

BOB MIELKE'S BEARCATS

*Live at
the*

Sail'N

*San Francisco
1958*



ARHOLLE 1099

Featuring:

P.T. STANTON cornet • BILL NAPIER clarinet (not pictured)
BOB MIELKE trombone • DICK OXTOT banjo • PETE ALLEN bass
DON MARCHANT drums • BILL ERICKSON piano

Bob Mielke's Bearcats

THE BEARCATS

By 1958, when Chris Strachwitz recorded the Bearcats at the "Sail 'N'", the band had been together for four years. The Bearcats grew out of a series of musical get-togethers at Dick Oxtot's house, starting in 1953. These evolved into creative rehearsals, as we worked out head arrangements. It was a cooperative effort, everyone contributed ideas for tunes, etc., but the musical arbiter became P. T. Stanton. He resolved harmonic confusions and made much-needed decisions on voicings for the horns as we proceeded, trial and error style. The arranged passages were usually at most one chorus long, and often only 4 to 8 bars. Even so, they were hard to remember between sessions, and I was designated to write them down on little strips of music-paper we called "our spaghetti". When it came time to play in public, I was chosen as bandstand leader and M.C. as the one with the best gift of gab in public. So it became Bob Mielke's Bearcats, but it was really always a cooperative band.

Though it was a Bay Area band, the Bearcats did not have the so-called "San Francisco sound" (a la Lu Watters or Turk Murphy), a fact that puzzled some trad jazz aficionados. We approached New Orleans music in the Bunk Johnson-George Lewis and Sam Morgan manner, more of a straight-ahead 4-4 driving beat than was considered "orthodox" by Bay Area jazz lovers devoted to the Watters sound. I was pleased to think of us going our own way, and as an alternative sound.

We also deviated from the trad jazz bands of the time by gravitating toward non-New Orleans jazz sources in some of our material and our approach. These included early Duke Ellington, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, and Count Basie. But I think it's fair to say that our most distinguishing feature was P.T. Stanton's horn. Without him there was no "Bearcat sound". His style was inimitable. It's hard to describe, but on this record I hear his "ragamuffin" funky New Orleans sound, followed by punchy riff-like phrasing, and then gutsy blues and real lyricism.

This record is really P.T.'s show, as much as the Bearcats', and, especially since P.T. Stanton is no longer with us, let's dedicate it to him!

(Bob Mielke)

BOB MIELKE (Trombone/Leader)

San Francisco-born Mielke took up trombone in High School. His first jazz gig was in a quartet with Bill Napier at the Black Cat in North Beach, CA 1942. He first recorded in 1947 with Sydney Bechet and Bob Wilber's Wildcats in New York. Returning West, he earned a music degree, he played full-time, including a long stint at an Oakland taxi-dance hall. He later worked and recorded in Ohio with the Dayton Dixieland Rhythm Kings.

Returning to the Bay Area in 1954, Mielke participated with P. T. Stanton and Dick Oxtot in sessions and gigs from which the Bearcats emerged. The band worked at San Francisco's Tin Angel, a long stand at the Larks Club, Berkeley, Reno's in Oakland, and others. Later manifestations of the band continued at Burp Hollow in North Beach through the early '60s.

After graduate work at U.C. Berkeley, Mielke worked as a sociologist, but continued to play with various groups. He worked the Monterey Jazz Festival and recorded with George Lewis in 1959. His other recording credits include Bob Scobey, Golden State Jazz Band, Barbara Dane (Arhoolie 1600), Lu Watters' "Bodega Bay" album, and Dick Oxtot's Golden Age Jazz Band (Arhoolie 4007 and 4010). Mielke played the Breda, Holland Jazz Festival three time (1976-'78), and worked in Japan with the New Century Jazz Band (1986). Since 1969 he has led the Oakland A's Swingers jazz band at the Oakland Coliseum, and currently directs Barbara Dane's Goodnews Bonanza Band.

P. T. STANTON, Cornet (1923-1987)

P. T. (for Peter Thomas) Stanton's expressive horn is known to dedicated collectors throughout the world for his recording with George Lewis (with Dick Oxtot, 1959), underground copies of Bearcats material (Empirical, Reliance, 1954), and Barbara Dane's "Trouble In Mind" LP (1957, with Don Ewell, Darnell Howard, Pops Foster, Bob Mielke). Stanton took up trumpet during junior high school in Berkeley, after explorations on guitar.

A unique man with wide-ranging interests, he was a gifted linguist, a teacher, and intellectual jack-of-all-trades. Besides jazz, he knew and loved Latin and Bavarian folk music, and three-tenor dance bands, with which he played while a U.C. student.

Turning to traditional jazz, he formed the Golden Gate Jazz Band in the early 1940's which broadcast weekly on KRE, Berkeley. Stanton played in many swing and jazz settings before helping to form the Bearcats in 1953-54. He was mainly occupied with family and his teaching career in the 1960s. Later, Stanton played in the Harbor Lights Orchestra, and was leader of the Stone Age Jazz Band.

P.T.'s distinctive jazz style left space for the other horns to fill, as in call and response. He was strongly influenced by the classic swing of Fletcher Henderson and Count Basie, the early Ellington "jungle" band, as well as the New Orleans sounds of Bunk Johnson, Sam Morgan, and Pappa Mutt Carey.

BILL NAPIER (Clarinet)

In a musical career that began full time in 1948, Napier played in the bands of Turk Murphy and Bob Scobey, and is featured on the early Murphy band recordings (1950s), and on numerous Scobey sides, 1954 through 1961. He toured Europe with Scobey in 1962. Napier also worked with Kid Ory, the Dixieland Rhythm Kings, the Bearcats, and the Golden Age and Golden State Jazz Bands. Except for Ory, he recorded with each of these groups. In 1976 Napier played the Breda, Holland, Jazz Festival. Currently he works with the Magnolia Trio and Jazz Band, and the Oakland A's Swingers jazz band, and gigs generally around the Bay Area.

As he has many times, Napier was leading his own small groups before joining Turk Murphy in 1950. For some ten years, from the mid-60s through 1974, Napier held forth at the Pier 23 Club in San Francisco, in various groups led first by Bill Erickson, then by himself, and later by Jack "Jive" Schaeffer.

Bunky Colman (1931-1983), the Bearcats' original clarinetist, was often busy with his medical career. When available, Napier replaced him in the band, cutting the arrangements and fitting-in beautifully. Bill Napier is admired for his rich, warm tone and individual style. The influence of Omer Simeon, Barney Bigard, and Albert Nicholas can be heard in his work.

DICK OXTOT, Banjo, Vocals

A long-time fixture on the Bay Area music scene, Oxtot began in 1942 as a self-taught cornetist. During the War he played Army Officers' Club dances. In 1950 he became bandstand leader of the Polecats in Berkeley, and later played and recorded with the Dayton Rhythm Kings. After returning to Berkeley, Oxtot was stricken with hepatitis in 1953 and forbidden to play cornet. During his long recovery he took up banjo and hosted the initial sessions of the group that became the Bearcats. Oxtot was a mainstay of the band through the 1950s and early '60s, contributing tune ideas and his own originals, a winning vocal style, and rock-solid beat. He also led his own groups, and in 1957 organized the recording session with George Lewis and P.T. Stanton.

After a venture into folk/pop music in the 1960s, Oxtot returned to jazz as leader of the Golden Age Jazz Band, which continues today, and has recorded for Arhoolie (4007 and 4010). He is also an original member of the Oakland A's Swingers jazz band.

PETE ALLEN, Bass

Allen took up the bass at the urging of P.T. Stanton in the early 1940's, playing U.C. frat house gigs. After discovering the Armstrong Hot Five and Lu Watters, he took up clarinet and joined P.T. in the Golden Gate Jazz Band. From 1947 on, Allen had a long career in electronics, but carried on his musical activities. He joined the Bearcats on bass in 1954, and from the early 60s on, has worked with many groups, including Kid Ory, Muggsy Spanier, and Joe Sullivan. He has led and written arrangements for the Harbor Lights Orchestra, Casa Verde Rhythm, and is currently a member of Barbara Dane's Goodnews Bonanza Band and the New Century Jazz Band.

DON MARCHANT, Drums

Marchant took up drums in High School in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and worked in the Buddy Kaye Orchestra there. He was in the University of St. John college band, and during his Service years played in the Army Ground Forces Band. In 1946 Marchant moved to the Bay Area, working as a petroleum and environmental engineer, but kept up his musical activities. He played at Victor and Roxie's with George Probert, after Scobey's long stand there. Marchant gigged with various groups, including those headed by P.T. Stanton, Oxtot, and Mielke, before joining the Bearcats in 1954. He moved to Santa Rosa, where his environmental and musical activities are now centered.

BILL ERICKSON, Piano (19__-1967)

Although not a regular member of the Bearcats, Erickson was present at the Sail Inn the night this recording was made. A close friend and associate of most of the Bearcats, he was invited to sit-in and is heard on a number of selections.

Erickson is warmly remembered for his long residency at the Pier 23 Club, where his piano formed the nucleus of many great sit-in sessions. He led various trios and quartets there that included, among others, clarinetists Bill Napier and Frank "Big Boy" Goudie. Erickson was originally from Glendale, and played trumpet, as well as piano. He had studied composition and had some of his works performed at the music department at S.F. State. In a full-time music career in the Bay Area, he had played with many groups including those of Kid Ory, Bill Napier, Jack Sheedy, and the later "Bearcats" bands at the Burp Hollow. He also led a quartet at Berkeley's Monkey Inn once a week for years (this included Mielke, and Goudie or Ellis Horne on reeds).

(Bob Mielke)

SOME PROGRAM NOTES

"Milenburg Joys" in many ways defines the Bearcats' collective, and individual, approach to its music. The strong four-beat bass line (Pops Foster, greatest of the New Orleans bassist lived in San Francisco, after all); the rattling, syncopating, and (ultimately) truly swinging rhythm. The solos are all within an ensemble sound, not merely above a rhythm section. Napier's Noone-like solo is the selection's longest, then comes Erickson's Mortonish solo, made especially effective by the off-pitch upright's distance from the mike. Mielke's trombone gets a half-chorus not as a solo, but (in fact) as the lead horn, then Stanton takes over as the ensemble's front-man and the two-chorus finale romps along in the grandest of the Sam Morgan Band's style. Mielke's staccato syncopations on the last chorus provide an amazing foundation for the Bearcats overall sound.

"I'm Satisfied With My Gal," one of those hundreds (thousands?) of great tunes that popped up on records in the period between the World Wars is pure New Orleans-pop, written and recorded by Sharky Bonano. Here, it becomes a jocular stomp highlighted by Oxtot's vocal accompanied by the "band choir" and Stanton's Bix-like cadenzas. Erickson turns to a post-Morton style on his piano solo, Oxtot ploughs through a stomping banjo chorus and good cheer abounds.

"Saturday Night Function" (1929) and "Shout 'Em Aunt Tillie" (1930) are from the early Ellington book; both are blues-based although the latter indicates Duke's enthusiasm for more sophisticated material. ("Black and Tan Fantasy" and "Mood Indigo" were to be first recorded by Ellington within a few weeks of "Shout 'Em Aunt Tillie."). The Bearcats arrangements are wonderfully full-reflecting not only late 20s Ellington but also Morton and Oliver at the same period. Napier's Bigard-like clarinet is outstanding, and Stanton's two cornet choruses over the ensemble's elegant harmonic bed (on "Shout 'Em") are high points of the whole LP.

The Bearcats regularly included selections from the old New Orleans "Red Book (of rags and marches)" in their performances, but theirs were impressionistic versions, not imitative--after all, the New Orleans marching bands were also dance bands and New Orleans marches were often also dance favorites--you move your body to both.

"Winin' Boy Blues" wasn't nearly as familiar a number in 1958 as it was to become in later years as a result of performances and recordings by latter-day traditionalists, dixielanders, and even a number of rock-pop groups--Hot Tuna and Leon Redbone, among others. Here, the Morton tune becomes a comfortable collaboration for the vocal (and cornet) of Stanton, the poignant piano solo by Burt Bales and the background instrumental embroidery by Napier's clarinet and Mielke's trombone.

The emotional effectiveness of this performance demonstrates as nothing else could the reverence and love for both Morton and the blues held by mainstream jazz musicians 30 years ago. This "Winin' Boy" is difficult for me to listen to through the clutter of nostalgia.

"Moose March" is, simply, one of the great recorded performances from this post-revivalist era. Beginning on the march's trio chorus, the Bearcats tie into the piece immediately, never even alluding to the inherent military cadence of a march. "Moose March" swings and stomps, roars and rolls along, with Stanton playing cornet like a man possessed--which he was, in fact. He bounds up and down his arpeggios with disarming informality, splats and smears his notes for emphasis, then, climactically, flutter-tongues his way through the last triumphant chorus. What a way to go!

"Maryland My Maryland" is played, here, pretty close to the book with a very tight arrangement and some deliciously mellow cornet lines by Stanton. I loved the way he always made use of space in his phrasing. "Bugle Boy March" by the Bearcats is up-tempo, four-beat, and swinging--a swaggering swing at that. Here, the eclectic Napier is over in his George Lewis bag--and listen and marvel to the trombone-clarinet duet chorus. Stanton and Mielke

have an astonishing segment of cornet/trombone counterpoint and Stanton's smears (or are they wails) are splendidly appropriate.

Those who know of "Pastel Blue" probably remember it as the radio theme of the John Kirby Sextet - trumpeter Charlie Shavers wrote it in 1938; it was also known as "Blue Dilemma" and "Why Begin Again?" The Bearcats use the attractive theme as a framework for some lusty blues solos, including a marvelous Mielke trombone chorus and a smooth, Buster Bailey-style clarinet stanza by Napier. Stanton loved the nasty, wah-wah growls with which he ends this tune.

As a San Francisco-based band of the 1950's the Bearcats were directly influenced by some of the most significant classic jazz music and musicians of the era--Bunk Johnson, Kid Ory, George Lewis, Papa Celestin among others from the ragtime/jazz years around World War I. "Eh, La Bas" was one of the first Creole-based New Orleans numbers most of us jazz fans heard in the late 1940's--Kid Ory featured it, and others of a similar style. The Bearcats, following tradition, combine vocal and instrumental ensemble performance on "Eh, La Bas," with Stanton evoking memories of cornetist Papa Mutt Carey and Mielke playing the Ory role. Audiences always joined in the swinging fun of these old Creole party numbers.

"Because My Baby Don't Mean Maybe Now" probably found its way into the Bearcats book because it was one of a slew of interesting pop tunes from the late 1920's that Bix and Bing recorded with the Paul Whiteman orchestra. With Oxtot's vocal, the great swing generated by Allen's bass and Don Marchant's drums and (especially) Mielke's near-Teagarden trombone, this is a grand, bouncy rendition.

(Phil Ellwood)



Side A

1. MILENBURG JOYS
2. I'M SATISFIED WITH MY GAL
3. SATURDAY NIGHT FUNCTION
4. WININ' BOY BLUES
5. MOOSE MARCH

Side B

1. SHOUT 'EM AUNT TILLIE
2. MARYLAND MY MARYLAND
3. PASTEL BLUE
4. EH, LA BAS
5. BECAUSE MY BABY DON'T MEAN MAYBE NOW
6. BUGLE BOY MARCH

Bob Mielke-trombone

P.T. Stanton-cornet

Bill Napier-clarinet

Dick Oxtot-banjo

Pete Allen-string bass

Don Marchant-drums

Bill Erickson-piano

Burt Bales-piano on "Winin' Boy"

Recorded by Chris Strachwitz with one crystal mike at the "Sail 'N'" in San Francisco, Ca. in 1958.

Cover photo shows Bunky Colman on clarinet, however he is not heard on this recording.

Liner notes by Bob Mielke and Phil Ellwood

Cover by Elizabeth Weil

Produced by Chris Strachwitz & Bob Mielke

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