

# ALL THAT'S JAZZ

by Tom O'Neill



## ANDREWS SISTERS

[This is the thirty-first article about legendary figures in the Jazz world, presenting little-known facts about those artists, about whom we thought we knew everything, or as time went on, had forgotten.]

- Over 75 million records sold from a little over 600 recorded tunes; 19 gold records.
- 113 charted *Billboard* hits, 46 reaching Top 10 status (more than Elvis Presley or The Beatles)
- 17 Hollywood films (more than any other singing group in the history of movies).
- Record-breaking theater and cabaret runs all across America and Europe;
- Countless appearances on radio shows from 1935 to 1960 (including their own)
- Guest spots on every major TV show of the 50s and 60s, including those hosted by Ed Sullivan, Milton Berle, Perry Como, and Frank Sinatra to name just a few.
- They were nicknamed “The Sweethearts of the Armed Forces” for their numerous USO appearances, as well as “The Queens of the Jukebox Machines” for their countless hit records.
- Several of their songs were included in Video Arcade games, and they lent their voices to a couple of Disney animated features.

Not bad for three sisters from Mound, MN, a small city of about 5 square miles, of which more than 2 is water. (FYI, the Tonka toy truck was born there, named after Lake Minnetonka.)

Patty, Maxene and LaVerne were born to Peter Andreos (changed to "Andrews" upon arriving in the US from Greece) and Olga from Norway. Patty was only 7 years old when the trio was formed, and five years later, they won a talent contest in Minneapolis. By that time, they were gaining proficiency in dancing as well, which they incorporated into their performances. They spent the next 5 or 6 years singing with various dance bands and touring in vaudeville shows.

The Andrews Sisters hit the big times in the mid 1930s. They produced an unconventional sound, producing “close” harmony while singing at the top of their lungs to emulate the sound of three very loud trumpets in harmony. All this in front of a big swing band. Since this technique emphasized the vocals, quite a few musicians and some bandleaders were upset. They didn’t want to share the spotlight and play backup to a girl trio.

In 1937, they first came to national public awareness with their first big hit, "*Bei Mir Bist Du Schön*" which became a favorite of the Nazis, until it was discovered that the song's composers were of Jewish descent.

During WW II, they entertained the Allied troops all over America, Africa and Italy. They encouraged U.S. citizens to purchase war bonds. They helped actors Bette Davis and John Garfield found California's famous Hollywood Canteen, a facility providing a welcome retreat for servicemen where the trio often volunteered their personal time to sing and dance for our troops. They often performed at New York City's Stage Door Canteen, as well. While on tour, they often treated three random servicemen to dinner when they were dining out.

The Andrews Sisters' best-known song, *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*, was introduced during the film *Buck Privates* with Abbott and Costello! The tune was nominated for Best Song of 1941 at the Academy Awards, but lost to *The Last Time I Saw Paris* from the film, *Lady Be Good*. Their next huge hit, *Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else But Me*, first appeared in the 1942 movie, *Private Buckaroo*, where the gals put on a show for servicemen. Their string of successes led to this interesting statistic: during the 40s, the only musical performer to sell more records than The Andrews Sisters was Bing Crosby!



During their own radio shows from 1944 - 1951, they sang specially written commercial jingles for various sponsors' products (who could forget their "That's what Campbell's soups are, mmm-mmm-good").

The Andrews Sisters disbanded in 1951 when Patty joined another group. She later related that the breakup was due to the deaths of their parents, saying "we had been together nearly all our lives... then in one year our dream world ended. Our mother died (in 1948) and then our father (in 1949). All three of us were upset, and we were at each other's throats all the time." Making matters worse, Maxene and LaVerne heard about Patty's leaving from the gossip columns, creating a bitterness that never quite faded.

However in 1956, the trio reunited, signing a new recording deal with Capitol Records, but by then the public wanted rock 'n roll, effectively pushing The Andrew Sisters to the sidelines, although they continued to perform. That is, until LaVerne, the eldest, died in 1967 of cancer. She was 55. In 1968, Maxene became the Dean of Women at Tahoe Paradise College, teaching acting, drama and speech.

When Bette Midler covered *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy* in 1973, Patty and Maxine's careers found a new audience. The following year, the two debuted on Broadway in the World War II musical: *Over Here!* which garnered rave reviews. It was their last musical success, and once again they went their separate ways. The two sisters reunited in 1987 as they received a star on Hollywood's *Walk of Fame for Recording* at 6834 Hollywood Boulevard.

In 1995, Maxene died on Cape Cod of a heart attack. Patty survived her sister for another 18 years, dying of natural causes at her California home in 2013 at the age of 94.

As a most fitting tribute to The Andrews Sisters, the National WW2 Museum's Victory Belles perform their music daily in New Orleans' Stage Door Canteen in -- *America's Wartime Sweethearts: A Tribute to The Andrews Sisters*, running from January 28 to

August 19, 2015. Find out more at <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/stage-door-canteen/index.html>

*Tom and his wife Cheryl perform locally as “Just Me 2”, a live music duo specializing in songs from the Great American Songbook. They can be reached at (772) 532-5054 or at [www.JustMeLiveMusic.com](http://www.JustMeLiveMusic.com). See them on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/JustMeLiveMusic](http://www.facebook.com/JustMeLiveMusic)*