other accounts, at a New Year's Eve party.

The couple eloped to Las Vegas and were married on April 8, 1943. Pat Dane was born in Jacksonville, Florida, and attended the University of Alabama before moving to Hollywood. She was at least fourteen years younger than Dorsey, born August 4, 1919 (or 1921, according to M-G-M). Dane was, to put it mildly, an extrovert like TD and the polar opposite of Toots.

The Dorsey-Dane “honeymoon” was the April-June road trip. In Chicago, host Dick Powell interviewed Dane and TD on an NBC *Fitch Bandwagon* broadcast featuring the Dorsey band. Pat Dane was to TD what future generations might call a “trophy wife.”

Dorsey took a vacation the first two weeks of June 1943 and brother Jimmy Dorsey and his Orchestra substituted for TD’s commercial radio program. Betty Brewer replaced Liz Tilton as of the Raleigh-Kool program of June 16, 1943 from Hollywood. The band started work on their fifth M-G-M film, *Broadway Rhythm*, starring George Murphy and Ginny Simms. The film was in production until early September 1943. The final broadcast of the Raleigh-Kool program was Wednesday, September 8, 1943.

Expressing frustration with his band to the trade press, Dorsey made a public show of firing the entire band and then re-hiring about half of them. A reconstituted Dorsey band set off for New York where TD opened at the Café Rouge of the Hotel Pennsylvania October 3, 1943. A female vocal group, the Clark Sisters (Peggy, Mary, Jean and Ann) became the “new” Sentimentalists. Betty Brewer was still with the band, but a singer named Jimmy Cook replaced Skip Nelson. Despite the continuing personnel changes, according to critics, the band sounded even better, perhaps due to Dorsey’s professional leadership and tough standards.

Perhaps with an eye toward making a strong public statement, in December 1943 Tommy Dorsey hired longtime friend Gene Krupa as drummer. A year earlier Krupa had been arrested for marijuana possession and his subsequent trial had been national news. He had lost his own popular band as a result. Krupa was able to restore his public persona working with Dorsey and soon again had his own band.

Among the Army Service Forces Special Services activities was the production of V-Discs or phonograph records for distribution to the armed forces. The American Federation of Musicians relaxed its recording ban to allow the production of V-Discs as it had allowed musicians to participate in armed forces radio productions. During a *Victory Parade of Spotlight Bands* broadcast at Carnegie Hall, New York in April 1944, Dorsey and the band recorded several V-Discs. Some of TD’s Victor records were used for V-Discs and many tracks recorded from Dorsey’s other network radio programs were also used for V-Discs. By this time, vocalist and former bandleader Bob Allen had come aboard as Dorsey’s male vocalist and Bonnie Lou Williams had replaced Betty Brewer.

Tommy Dorsey was again selected as a summer replacement for a radio series in 1944. The band would return to the west coast in June 1944 to appear on the Lucky Strike *Your All Time Hit Parade*, Sunday evenings at 4:00-4:30 p.m. PWT (7:00-7:30 p.m. EWT) from NBC in Hollywood. Each program featured a guest star, including Bing Crosby, Al Jolson, Rudy Vallee, Kay Kyser and even an apparently reconciled Frank Sinatra (at least as it was presented to the nationwide radio audiences). The Lucky Strike series gave the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) the opportunity to resume its edited *Tommy Dorsey Show* series.

With even Sy Oliver now in the service, Dorsey needed arranging help. A new member of his brass section was Nelson Riddle, who would supplement his worth as a trombone player by embarking on what would become a stellar career as a composer and arranger. For the moment, Dorsey teamed Riddle with established arranger Sid Cooper, who doubled in Dorsey’s reed section.

Tommy Dorsey could be forgiven for feeling invincible at this point in his career. He was at his peak professionally and was leading a personal life he enjoyed. However, his equilibrium was disturbed the evening of August 5, 1944. During a party at Dorsey's West Hollywood apartment, the volatile TD assaulted actor Jon Hall who Dorsey felt had put his (Hall's) arms around wife Pat Dane in an improper manner. Hall appeared to be seriously injured and, indeed, needed dozens of stitches to his head and neck at a hospital emergency room. Hall's wounds appeared to be from a knife. The police report indicated several individuals assisted Dorsey in the fracas, including Dorsey's neighbor and friend Alan Smiley, owner of the apparent weapon (according to Los Angeles newspaper reports). District Attorney Fred N. Howser indicted Dorsey, Smiley and feisty Pat Dane for felonious assault even when Hall surprisingly decided not to press charges. The trial was scheduled for September 26, 1944. Meanwhile, the *All-Time Hit Parade* program continued over NBC and concluded as scheduled with the September 24, 1944 broadcast.

Coincidentally, Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra were scheduled to open at the Casino Gardens Ballroom in Ocean Park (Santa Monica), California September 29, 1944. Frustrated with the terms he received from the Hollywood Palladium, Dorsey directed his business representative Charles Wick to negotiate the purchase of the Casino Gardens at Ocean Park Pier. Jimmy Dorsey and Harry James were minority partners in the purchase.

The Dorsey trial was postponed and started on November 30, 1944. Panamanian actor/sailor Antonio Icaza also accused Dorsey of assaulting him and both Icaza and Jon Hall were prosecution witnesses. Their testimony was inconsistent. Smiley's attorney, the famous Jerry Giesler and Dorsey's attorney, Issac Pacht, were able to strongly challenge the prosecution case. The District Attorney's office moved for a dismissal, but the judge ordered the trial to proceed. On December 7, 1944, Superior Court Judge Arthur Crum dismissed the charges. Tommy Dorsey, Pat Dane and Alan Smiley were fully exonerated. The Dorsey band had gone ahead to Chicago for an engagement without TD and he quickly left Los Angeles to catch up with them.

Before and during the trial, the Dorsey band was working on the production of its sixth film for M-G-M, *Thrill Of A Romance*, starring Van Johnson, Esther Williams and Lauritz Melchior. As a consequence of the trial, the film would turn out to be Dorsey's unexpectedly and prematurely final film for M-G-M. Studio chief Louis B. Mayer was appalled by the negative publicity even though it was rumored M-G-M worked behind the scenes to protect its interests and had allegedly paid off Hall to drop the charges before the District Attorney went ahead with the case. Whatever the particulars, Dorsey's option was not renewed by M-G-M. Pat Dane's career was also affected.

Dorsey did receive good news November 10, 1944, when AFM chief James Cesar Petrillo ended the recording ban against Victor and Columbia (the AFM had settled with Decca and Capitol a year earlier). Dorsey was back into the Victor studio right away to wax Sy Oliver's "Opus One," perhaps the most memorable of Oliver's Dorsey arrangements. The clarinet solo by Buddy De Franco was so good Dorsey reportedly wanted it repeated the same way for every succeeding performance, similar to Glenn Miller's alleged desire to have Bobby Hackett repeat the cornet solo on Miller's hit record of "A String of Pearls." Present for the November 14, 1944 recording session was drummer Buddy Rich, fresh out of the Marine Corps and reunited with Dorsey. Also recorded the same day was Oliver's arrangement of "On The Sunny Side Of The Street."

Because of his focus on West Coast activities, Dorsey sold Twin Oaks in Bernardsville, New Jersey, in November 1944.

The band returned to Chicago and the Panther Room of the Hotel Sherman in December 1944. Dorsey was absent for part of the engagement because of the Jon Hall case which was underway on the West Coast. He rejoined the band on December 9, 1944, and continued to the East Coast for an engagement at the Meadowbrook in New Jersey. Dorsey appeared with maestro Leopold Stokowski and the New York Symphony on February 15, 1945, as a guest trombonist performing Nathaniel Shilkret's *Concerto for Trombone* at City Center Hall in New York. The Dorsey band opened on February 16, 1945, at the "400" Restaurant in New York. *Metronome* editor George T. Simon was in the Army and had spent time assigned to the AAF with Capt. Glenn Miller's Radio Production Unit (418th AAF Band) and later the associated 718th AAF Band at the AAF Technical School, New Haven, Connecticut. When Miller's Radio Production Unit was sent to Europe, Simon transferred to the V-Disc program (with Miller's recommendation). With V-Discs, Simon produced memorable New York recording sessions. March 15, 1945, Cpl. Simon welcomed the combined bands of Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey to the Victor Studio in New York where V-Disc 451-A "More Than You Know" and 451-B, "Brotherly Jump" (arranged by Sy Oliver) and were recorded.

When the band returned east in December 1944, vocalist Bob Allen remained behind, and for a while, his replacement was Frankie Lester. While appearing with his band on *Victory Parade of Spotlight Bands* episodes and at the "400" Restaurant, Dorsey began to appear as a regular guest on NBC's RCA Victor radio program *Music America Loves Best*. The series, featuring mainly light classics mixed with popular ballads, was also edited for broadcast by AFRS. Actor Louis Calhern was the nominally regular host of the program. TD became Master of Ceremonies for *Music America Loves Best* in 1945 (Sundays, 4:30-5:00 p.m.): April 29-May 27 from New York, with Jay Blackton's Orchestra; June 3-August 26 from Hollywood, with Lou Bring's Orchestra and September 2-November 25 from New York again, with Blackton

In March 1945, former Ina Ray Hutton vocalist Stuart Foster (Tamer Aswad) joined the band. Following Jack Leonard and Frank Sinatra, Foster would be arguably the most popular and certainly longest tenured of Dorsey's male singers. Another major addition in early 1945 was African American trumpeter Charlie Shavers, the first regular black musician to appear in the band as a regular (Sy Oliver had substituted in the trumpet section). Shavers would work for Dorsey regularly until 1956. When Ziggy Elman returned from military service, the trumpet duo was a phenomenal hit among jazz and swing fans.

On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered, and V-E (Victory in Europe) Day was celebrated on May 8, 1945. The following week fellow band leader Duke Ellington joined TD and the band for a recording session at RCA Victor. Ellington replaced Jess Stacy at the piano for Sy Oliver's "The Minor Goes A Muggin'." The same day, May 14, 1945, Dorsey joined the Ellington band for "Tonight I Sleep." Both sides were issued on the Victor "Double Feature" 78rpm release 45-0002. The Dorsey band left New York to return west via Chicago. May 26, 1945, at the Victor Studio in Chicago, they recorded Johnny Mercer and Harry Warren's "On The Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe" from the M-G-M film *The Harvey Girls*, complete with a robust Dorsey trombone solo and vocal by the Sentimentalists.

Dorsey grabbed another summer replacement series for 1945 as the negative publicity from his 1944 trial abated. Tenderleaf Tea and Bluebonnet Margarine sponsored *Tommy Dorsey and Company*, which aired Sundays from 5:30-6:00 p.m. PWT (8:30-9:00 p.m. EWT) from NBC Hollywood. The format included a different female Hollywood star each week as Dorsey's guest. The series ran through September 2, 1945, providing AFRS with additional material for its edited *Tommy Dorsey Show*.

On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan by Army Air Forces B-29 aircraft based in the Marianas Islands. The formal surrender was signed on September 2, 1945, aboard the U. S. S. *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, ending World War II. Dorsey and the band had returned to New York to complete their summer network series and to return to the "400" Restaurant.

TD appeared on *Songs By Sinatra* on October 24, 1945, on CBS, returning the favor of Frank Sinatra's visit to the All-Time *Hit Parade* in 1944.

Several years earlier, the Blue Network named Paul Whiteman its music director. Not to be outdone, Mutual named Dorsey its music director in March 1946. In September 1947, Dorsey became the host of his own weekday music program as a disc jockey. 150 participating stations broadcast *The Tommy Dorsey Show*, produced by Lou Cowan. Dorsey provided transcribed spoken introductions for records played by the participating stations.

In 1946, United Artists produced a film biography of the Dorsey Brothers titled *The Fabulous Dorseys*. The film included realistic and fabricated events in the lives of the brothers, who appeared together. Paul Whiteman, Bob Eberly, and Ziggy Elman appeared in the film; Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra declined. The Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy Dorsey bands also appeared in the film, which starred William Lundigan and Janet Blair.

Although Tommy Dorsey was confident, the band business hit a sour note during 1946 when many leaders broke up their bands due to high costs that declining revenues could not support. The exception was the new postwar Glenn Miller Orchestra directed by former Miller sideman Gordon "Tex" Beneke, which initially thrived on the Miller legacy following the bandleader's disappearance while serving in the military. The Beneke-led band, complete with strings, commanded top billing. But the others struggled. The brother and Harry James pulled out of Casino Gardens, leaving TD alone as a sole proprietor. Dorsey adjusted to the new business environment by dropping his fees. But musical tastes had changed, and TD could not manufacture business. Dorsey joined Benny Goodman, Harry James, Les Brown, and Woody Herman in giving his band notice in December 1946. But he would return.

REUNION (1947-1956)

Tommy Dorsey continued to host his Mutual radio program on weekdays while he planned and plotted his return with a downsized band (no strings) focused on realistic artistic and financial objectives. His music publishing business grew, even as novelty tunes supplanted romantic ballads. Dorsey spent March 1947 in Miami, Florida, where he purchased a yacht, which a crew sailed through the Panama Canal to California for him.

Then TD put together a new band without strings, with Stuart Foster again delivering quality vocals and new best-selling records. TD hired the Town Criers vocal group, drummer Louis Bellson, and brought back both Ziggy Elman and Charlie Shavers. They opened on May 16, 1947, at Dorsey's Casino Gardens. After four years of marriage, Pat Dane filed for divorce from Dorsey in Nevada on July 3, 1947. During this time, Dorsey also worked solo in the Samuel Goldwyn film *A Song Is Born*, starring Danny Kaye and Virginia Mayo, along with fellow bandleaders and musicians Benny Goodman, Charlie Barnet, Lionel Hampton, Louis Armstrong, and Mel Powell. During the film's production, Dorsey reportedly took a swing at none other than Benny Goodman, and Louis Armstrong reportedly broke up what might have become a fight. The press eagerly reported the incident.

TD also met Janie New, a former chorus girl, on the set of *A Song Is Born* or at Casino Gardens. New appeared in the film as one of Dorsey's singers, seated next to regular girl singer Lucy Ann Polk (New did not sing in the film). New soon departed for work in New York, but the pair would see each other again as Dorsey's schedule allowed, and both were involved socially with other people. Dorsey returned with the band to Florida, and his yacht, now named *The Sentimentalist*, followed. Dorsey, members of the band, and TD's friend, comedian Jackie Gleason (a protégé of TD advance man "Bullets" Durgom) spent considerable time aboard. While in New York and Florida, Dorsey pursued New, who had thought from the trade press that TD was involved with model and actress Candy Toxton (Florence Anna Tockstein). Dorsey was very much involved with Toxton, who thought they would get married. So did gossip columnist Jimmie Fidler, who said so on his radio program.

Following an awkward few days in Miami, where both women were present (Toxton was aboard the *Sentimentalist*), Toxton returned to Los Angeles, where she worked for Columbia Pictures. Dorsey married Jane New on March 24, 1948. Toxton went on to marry singer Mel Tormé on February 11, 1949.

The musicians had to sit out another AFM recording ban during 1948, but TD was back in the studios when the ban ended on December 14, 1948, to record the hit "Down By the Station" during the early hours of the following day. Dorsey would produce a new string of successful records for Victor's RCA. Not necessarily adverse to change, by 1950, Dorsey briefly hired musicians who had be-bop backgrounds. But Dorsey hated be-bop, and TD fired them when the musicians attempted to play it. Dorsey was a swing fixture and not a modern jazz pioneer. Among the musicians working with Dorsey were Boomie Richman, Zoot Sims, and Doc Severinsen. By 1949, Dorsey found Casino Gardens a losing proposition and sold the ballroom. He rationalized the loss by now having more time on the road.

RCA Victor ended its relationship with Tommy Dorsey on August 17, 1950, after fifteen productive years during which Dorsey was the most-recorded bandleader in history. Competitor Decca Records immediately signed Dorsey to a three-year contract with a guarantee of fifty records and \$52,000 per year. Dorsey's contract with MCA ended in December 1950, and he made a high-profile public show representing himself from his office in New York. In January 1950, the Dorsey band played an extended engagement at Sans Souci Club and Club Tropicana in Havana, Cuba. In November 1951, the band toured Brazil, including the Night and Day Club and Hotel Serrador in Rio de Janeiro. They also played in Recife. The tour to Brazil was a disaster. Dorsey took his wife Jane and their two-year-old daughter Susan along, but TD did not receive the \$200,000 fee for the tour upfront as specified in the contract. Dorsey, his wife, and daughter returned to Miami and left the band stranded in Rio de Janeiro. Sam Donahue, the former civilian bandleader and wartime U. S. Navy bandleader (succeeding Artie Shaw), was in the TD reed section and led the band for the remainder of the tour. Dorsey and the band were eventually paid.

By this time, Dorsey's hair had gone gray, and he was starting to wear it in a crew cut. His physical condition had also gone downhill after years of high living. Jane New and Dorsey would have another child, a son, Stephen Parker Dorsey.

As a new generation of band leaders including Ray Anthony, Billy May, and Ralph Flanagan, rose to prominence in what remained of the band business by 1952 and 1953, Dorsey, Stan Kenton, Harry James, Woody Herman, and other veteran leaders were enjoying rejuvenated interest and activity. The jazz scene, including Dave Brubeck, had moved forward with new concepts and talent. Count Basie and Duke Ellington continued to move forward. Music would soon change dramatically, but the band business was experiencing an uptick.

By the spring of 1953, Tommy Dorsey was steadily engaged at the Café Rouge of the Hotel Statler (formerly Hotel Pennsylvania) in New York. TD had purchased a home in Greenwich, Connecticut, and made New York his home base. He continued to be a close social friend (and drinking buddy) of numerous entertainers, including Jackie Gleason, who had become a key television producer and entertainer. Their favorite New York watering hole was Toots Shor's. Gleason proposed a CBS television series reuniting the Dorsey Brothers.

Jimmy Dorsey had experienced serious health issues and was arguably not in good enough shape to meet the demands of leading a band. He was also experiencing financial problems and thus disbanded. Their mother, Tess, who was still alive, told TD he had to help "the brother." So Jimmy Dorsey joined TD's band in April 1953. Although TD owned the band and Jimmy played as a sideman, he rebranded his band "The Fabulous Dorseys, Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra featuring Jimmy Dorsey." Jimmy Dorsey would commonly lead the band for the first set at engagements with his hits and jazz standards. After intermission, Tommy Dorsey would lead the band with his hits and current arrangements. This kept them comfortable with one another.

"The Fabulous Dorseys" were guest stars on the May 23, 1953, CBS television *Jackie Gleason Show*. At the time, the program was top-rated and featured the legendary *Honeymooners* segment. The brothers returned as guests on the December 26, 1953 *Jackie Gleason Show*. The band did well on the road during 1953 and returned to the Café Rouge, where NBC radio featured them in a new *All-Star Parade of Bands* series. TD's recording agreement with Decca was not renewed by mutual agreement. TD recorded his last sides for Decca (without Jimmy) in August 1953. The brothers agreed with a new label, Bell Records. In 1954, CBS decided to produce *Stage Show*, a variety program that would be the summer replacement series for the Jackie Gleason Show and feature the brothers from July 3, 1954, to September 18, 1954. Since the program aired Saturday evening, an agreement was worked out with owner Frank Dailey for the Dorseys to play at the Meadowbrook while appearing on the television program.



Tommy Dorsey and Charlie Shavers
Greenwich, Connecticut
November 1956

In November 1954, Tommy brought Buddy Rich back as drummer. The reunion lasted until April 1955. TD then independently recorded a series of instrumental selections, including Jackie Gleason's television theme, *Melancholy Serenade*. The recordings were later leased to Columbia by Dorsey's estate after both brothers had passed away. During the 1955 summer season, *Stage Show* was not Gleason's summer replacement. Paul Whiteman hosted *America's Greatest Bands*, where different bands appeared each week. But *Stage Show* was destined to be a full-time, half-hour CBS television series (the Gleason program slot was an hour). *Stage Show* would precede a half-hour version of *The Honeymooners*, Saturday, 8:00-8:30 p.m. It debuted on October 29, 1955. New and established talent appeared on the programs as guests, including Tony Bennett, Sarah Vaughn, and Connie Francis. The Dorsey band played background on one stage performance per program by the June Taylor Dancers.

Looking for new talent, the producers scheduled a singer from Tupelo, Mississippi, for the January 18, 1956, telecast. His name was Elvis Presley, and he would ultimately appear on six *Stage Show* programs. Although Jackie Gleason and the band members were dismissive of Presley, TD felt the unorthodox young performer would become a major success, and Dorsey was correct. In a sense, Tommy Dorsey introduced Elvis to the national audience (*before* Ed Sullivan) and presented him in a manner that showcased Presley's true talent. The young performer would soon become the biggest-selling artist in RCA Victor Records' history, ironically, the record label for which Tommy Dorsey had been a best-selling artist.

Jane New Dorsey filed a divorce action against Tommy Dorsey on October 24, 1956. Their marriage had reportedly been volatile. In a preliminary action, a judge suggested the couple live in separate locked bedrooms in separate wings of their Greenwich home, "Ho Hum Hollow." CBS wanted to return *The Jackie Gleason Show* to a one-hour format for the 1956-1957 season, so September 22, 1956 was the final *Stage Show* telecast.

Saturday evening, November 24, 1956, the Dorsey band was at the Café Rouge and made a CBS radio broadcast. After finishing for the evening, Tommy Dorsey drove to an Italian restaurant in the Bronx with Lee Castle, the member of the band whom TD had essentially made his assistant bandleader. They met Vince Carbone and his wife. Carbone, who had been with Glenn Miller's Army Air Forces Orchestra, was Dorsey's business manager since 1950. Back in the Café Rouge on Sunday, November 25, 1956, for the 12:30 p.m. CBS *Dorsey Brothers Show*, Dorsey took food home for dinner when he dined at his Greenwich home with his wife and her mother. Dorsey had told Carbone he and Jane were getting along better. After dinner, Dorsey went to his room. Carbone recalled receiving a telephone call from his boss around 9:00 p.m. Dorsey sounded incoherent. Carbone, alarmed, called Jane at her private number in the home and asked her to check on TD. She did, and Dorsey replied behind the locked door that he was on the phone. Carbone was satisfied. Later, she checked and heard Dorsey snoring, and the television was in the room.

Carbone arrived the following morning, Monday, November 26, 1956, because he used the home's basement as Dorsey's booking office. TD was still apparently sleeping. When Dorsey had not appeared by afternoon, Jane tried his door, but it was still locked. Carbone used a ladder to climb up to the bedroom window and open it. He found Tommy Dorsey fully clothed in his bed with no sign of life and vomiting evident on his face and the bedding.

The medical examiner determined Dorsey had choked to death sometime between 2:00 and 4:00 a.m. The cause of death was asphyxia. He became sick while he slept, and food lodged in his windpipe as he choked. It is possible that a combination of wine with dinner and sleeping pills prevented him from awakening. After the initial determination, the medical examiner amended the cause to state that Dorsey was anesthetized by barbiturates when he choked to death. A police officer discovered a note written by Dorsey that could have been misconstrued to be a suicide note (the authorities and Jane New Dorsey dismissed this).

Tommy Dorsey's funeral was held in New York on Thursday, November 29, 1956. Mourners included Jackie Gleason, Paul Whiteman, Tex Beneke, and Guy Lombardo. TD's son "Skipper," Lt. (jg) Thomas F. Dorsey III, USN, received emergency leave from his duty as a Navy pilot to travel from Hawaii and attend the service. Dorsey's daughter Pat Dorsey Hooker was also in attendance. Jane felt her children Susan and Steven were too young to attend. Many of the musicians who worked for Dorsey over the years attended. TD was interred at Valhalla Cemetery in Westchester County. His funeral service and large tombstone were courtesy of Jackie Gleason, whose floral arrangement was inscribed "for my dearest friend." Gleason canceled his regular program on Saturday, December 1, 1956, to televise an all-star tribute to Tommy Dorsey.

During the 1956 holiday season, Jimmy Dorsey led the band on the NBC Radio *Bandstand* series. He renamed the band "Jimmy Dorsey and the Fabulous Dorsey Orchestra." The health of The Brother was already problematic and only worsened after the loss of TD. In January 1957, Jimmy's left lung had to be removed due to cancer. Unfortunately, the cancer had spread. Jimmy carried on with a road trip in the southwest and Midwest and spent time in Florida to recuperate. Upon his return to New York, he was checked into hospital and died June 12, 1957. He was laid to rest in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, with his father. Tess Dorsey was alive to see both of her sons pass. Tommy Dorsey was 51, and Jimmy Dorsey was 53 when they died. The mother lived to the age of 93 and passed away in 1968.

Tommy Dorsey left a complicated estate, which was settled in June 1957. Jane New Dorsey held the Dorsey music library and was receptive when agent Willard Alexander approached her about creating a new Tommy Dorsey band. In 1956 Alexander worked with the Glenn Miller Estate to re-launch a Glenn Miller band. Trombonist Warren Covington was hired to lead the new band and had a quick hit with "Tea For Two Cha Cha." In 1961, Frank Sinatra recorded the Reprise label album *I Remember Tommy* in collaboration with Sy Oliver. When Covington left, a succeeding Dorsey band was put together in late 1961 with Sam Donahue as the leader. This band lasted for a few years. Frank Sinatra, Jr. was the male vocalist for a time. Several other Tommy Dorsey bands followed. Ultimately, former TD sideman and bandleader Buddy Morrow would lead the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra sponsored by widow Jane New Dorsey and her children.

Pat Dane, Jane New Dorsey, Pat Dorsey Hooker, and Tom Dorsey III have all now passed away. Tom Dorsey III's wife, Barbara, lives in Colorado and is a good friend of the University of Colorado American Music Research Center Glenn Miller Collections. During his lifetime, Tom was a valued friend and adviser.

The GMC has assembled and preserves significant collections containing a comprehensive library of Tommy Dorsey recordings, broadcasts, photographs, and documents, including the Walter C. Scott and Edward Burke Collections. It is an honor to preserve, enhance, and share the legacy of Thomas Francis Dorsey, Jr., who Rick Crandall and I regularly feature Tommy Dorsey in our weekly worldwide broadcast and podcast, *The Star-Spangled Radio Hour*.

Tommy Dorsey was an impeccably dressed, engaging, and larger-than-life figure. He had an influential impact on the history of American popular music. He was arguably among the most accomplished trombonists and promoted the careers of many singers and musicians. The Dorsey name and legend is synonymous with what is now called the "swing era" of popular music and jazz. He was an American original.

Dennis M. Spragg
Updated March 2025



Tommy Dorsey and Gene Krupa - 1943

Learn more about Tommy Dorsey

Comprehensive online resources are available here and constantly updated:

<https://www.dennismpragg.com/tommy-dorsey>

Including detailed annual chronological histories, 1935-1946, with 1947-1956 to come.

Index of all Tommy Dorsey recordings, broadcasts, and appearances.

Image library and Sy Oliver arrangements study.

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