

mood swings

LAURA BLOOM talks to ALAN GOLD about how Glenn Miller inspired her to write a novel about post-war Australia.

Nine years ago, Laura Bloom bought a box set of CDs of big band jazz from the 1940s. She fell in love with the music. 'Songs like *Golden Wedding* and *In The Mood* are so catchy and sophisticated and happy,' she says. 'Yet at the time that music was so popular, people were enduring the Second World War. The contrast between the gaiety of the music and the horror of the times fascinated me, as did the fact that the attitude embodied by the music was encouraged by society.'

Laura Bloom is leading a new generation of young Australian novelists in changing the way in which we see ourselves. Her latest book, inspired by and named for the Glenn Miller song *In the Mood*, was published earlier this year. It sheds new light on the way in which the families that are left behind are just as much affected by war as the soldiers sent to fight.

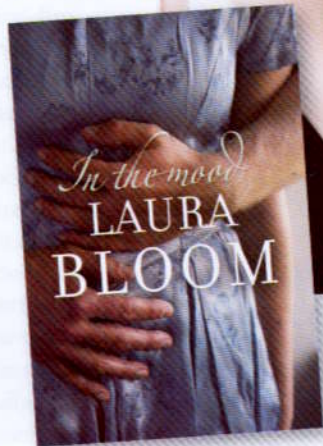
'Soldiers were advised to forget about the war and assimilate back home as quickly as possible, and women and families were told to discourage them from talking about it and to act as though nothing had changed. It was all very quickly pushed under the carpet, once the war was over, and even now, it seems to me, we are still reacting in the same way.'

The common modern perception of that post-war period as being a calm, idyllic time made her want to explore the uncertainty and pain that surely existed below the façade for families and soldiers who'd returned from World War II.

'How soldiers and their families dealt with what they'd gone through, and got themselves in shape to face the future, was to have a lasting impact on us all. I wanted to look beneath the surface of our popular conceptions about that time to see what it might have been like for a man and a woman in that situation, and how they might have been different from, or similar to, me.'

To research the book Laura read the oral history accounts of soldiers at the Australian War Memorial, as well as at local libraries. But it was the lessons she learned in writing *In the Mood* that she found memorable.

'I find it inspiring to remember that as a community we've been through much worse challenges than the ones we're facing now. In fact, for many of us, we've never had it so good. And it's made me more aware of those who got it for us. The men and women who have fought in war and in peacetime for equal rights and universal health care, for example, or the men and women in the defence forces who are fighting on behalf of Australia right now.'



'By remembering a time like 1946 when there was so much to stop people, individually and as a community, from making a go of things, it's inspiring to think what we are capable of achieving now,' she says.

I ask her where she gets her ideas from, and she answers immediately. 'A story comes to me with its own atmosphere and way of unfolding. This sounds magical, but the imagination is a pretty magical kind of place. I am most influenced in my writing by music, both in the tone and the texture of a piece or a song, and often in the structure, too. This novel, for example, is inspired by the structure of the song of the same name by Glenn Miller, as well by its energy and mood.'

Writing a novel set in a time still in living memory was daunting for Laura, and she was nervous about how it would be received by people who remembered the period. She need not have worried.

'I've been especially pleased that a number of older people, including families of veterans, have told me how much they love the novel, and that they are pressing their friends and family to read it ... several have even been moved to tears. There's not much higher praise I can hope for as a writer.' **qr**

In the Mood by Laura Bloom is published by Viking, rrp \$32.95.