

Frank “Big Boy” Goudie, Bob Mielke, Bill Erickson Combo in Stereo Hi-fi

Live at Monkey Inn, 1961-62 Volume 2: The Mystery Horn Sessions



[Monkey Inn](#) was a beer and pizza joint in Berkeley where musicians met Thursday nights to play jazz. These cats rarely sounded better than when offering the equivalent of an on-stage master class in jazz improvisation for a mostly indifferent college crowd. Miraculously, a dozen hours of vivid audiotapes survive, preserving a conversation among inspired musicians at the apex of their creativity.

This second volume of Erickson’s combo is offered despite uncertainties regarding the trumpet or cornet player, very possibly Jerry Blumberg, the “mystery horn” player for which this volume is named. The other soloists in this combo all played significant roles in the Frisco jazz revival of the 1950s and ‘60s:

- [Bob Mielke](#) crafted his own powerful jazz trombone style. His Bearcats Jazz Band was a distinctly independent voice in the mid-century jazz revival and focal point for the music in the East Bay.
- Creole clarinet player [Frank Goudie](#) had arrived in San Francisco only a few years earlier, returning to America after three decades overseas. His life reflected the story of jazz itself: origin in turn-of-the-century Louisiana, migration to Europe and Latin America, transition to swing, and recapitulation in the New Orleans revival.

- [Bill Erickson](#) was a dynamic jazz pianist, trumpet player and entertainer; a catalytic musician and creative force who led combos and jam sessions at the region's most popular jazz dive: Pier 23 on the Frisco waterfront, and these combos.

Mystery Horn

There's a puzzling mystery surrounding the identity of this trumpet player. For decades Bob Mielke recalled that it was [Jerry Blumberg](#) who played on this gig. Blumberg was known for his work in New York with Bunk Johnson and Bob Wilber, where he and Mielke first met in 1947. He later came under the influence of Bobby Hackett. Briefly in the Bay Area during the late 1950s and early 60s, Jerry made a strong impression on local musicians. But he soon quit music for health and personal reasons.

However, Blumberg recently broke a silence of 50 years to state that he is not the horn player on these tapes. Nonetheless, he did recall playing Monkey Inn with Mielke a couple times. Furthermore, his itinerary in the Bay Area overlapped with these sessions, he was sometimes heard at Erickson's Pier 23 jam sessions, and extant tapes of Jerry subbing in the Bearcats show a strong resemblance. Despite his demurral, informed listeners remain convinced this is Blumberg, including me, Bob Mielke and jazz scholar, Richard Hadlock who distinctly recalls Jerry's "classy" sound.

The lead horn added substantially to this group, upgrading it from a combo to a classic jazz ensemble. Though only a quintet, and lacking a proper bass line, the third horn allowed for the music parts of a New Orleans ensemble to generate polyphonic melodic counterpoint. And for riffing: playing simple repeated figures behind a soloist which was a popular and effective technique in Bay Area jazz performance at the time, adding complexity, harmonic layering and rhythmic drive to the music.

Whoever it was, this horn player is very good indeed. He dips into Louis Armstrong's repertoire and style for "I'm Confessin'" and "Struttin' with Some Barbeque." Meilke sits-out a fresh interpretation of Benny Goodman's "Avalon" by our "mystery horn" demonstrating his exemplary control of dynamics and modulation of intensity levels.

Throughout these sessions, this "mystery horn," very possibly Jerry Blumberg, provides skillful leadership without aggressiveness, a full tone, fluid technique and fresh improvisational ideas. He blends a swinging Bobby Hackett New York Dixieland sound with flourishes of Bunk Johnson.

Bob Mielke (b. 1926)

Mielke created his own exciting jazz trombone style fusing elements from Kid Ory's New Orleans tailgate tradition, the Harlem swing of J.C. Higginbotham, and Ellington's "Tricky Sam" Nanton. His trombone exemplar for playing New Orleans parts was George Brunis, heard in the 1939 Muggsy Spanier Ragtime Band. As a soloist Bob was interesting because he was brave enough to take the unexpected path. His support for the other players is strong; his comping alternates between supportive riffs and ensemble counterpoint.

In the 1950s and '60s Bob Mielke's popular Bearcats were at the core of an East Bay/Berkeley contingent in the Frisco jazz revival. Mielke, Erickson, Goudie and company were part of a second wave of musicians who built an independent traditionalist style. This combo exemplifies their co-operative, adventurous and musically sophisticated outlook. By his own admission, Mielke was occasionally in over his head musically with these better-trained veterans. Listening today, he's very proud of the music and astonished by Erickson's audacious soloing.



Bob Mielke, Lark's Club, Berkeley, CA, 1955.

Bill Erickson (1929-67)

A dynamic force in the Frisco revival, Erickson is almost completely forgotten today. A musical genius and jam session director, he was remarkably skilled at setting the stage for others to shine. Besides playing piano in Mielke's Bearcats when called upon, his other main enterprise was directing jam sessions at [Pier 23](#) on the San Francisco waterfront a couple nights a week, with Goudie a regular fixture.



Bill Erickson at Monkey Inn, 1962 with Earl Scheelar (cornet) and Bret Runkle (washboard). Photo by William Carter, courtesy Scheelar.

Leading the Monkey Inn combos from the piano Erickson delivered solid bass support, imaginative harmonics and sparkling solos. These are the finest examples of his piano playing on disc or tape; his improvisations take daring harmonic leaps, presenting brilliant melodic variations. His genius is undeniable whether soloing or playing counterpoint to the horns on "I've Found a New Baby," "Love Nest," or "Everybody Loves my Baby."

A gifted all around musician known locally as "Willie the Master," Erickson was also an accomplished trumpet player, arranger, entertainer and raconteur. For a while in the late 1950s, his roomy nearby Victorian was known as the 'Berkeley jazz house,' a site legendary for music parties and jam sessions. Members of Mielke's band including Goudie often jammed there from afternoon until past midnight.

The shock of his 1967 suicide, and scarcity of surviving discs, extinguished too quickly the memory of this bright light in Bay Area music. This is the first publication of music produced solely under Bill Erickson's leadership.

Frank “Big Boy” Goudie (1899-1964)

From about 1957-63 Goudie was a notable figure in the Frisco revival. The 6’ 5” multi-instrumentalist originally from Louisiana moved to Paris in 1924, South America during WW II, back to Europe after the war, and eventually back to the USA. His globe-spanning saga is only now being fully explored. *“Behind his easy smile lies one of the most colorful stories in jazz,”* wrote broadcaster, musician and writer Richard Hadlock in the early 1960s, *“I never saw a musician more eager to play.”*



Frank “Big Boy” Goudie, Chikito Club, Basel, Switzerland, 1949.

In his sixties and still brimming with energy Goudie was known exclusively as a clarinetist in the Bay Area: fertile ground for an autumnal flowering of his music. The former saxophone player developed a distinctive personal voice: a rich, husky tone with flowing lines and a vocabulary incorporating both New Orleans tradition and his decades playing swing tenor. Like his greatest inspiration Coleman Hawkins, Goudie developed the ability to improvise endlessly with ease. Drawing from broad experience that had included jamming with the jazz elite of Europe during the 1920s, ‘30s and ‘40s, he solos at length effortlessly in “Avalon,” “I’m Confessin’,” “The Love Nest,” and “Gee, Baby, Ain’t I Good to You.”

By the early 1960s Frank was playing most nights of the week with any of a half-dozen ensembles, or with Bill Erickson at Pier 23 and Monkey Inn. He had a “continental” manner, wore a beret, spoke with a strong French accent, yet retained earthy traces of his Louisiana Creole origins. His younger associates found him cultured, intelligent, worldly and modest; a charming

“gentleman of jazz” with considerable personal warmth, *“though none of us called him ‘Big Boy’,”* noted trombonist Bill Bardin.

The Monkey Inn sessions are by far the best pickup of Goudie’s masterful New Orleans Creole clarinet sound. He poured out his variations with drive and imagination, his eloquent solos opening like blossoms. Sadly, he was dead from lung cancer within two years, Erickson a suicide five years later.

Drummer **Jimmy Carter** was an African-American native of New Orleans working regularly at Erickson’s Pier 23 jams, and with this combo. Accurate and supportive he shifts his patterns fluidly, punctuating the action with quick jabs.

Repertorie

Several revival jazz bands played Monkey Inn in that era: Bay City, Great Pacific, and Bob Mielke’s Bearcats. Mielke, Erickson and the East Bay jazz crew took special pride in offering a broad repertoire of great but overlooked tunes from earlier decades. The combo’s tune list encompassed classic jazz, the Swing era, Blues, New Orleans and popular music.

For Goudie “I’ve Found a New Baby” had special significance. It was the first title waxed under his name in Paris, 1935 when he “tripled:” soloing on cornet, tenor sax and clarinet, backed by guitarist Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli, piano.



Drummer Jimmy Carter with bassist, Charles Oden, 1957. Courtesy Richard Hadlock.

A minor hit in the Thirties the light-hearted “Isle of Capri” made a Pop and Jazz comeback worldwide during the Fifties. “Gee, Baby, Ain’t I Good to You” gives each player ample opportunity to comment on the blues. Notably almost nothing appears from the Lu Watters or Turk Murphy Trad Jazz genre.

Voicing of the horns is especially pleasing on Jimmie Noone’s “Apex Blues” and the early New Orleans classic, “All The Girls Go Crazy.” Our Mystery-horn lead captures the full-bore energy of early classic jazz, while deftly modulating intensity levels on “Everybody Loves my Baby” and “Struttin’ with Some Barbeque.”

Historic Sessions

Bob Mielke describes the Monkey Inn crowd as “*frat boys out on their first beer benders,*” though another less charitably called them, “*a little pack of thugs.*” Mostly a college-age crowd, they responded to the music with mild indifference or overheated enthusiasm.



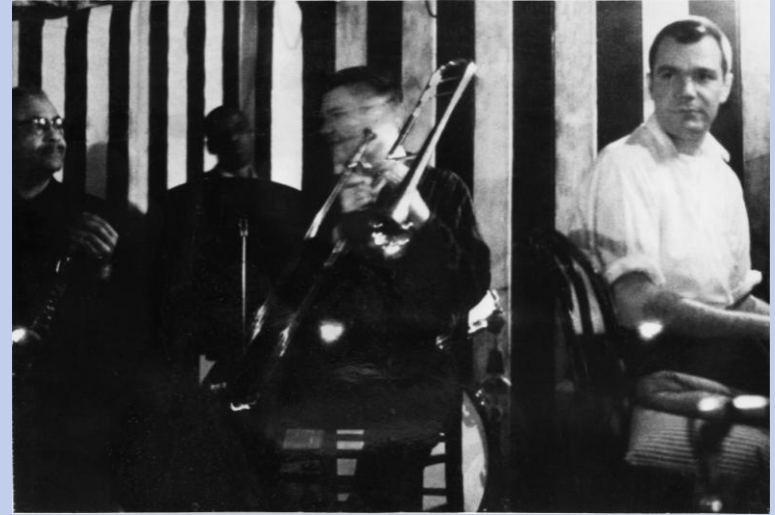
Goudie, Carter, Mielke, Erickson in action at Monkey Inn

These recovered audio artifacts are only slightly marred by weak pickup of Goudie in the ensemble, too much horn in the balance, and a mild ambient hum on the four tracks from 8.31.61. Some minor tape flaws may be heard, and plenty of location or performance noise: like the swinging doors next to the piano, a tired poorly tuned upright. Mielke wanders around audibly, claps, and stomps his foot near the end of each number alerting other musicians to the concluding bars.

The music in this series is taken from a dozen hours of open reel audiotapes recorded by music fans Alvin and Barbara Bryant. Captured in vivid stereo with an Ampex tape deck and Telefunken microphones

the sound is surprisingly lifelike; the original dynamics have been preserved with only equalization adjusted.

These historic public performances offer an intimate glimpse of master musicians conducting a graduate seminar in jazz improvisation. Goudie, Mielke, Erickson, Carter, and possibly Blumberg, explored the full dynamic musical potential within a few bits of unamplified wood, brass, felt, steel, ebony and skin. Speaking with their own true voices these artists blended their harmonic modulations, melodic variations and rhythmic syncopations, adding up to a whole considerably greater than the sum of its estimable parts.



Goudie, Carter, Mielke, Erickson, Monkey Inn, 1961-62

Dave Radlauer, 2015

Award-winning broadcaster, writer and audio engineer presenting vintage jazz since 1982.

Thanks to Bob Mielke for access to his personal collection and corroboration of the liner notes for this series, which are based on interviews with Bob Mielke and Bill Bardin (trombones), Richard Hadlock (soprano and clarinet), Dave Greer (fan/observer), and correspondence with Jerry Blumberg.

For more recordings of Bob Mielke and Frank “Big Boy” Goudie see Grammercy Records’ *The Odd Brilliance of P.T. Stanton, Frank Goudie on the West Coast*, and others from Frisco Jazz Archival Rarities.

Cover photos: Photos of Bob Mielke, Frank Goudie, East Bay, Pioneer Village, 1957-58; and Bill Erickson from the late-1950s. Courtesy Bob Mielke.

Find more about these artists, original research, articles, and audio archives at the [JAZZ RHYTHM](#) website.

Track List	Date	Time
1. I've Found a New Baby	8.31.61	7:36
2. Isle of Capri	8.31.61	7:39
3. Avalon	8.31.61	5:56
4. I'm Confessin'	8.31.61	4:20
5. The Love Nest	9.7.61	7:26
6. Apex Blues	9.7.61	5:55
7. Gee, Baby, Ain't I Good to You?	9.7.61	8:21
8. All the Girls Go Crazy	9.7.61	5:42
9. Everybody Loves my Baby	9.7.61	6:49
10. Struttin' with Some Barbeque	9.7.61	7:54
	Total	72:17

Trumpet player unknown, probably Jerry Blumberg.

Frank "Big Boy" Goudie (clarinet), Bob Mielke (trombone), Bill Erickson (piano, leader) and Jimmy Carter (drums).

Track 3, "Avalon," Mielke out.

Recorded at: Monkey Inn, Berkeley, CA, 1961

Tapes: Bob Mielke Collection

Photos: Dick Oxtot & Bob Mielke Collections

Re-mastering, production, research & liner notes: Dave Radlauer

Transferred and mastered using a J-corder modified Technics reel deck, RME Fireface d/a, Bybee AC filtering, and Pro Tools.



Grammercy Records and Dave Radlauer present **Frisco Jazz Archival Rarities**: unissued historic recordings of merit drawn from live performances, jam sessions and private tapes. These recovered artifacts of the San Francisco jazz revival offer music previously unavailable, long out-of-print, or revealing unexpected aspects of familiar names. Recorded mostly in the Bay Area 1945-75, this is lost sound from a unique time and place: a boisterous musical culture that created an independent jazz style of its own.

Some recordings contain minor flaws of performance and sound quality. The original sources vary from vivid stereo to limited-range monophonic. While a few tracks are incomplete at start or finish, we hope you will agree they are nonetheless worth having.

Re-mastering, research, and liner notes by Dave Radlauer: award-winning broadcaster, writer and audio engineer presenting vintage jazz since 1982. Transferred and mastered using a J-corder modified Technics reel deck, RME Fireface d/a, Bybee AC filtering, and Pro Tools.

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