

The United States Air Force  
**AIRMEN OF NOTE**

Chief Master Sergeant  
Peter C. BarenBregge, Director

**BLUES**  
**BEYOND**

The United States Air Force Band



Washington, D.C.

# BLUES & BEYOND

Memories. Sitting at the back of the control room listening to the starts and stops of a typical recording session, my mind drifts back to strong images of a younger time nearly 25 years ago in Los Angeles.

Back then, they called themselves “The Official Air Force Jazz Ensemble: The Airmen of Note,” an aggregation (or as their various leaders have jokingly referred to them “an aggravation”) of 18 people from roughly 25 to 50 years old who get paid by Uncle Sam to make music - jazz music. It’s the band Glenn Miller started in 1940 when he was a member of the Army Air Corps. At that time the band played his music, the music of the times. Over its 46 year history the “Note,” as we and they affectionately call it, has evolved into one of the world’s first-class jazz orchestras. And while they still include the ever-popular “Miller Medley” when they perform throughout the nation and the world, this band has developed a cutting edge jazz repertoire that is second to none.

At that time, I was young and frankly awed at being at Capitol Studios in Los Angeles, whose walls had echoed the sounds of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald and Stan Kenton. I was doing interviews for the Air Force’s “Serenade in Blue” radio show with the likes of Sue Raney, Dick Haymes, Frank Rosolino and Sarah Vaughan, among others.

What amazed me then and still amazes me now, frustrated musician that I am, is the sheer brilliance of this band when asked to sightread any chart put before them. In Los Angeles, when you moved four or five guest artists a day through the recording studio, you had little or no time to rehearse, let alone fully “run-down” charts the way most sessions demand. Yet, in case after case, you would see the astonishment on the faces of the singers who were literally bowled over by the “Note’s” proficiency. One story will illustrate.

Sue Raney, one of the most exquisite singers in the business, was just finishing up her set with a heart-rending ballad which so moved *her* that tears streamed down her face. It was a poignant moment, and the band and I were touched by her performance as well. Sitting stoically, and somewhat smugly through all this in the rear of the control room was Sarah Vaughan, with a kind of “been there, done that” look upon her face, feeling perhaps a smidgen of envy at the effect

Ms. Raney had on us. Sue said her good-byes and it was now Sarah's turn. Charts were distributed, a couple of instructions given and away they went. Sarah Vaughan was terrific at this session, astonishing an already reverential audience.

After four or five tunes, she looked through the glass of her booth with a sincere, broad smile on her face and said, "I'm gonna be in Vegas next week, are you guys busy?" That's the tale. And 25 years later, that level of musicianship and professionalism is as apparent as ever.

It also occurred to me that any well-oiled machine, whether in sports, combat or space shots requires team work. But nowhere is this more critical than in music. The first presumption is that you can *play*. But when you meld 18 people playing six different categories of instruments with a hierarchy of sound within each group, and combine this with exacting rhythm requirements, you are faced with a daunting task.

The Airmen of Note meet that task splendidly on "**Blues & Beyond.**" Using a mix of standards and original compositions, the blues form is squeezed, punched, caressed and flat out stomped in this homage to the essence of that most basic of jazz forms.

Four of the 10 tunes here were arranged and two of those composed by the band's composer-in-residence, SMSgt Mike Crotty. Mike brings 24 years of writing and arranging expertise to the task, as well as perfect pitch and the ability to play virtually any instrument in the band. The title tune is his magnum opus here and its form is quintessential Crotty; starting simply and propelling forward, building throughout, becoming more complicated harmonically and rhythmically - a rose opening to full flower. MSgt Wade Beach's poetic piano introduction belies the power about to come and just listen to his comping in the background. MSgt Saul Miller's tenor gets a workout on this tune in sharp contrast to his contemplative reading on **In a Sentimental Mood**.

Lee Morgan's **Speedball** really romps with great solos from "Note" director CMSgt Pete BarenBregge on tenor and guitarist MSgt Wayne Wilkinson. Take special note of the sax section here with Pete leading them on soprano. It is one of the great examples of reed section precision and swing.

Chief Master Sergeant Pete BarenBregge, a band member since 1979 and its director since

1989, remarked to me that “planning repertoire for this group is very difficult. Usually any big band has maybe four or five soloists with the rest being content to play their section parts. But in this band, virtually everyone is a jazz player and wants room to solo. So working them all in is quite a job.” An embarrassment of riches I would say.

The “Note” has always had a great tradition of trombone players. To mention just two who fit into the phenomenal category, the recently retired Rick Lillard and Dave Steinmeyer come to mind. Up until seven years ago, and for the preceding 25, Dave was the groups lead trombonist and arguably one of the top players in the world. Continuing this tradition of excellence is TSgt Doug Elliott. Listen to his reading of Strayhorn’s **Lush Life**, or his straight-ahead blowing on the Crotty original **A Change of Elevation**. Before we leave the “bone” section, mention must be made of TSgt Joe Jackson’s work on **Never Make Your Move Too Soon**, and his painstaking transcription from original Duke Ellington band recordings of the Ellington staple, **Rocks In My Bed**.

Technical Sergeant Tracey Wright is the “Note’s” featured singer. The band has almost always had a female singer and she is yet another in a long line of superb vocalists to join forces with this outstanding group. TSgt Wright can interpret so skillfully and soulfully the essence of the tunes she sings. The growls, the smoky lower registers, the soaring high notes, the feel. The things you cannot teach. Listen for yourself on the four songs on which she’s featured: **Never Make Your Move Too Soon**, **Rocks In My Bed**, **Summertime** and **All Blues**.

**Limehouse Blues** is the barn burner of the set. Great solos again from MSgt Wade Beach, trumpeter TSgt Rich Sigler and another member of the stellar sax section, TSgt Andy Axelrad. Note also his solo on Miles’ **All Blues**. With due respect to Cannonball, Andy puts his own mark on this version.

Frequently unheralded, usually overworked, and to here them tell it, always underloved, the rock steady rhythm section of bassist MSgt Paul Henry and drummer SMSgt Claud Askew are always there. Claud and I have even developed a kind of act; he supplying the appropriate drum rolls and rim shots during my live emcee duties in response to a clever line (sometimes even when they’re not so clever). But when the audience hears Claud’s drum work they laugh anyway. Thanks Claud.

In closing, let me recall my earlier thoughts about this band's precision, excellence and attention to its task. It is no secret in this ever economizing world we live in that music, particularly taxpayer-funded music, can bear the brunt of the budgetary axe. The immediate past commander of the Air Force's 11th Wing, Colonel Steven A. Roser, (now a Brigadier General) under whose command the "Note" resided, had an interesting and so very appropriate philosophy on the subject. He said that every day all over the world the Air Force, in its many guises, performs complicated and sometimes heroic tasks in the pursuit of precision and excellence. And whether these occur in the air, on the ground, on the flight lines or in countless other ways, very few of us see, let alone appreciate, the magnitude of these endeavors. But when we see on the stage, hear on radio or watch on television the premier jazz ensemble of the United States Air Force, The Airmen of Note, they become the visual embodiment, the public's link if you will, to all others in service to their country that care as much as they do about excellence and its attainment. Wise words General Roser.

Paul Anthony  
Host, "Jazz Unlimited with Paul Anthony"

**Paul Anthony** has spent over 35 years performing in all manner of broadcast and non-broadcast media beginning with his first job as jazz disc jockey on Georgetown University's FM radio station WGTB in 1960 hosting JAZZ UNLIMITED. During the '70s Mr. Anthony hosted a weekly program for the U.S. Air Force called FOCUS ON JAZZ and a show on National Public Radio doing features and interviews with the greats of jazz. He helped develop the format for, and frequently hosted, NPR's weekly performance program, JAZZ ALIVE! Meanwhile, he continued his work in the commercial arena by hosting and programming an all jazz format on WRC-FM.

In 1980, JAZZ UNLIMITED moved to classical music station WGMS, where it enjoyed nine years of success. In 1987, the Achievement in Radio Awards panel bestowed on Paul Anthony and JAZZ UNLIMITED the honor of being the best radio program on the air in the metropolitan Washington area.

Mr. Anthony's association with the Airmen of Note dates from the late '60s when he hosted many of their concerts and traveled with the band for several recording sessions in California doing interviews with guest artists.

## Selections

- 1. LIMEHOUSE BLUES** Philip Braham (4:33)  
*Arr. Matt Harris*  
MSgt Wade Beach, piano  
TSgt Rich Sigler, trumpet  
TSgt Andy Axelrad, alto saxophone
- 2. IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD** Duke Ellington (6:10)  
*Arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty\**  
MSgt Saul Miller, Jr., tenor saxophone
- 3. NEVER MAKE YOUR MOVE TOO SOON** Stix Hooper / Will Jennings (4:28)  
*Arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty\**  
TSgt Tracey Wright, vocal  
TSgt Joe Jackson, trombone
- 4. BLUES & BEYOND** SMSgt Mike Crotty\* (11:07)  
MSgt Saul Miller, Jr., tenor saxophone  
MSgt Wade Beach, piano
- 5. ROCKS IN MY BED** Duke Ellington (3:11)  
*Trans. TSgt Joe Jackson\**  
TSgt Andy Axelrad, alto saxophone  
SMSgt Joe Eckert, alto saxophone, clarinet  
TSgt Tracey Wright, vocal  
MSgt Wade Beach, piano

6. **A CHANGE IN ELEVATION** SMSgt Mike Crotty\* (7:10)  
MSgt Don New, baritone saxophone  
TSgt Doug Elliott, trombone
7. **SUMMERTIME** George Gershwin / DuBose Hayward (5:20)  
*Arr. John Fluck*  
TSgt Tracey Wright, vocal  
MSgt Saul Miller, Jr., tenor saxophone
8. **ALL BLUES** Miles Davis / Oscar Brown, Jr. (7:11)  
*Arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty\**  
TSgt Tracey Wright, vocal  
TSgt Andrew Axelrad, alto saxophone  
MSgt Wayne Wilkinson, guitar
9. **LUSHLIFE** Billy Strayhorn (7:07)  
*Arr. Eric Richards*  
TSgt Doug Elliott, trombone
10. **SPEEDBALL** Lee Morgan (9:08)  
*Arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty\**  
CMSgt Peter BarenBregge, tenor saxophone  
MSgt Wayne Wilkinson, guitar

Total Time 65:52

\*Member, The United States Air Force Band

## PERSONNEL

THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AIRMEN OF NOTE • WASHINGTON, D.C.  
Chief Master Sergeant Peter C. BarenBregge, Director

### **WOODWINDS**

Senior Master Sergeant Joe Eckert, alto saxophone  
Technical Sergeant Andy Axelrad, alto saxophone  
Chief Master Sergeant Peter BarenBregge, tenor saxophone  
Master Sergeant Saul Miller Jr., tenor saxophone  
Master Sergeant Don New, baritone saxophone

Cleveland, Ohio  
Buffalo Grove, Illinois  
Wilmington, Delaware  
Riverside, California  
Levittown, Pennsylvania

### **TRUMPETS**

Technical Sergeant Rich Haering, lead trumpet  
Master Sergeant Bruce Gates, trumpet  
Technical Sergeant Rich Sigler, jazz trumpet  
Technical Sergeant Tim Leahy, jazz trumpet

Flint, Michigan  
Geneva, Illinois  
Mt. View, California  
Altoona, Pennsylvania

### **TROMBONES**

Technical Sergeant Joe Jackson, lead trombone  
Technical Sergeant Doug Elliott, jazz trombone  
Senior Master Sergeant Gary Hall, jazz trombone  
Master Sergeant Dudley Hinote, bass trombone

Denton, Texas  
Silver Spring, Maryland  
Fairfax, Virginia  
Titusville, Florida

### **RHYTHM**

Senior Master Sergeant C.E. Askew, drums  
Master Sergeant Wayne Wilkinson, guitar  
Master Sergeant Wade Beach, piano  
Master Sergeant Paul Henry, bass

Stuttgart, Arkansas  
San Antonio, Texas  
Baltimore, Maryland  
Green Bay, Wisconsin

### **VOCALIST**

Technical Sergeant Tracey Wright

Alexandria, Virginia

### **TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

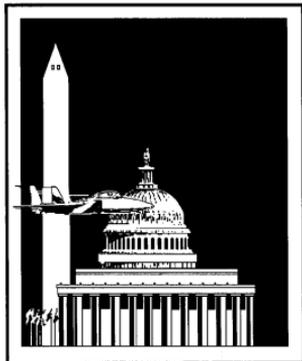
Technical Sergeant Joseph Dougherty, audio engineer  
Technical Sergeant Mike Ryan, stage manager

Glen Mills, Pennsylvania  
Horseheads, New York

### **Thanks to the following for their assistance:**

Master Sergeant Pat Shrieves (USAF Concert Band),  
percussion (on all tracks except 5 & 6)  
Technical Sergeant Anita Pavey (USAF Silver Wings),  
vocal (track 4)

Freehold, New Jersey  
Balsam, North Carolina



In 1950, the U.S. Air Force created the **Airmen of Note** to carry on the style of Glenn Miller's Army Air Corps dance band. In its day, Miller's band revolutionized music in the military by breaking with the long-standing tradition of the military march style, the band began a course that would add a new dimension to military music that still exists today. In the mid-1950s, the **Airmen of Note** began to expand its library with a more contemporary style under the direction of the legendary arranger Sammy Nestico.

Senior Master Sergeant Mike Crotty, the "**Note's**" chief arranger since the early '70's, has kept the band on the innovative course initiated by Glenn Miller in 1942. To augment its talented writing staff, the **Airmen of Note** has commissioned works by such celebrated arrangers as Bob Florence, Gary Lindsay, Matt Harris and Bob Mintzer. Tommy Newsom, another "**Note**" alumnus, along with Sammy Nestico also contribute to the **Airmen of Note** library. Today, the **Airmen of Note** is one of the few touring big bands, and as a result, has attracted 18 of the finest musicians in the country. With over 150 concerts annually, the "**Note**" provides musical support for a comprehensive array of U.S. Air Force and Department of Defense activities and performs frequently at the White House. In addition, the band tours the United States twice a year performing community relations concerts in the spring and fall. If you are a resident of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area you can hear the band during The USAF Band's Summer Concert Series, or the "**Note's**" own Jazz Heritage Concert Series featuring name jazz artists.

## CREDITS

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Lieutenant Colonel Lowell E. Graham</b>  | Commander                                       |
| <b>Chief Master Sergeant Peter C. BarenBregge</b>                                 | Director, Airmen of Note / Co-Producer / Mixing |
| <b>Senior Master Sergeant Michael M. Crotty</b>                                   | Co-Producer / Mixing                            |
| <b>Mr. Bob Dawson</b><br><i>Bias Recording / Springfield, Virginia</i>            | Recording Engineer / Mixing                     |
| <b>Technical Sergeant Douglas E. Elliott</b>                                      | Mixing  |
| <b>Mr. Dave Glasser</b><br><i>Airshow / Springfield, Virginia</i>                 | Mastering                                       |
| <b>Chief Master Sergeant Dana L. Steinhauser</b>                                  | Director of Public Affairs                      |
| <b>Master Sergeant William D. Porter II</b>                                       | Recording Production                            |
| <b>Master Sergeant William E. Marr &amp;<br/>Master Sergeant Dudley J. Hinote</b> | Graphic Layout                                  |
| <b>Master Sergeant James E. Bittner</b>   | Booklet Editor                                  |
| <b>Mr. Jim McKay</b><br><i>rewindplay / Vienna, Virginia</i>                      | Cover Art                                       |
| <b>Crabtree &amp; Jemison, Inc.,</b><br><i>Arlington, Virginia</i>                | Graphic Design                                  |
| <b>Compact Disc Service</b><br><i>Glendale, California</i>                        | Disc Replication                                |

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THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AIRMEN OF NOTE • WASHINGTON, D.C.

## Selections

- |          |  |           |  |
|----------|--|-----------|--|
| <b>1</b> | <b>LIMEHOUSE BLUES</b> (4:33)<br>Philip Braham / <i>arr. Matt Harris</i>                                       | <b>6</b>  | <b>A CHANGE IN ELEVATION</b> (7:10)<br>SMSgt Mike Crotty                                   |
| <b>2</b> | <b>IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD</b> (6:10)<br>Duke Ellington / <i>arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty</i>                          | <b>7</b>  | <b>SUMMERTIME</b> (5:20)<br>George Gershwin / DuBose Hayward<br><i>arr. John Fluck</i>     |
| <b>3</b> | <b>NEVER MAKE YOUR MOVE<br/>TOO SOON</b> (4:28)<br>Six Hooper / Will Jennings<br><i>arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty</i> | <b>8</b>  | <b>ALL BLUES</b> (7:11)<br>Miles Davis / Oscar Brown, Jr.<br><i>arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty</i> |
| <b>4</b> | <b>BLUES &amp; BEYOND</b> (11:07)<br>SMSgt Mike Crotty   | <b>9</b>  | <b>LUSH LIFE</b> (7:07)<br>Billy Strayhorn / <i>arr. Eric Richards</i>                     |
| <b>5</b> | <b>ROCKS IN MY BED</b> (3:11)<br>Duke Ellington / <i>trans. TSgt Joe Jackson</i>                               | <b>10</b> | <b>SPEEDBALL</b> (9:08)<br>Lee Morgan / <i>arr. SMSgt Mike Crotty</i>                      |

Total Time 65:52

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