

Frank “Big Boy” Goudie, Bob Mielke, Bill Erickson

Combo In Stereo Hi-fi

Live at Monkey Inn, 1961-62, Volume 1: The Quartet

[Monkey Inn](#) was a beer and pizza joint in Berkeley where musicians met Thursday nights to play jazz. These cats never sounded happier than when offering the equivalent of an on-stage master class in jazz improvisation, while playing 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.

The soloists in this combo played significant roles in the San Francisco jazz revival of the 1950s and ‘60s:

- [Bob Mielke](#) crafted his own powerful jazz trombone style. Bob Mielke’s Bearcats Jazz Band was a distinctly independent voice in the mid-century jazz revival and focal point for the music in the East Bay.
- [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.
- Creole reed player [Frank “Big Boy” Goudie](#) had arrived only a few years earlier, returning to America after three decades overseas. His life reflected the story of Jazz itself: origins in turn-of-the-century Louisiana, migration to Europe and Latin America, transition to swing, and recapitulation in the New Orleans revival. Since his passing in 1964 there has been only one title issued under his almost-forgotten name; this is the second.

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 1963, “*I never saw a musician more eager to play.*”



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.

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 Creole origins. His younger West Coast 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.

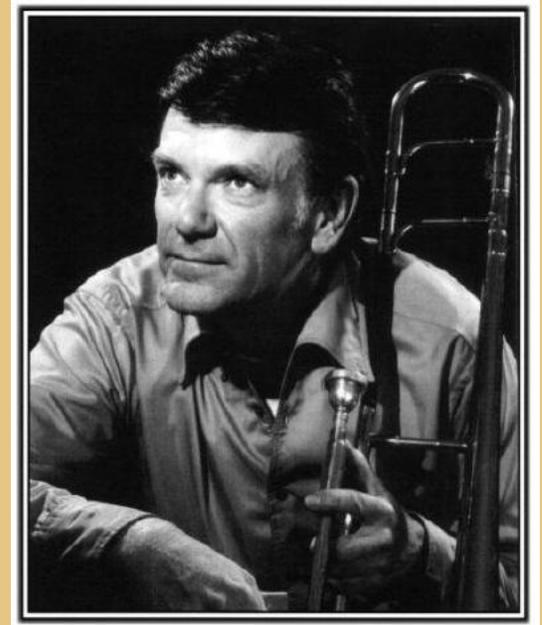
This is by far the best pickup of Goudie’s masterful Louisiana Creole clarinet sound. He poured out his variations with drive and imagination, his eloquent solos opening like blossoms.

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. As a soloist Bob kept things interesting by being brave enough to take the unexpected path. His support for the other players is strong; his comping alternates between supportive riffs and ensemble counterpoint.

Bob Mielke's popular Bearcats Jazz Band was at the core of an East Bay/Berkeley contingent in the Frisco revival in the 1950-60s. Mielke, Erickson, Goudie and company were part of a second wave of jazz musicians who built their own independent Traditionalist style. This combo exemplifies their co-operative, adventurous and musically sophisticated outlook.

Bob learned a lot working with these more seasoned musicians, though he admits frankly that this quartet – with the clarinet and trombone swapping lead -- was not playing Traditional or even Dixieland Jazz at all, but Swing. Listening to the tapes, Bob was very proud of his role and astonished at Erickson's audacious soloing.



Bill Erickson (1929-67)

A dynamic force in the East Bay jazz 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.



Leading the Monkey Inn combo from the piano Erickson delivered solid bass support, imaginative harmonics and superb solos. These are the finest examples of his piano playing on disc or tape; his improvisations take daring harmonic leaps, presenting brilliant melodic variations.

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 Victorian residence became 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.

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

Mielke says that the Bearcats and East Bay jazz crew took special pride in presenting a broad repertoire of overlooked music beyond the usual Dixieland canon; and notably, nothing appears from the Lu Watters-Turk Murphy Trad Jazz genre. Instead the combo offers fresh perspectives on classic jazz, American standards and the Swing era.

Made famous by the Andrews Sisters, “Joseph, Joseph” may derive from Jewish folk music. “Japanese Sandman” has rarely been recorded since the Thirties, “Ring Dem Bells” is Duke Ellington 1930. “Get Out of Here” dates back to earliest New Orleans, and it’s a pity the uplifting “Walking With the King” is nearly forgotten as a jazz song today.

Goudie is featured on “Petite Fleur” which was little known at the time. His interpretation is straightforward compared to Bechet’s bravura stem-winder. Barely audible after finishing Frank says, “*that’s Sidney,*” whom he knew and once recorded with in Europe. On “Blues at the Inn” he wails like a man who learned the Blues four decades earlier in New Orleans.

The Monkey Inn tapes

The music in this series is taken from a dozen hours of open reel audiotapes recorded during 1961-62 by music fans Alvin and Barbara Bryant. Its publication realizes a long-held aspiration of Bob Mielke, though sadly, Goudie was dead from lung cancer within two years, Erickson a suicide five years later.

A few minor tape flaws may be heard with plenty of location and performance noise, like the swinging doors next to the piano: a tired old poorly tuned upright. Mielke wanders around audibly, claps, and stomps his foot near the end of each tune alerting other musicians to the concluding bars. Captured in lively stereo with an Ampex tape deck and two Telefunken microphones, the sound is surprisingly lifelike; the original dynamics have been retained with only equalization adjusted.

These private tapes of public performances offer an onstage graduate seminar in jazz improvisation. Inspired as these four individual musicians were, their blended melodic variations, harmonic modulations and rhythmic syncopations add up to a whole considerably greater than the sum of its estimable parts.



Bob Mielke and Frank Goudie, East Bay late 1950s. Mielke collection.

Dave Radlauer, 2014

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

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 (trombone), Richard Hadlock (soprano and clarinet) and Dave Greer (fan/observer).