

Tex Beneke leads band in tired recall of past

By JIM WINDELL

Something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue.

That's the way one of the late Glenn Miller's medley announcements would go. It could just as well describe Friday night's concert at Meadow Brook Music Festival on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

A generous three-hour concert, it featured Tex Beneke and his orchestra, the Modernaires, Connie Haines and Johnny Desmond. The concert was billed as a salute to the big bands. While it was a tribute to Dorsey, James

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and a few others from the swing era, it didn't stray too far from the Glenn Miller orchestra.

Something old: Tenor sax man and vocalist in the Glenn Miller orchestra of the late '30s and early '40s, Tex Beneke is looking like a caricature of himself.

HE PUT HIS BAND (which had Brookside Jazz Ensemble regular drummer Jerry McKenzie on the

drums) through tepid pieces recalling the heyday of the Glenn Miller band.

The mere introduction of some of the songs the band reeled off brought applause from a crowd that looked to be about the same age as Beneke. A nostalgia-dripping program that evoked memories of the Eastwood Gardens, the Fox Theatre, Chesterfield broadcasts and the jitterbug may have been what the doctor ordered to stir the blood of the audience.

Beneke did his part with "A String of Pearls" (1941), "Idea Sweet As Apple Cider" (1941), and "Sunrise Serenade" (1939).

Something new: The first half was

enlivened by the reincarnated Modernaires. A fixture with the Glenn Miller Orchestra from 1940-1942, when Miller broke up the band as he entered military service, the vocal quartet is made up of four younger people.

The relationship to the original quartet, founded by Hal Dickinson and a pioneering group in terms of its modern style and advanced harmonies, comes through present quartet member Paula Kelly Jr. She's the daughter of Dickinson and another Miller singer, Paula Kelly.

THE YOUNG MODERNAIRES zip through eight numbers that recall their

vocal legacy and include "Tuxedo Junction" (1940), "Chattanooga Choo Choo" (1941) and "Juke Box Saturday Night" (1942).

"Juke Box Saturday Night" is an updated version that gets laughs at its faithful impression of more modern groups and singers.

Something borrowed: Helen Forrest was scheduled to appear on the program, but illness forced her cancellation, and the borrowing of Connie Haines for the evening.

The petite and dynamic Connie Haines, best known for her work with the Tommy Dorsey Band in the early '40s, put on a show that took off the

years. She is still a dramatic singer who shouts, whispers and cajoles her way through songs like "I'll Never Smile Again" (1940) and "Let's Get Away From It All" (1941). Her showmanship rated her a standing ovation.

Something blue: Perhaps what Johnny Desmond was feeling trying to follow Connie Haines. No shrinking violet and hardly lacking in personal appeal and experience, the one-time singer for Miller, Bob Crosby and Gene Krupa used his forceful baritone and a medley of songs associated with various big band singers to win over the audience.

Sha Na Na gives magic to oldies

By JIM WINDELL

What is it about nostalgia?

"4 Girls 4" with four singers from a bygone era is setting attendance records across the country. Tex Beneke and some old big band singers thrill older audiences everywhere they go, and Sha Na Na brings out a full house that is a cross section of America.

For the most part, the audience at Saturday night's concert at Pine Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston, made it look like children's matinee time. But someone had to bring these toddlers, who in many cases probably can't remember 1972 let alone the late '50s.

Yet they were all there screaming for the hits of the golden age of rock and roll. Sha Na Na was there to oblige.

Is 50s rock and roll that good? Probably not, yet Sha Na Na brings out the best and the worst of the era of Eisenhower and Elvis. It has somehow distilled the essential raunchiness of the 50s with the guileless wonder of childhood and adolescence.

Add to this the group's sometimes faithful recreations of interesting late 50s rock and roll tunes, with Sha Na Na's irreverent sense of humor, and you have the ingredients for appeal to most ages.

AROUND SINCE Woodstock, Sha Na Na has perpetuated interest in the greaser and rock tunes of the time through its weekly TV show. Featuring

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the mugging and clowning of Bowser; the tough-guy, dead-end kid appeal of Donny; the sax of fat Leony; and the Jerry Lee Lewis-like piano antics of Screaming Scott. Sha Na Na captivates its audience with the Silhouettes' 1958 hit "Get a Job," the Big Bopper's "Chantilly Lane," the Crests' 1959 smash "Sixteen Candles," the Browns' "Three Bells" and Presley's "Hound Dog," and "Paddy Bear."

The group offered the same routines it has scored with before, including a monster gathering based around "Monster Mash" and a "Dance Contest" with three young ladies from the audience helping out while Bowser serves as emcee.

The closing numbers, including Ray Charles' "What'd I Say," were definitely upbeat and left the crowd on its feet pleading for more Sha Na Na tomfoolery. The group obliged with two encores.

The opening act was John Sebastian, one-time founder, writer, harmonica player and lead singer for the Lovin' Spoonful. Sebastian left that group in 1968 to go solo but not before he penned such popular standards as "Nashville Cats," "Summer in the City" and "Daydream."

Since Lovin' Spoonful, Sebastian has continued to write songs and do TV and movie scores and records, as well as solo concert gigs.

HIS OPENING 40 minutes was a pleasantly low-key prologue for the second set with Sha Na Na. Sebastian featured his classic songs, among which his "You're a Big Boy Now" went well with the youthful audience. He also did a couple of new tunes in his distinctive baritone.

Following two older numbers from albums of several years ago ("Red Eye Express" and "Day Dream"), the audience mildly insisted on an encore and Sebastian readily acknowledged. His early 70s "Darlin' Be Home Soon" was the response. His gentle folksiness was a pleasant set-up for the screaming freight train of Sha Na Na.

17th season winding up

The Meadow Brook Music Festival's last full week of the season continues with Nancy Wilson plus three performances by the Minnesota Orchestra.

The summer festival will end Sunday at a program by the Detroit Concert Band, led by Leonard B. Smith, and a grand finale of fireworks.

Nancy Wilson appears Friday on a bill with the Persuasions.

The Minnesota Orchestra performs three concerts at Meadow Brook this week, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Neville Marriner, artistic director of the festival, will conduct the Minnesota Orchestra, of which he is music director.

LYNN HARRELL, called "one of the world's leading cellists" by the New York Post, will perform Schumann's Concerto in A minor Thursday.

Violinist Lea Folt will play Prokofiev's Concerto No. 1 in D major Saturday. A native of British Columbia, Folt is currently serving as concertmaster of the Minnesota Orchestra.

Pianist Garrick Ohlsson performs Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 on Sunday with the Minnesota Orchestra as part of "Last Night at the (Meadow Brook) Proms." Proms concerts are the equivalent of the American pops concerts.

Concerts start at 8:30 p.m., with the exception of the Sunday Pops concert which starts at 7:30 p.m. Grounds open 2 1/2 hours before evening concerts for picnicking or dining at Trumbull Terrace.

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