

LES BROWN

Good day, everyone--it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

It was good news when I heard that Les Brown and his band were coming East and will be playing Pennsylvania dates about the time you hear this. Les Brown and his Band of Renown--what memories it conjures up; with Les, fronting confidently, and playing a sax almost without peer; Brother Stumpy, short arms hitting the deep notes on the bass trombone; and in the old days Doris Day and Jack Haskell singing it like it was meant to be sung. The big bands are gone, but occasionally, the big band guys come home to Pennsylvania on club dates; and that's what Les is doing--taking time off from his work with the Bob Hope Shows and the Dean Martin Shows--or his annual trips with Hope to Vietnam. Les always liked it where the action was--his band was an action band, coming on with "Sentimental Journey"--or wildly with "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue"--one of the greatest arranged instrumentals ever. And Les arranged it! The Brown boys--there were three--Les and Stumpy, born Clyde Lamar, and Warren. They were musicians born, the sons of Ray Brown, Bandmaster Par Excellence--and the man who made more music in the Lower Regions and Upper Dauphin County than anyone alive. Ray Brown sits on his porch there at Tower City now with plenty to reminisce about--he began on cornet at eight, playing the Sunday School circuit, then switched to baritone and trombone--and finally, he says laughingly, "when the teeth left I switched to clarinet and the reeds." But above all, beginning in 1913, Ray Brown began teaching--and taught any kids who wanted to play,

how to play. The Region enjoys the sound of music because of men like Pop Brown. Last year at the Tower City Centennial, Ray Brown was in front of the bandstand conducting it by ear with his band of "kids." His own boys learned from a master--at 14, Les was at the Ithica Conservatory, at 15 he was fronting the "Rainbow Men"--a long time ago. And now, after eight years along the Pacific Palisades, he comes back East for the club dates around the music places--the clubs in Hanover, York, Lebanon and other towns. But it all goes back to Tower City and Lykens and the coal towns, southwest of the towns that gave us the Dorseys and Russ Morgan and others. "They don't play like they used to," says Ray Brown, swinging on his porch--"like the Orwin Post Band--there were thirty guys who could play better than anybody else in the world"--great Pennsylvania home-town musicians. When that crowd blew the Poet and Peasant Overture, with Ray Brown conducting, and his own kids wailing, there was no tomorrow. That's where the music of the band of renown came from--the Regions of Anthracite Pennsylvania--out of the hearts of Welshmen, born and bred with it. And the man who began it all is Ray Brown, "Pop" Brown, the band leader of Tower City--whose sons Les and Stumpy--and maybe even Warren, the music publisher, will be making the scene on the one-nighters again this summer in Pennsylvania. Those will be dates you won't want to miss in Pennsylvania Summertime.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.