Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth and this Bill Kenwright production of The Glenn Miller Story.

My name is Penny and I will be describing Act 1 for you, my colleague Denise will be describing Act 2. The total running time is 2hours 20 minutes. Act 1 lasts 52 min, as does Act 2 – there will be a 20 minute interval. The play is directed by Bob Tomson and Bill Kenwright.

Many of us are too young to remember Glenn Miller in his day, but his legacy remains in his wonderful music, and the lasting mystery of his tragic disappearance on a flight to Paris over the English Channel in the last months of the Second World War. Glenn Miller was born in 1904 in Iowa, USA. His meteoric rise through the ranks of the many talented musicians of his era, was due to his skill with musical arrangements, especially his innovative use of syncopation combined with his love of boogie. In 1942 he was drafted into the US Army, and his Army Air Force band toured many US and European military bases boosting the troops morale with his catchy rhythms.

Tommy Steele brings to life the story of this unique musical master, with the help of dancers and a fantastic, toe tapping, big brass 15 piece orchestra, playing the hits that Glenn Miller created.

The music is played at volume, and please be aware, that there are in the production, the sounds of low flying aircraft and bombs exploding.

Act 1begins with Tommy, wearing a large black overcoat, introducing us to the Glenn Miller appreciation society who join him wearing trench coats. We are in a large aircraft hangar on RAF Twinwood Air Force Base in December 1944. The curved hangar roof and sides are formed by three semicircular metal strutted arches. At the far end are full height corrugated metal sliding doors which part in the middle to reveal the evening sky. The hangar is also a workshop set up with saw benches and a trolley containing a propeller and various aircraft parts. The appreciation society remove their coats and become the engineering ground crew, wearing navy boiler suits. Tommy turns to shed his overcoat and becomes Glenn in a buff Army uniform complete with military peaked cap and Glenn’s trademark wire rimmed spectacles. The admiration society remove their boiler suits to reveal British Air Force uniforms. Glenn greets British Group Captain Henry, and is then joined by his friend and fellow songwriting musician Chummy McGregor in uniform, who has also enlisted in the US Army.

We then move back in time to the start of Glenn’s career. A grey, grid screen closes to form a room set with four chairs, one has a musical instrument case under a white sheet, and two tables, on one of which stands a Bakelite telephone. Up high, a silhouette of light shines down through the slats of a Venetian blind. Glenn wears a Fair Isle jumper over a white shirt, dark tie and tan coloured slacks. He carries a music manuscript as they sing ‘Without you’ together. We next meet Mark Minton who assembles his band, which consists of an upright piano, saxophone, clarinet, trumpet and trombone. They are joined by three couples dancing and the full orchestra to play ‘It don’t mean a thing, if it ain’t got that swing’

The next character Glenn bumps into is Helen Burger, a pretty auburn haired girl wearing a white short sleeved shirt and full, mid calf length blue skirt, who is to become Glenn’s wife. She joins her College chorale on stage to sing ‘The Whiffenpoof song’ under a full moon, red Chinese lanterns and garlands of lights. They are dressed in Chinese style outfits and sit on 2 long low wooden benches and a garden seat, there is a white wicker picnic hamper alongside. To the song ‘Zing’ the couples and Helen and Glenn dance. We are then taken to night time Broadway, the lights blazing from the theatre frontages. The dancers spin their open black umbrellas. In Basin Street jazz club, the bar advertises cocktails and Cajun seafood, and the band plays ‘The music goes round and round’ and then ‘Sing sing sing’. With the backdrop of the New York skyline, on their first wedding anniversary, Helen, dressed in a pinny over her dress, has a cake with one candle, which she lights as Glenn arrives with a bunch of flowers. Cy Shribman, a big man in a long coat with an astrakhan collar and homburg hat, puffs his way up to their apartment. Glenn completes the new score for ‘Moonlight serenade’ and as the music plays, the Glenn Miller orchestra is revealed wearing monogrammed dinner jackets, individual black music stands with the initials GM on the front of each and a shimmering silver ruched backdrop.

CAST

Glenn Miller is played by Tommy Steele

Chummy MacGregor by Ashley Knight

Helen Burger by Abigail Jaye

Colonel Chambers / Trumpet by Robert Pearce

Cy Shribman / Trombone by Mike Lloyd

Film director / Tenor saxophone by Chris Bone

Mark Minton / Alto saxophone and clarinet by Harry Myers

The female singers and dancers Rita, Babs and Flo are played by Zoe Nicole Adkin, Siobhan Diffin and Jessica Ellen

The male singers and dancers Brad, Fred and Ron are played by Michael Anthony, Jordan Oliver and Alex Tranter

The music producer is Keith Strachan

Choreographer Bill Deamer

914 words

Time approx. 6 minutes