Glenn Muller: —the swing era and up through a lot of different kinds of music, and I’ve been at it more or less all the time since then. But this Dixieland thing—I always liked Dixieland music, and after I got out of the nightclub scene and playing popular dance music, I got associated, became associated with this group that plays the Dixieland music and that’s the most fun I’ve had in years. [laughs] It’s a real kick. It’s really nice.

Unknown Interviewer: What instruments do you play?

GM: I’m a tenor saxophonist.

UI: You said you started out in Bozeman.

GM: Yes.

UI: What influenced you? What started you out in the music?

GM: Well, I came from a musical family. My mother played, and we always had music at home. In fact, before I got into high school, I played guitar and Mother played piano, and we used to have the old fashioned singalongs in the evening at home. So music was just kind of a part of my life, and when I got into high school where they had the music programs, I thought that it’d be fun to learn to play an instrument. My older brother was a trombonist, and he kind of encouraged me to start playing sax. So that’s how my folks bought me this instrument...no, I guess my freshman year in high school, and I learned to play it and became proficient enough that I did, as I say, get a job with this band at the college up there playing for dances and parties. I just kind of went on from there.

UI: When you played, was there...was a large part of it improvisational, or would you work together before or—

GM: A lot of it was more or less spontaneous. A lot of the music in them days was that way. In other words, four or five guys got together, and you said, “Well, we’re going to play such and such a song,” and the...We put a lot of emphasis on music in that era pretty much followed a standard chord pattern. So you kind of started out by memorizing these songs and the chord
patterns—at least I did—and then so that you could play and play the harmony or whatever fit in as you went along with the other instruments that you’re working with. Almost kind of like spontaneous arrangements—instantaneous arrangements—as you as you played, and I just learned to play that way base on the chord structure of whatever particular melody we were working with so that it’s a natural thing for me to simply hear the chords or follow the chord line and play and kind of make up my own notes within that chord structure as I go along.

Ul: Is there sheet music involved then?

GM: Well, yeah, yeah. Of course, that’s the way that we’d learn most new songs was by the sheet music, and from the piano music I learned to read and transpose from the melody line off the piano music and then just embellish it from there—go on and play whatever it took to do it.

Ul: You were saying this is so in the early, late ‘30s, early ‘40s, then being the ‘90s 50 years later, have you seen a huge change as far as your playing, I guess, the style of playing or what’s asked of you as a musician?

GM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Of course, nowadays modern music isn’t as complex musically as a lot of these things that we used to play, like in the big bands during the swing era, the music we were playing then was quite complex—complex harmonies and chord structures. Modern music, you’re lucky if they have three chords, and it doesn’t really...There’s more emphasis on the vocal aspect of modern music than there is of the instrumental aspect. About all that the instruments are doing are playing one single lead line and their bass rhythms with it. Then the lead guitarist is the improvisational instrumentalist and then your vocalists, and that’s all there is to it. But some...

Well, when I was in the Air Force, I played in big bands in the Air Force in Denver and down in Arizona in Phoenix and over in Victorville, California, also—I played in the big bands. But we’d have regular written arrangements with complex harmony parts and then with individual adlib solos—portions in them—that you had to perform. So it was a lot more complex, I guess you’d say, than what is required now. The latter part of my musical career, I’ve been playing with small groups where...Well, I played for years in the local nightclubs and such with just a trio, just an organist and a drummer and myself and sometimes a girl vocalist, but doing, well, the older music—the swing music—for dancing. There you’re simply a soloist—and instrumental soloist, in other words. So that requires that the basic background of being able to play against the chords that’s going with the chord line in the tunes that your playing.

But music, I guess, is music, but the different rhythmic patterns kind of differentiate. The Dixieland music is brighter and, oh I guess, more fun because of the flexibility of it. As you improvise against the Dixieland melodies and then with the rest of the instrumentalists, you kind of fit things together as they occur, and it’s fun. It’s just a very interesting thing to do because you’re...well, you’re literally playing all the time almost and working with the other
instrumentalists that are working, so it is, well, more gratifying, I guess—the nature of the music.

UI: Is there like a particular leader then that fits it all together?

GM: No, not necessarily. You mean like from, as a musical group someone that—

UI: Well, as a musical group you're playing along, and is there one person that may speed up the tempo or slow it down or decrescendo or crescendo?

GM: Well, kind of. It's pretty much spontaneous. It's pretty much as you feel it. We do this with certain things. We'll double the tempo. We'll start out with single...Well, in the case of the Dixieland music as they used to years ago start but with a single banjo solo, playing some of the old spirituals or something. Start them in a very slow tempo or just without any set tempo. Just playing by himself. Then we'll pick it up, play along with him. Then we'll double the tempo and get it up into the Dixieland jazz-type thing. But it all happens just kind of mutually. We think about it as we go along and think, well, this is the place where the drum break should occur, and then we'll double the tempo and go from there. Everybody just kind of does it. It's hard to explain because you'd think that there should be some signal or some rhyme or reason to how it would occur.

UI: It's just kind of like a feeling, isn't it?

UI: Just a sense?

GM: It is. It's just a—

UI: It's the coordination of everybody together.

GM: You just somehow feel it that that's what's going to happen. The drummer takes the drum break and away you go. It just happens.

UI: Now, do you find that sense even like you, even just if you're with...if you had four other musicians just come in here that had been playing as long as you did, would that same sense or feeling happen, or does that come more with people that you play over a...Is that a sense that becomes embodied in the musician over the years, or—

GM: Well, probably but it takes a little practice and working together to get it to work together as a group. But everyone kind of has the basic understanding that that's possibly what could happen, and you're kind of looking for it, I guess, as you go along. The music...we switch leads. In other words, the trumpet will play lead chorus, and I'll play a chorus and maybe clarinet will play a chorus, whatever. But all the time, all the background is going on with this at the same time. So it's the Dixieland music, like I say, it's full and complete and goes way back to before
the swing era when it was originated in the South. But it’s wonderful music. [laughs] It’s a great form of expression because it’s all happy and it’s fun and it allows you the flexibility of doing what you want to do when you want to do it and the other guys will go along with you.

UI: Does it originate from the African slaves coming up and from the soul songs that they sang?

GM: Yeah. This Dixieland music kind of started in New Orleans and in the South. People like Louis Armstrong, Sy Oliver [Melvin James “Sy” Oliver], some of the old timers that...Bunk Johnson [Willie Gary “Bunk” Johnson]—people that played this music and played on the riverboats up and down the river—it just kind of grew out of the South and came north until it hit Chicago. Then Chicago jazz was kind of another era—another change. Went through the Chicago jazz era, and then into...well, I guess about that time was when we got into the swing thing and the era of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra—the big orchestras came into being about that time. Then it just went on through World War Two and up until we had another change in music in the ‘50s and started to show some trend toward the so-called western [country and western, or country] music—the Western swing and so forth that became popular. Yet it’d always been there, and there was a certain group of people that played western music. We used to call it cowboy music, but it then it also evolved—went through some changes—where it became, through the western swing and up to where it is now—where western music is kind of in the class by itself now. Yet it’s based on the very same thing that all the other music is as well, but the kids that...or the people that are playing now—playing Western music are not playing what Western music started out as. The professional people—the stars in the western music field—are responsible for making some very nice changes in music and western music and bringing it up to where it is, well I think, a very viable and enjoyable form of music. I personally like western music very much. I played with a couple of western swing bands, and—

UI: Did you continue playing tenor saxophone?

GM: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And I see a lot of them coming back now again, using brass instruments in western bands, and of course, there’s been a few people that have kind of kept that alive. People like Boots Randolph [Homer Lewis “Boots” Randolph] that have played all kinds of music. But I, like to say, have played with a couple of good western groups where I played tenor sax right along beside the guitar players. That works too. But music—I don’t know how to say it except that music is music. It’s just that once you have it and you master your instrument, you can make it fit with most anything and play anything that you want to do.

UI: Did you ever get into playing bluegrass music?

GM: No, not really. I’ve sat in with a few bluegrass groups, but that is something that is strictly almost confined to string instruments. It’s a music that has to be performed on string instruments to get the proper twang to it. And really it is, and that's what makes it bluegrass
music. It's a different rhythm pattern, and it is, well, easier performed I guess by the artists on stringed instruments and almost mandatory that that's the way it be done.

Ul: Going back, you mentioned Louis Armstrong and some of the big guys. Is it improvisational feeling that they give to the music, is that what makes them so great?

GM: Yeah. Yeah, they...some of the old timers, well, like Louis Armstrong, played a kind of a special kind of a horn that added so much. There was so much expression in his playing that it was almost overwhelming as far as the other instrumentalists. That is to say that he could take a simple tune and improvise on the theme and add notes musically to the thing as he played it to where it gave it a lot more life and brilliance. And it was outstanding. His work was really outstanding for that reason. Then people came along that, well like Duke Ellington for example, that wrote some marvelous music—semi-classical music—but still with this wonderful free swing style and the marvelous instrumental—individual instrumental—work that his musicians were capable of made it simply outstanding. They're classics—

Dorothy Muller: I think too, Glenn, that the lyrics were so beautiful. They weren't just dumbed down [unintelligible]. They were melodically beautiful instrumentally, but they were so pretty. They were really lovely to listen to. A lot of thought went in to create them.

Ul: Do you see any of that happening today?

DM: None.

Ul: None? [laughs]

GM: Dorothy's not a real rock and roll enthusiast.

DM: No, no. Well, take “Stardust” for instance—that tune—that’s so beautiful, and you don’t hear anything like that now. There’s nothing. There is nothing in the world like it. Like he’s saying Duke Ellington, oh, “On Gossamer Wings” and all those pretty things that were so gorgeous to listen to.

GM: Well, the romantic era there that during the swing era—those were beautiful tunes and beautiful melodies. I just said to her the other day that you don’t hear people play nowadays with the skill with that they used to. You could take...pick any guy out of Benny Goodman’s band, for example, and he was a better technician—a all-around better musician—and could stand up and play anything with anybody—

DM: Anytime.

GM: —even if he was playing fourth tenor in that band, he still had the capability and the musical skill to be a star instrumentalist on his own if the occasion called for it. It doesn't seem
to me that there's that caliber of musician around today—a lot of them. There's a few, but you take all those big bands they had some sensational musicians in them. Well, we were sitting here Sunday night or whenever it was listening to some old reruns of Lawrence Welk's old band. Lawrence had some marvelous musicians. People that were exceptional instrumentalists. And Willie Nelson's got some good people with him. You can go down through any of these popular groups today, and these people have worked their way up to where they're are good instrumentalists, but the music that they have to work with doesn't, to me, doesn't demand the skill. Consequently, they don't exhibit the skill that people used to.

UI: Not placing blame anywhere, but it's the music that's inhibiting?

GM: I think it is. I really think that today's music...Well, I don't know any other way to express it other than to say that it's kind of shallow. Both lyrically and musically.

DM: It's a bit lazy, isn't it, Glenn?

GM: Well, it's repetitious. It not performed particularly well.

UI: [unintelligible]

GM: About all it is is loud. And I don't like loud. I don't like to play loud. I like to play so I can be heard, and I like to play with as much expression as I can and you can't use a lot of expression on any instrument if you're playing loud.

DM: But the Dixieland band gets wound up and plays loud sometimes. [laughs]

GM: [laughs] Oh yeah, we play loud sometimes—

DM: That's fun. That's free expression.

GM: —but it's because of the impetus of the thing. You get going, and it's fun, and everybody's having a good time, and it's this great...and it does get loud. But by and large, the average run of today's modern, popular music, to me, it isn't as musical as some other music out of the past.

UI: You talked a little bit about Duke Ellington. Were those people of yours that were idols of yours or people that that you aspired, wanted to be like or—

GM: Sure, you bet.

UI: —or were there other people in your family? I guess my question is...I guess people that were heroes of yours or that—

GM: Yes. People that I patterned after in my playing, you mean?
Ul: Yes.

GM: Oh well, sure. I was a great fan of all of these guys like Benny Goodman I think was the greatest clarinetist that ever was. But Artie Shaw running a close second right behind him. And Benny Carter is a fine saxophonist. Course Tex Beneke with the old Glenn Miller Band was a marvelous musician. Glenn himself wasn’t a tremendous musician, but he had a lot of good people in that band. All of these that you...at the time that I was growing up learning to play, you aspired to play like they did, and it was a case of practicing and memorizing and trying to duplicate. There were, oh gosh, hundreds of people that I admired. Johnny Hodges played with Duke Ellington. [long pause] I don’t know...forgotten a lot of it now.

DM: They’re still your idols [unintelligible].

GM: Oh yeah.

DM: They still play, still enjoy it and learn. You know, you can still learn from things that you hear [unintelligible].

GM: Yeah, I used to collect records—the old 78s—when we finally got down to where the 45s came out. But I had a tremendous collection of the old 78 phonograph records with all this music on it.

DM: Still do. Still got some—

GM: Still got a lot of them.

DM: —issues that—

GM: I just run on to a new kind of a jazz record club here. In fact, I received the first tape from them today that they’re going to reproduce a bunch of these jazz classics on tape now. So I’ll start buying some of those. But these people...like I say, they were better musicians.

DM: [unintelligible]

Ul: I enjoy all kinds of music I grew up in the South. Like he was saying, bluegrass, country music [unintelligible].

Ul: Yeah, like Courtney [one of the interviewers] was saying, I come from a musical family and not a lot of my immediate family but my mom had five brothers and they grew up on a farm and a lot of them and that’s what I...you know, a lot of Thanksgivings or family things and that...the music of that just seems to have so much more power to [unintelligible], so much more substance.
GM: Yeah.

DM: I think children of today are missing that. Any of it at all. They don't know what you're talking about. Thanksgiving you'd sit around play and they thought you were crazy and they wouldn't think that was fun at all but it is fun. But there wasn't a lot of other things to do. It was a lot of fun. It's fun for the participant, it was fun for [unintelligible].

Ul: My folks, that's how they had met, at a dance hall. They said they went every Saturday night. She worked as a tour guide at a cave, and every Saturday night they would go to Nemo [South Dakota?] was the place, and they’d have a band there.

DM: Sure. That’s where Glenn and I met. I had a child to support and I was working as a cocktail waitress and he was playing in the band there, and we got married and we’ve been married for 42 years. Some good, some bad. [laughs]

GM: I've played in a lot of dance halls and a lot of Saturday night dances. I can remember before I started playing, going—we were back in Wisconsin, our family was in Wisconsin at that time—going to hear my brother play in the band that he played with on Saturday night and that was...that was it. That was the entertainment. I've done a lot of it and enjoyed every minute of it.

Ul: Was there a time when you supported yourself as a musician?

GM: No. I've always—

DM: Had a legitimate job.

GM: I've always played with the idea that the money I made playing was extra and provided us some of the extra things that we wanted. But I never tried to support myself playing. I think it was impossible then and it’s more so now. I still think it’s impossible. I think that you've got to love music enough—these people that are in it professionally—have to like what they're doing that they're able to cope with the hardship of playing music to stay in it and being content with what they can derive from it. But financially, I don't...Well, of course nowadays, you have the big concerts and the big groups making thousands of dollars and all this, but that's the exception rather than the rule. You take the guy that's out playing in the corner bar for 15 dollars a night. He ain't getting rich, no. We can't all be stars—

[Break in audio]

DM: —just like the chipmunks, they say, “[unintelligible].”

GM: Had an appendectomy as a matter of fact—appendicitis.
DM: Yeah, they said, “Oh, Glenn could do that easy.” So he just went in—never played with them before in his life—

GM: Didn’t even get a chance to rehearse with them.

DM: No. Played the whole evening and nobody ever knew the difference. He even had a solo that he had to do, and he did it real easily and very nicely and that was fun for him.

Ul: Do you think that was probably your most exciting moment as a musician?

GM: Oh gosh, I don’t know. It was fun. It was great. I’ve had a lot of them, but…I played with a bunch of guys down in Victorville, California, like I say, out of…well, there was a band leader at that time had a big band—Ted Therito (?) was his name. These guys, most of his musicians were drafted into the Air Force and ended up in our Victorville Air Force Base band. So I used to go over and play with them, and we did several performances and we had people coming through for USO shows that we played for. Vocalists like Joe Stafford and I can’t remember anymore, but it seemed like we had a lot of people coming through that were kind of on the star circuit that made the rounds of the USO shows. I did the same thing with a band in Denver—played in the Air Force band in Denver. [unintelligible].

So I’ve had a lot of, I guess, great moments playing that just by virtue of being there, just being a part of it is gratification enough for me. I’ve met a lot of people and been a lot of places and played for a lot of things and it’s all been fun, but I never would have wanted to have to be dependent upon it for a career. It’s always just been fun for me. I guess that’s why I still like to play.

Ul: How’s your typical audience changed since when you started?

GM: Well, they’re very divided now. You can find the select groups. You can go to the Elks Club for example and find the people that liked to dance to the old swing-era music. Or you can go to [unintelligible] Daltons and find the country western and western swing bands. These audiences are pretty well defined—where they go and types of music they like. There’s some crossover. You’ll find…Well, I’ve had a lot of experience playing at the Elks Club, and in later years we’ve enjoyed some younger participants in our audiences. People kind of switching over I guess from rock and roll back into looking for something different. I kind of feel like that there is a feeling among young people that way today that they are kind of looking for something a little different. Maybe it’s time for a general change in music to go from rock and roll to something else. I don’t know what the something else would be, but I have seen some of these things occur up the line here and it might just be that somebody will develop something else that will take its place.
Latin music fit into one of those niches along the line there, and of course now the African music is beginning to creep into American music—and the African influence—and they're introducing some great rhythms and some very interesting musical patterns that are...well, they're kind of in a class by themselves. I find them very enjoyable because they are musically far more technical than what we've been listening to for a while.

UI: What were some of...you talked about with that being the evening—this is a little off the subject of music—but that the dances and stuff. What were the types of dances that...especially back in the ’40s and so forth, and then, I guess, how those dances have evolved up through now.

GM: Oh gosh. Well, Dorothy, maybe you can help me remember some them—

DM: The old jitterbug, you know.

GM: Well, the old jitterbug, yeah—

DM: That’s still going.

GM: Of course, now this new western jitterbug is kind of...What?

DM: Cowboy jitterbug.

GM: Yeah, the cowboy jitterbug, that’s kind of...almost like the old original jitterbug was when, well, we were in high school. Then, what? Oh, there was a lot of those other things—

DM: Hasn’t changed a lot, really. It was more one-on-one contact than dancing apart.

GM: Well, ballroom dancing, of course, just goes right on through. It stays the same regardless. But there were...like young people today have these little dances that they are happening in the discos and stuff that like we have some of them. I can’t think of—

DM: [unintelligible].

GM: Yeah. That’s right.

DM: I don’t know how we did that one.

GM: I don’t know either. But it was. [laughs] But they were just steps that went on, well, just like as I say, like some of the modern dances and the discos are today. But they were fun and just a passing fancy. Something that somebody thought up.
DM: And the audience and the band kind of made a group too. There was a feeling there that you felt really the warmth of the orchestra when it was playing—

GM: Of course, when rock and roll first started and they came out with things like the twist, see, which was one of the first dances that evolved from rock and roll, then that kind of put a new complexion on it. And the old rock n roll was a consolidation of a little different rhythm pattern with the old swing style. Then it went on through the...the country western people got a hold of it, and they went through their rhythm and blues and rockabilly and all of the things that happened. So this music's kind of gone off on a lot of different tangents down through the years, but it comes out in the end of all kind of consolidated again into, well, three or four basic, different kinds of music that you can hear today in the different clubs.

UI: Are there recording artists today, in groups today, that that are Dixieland groups that you're aware of?

GM: Yeah.

DM: Yes. These Dixieland jazz festivals? Oh! some of these that come up from Los Angeles, Some that come from New York [unintelligible] special—

GM: Oh yeah, there's some wonderful Dixieland bands around. There's a group in Seattle that they're over here at most of the jazz festivals, and they're exceedingly good. Of course, out of L.A. and Sacramento—that Sacramento Jazz Festival brings a lot of people out from California and up and down the coast. There's many, many good Dixieland bands.

DM: Kind of bring a little clientele with them [unintelligible] dress for the era. That's really darling to watch because they have the clothes made—the man in the [unintelligible] tuxedo and the high hat and all this. There's a few people that travel right with them that they like it so much. They're retired people. It's really fun to watch. They dance well. [unintelligible].

GM: Oh yeah, sure. Yeah. Real fans of Dixieland music, they really get into it and come to these festivals. I've played in a couple of the jazz...well, several of the jazz festivals in Helena. We had one here last year in November, but I don't know going to do that again or not. I haven't heard anything from Don West (?) who was kind of the organizer of that thing, but it would be kind of fun to do it again.

UI: Is there a difference between...could you say that there is just Dixieland music and jazz music? Or is it Dixieland jazz?

GM: Well, now, there's improvisational jazz where musicians...The old jazz—what we used to call jazz in beginning—was just a basic theme where the individual instrumentalist improvised on that theme, and there's still that type of thing going on. Then you have the jazz vocalists. Nancy Wilson and Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, who just died. People that were exceptional in
those areas. Then there's a modern jazz, which is still improvisation of a theme like Morales [Carlos Emilio Morales] and Thelonious Monk—some of these people that are the jazz greats of now. But that is one type of music. Then the Dixieland jazz is the old form that we're doing—the old, well, rhythm and blues basically. Then there's other kinds of...well, Willie Nelson's style of country western music and some of those people in that same class with him that are playing kind of a country western-jazz style, I guess you'd say, because it it's not just the straight old three-chord, cowboy-tune type thing. Then you get into the rock and roll types of music, which you're probably well familiar more than I—the different types of rock and roll are present today. But there's all these little branches off of the basic thing, but everybody kind of does something slightly different. But it still is fundamentally all based on a central theme more or less.

DM: This was kind of interesting. When we were in Helena, we were in Rose's Cantina, and it was just raining outdoors—just pouring rain—and we went in there and they got all set to play, just ready to go, and the lights went out. The lightning hit the transformer, and it was just pitch black in there. There was nothing. You couldn't see anything. So another woman said, “Okay, let's see what you can do.”

They said, “Okay.” So they found one of those red candles that's in the big...and propped it up on the piano so the piano man could see the keys. They played their full hour without [unintelligible]. It was really wonderful. Oh, the crowd was just wonderful! But it was absolutely black as your hand in there, and you couldn't see anything.

GM: You don't really have to see to play the stuff, you know. [laughs]

DM: But if that had been another band, they couldn't play. They would have had to have music, but they could just—

GM: Most of the time I have my glasses off anyway. I couldn't see if I had to.

UI: Is there a different types of songs within Dixieland?

GM: Oh yeah, yeah. Go from the gospel...Sacred music, the gospel, which is all part of the Dixieland thing because, like I say, these Dixieland bands started out primarily playing for wakes and weddings and funerals in New Orleans. Really, that was the idea. And all of the colored people in the South when a member of their family died or something, they'd have this wake and the people would come in and play and play this kind of rhythm and blues type of soul music because that was comforting to them. That was it was a real comfort to them. Then they'd go to the cemetery and play the dirges as they marched along, and then on the way back, everybody would break into this Dixieland jazz music and play the happy music coming back. So it was...that was their sole gratification, I guess if you will, as far as that aspect of their life was concerned and they expressed it musically that way. That's how the sacred music came into being. They produced these spirituals and gospel music that are still very popular today.
with a lot of the people. Barbara Mandrell has just put out a new album of gospel music that she uses all the time on her tours and on television program, so that is kind of the basis of this Dixieland music. The happy part of it is simply the expression of joy or relief or kind of a gratification that it was just a means of expression that everyone enjoyed the brighter, fuller type of music. So that's what they produced, and it was...I can't tell you much more about how it came into being other than just by people playing it. These bands started playing on the riverboats and gradually worked its way north and expanded, and it became a staple part of the American music.

But Dixieland encompasses a wide range of things. You look at our tune lists, and you will see a lot of the old hymns and gospel music and right on up through to fairly modern things that Dixieland bands are playing that are an outgrowth of the music out of Chicago and stuff that it's just another form of expression. It's fascinating music to me. I love it.

DM: The Dixieland bands that's played here in the churches too, they play in churches just as the jazz [unintelligible]. That's really...the congregation really like that.

GM: We did a jazz service at the Presbyterian church, which they enjoyed.

DM: Wonderful. The whole place was just full of music. It was such a pretty day, and it was just...you could hear it all over.

GM: In that one, we combined our instrumental music with the choral group—with the chorus, the choir—and they...We had a pretty good show that day.

UI: [unintelligible].

GM: Yeah, we did, well, several of the old hymns.

DM: “Saints Go Marching in.”

GM: [unintelligible].

DM: You did like one rehearsal with the choir, didn’t you? Or did you do any?

GM: No. We never did actually do a rehearsal with the choir. They rehearsed it by themselves, and we rehearsed it by ourselves. So we just went into the church and did it and put it together.

DM: It was good.

GM: So that's a case of just having to listen to what the other people are doing, see, and how it all fit. That's the joy of playing. That's the fun. To sit down read a bunch of notes and play through something, there's gratification in that too. I don't mean to say that...for example, I
love to hear a classical orchestra sit down and play a classical composition with full orchestral arrangement. It’s beautiful. I can enjoy it completely. But that’s not my thing. That isn’t what I would choose to play although it’s no different except that it’s a little more rigid in its composition and execution. You have to be right. [laughs] There’s no room for error playing classical music. But—

GM: Do you play?

UI: Yeah.

UI: I played in high school.

GM: Really, what do you play?

UI: I play the flute and alto sax.

UI: I played baritone.

DM: Oh yeah.

UI: I play guitar and bass clarinet.

DM: Do you guys get together and play?

GM: Oh yeah, we ought to—

UI: I haven’t played in over five years.

DM: Oh you should. That would be so fun. It really would.

GM: Yeah. It’s a lot of fun. Playing is great.

DM: Flute is so pretty. It’s beautiful, beautiful. It fits into any place.

UI: Yeah it’s kind of one of the reasons I wanted to take it up.

DM: [unintelligible]. Who know where music’s going. It may all come back again.

UI: Yeah. What was interesting comment that you made that maybe rock n roll has kind of run its course as far as a new form needing to emerge. I guess I’d never thought of that. I guess I just...For some reason, I just thought that rock n roll was kind of the final, the final word. I don’t know why I thought that, but it it’s very interesting and encouraging that there—

Glenn Muller Interview, OH 253-004, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
GM: Well, just as I've watched it over the years here, where it's gone from its original rhythm and blues origin it kind of up through where it is now, I can't imagine where else it's going in its present form. Like I say, the Afro influence coming into it is going to break away from the straight rock and roll pattern as we know it today because that's going to bring out a new series of rhythms that are going to be...they're not going to be adaptable to rock and roll like we know it now with 16 beats to measure. It's not going to work. So I don't know what that might do, but it just seems feasible that if we went from...what did they call music before swing?

[long pause]

Oh, the old Chicago style—they had a name on it. Well anyway, we went from that to swing to country western to rock and roll to who knows what. I just kind of feel like maybe there is something off in the wings there that's going to emerge someday and put a whole new complexion on this thing.

Ul: Could you pinpoint anything that set up those changes between them? Do you know? Or did it suddenly just—

GM: Well, just...they occur with changes generations.

RM: There, that's it. You don't want the same, you don't want your father's [unintelligible].

GM: Yeah, [unintelligible] generation. Because like I say, when I started to play, I was looking for something different, and we used to kind of poke fun at the older musicians that played the choppier style of music. What in the world did they call it?

RM: [unintelligible].

GM: Well, that's the expression we used, yeah, but we did. We kind of, as I say, poke fun at that type of thing and smoothed it all out into the swing era and good musicianship and what we thought was really the epitome of good music. Then all of a sudden you come up to the '50s, and that generation started thinking they'd like something else. So rock and roll came along in its original form, and it kind of took off and went a while and then in the last...well, during the '80s, you've seen rock and roll change again over into the different so-called hard rock type of music and acid rock so-called and the things that have changed about it to make it different just to satisfy in another generation. I really think that that will continue to go on though I don't know what it will be. I haven't any idea what it will be, but I think there'll be something.

RM: And the war made a difference.

GM: Well, yeah, the war made a definite difference. World War Two made a made a big difference.
DM: [unintelligible].

GM: Well, that was what brought on the romantic era of romantic music.

UI: Did Dixieland, did it adjust at all or was it affected at all by the folk music and stuff maybe through the ‘60s [unintelligible]. Did it—

GM: Not much.

UI: —retain its own shape?

GM: Yeah, yeah. Because we're still playing the same songs today that W.C. Handy “St. Louis Blues” is just as popular today with Dixieland groups as it was 50 years ago. And right on down the roster. These bands are playing the same music today that they were playing then. So Dixieland has kind of remained a pure form through all of this. Just come right along without any variation or changes—both by virtue of instrumentation and the actual music itself. A Dixieland jazz band is still comprised of the clarinet and a banjo and a trumpet and the trombone and a drum and whatever else you want to embellish it with. But you still got the basic form of Dixieland bands performing today while some of these other types of music do...like I said, gone from the big bands down to the little groups now that are so popular today simply because it’s playing this modern type of music, you couldn't have 16 people trying to play together without some pretty tight arrangements of doing this stuff even though it isn’t that complex to keep it all together and express the music in its true form. It’d be hard to do. Too many cooks spoil the broth and that kind of thing. You don't need five guitar players when two can do it.

UI: Do you think the improvisational aspect of it helped bring it along because people could change the way they want it?

GM: Yeah. It’s a freer form of expression.

DM: Like when a Dixieland band goes to play, they don't really know if there’s going to be 12 or 7 or 6, but whomever shows up they can play it whatever it is. Doesn't matter. You don't have to have so many of this and so many of that and so many of that. It’s just whoever comes, the can play. That’s why I guess it’s remained.

GM: Yeah, and the free form of it is so nice because if the drum player isn’t there, I can play what normally he plays as far as...and if I’m not there, he can play what I play. But it’s just nice to have the total complex of musicians, and then you get the right sound. But it’s just about got to be that way, and you can’t change it much.

Yeah, I don't know actually what's on the market today as far as to go down to the record store to buy Dixieland music. I don't know whether you can find it or not. I suppose there is some
available. I've never checked. I don't know. I've got some tapes and things that we've done and other bands that I've heard that play Dixieland music. But there isn't a lot of it around on the open market, I don't think.

DM: Well I think it's [unintelligible] to my feet. I got to move around a little bit because if I don't move I get stiff.

GM: All right.

DM: I tell you, I'm a real [unintelligible.]

Ul: This has been Courtney Jones, Deena Larson, Mike Sears at the home of Glenn Muller with his wife, October 29, at 6:30.