## WHEN RARE IS WELL DONE

by William Carter

When musicians hang out and gossip, a certain few rare names tend to come up. We've all

performed with dozens of fine players, including some great lead horn players, over the years. But I'm using "rare" in another sense.

Certain jazz guys have a peculiar twist of their inner timber such that when they express themselves musically, you know instantly. And when you work with them, at least in the front line, that timbertwist instantly affects your own playing. As in call and response song. You can't plan or know in advance the spontaneous conversation you will have with someone – especially someone as rare as P.T.

I'm so glad Dave Radlauer has done the monumental research and technical processing needed to bring us this issue of the Cricket. Those of you who access



P.T. Stanton mid-1950s, probably at the Lark's Club. Bob Mielke collection

the magazine online will have the special treat of clicking on a lot of links to hear some wonderful

> material that is "rare" in both senses: recordings impossible to find anywhere except via Dave's audio streaming site; and saturated, subtly and overtly, with the serious humor of the incomparable P.T. Stanton.

> He had it — was it — offstage as well as on. As did a very few others of his ilk (I'm thinking Ray Ronnei and Jim Goodwin). They could only have been who they were, and no one else could ever be a whit like them. In life or in music. Storied: as in, to play jazz is to tell a story.

I'm so lucky to have played with him a few times. So unlucky it was not more times.

A story gains in the telling, and in this instance the telling gains by the way Radlauer tells the story and selects the material.

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As I say, if you're a dyed in the wool print guy like me, you're probably not in the habit of reading articles online — but in this case you owe it to yourself to do so, because the essence is in P.T.'s own telling, the unmistakable voice speaking from within those fine ensembles of Mielke and Oxtot and Pete Allen and the others. This were some of the purest sounds to have emanated from the vital, less recorded, East Bay wing of the San Francisco Traditional Jazz community in its definitive years.



Right: At the Lark's Club: Bob Mielke, Pete Allen, Bunky Coleman, P. T. Stanton. Bob Mielke collection

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Publisher: William Carter
Editor, Layout, Webmaster: Scott Anthony
Curator of the Archive: Clint Baker
Special Projects Consultant: Hal Smith
Office Manager: Scott Anthony

John R. Browne, III John Matthews
William Carter Terry O'Reilly
Jim Cullum Margaret Pick
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## THE ODD BRILLIANCE OF P.T. STANTON (1923-87)

by Dave Radlauer



At P.T. Stanton Night, Dec. 16, 1972. Photo by Ed Lawless, courtesy SFTJF.

#### A TALE WORTH TELLING

P.T. Stanton was a unique and original cornet player active in the San Francisco Bay Area jazz revival from the late-1940s through the 1970s, mainly in the bands of Bob Mielke and Dick Oxtot. After the mid-1960s he was heard with Earl Scheelar in various ensembles, one of which was P.T. Stanton's Stone Age Jazz Band.

He first came to my attention decades ago as the faint rumor of a notable but peculiar local jazz horn player. Stanton's name surfaced often while researching his musical colleagues: Frank "Big Boy" Goudie (clarinet), Bill Erickson (piano and trumpet), multi-instrumentalist Earl Scheelar and jazz trombone players Bob Mielke and Bill Bardin.

After recovering a large volume of P.T.'s rare performance tapes (sampled below) I came to appreciate his distinctly original instrumental voice. The outlandish stories of folks who'd known him hinted at the manifold dimensions of his vast musical

talents, puckish personality, crazy-like-a-fox intelligence, self-destructive drinking, bizarre verbal antics, and brilliant oddness. I was convinced his tale needed telling.

#### **HIS UNIQUE TONE**

P.T. Stanton's jazz cornet sound was like no other: neither conventional nor straightforward. Instead, a unique personal vocabulary of quavering growls, peculiar squawks and strangled tones issued from his horn, which almost always had a mute, plunger, or hand stuffed in or near the bell.

Though he played his cornet un-muted when the music called for it, P.T.'s characteristic sound was quite intentionally a tattered, wheezy ragamuffin. Notes rarely exited his horn without modification: they were 'stressed' with a variety of mutes, or blown into a tin derby hat which he kept mounted on a stand nearby.

"Bogalusa Strut," "Saturday Night Function" - Bob Mielke's Bearcats, late-1950s, Oxtot collection.

#### LEADERSHIP BY SLEIGHT OF HAND

While his demeanor as a cornet player was notably un-

derstated, Stanton was pivotal in a jazz band: coaching and coaxing the ensemble. He was the guiding light of Bob Mielke's popular Bearcats band in the 1950s and '60s. "The heart of the Bearcats was P.T. Stanton, whose trumpet more than anything else, gave the band its identity," said their string bass player, Pete Allen.

Though Bob Mielke was the Bearcats' front man at the microphone, P.T. was in many ways its musical director. He defined and molded its style wrote Mielke: "The musical arbiter became P.T. Stanton. He resolved harmonic confusions and made much-needed decisions on voicings for the horns."

"Pontchartrain," "Moose March" – Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Lark's Club, 1955.

Stanton's leadership worked nearly invisibly by sleight



most imaginative cornet player in the traditional field is P. T. Stanton, a charter member of the Berkeley jazz group.

Berkeley Daily Gazette, October 26, 1957. Oxtot collection.

of hand; guiding the ensemble, steering and maintaining its momentum in a manner so subtle as to be barely observable. This revelation was slow to dawn on one of their most ardent fans, Dave Greer, until:

It was an epiphany . . . it dawned on me: THIS GUY he's the real genius behind it all. It's this odd conception. P.T. was sort of the presiding musical genius; back there suggesting this or that.

He could get the whole band in motion. It was like he had a wheel going, and he could just tap now and then to keep it going. It was just a few licks. He was a master of understatement: just a few notes, and strange growling noises.

#### AT THE LARK'S CLUB

Bob Mielke's Bearcats jelled into a tightly knit ensemble of exceptional talents with a wide-ranging repertoire in the mid-1950s. They developed their sound at East Bay bars and nightclubs like Reno's in Oakland and the Lark's Club, located in a black neighborhood of Berkeley.

Lark's Club was a long room with the bar to one side, and the bandstand deep in back. Owned by Bill Nelson, a former trombone player in the Jimmy Lunceford orchestra, it had an integrated clientele; about half were African-American. The Bearcats first steady gig, Lark's Club nurtured the band and seasoned their chops during 1954-55.

"Milenberg Joys," "Corrine, Corrina" - Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Lark's Club, vocal Oxtot, 1954.



Lark's Club 1954-55 was the first and best venue for Bob Mielke's Bearcats: Mielke, Oxtot, Napier, Allen, Stanton. SFTJF.

The basic lineup was P.T. Stanton (cornet), Bob Mielke (trombone), Bunky Coleman (clarinet), Dick Oxtot (banjo and vocals), Pete Allen (bass), and Don Marchant (drums). Additions and substitutes included singer Barbara Dane, clarinet players Bill Napier, Ellis Horne and Frank Goudie. Substitute drummers in the early years included Don Fay and on rare occasions Bill Dart.

The core group did not include piano, and they didn't use one at the Lark's Club, but if a piano player was needed for a gig Bill Erickson or Burt Bales got the call. When Mielke could not attend Bill Bardin stood in on trombone. Substitutes for P.T. included Ev Farey, Jerry Blumberg and others.

By December 1956 the Bearcats had grabbed the attention of a local newspaper. *Berkeley Daily Gazette* took note of their unorthodox stance:

Mielke claims the Bearcats are the only Bay Area traditionalist band that isn't influenced by the Lu Watters school. Instead, the major influences are Duke Ellington, Count Basie, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, George Lewis and Kid Ory.

#### **AUTHORING THE BEARCATS SOUND**

P.T. established early the basic elements of the Bearcats sound: strong ensemble unity, and riffing. Riffing was P.T.'s contribution inspired by the Basic band, says Mielke. The riffs were simple repeated figures played behind a soloist, typically Stanton in co-ordination with the clarinet or trombone player. Riffing added complexity, harmonic development and rhythmic drive to the music. It was a popular technique in Bay Area jams and jazz performance at the time.

"Sing On," "Sweet Georgia Brown," - Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Lark's Club, vocal, Oxtot, c, 1955.

Fusing Mielke's love for full-throated New Orleans ensemble polyphony and P.T.'s sly riffing, the Bearcats created an independent style that was a potent brew. It proved a fresh alternative to the formulas of Eddie Condon's Dixieland jam sessions, East Coast 'cutting contests,' and the Traditional Jazz styles of Lu Watters and Turk Murphy.

"My Lovin' Imogene" (vocal and composition by Oxtot), "Tiger Rag" - Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Lark's Club, 1955.



The core Bearcats, L to R: Oxtot, Allen, Stanton, Coleman, Mielke, mid-1950s. Oxtot collection.

Musician, writer and broadcaster Richard Hadlock, who knew and worked with both Stanton and Mielke, suggests a fitting analogy for their partnership:

I would say that P.T. did for Mielke much of what trumpeter Mutt Carey did for trombone player Kid Ory. Mutt was the real music director of Ory's band, shaping the ensemble approach and soloing less often than others in the front line. He drove the band, yet was understated, conservative and eccentric all at the same time.

## INFLUENCES, BUNK AND "PLAYING IMAGINARY LEAD"

One could point in any direction of the jazz compass for influences on Stanton, but in the final analysis he was completely original. Bill Carter who played clarinet beside him heard strong echoes of New Orleans horn players like De De Pierce in his "forceful, cut-down, punchy leads and individualistic, blues-based" sound.

Stanton venerated Lu Watters, who rejected the predominant dance band, big band and dixieland formulas in search of the 'real and righteous' early jazz of King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton and New Orleans. Yet P.T. loved the great swing trumpeters, Rex Stewart and Buck Clayton.

An admirer of the Count Basie swing orchestra, Stanton could play decent Basie-style piano, and was a solid guitarist in the manner of Basie's rhythm guitarist, Freddie Green. "Pastel Blue" introduced to the Bearcats by P.T. was his interpretation of the John Kirby Sextet theme, written by Charlie Shavers and Artie Shaw.

"Pastel Blue" - Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Sail 'N, 1958.

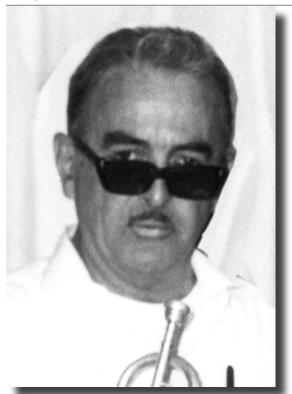
On first listen P.T. could be mistaken for a follower of Bunk Johnson. He admired Bunk, and was in town when the freshly rediscovered New Orleans trumpeter held forth in San Francisco for almost a year. And like Bunk, P.T. had an endless supply of surprising musical devices. But his sound was a rough and rowdy contrast to Johnson's ragtime-influenced, baroque elegance.



P.T Stanton, 1950s. Oxtot collection.

Stanton's unpredictability could be unnerving. Bill Bardin, Bob Mielke and others described with bemused annoyance his habit of dropping out of the front line. He sometimes had the cornet to his mouth and was keying the valves but not making any sound. When confronted, he declared that he was "playing imaginary lead," citing Bunk Johnson as precedent. "That's exactly the kind of thing P.T. would say," agreed Bardin:

One thing he did on the bandstand -- not playing -- he got directly from Bunk Johnson . . . Bunk at any time might just stop playing, and wipe his mouth off. I've seen this happen with other bands . . . in the real



Stanton, 1971. Oxtot collection.

New Orleans bands, the other horns just close in a little bit and make up for it. It used to be very irritating when P.T. would just stop playing, for instance on the stompy part of the last chorus.

## ECCENTRIC, DISSIPATED AND INTENTIONALLY OBLIQUE

Peter Thomas Stanton was a strange and unique person. A broad intellect, he was original not only in his horn style but also in his thought, outlook and manner of self-expression. His speech pattern was a series of digressions suggests Dave Greer, "He never said anything that was particularly straightforward. It took a while for P.T. to get to the point of just about anything, even just pass the butter or whatever. It was always charming."

Singer Barbara Dane puts it this way:

His contemporaries thought of him as a mystery man, a self-made intellectual, an amateur linguist who dominated several languages, especially Spanish and Portuguese, and a raconteur who was entertaining enough to keep you supplying him with one beer after another until the sun came up.

Richard Hadlock who played music with P.T. for years calls him "the world's most eccentric eccentric:"

Despite his eccentricity, he was sly as a fox. His favorite word was righteous: "that's a good band, that has a righteous sound." It was kind of a spiritual thing with him producing that music, so maybe that was the right word for him to use.

A pretty good singer, Stanton's parody rendition of "Little Coquette (from Lafayette)" was said to be memorable. Noted the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* on December 5, 1956: "Stanton takes a few vocals in the tongue-in-cheek Fats Waller tradition. He takes vast liberties with the lyrics, frequently sneaking in references to news events of the day."

"Darktown Strutter's Ball" – Mielke's Bearcats, vocal P.T. Stanton, mid-1950s, Oxtot Collection "Isle of Capri" - Dick Oxtot's birthday, 3/65, vocal by P.T. Stanton with Mielke & band, J. Smith (soprano), B. Erickson, D. Oxtot, P. Allen.

Stanton was an alcoholic. He emulated the excessive drinking and hard living of certain early jazz horn men who died in their thirties. Long time collegue, trombonist Bill Bardin, felt he admired Beiderbecke's lifestyle: "He thought Bix had the right idea. I think P.T. was a little disappointed to find himself carrying on after the age of thirty. It upset his plans." And years later Bill was still puzzling over P.T.'s comment to another musician, "think of it as a series of one."



The Stone Age jazz era at Old St. Hilary Church, mid-1970s. L to R: Bardin, P.T., Berg, Allen (obscured), Sheelar, Boberg. Courtesy Earl Scheelar.

## SOBRIETY, EARL SCHEELAR, AND STONE AGE JAZZ BAND

Around the time he turned 50, Stanton made a shift in lifestyle when he stopped drinking for a few years during the 1970s. In December 1972 his friends

and associates surprised him with a grand party and benefit. At a large gathering of Bay Area revival-jazz talent and supporters, P.T. was presented a check for several hundred dollars and good wishes. It marked the start of about seven years sobriety, during which time he launched and successfully ran his own band.

"Isle of Capri," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Ice Cream" – P.T. Stanton Night, Stanton and Jim Goodwin (cornets), Hadlock and Helm (soprano saxes) with large ensemble jam band, San Francisco, 12/72.



Note P.T.'s hardware: mutes, plunger, and tin derby hat. Courtesy Earl Scheelar.

Earl Scheelar who knew and played alongside P.T. for years calls him, "completely nuts." Nonetheless, Scheelar was deeply influenced by his spare cornet technique, and modeled his horn leadership on Stanton's:

His cornet style was so sparse, so laid back, but he would punctuate and syncopate and do things that made other people respond. P.T. was the most understated back-in-the-background player. But he had the ability to goose people and get the best out of them. And that's very evident in the Bearcats, and in the Stone Age.

During the 1970s, Stone Age Jazz Band -- so called for its primitive jazz style -- coalesced around Stanton's iconoclastic leadership. Stone Age was gleefully non-conformist in style and outlook; both P.T. and Earl sported beards at times. They specialized in playing familiar tunes in an unfamiliar way, though P.T. called it, "basically a dance band."

The lineup was nearly identical to Earl's former New Orleans House Band: usually trombone player Bill Bardin, a rhythm section consisting of guitar and banjo, with Pete Allen on string bass or Walter Yost tuba; no piano or drums. Vocal harmonizing by band members added a note of antiquated charm.

"Put on Your Old Gray Bonnet," "Sister Kate,"
"Swanee River" – Stone Age Jazz Band, Old St. Hilary
Church, 1977-78, P.T. Stanton, E. Scheelar, B. Bardin, P.
Boberg, P. Berg, P. Allen.

Typically, Stanton's horn was throttled back, choked-up with his mutes and tin derby, embedded in the ensemble until needed for a rare solo or the rideout chorus. In liner notes for their Stomp Off Records album, bassist Mike Duffy describes something of his onstage procedure:

Almost all the chatter you will hear in the back-ground on these live recordings is from P.T. Stanton, who was forever giving directions and encouraging his mates ("Keep going, Willie"). And if you notice clattering metal sounds, that will be P.T. too, digging around among his mutes for the right one.

In perfect accord with P.T.'s sensibilities, Scheelar played passionate clarinet with a big rich tone and a style reminiscent of Johnny Dodds. P.T. took very few solos, says Earl: "he felt the solos should really be played by the clarinet and trombone. He wanted the ensemble sound."

"1919 Rag," "The Waltz You Saved for Me,"
"Move the Body Over" – Stone Age Jazz Band, Berkeley, CA c. 1974, P.T. Stanton, E. Scheelar, B. Bardin, Lisa Pollard, W. Yost, others.

#### LEGACY OF THE BEARCATS

It's unclear exactly when P.T. stopped playing. Though sober during much of the 1970s, he resumed drinking, went into a steady decline, and died in 1987 at age 64. Stanton left behind a limited set of issued recordings, but at the JAZZ RHYTHM website you'll find photos, recollections and a P.T. Stanton archive of jam sessions and performance tapes offered for the first time, and sampled below.

It's apparent from his music and the high estimation of his contemporaries that P.T. Stanton was a rambunctious, expressive and first-rate musical talent. He was one of the most colorful personalities at the leading edge of a second-wave of San Francisco jazz revival musicians, inspired by Lu Watters and the rediscovery of New Orleans music, who built their own independent style during the 1950s.

The Frisco Cricket Spring 2014



"Piedmont Blues," "Haunted Blues:" P.T. Stanton, Clem Raymond, Bill Bardin, (seen above), D. Oxtot, P. Allen, 1958. Very little is known of this New Orleans native active briefly in the Bay Area who recorded with Oxtot at The Bagatelle in 1958. Oxtot collection.

Mielke's band was a significant voice in the midcentury jazz revival. Stanton's unorthodox cornet lead, indirect leadership style, and odd brilliance were key elements sustaining its creativity. As its musical *consigliere* his contribution to crafting their independent style was an achievement of originality. By authoring the distinctive Bearcats sound, P.T. Stanton imprinted his unmistakable personal signature on the West Coast jazz revival.

"Shout 'em Aunt Tillie" – Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Sail 'N, 1958. "Ice Cream" - Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Jenny Lind Hall, 1954.

**Thanks** for corroboration and assistance to Bill Carter, Dave Greer, Richard Hadlock, Bob Mielke and Earl Scheelar; Darylene Oxtot, Mili Bardin-Rosenblatt and Hal Smith for photos or audio.

#### PRIMARY SOURCES:

- Bardin, Bill, interview, 1994
- Dane, Barbara, correspondence 2014
- Greer, Dave, interviews and discussions, 2013, 2014
- Hadlock, Richard, interview, phone and e-mail correspondence 2014
- Mielke, Bob, interviews and discussions, 1993, 2013, 2014
- Scheelar, Earl, interviews and discussions, 2014

#### **SECONDARY SOURCES:**

- Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Live at Sail 'N 1958, Arhoolie C-1099, 1998
- Bob Mielke's Bearcats 1955, GHB Records, 2002, Mielke liner notes
- Ecklund, K.O., *Jazz West* 2, 1995
- Goggin, Jim, Bob Mielke: A Life in Jazz, Goggin/ Trafford Publishing, 2008
- Oxtot, Dick and Goggin, Jim, Jazz Scrapbook: Dick Oxtot-Me & Other Stuff, Creative Arts, 1999
- *P.T. Stanton's Stone Age Jazz Band,* Stomp Off Records SOS 1228, 1991, Mike Duffy liner notes
- Salzman, Ed, "Berkeleyans Score with Dixieland Beat," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Dec. 5, 1956, p. 18
- Salzman, Ed, "Berkeley Has One of World's Largest Jazz Communities: Members Placing Most of Effort on Ensembles," *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1957, p. 14
- SFTJF Presents: Bob Mielke's Bearcats, San Francisco Traditional Jazz Foundation SFCD-3

**Note:** This and recent projects have broadened my admiration and respect for Mielke's Bearcats and the greater East Bay revival-jazz crew. I plan a series of articles and web pages profiling the individual musicians of the band: Bob Mielke, clarinet players Bunky Coleman and Bill Napier, bassist Peter Allen, and Dick Oxtot, a subject unto himself.



Odd things could happen at early Bearcats gigs, like this one at Lafayette Pioneer Village in San Leandro, CA. L to R: P.T. Stanton (banjo), Jim Cummings (bass), Dick Oxtot (cornet), Bill Dart (drums), Bunky Coleman and Bob Mielke.

**Personnel** for the Bearcats recordings cited above are the core group: P.T. Stanton (cornet), Bunky Coleman (clarinet), Bob Mielke (trombone), Dick Oxtot (banjo), Pete Allen (bass) and Don Marchant (drums), except the 1958 Sail 'N session with Bill Napier (clarinet), Bill Erickson (piano), and other minor exceptions.

#### I. SELECTED ISSUED RECORDINGS:

George Lewis, San Francisco, 1956-57. Lewis (clarinet), P.T. Stanton (cornet), Oxtot (banjo), Lelias Sharpton (bass): "Till We Meet Again," "Smiles"

Barbara Dane, accompanied by P.T. Stanton Trouble in Mind LP, 1957 Dreadnaught Music DNCD-1601 P.T. Stanton, Darnell Howard, Bob Mielke, Don Ewell, Pops Foster: "Good Morning Blues," "Mighty Rumbling Blues," "Trouble in Mind"

**P.T. and Friends**, 8/72, Berkeley Rhythm Records, EP 7" vinyl disc *P.T. Stanton, Dick Adams, Ray Skjelbred, Mike Duffy, Brett Runkle: "Pastel Blue"* 

P. T. Stanton's Stone Age Jazz Band, 1975-78, Stomp Off 1228 (LP/Cassette), 1992 P.T. Stanton, Earl Scheelar (clarinet), Bill Bardin (trombone), Melissa Levesque (guitar), Paul Boberg (banjo), Walter Yost (tuba) or Pete Allen (string bass): "Moose March," "Mecca Flat Blues," "There's Yes! Yes! in Your Eyes"

#### II. RECOVERED AUDIO

The audio artifacts below are presented for historic value despite technical or musical flaws.

Bob Mielke's Bearcats, Visalia, CA c. 1959. Courtesy Dave Greer. *P.T. Stanton, Goudie, Mielke, Oxtot, Burt Bales (piano):* "Mr. Sandman," "Blues," "Them There Eyes," "When You're Smiling" (incomplete)

The Black Egg Bar, San Mateo, CA 5/60, probably an Oxtot gig. Courtesy Dave Greer. P.T. Stanton, Goudie, Bardin, Oxtot, Pearl Zohn (piano): "Milenberg Joys," "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans"

P.T. Stanton's Stone Age Jazz Band, Berkeley, 1974. Courtesy Earl Scheelar. P.T. Stanton, Earl Scheelar (clarinet, alto), Lisa Pollard (tenor sax), Bill Bardin, Karl Walterskirchen (banjo), Peter Berg (guitar), Walter Yost (tuba): "Mecca Flat Blues," "Make Me a Pallet," "Old Spinning Wheel," "Tiger Rag"

**Bob Mielke's Bearcats** 7/76, with Bill Carter. Courtesy Bob Mielke. *P.T. Stanton, Bill Carter (clarinet), Mielke, Oxtot, others:* "Bourbon Street Parade," "Sing



P.T. Stanton's Stone Age Jazz Band, mid-1970s. Courtesy Earl Scheelar.

On," "Blue Guaiac Blues" (composition by Bunky Coleman), "Ice Cream"

P.T. Stanton's Stone Age Jazz Band, Sacramento Jazz Club, 12/76. Courtesy Mili Bardin. "Sister Kate," "Dallas Blues," vocal duet, Stanton and Bardin, "Get Out of Here" with intro by P.T. and closing theme.

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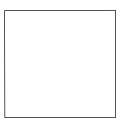
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