

BAY AREA JAZZ CLUBS OF THE 'FIFTIES

by R.B.Runkle

Some newscaster stated that regardless of their age, most people look back on the nineteen fifties as a desirable, nostalgic decade. The TV situation comedies about the 'fifties don't show the decade I was in. I would have asked for a transfer to the 'thirties. The 'fifties correspond to my "twenties". I don't remember anything about grease or stealing hubcaps. Rock and roll was (hopefully) a passing fancy for underage squares who dug violence. I was hooked on traditional jazz music in high school and in my early years as a Cal student. In 1948 I was visiting Hambone Kelly's at age 18. I graduated as an engineer in '51 and was lucky enough to stay out of the Army. Until well into the '60s I spent most of my surplus income in saloons that had jazz. As an amateur or dilettante, I played the washboard in a few bands too.

I remember the 'fifties as a time when Friday night was a total delight. A variety of high quality music and pure fun was available. You ran into your friends everywhere. The people you didn't know were at least amiable and fairly knowledgeable about jazz music. Most of them (not me, unfortunately) were good or passable dancers. Dancing skills seemed to fall off rapidly throughout the '50s and '60s. There were no topless joints and very few hookers. We were under the delusion that the Bay Area was smog free. It was literally safe to walk the streets at night. The women you could meet at jazz joints hadn't found out about the signs of the zodiac!

People who liked jazz were usually on the intellectual side. Generally the musicians were thought to be gifted lowbrows unless you got to know them. I did and found that most of them were my intellectual superiors.

Roughly half of the "classical jazz" musicians of the 'twenties and almost all of the 'forties revivalists were still active. Another strong revivalist generation was coming up and they were about my age! I have thought about it and concluded that the musicians playing then generally outplayed the revivalists of the 'sixties and 'seventies. By outplayed, I mean they worked harder, served a longer apprenticeship and had a better grasp of how to make a tune swing. Contrary to the popular impression, I personally observed that the "live" Watters and Bay City Jazz Bands could swing like crazy. The discipline of playing from loose charts gave them a secret weapon. You could write in a surprise, whereas most off-the-cuff jazz seems predictably based on successive cliches, relieved occasionally by strokes of brilliance.

I think jazz music in the area tended to peak about 1958 and that the geographical center of the jazz action was Broadway in North Beach, San Francisco. Broadway also

offered modern jazz, contemporary pop, opera and sometimes mariachi. I know practically nothing about what was happening on the Peninsula and little about Marin because I lived in Berkeley. Until some of its straight-laced city ordinances loosened up in the late 'fifties, Berkeley had very little performing jazz. Then it became much more significant as a jazz city. It probably had more jazz than San Francisco after topless killed off Broadway. Today things are pretty well diffused from Los Gatos to Port Costa and from Concord to the Beach.

One of the penalties of being a jazz hound in any generation is excessive drinking. I could hold it pretty well when I was young but I find it fogged my memory. As a dilettante, each time I played was a proud, nervous and important event. Yet whole bands have slipped from my memory. I was gratified to learn that everyone else seems to have the same problem. In putting together a tabulation of jazz clubs of the 'fifties, I have tried to make it roughly chronological, with a few "benchmark" dates and some guesses.

In the text I have attempted to say who generally played at the places. I found that the Bay Area produced two distinct and outstanding bands in the 'fifties. I traced some of the roots of these bands back through the clubs they played in. The Lu Watters, Turk Murphy and Bob Scobey Jazz Bands were established when the 'fifties began. They have been covered by numerous jazz historians, so I have merely tried to account for their whereabouts without delving too much in their roots.

I was assisted generously and patiently in this undertaking by Walt Yost, Turk Murphy, Dick Oxtot, Ev Farey and PT Stanton. Russell Glynn, Sanford Newbauer, Bob Helm, Bob Mielke, Bill Bardin, Pete Clute, Lee Valencia, Burt Bales, Dave Polos, Earl Scheelar, Devon Harkins, Bunky Colman and Jack Buck also lent their memories. Ray Landsberg, Walt Yost, Mike Duffy and Ray Skjelbred assisted with interviews. Special thanks go to Turk, who took the trouble to assemble his recollections in a comprehensive letter. Special thanks also to Dick Oxtot, who loaned me his newspaper clipping file.

The underlined clubs in the tabulation had an ongoing policy of featuring jazz. Note that I made no attempt to include modern jazz joints which were abundant and generally more successful. Several places featured traditional jazz on an "off-night" like Wednesday or Thursday. They had more commercial modern jazz on Friday and Saturday. Big band swing music was on a rapid decline.

I've coded hard booze with an "H" and an official dance policy with "D". If you danced in a place without a "D" you might be asked to stop because they were afraid of the cabaret tax (whatever that was). On the other hand, some places that didn't have an official dance policy might tolerate a few dancers. It seemed to be a matter of whim sometimes.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>JAZZ CLUB</u>	<u>RATING</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>CODE</u>
c'18-'64	The Rose Room	*	Downtown Oakland	H,D
c'18-'64	The Broadway Dancing Academy (-)		Downtown Oakland	H,D
'40s -'51	<u>Hambone Kelly's</u>	*****	El Cerrito	H,D
'40s-'70s	Larry Blake's Bathskellar *		Berkeley (Telegraph)	B&P
'40	The Melody Club	(-)	East Oakland(Foothill)	?
'49-'60s	<u>Hangover Club</u>	1*	Knob Hill (Bush St.)	H
'50-'54	<u>Victor and Roxie's</u>	***	Oakland (E.12th St.)	H,D
'50	Greenwich Village	(-)	Palo Alto	?
'50-'51	Windup	(-)	Albany	H,D
	Jenny Lind Hall	*	Oakland (Telegraph)	P
'51-'60s	<u>Tin Angel</u> (On The Levee)	**	Embarcadero	H
'51-'55	<u>Italian Village</u>	*	North Beach	H,D
'49-'52	Jug Club	*	N.Oakland (San Pablo Ave)	H,D
'53-'58	<u>El Rancho Grande</u> (Pioneer Village)	**	Lafayette	H,D
'54-'70s	<u>Pier 23</u>	***	Embarcadero	H,D
'53-'56	<u>Lark's Club</u>	***	N.Oakland (Sac'to St)	H
'54-'60(?)	<u>The Honeybucket</u>	***	Upper Fillmore	B & P
'55-'56	The Fallen Angel	*	Sutter Street (?)	H
'55-'59	<u>Sail 'N</u>	****	Front & Broadway	H,D
'56	Heno's	**	Oakland (Grove St)	H,D
c'56	Blind Pig	(-)	Oakland (San Pablo)	(?)
'56-'60's	<u>Monkey Inn</u>	**	South Berkeley (Shattuck)	B&P
'56	Storyville	(-)	Grant Avenue	H (D?)
'56-60s	<u>Burr Hollow</u>	***	North Beach	H
'57	<u>Jack's Waterfront</u> <u>Hangout</u>	*	Embarcadero	H
'57	Charlie Tye's	*	Downtown Oakland	H,D
'57	Crim's	(-)	East Oakland	(?)
c'57-58 '64-'68	La Val's Gardens	***	Berkeley (Northgate)	B&P
'58-'60	<u>Easy Street</u>	**	Wharf	H,D
'58	Wagon Wheel	**	Hayward	H,D
'58-'60(?)	<u>Kewpie Doll</u>	**	North Beach (Broadway)	H
c'58	Palace Corner	*	New Montgomery and Market	H
'58-'61	<u>Nod's Tap Room</u>	****	Downtown Berkeley	B&P
'59	Muir Beach	**	Marin Coast	D
'59	<u>Bagatelle</u>	**	Russian Hill (Polk)	H
'59	Copy Cat	*	Upper Fillmore	H,D(?)
'60-'61	(1st) <u>Earthquake</u> <u>McGoan's</u>	**	(see Sail 'N)	H,D
'60	Zack's	*	Sausalito	H
c'60	Black Egg	(-)	San Mateo	(?)
6/61-2/78	(2nd) <u>Earthquake</u> <u>McGoan's</u>	***	Clay Street	H,D

Note: Unless otherwise noted, the clubs are in San Francisco.

Places coded "B & P" were what we call "beer-and-peanuts" joints. I think Larry Blake's Rathskellar lifted the idea from the University of Wisconsin and pioneered it here. The places usually had sawdust on the floor and Greek letters on the walls and ceiling. Some of us wondered if restaurant catalogs had Greek-lettered wall paper. The beer-and-peanuts joints were pitched to college kids or singles in their early twenties. This included lots of late teenagers with phony IDs. I think the pizza parlors eventually supplanted the beer-and-peanuts places because of a broader family appeal. Until about 1954 I didn't know what pizza was.

I was one of a number of neophyte musicians who faced their first crowds at Blake's Rathskellar after swilling some liquid courage. Blake's and other sub-professional forums were important in the development of musicians of my generation. It was common knowledge that beer joints couldn't come close to paying scale. Some percentage of the bar gross, augmented with pitchers of "band beer" was usually negotiated as payment. Take home pay might be three bucks and a hangover. This was a lousy basis for a contract because some owners "skimmed" the bar gross if no band played. A matter of deep concern for musicians was the cleanliness of the plumbing that carried the beer. Dirt in the plumbing was believed to cause spectacular hangovers.

The number of asterisks after the club is an indication of how good a time I had there. Hambone Kelly's gets five stars right off the bat. I have never duplicated the level of excitement that came from standing "under the guns" while a hundred dancers picked them up and layed them down in precise Busby Berkely fashion behind me. Those 'forties cats could really dance! The beat the dancers maintained in Hambone's was so reliable that it was orchestrated into a "break" in at least one tune. In the recording of "Doin' the Hambone" there is a wide open break that sounds like a mistake. It's for the dancers.

Starting Sunday afternoons, Hambone's had a band (often a guest shot), cheap dinners and old-time movies. Physically, Hambone's looked like an old "wadhouse". It was set back from San Pablo Avenue and had ample parking in the rear. It had lots of shrubbery, part of which was illegal. Before the Watters band moved in, the place had been operated by Sally Rand. A county line bisected the club. Hambone's had a front bar in Alameda County and a large back-room bar in Contra Costa County.

On slow nights Watters might rumble musical advice from the next bar stool: ("Play big, not loud. If you play into a break by mistake, don't stop. Play right through it.") Bob Helm seldom missed an opportunity for a friendly chat and could field any question about jazz. The Watters band had charts for about 300 jazz tunes. They could play upwards of 1000 tunes!

I'm told that the Watters band I heard in 1949 and '50 was a pale imitation of the one a few years back, and that the Dawn Club was superior to Hambones. I suppose so but I was in the Boy Scouts then.

When I first started going to Hambone's in '48, I heard the first Turk Murphy band. Watters was on medical leave. Scobey and Turk left in '49. The Murphy band made a two year swing through Santa Monica, Hollywood, Seal Beach and Las Vegas. Turk also played The Hangover Club and The Greenwich Village in Palo Alto. Bob Helm took an off-night trio into D&R's in 1950. I didn't hear it. Aside from a couple of visits to the Hangover, I pretty much lost track of Murphy, Scobey and Helm from 1949 until 1951 due to a belated determination to graduate from UC.

Turk doubled on washboard at Hambone's and made it look easy. I decided that was my instrument. Seven years passed before I got good enough to play in a first line band. I prefer to think this was because the washboard is hard to play.

It was a sad New Years Day when we found out Watters had announced that Hambone Kelly's was closing. It also took the musicians by surprise. We all assumed the Watters Bnd would reorganize but it didn't. It took 28 years to find out that Scobey reopened Hambone's in early '51. After about three months, there was no liquor license in sight so the venture folded. Hambone Kelly's became a furniture store. A Wells Fargo Bank now sits on the approximate site.

The quality of musicianship obviously contributed greatly to the club's appeal. So why did The Hangover Club only get a half a star when they had good people like The Teagradsens, Turk Murphy, Darnell Howard, Joe Sullivan and Jimmie Archey? They hustled drinks unmercifully! We always felt like suckers afterward. Traditional jazz fans seemed to resent velvet ropes and cavalier treatment, while the modern guys ate them up. Finally, I would go to The Hangover only if I was entertaining people on an expense account. Of course, after twenty years you start kicking yourself when you realize what you missed!

The Rose Room and The Broadway Dancing Academy were dime-a-dance joints in downtown Oakland. They were also known as "dime jigs" or "dime grinds". They were a throwback to the 'thirties in that they used live musicians. Dime grinds in other cities had long since switched to recordings. Surprisingly, the live musicians were retained until the 'sixties in Oakland.

According to Bill Bardin, who played dime jigs from 1947 to 1949, they had a double-edged historical significance. First, numerous bay area jazz musicians worked them. A partial listing includes Lu Watters, Bob Scobey,

Bob Helm, Paul Lingle, Ellis Horne, Bob Mielke, Al Zohn, Red Gillham, Jack Buck, and Jack Crook. The latter three formed the Frisco Jazz Band while working at a dime jig. Red Nichols worked at local dime jigs during WWII.

Secondly, the dime grinds in Oakland are a vestige of the Barbary Coast. In World War I, the dance halls in San Francisco were shut down by the Navy a la Storyville. They took refuge across the bay. Jack Buck, Bob Helm and Bardin have many stories about the dime jigs and should do a paper on them.

The playing ground rules were pretty rigorous in a dime jig. Five men held the job. After fifteen minutes of full ensemble, the men took short breaks in rotation. A new tune was played every sixty seconds! I went to one session at the Rose Room which featured some forgotten jazz players. They didn't have time to talk to me and I didn't find a dancing girl who looked like Ruth Etting. After a few evenings in the dime jigs, playing sixty tunes an hour, a jazz player was a leg up on being a journeyman musician.

Incidentally, the jazz musicians of the 'fifties admired hotel ("potted palm") musicians. The jobs paid well and required a high degree of professionalism. Us fans thought they were clots.

The Windup in Albany was where Dick Oxtot and Bunky Colman had the original Polecats. Oxtot used this name for most of the bands he fronted in the 'fifties. I failed to go to The Windup and didn't meet Oxtot until about '53. He was mainly a cornet player then.

Soon after Hambone's closed, I began wearing a groove between my house and Victor and Roxie's to hear Bob Scobey's band. Scobey and Jack (trombone and piano) Buck opened at V&R's for years until I was frankly a little bored with the club and the band. To relieve the boredom the Oakland cops sometimes swarmed in and arrested someone on a concealed weapons charge..

In the 'fifties I learned that to avoid stagnation, a band must turn over its personnel and keep feeding new tunes into the "book". In my recollection the Scobey band depended too much on a few favorite tunes.

I found an old journal in which I kept track of daily expenses from late '51 through late '53. It revealed that V&R's had a band on Wednesday through Sunday. The Italian Village was visited less frequently because it was farther away and more expensive. The Village had bands on Wednesday through Saturday. By 1952 I was spending about \$9 a week on entertainment. My take home pay was about \$65. If I recall, a highball was about 35 cents and beer was about 25 cents. I usually dropped about \$2 in V&R's if I was by myself or \$5 if I had a date.

During this time I formed a friendship with George Probert, who was Scobey's reed man, and introduced him to his future wife. I met Earl Scheelar in V&R's in '51. I probably met Bob Mielke at a Probert party about '52. I drank gallons of coffee with drummer Freddie (The Fox) Higuera in V&R's restaurant. I seldom saw anybody eat there. The chef once made me a poultice for an infection. It almost cost me a finger.

The Italian Village was where Turk played from 1951 to '54. Claire Austin sang there. I met a dandy couple named Jim and Carol Leigh who had a band from San Jose that played when Turk didn't. The Village was a full fledged posh night club, comparable with Bimbo's today. The jazz was in the Venetian Room downstairs. I later regretted not spending more time upstairs listening to nostalgia acts like Connie Boswell and Nick Lucas. But I was a purist! The Italian Village burned down about 1955.

I ran across a ridiculous "loyalty" phenomenon in my travels. I found that some Murphy and Scobey fans had polarized. I was one of a small number of jazz hounds who heard both bands. Both factions considered me a "turncoat". It was like Watters had cast us few survivors adrift in two leaky lifeboats which were trying to ram each other!

In the '50's, jazz hounds could buy records at several places but the favorite was the Yerba Buena Music Shop operated by Vivian Bohrmann. The store was on Grove Street in Oakland. Later it was relocated on College Avenue near Alcatraz. Vivian is a recognized authority on jazz. I took an extension course from her about 1948. She had a Wednesday radio program. In my infinite wisdom, I called in and protested that the jazz was not pure enough. There were about three or four jazz programs at the start of the '50's and one or two at the close. The most famous jazz program was The Blue Room on KRE late Sunday nights. The station was supposed to sign off at midnight unless Dick Krause brought a bottle. Then we jazzhounds might be laughing in bed until 5AM. We had all been disappointed by movies entitled: "The _____ Story". Once Krause "reviewed" "The Jelly Roll Morton Story". The title roll of this non-existent movie was played by Van Johnson. Doris Day was Mamie Desdune and Sonnie Tufts was Frankie Dusen.

Paul Lingle played piano intermittently at the Jug Club. Lingle played like Jelly Roll Morton and sometimes (about '51) saw him come into The Jug Club. (Morton died in '41.) One night we talked to a glib Army private named Sam Charters and gave him a ride back to the Greyhound. One of our own number attained immortality by overturning a juke box that bawled forth a Frank Sinatra record after a beautiful Lingle piano solo. The 78rpm records were still rolling around while our feisty jazz brother was being

thrown halfway across San Pablo Avenue. Lingle moved to Hawaii and The Jug Club became a lesbian bar.

By mid 1953 a third regular stop was added to my odyssey in the form of El Rancho Grande in Lafayette. The Rancho was a large restaurant-bar-nightclub with a motel-modern-western decor. If I recall, Scobey opened it to jazz after a sabbatical from Victor and Roxie's. The bands of Kid Ory and Earl Hines played there.

The Dayton "Dixieland Rhythm King" boys frequently came to the Bay Area. In the late 'fifties a bunch of them were playing at the Rancho with none other than Ralph Sutton. I think Gene Mayl was leading and Jack Vastine was on banjo. The rhythm section couldn't get together with the piano. I was asked to sit in and try to pull off a "save". The rhythm got even more disjointed. Sutton had then been playing mainly as a piano soloist and we decided to blame it on him. Actually the Rancho (or Pioneer Village as it was called by this time) had movable partitions that made it an echo chamber. I always heard some other washboard playing a quarter beat late. The echos were probably lousing up all of us.

I first went to The Tin Angel in July '53. It was a spacious "bare bones" place with an impressive jazz track record. Bookings included the bands of Turk Murphy, George Lewis and Kid Ory. Lizzy Miles and Barbara Dane sang there. The owner, Ms Peggy Tolk-Watkins branched out in 1955 or '56 and set up The Fallen Angel using a bordello with ^{SALLY STANFORD'S EVACUATED} opulent antique furnishings. I went once or twice and felt like a jazz hound in a china shop. The venture was short lived despite the fact that Turk had the job. Mielke and Oxtot also worked there in a quartet.

In the late fifties The Tin Angel was sold to interests fronted by Kid Ory, who renamed it "On The Levee". Ory operated it into the sixties using local musicians after most of his original people died off. We continued to call it The Tin Angel. Eventually the place became a gay motorcycle bar.

Directly across the Embarcadero highway and tracks from The Angel was The Pier 23. The Pier opened to jazz in 1954. Burt Bales always seemed to be featured on piano and a platoon of brass players led by Robin Hodes always sat in. Hodes was another Dayton transplant. On off nights somebody like Bill Erickson or Devon Harkins took over the piano. Late in the decade Oxtot fronted a band at The Pier featuring Frank Goudie and Bales. The Pier was owned in the fifties by a colorful character named Havelock Jerome. Except for his singing voice and his nose he was a small man. The characters who hung out in The Pier 23 seemed to have stepped out of a Steinbeck novel. In those days bars were supposed to close an hour earlier or later when the time changed. The Pier always

closed later - at whatever time the cops came. By this time the patrons and musicians were spilling out the back door onto the pier itself. Havelock always convinced the cops that he was merely confused about daylight savings.

In the early '50's, aspiring jazz musicians of my generation were meeting other local and emigre musicians and forming "living room bands" dedicated to good times or serious rehearsing. I was involved in a "fun" group which formed in 1949 in the Berkeley Hills. It met regularly for about four years but never played professionally. PT Stanton and Harley Carter were our mentors. It was a two-cornet band emulating Watters. Most of us were rank amateurs but eventually we picked up elements of The Foggy City Seven, a working Berkeley High School group that stayed together through college. PT called us "The Northside Gang".

We tended to form a preference for traditional jazz in high school. Some of the high school friendships based on a common liking for jazz survived decades. Typically a gestation period of six or seven years was required to produce a polished player.

The next step after living room bands was playing for free beer in sub-professional places like Larry Blake's Rathskellar (Blake's Basement). Around 1950 or '51 some of us from The Northside Gang started playing (badly) at Blake's. We didn't know him but Bunky Colman was playing there at that time. Besides gaining experience, we were meeting others of the same persuasion.

By 1953 most erstwhile jazz players knew one another and were forming semi-professional bands. In the span of three years these groups would evolve into several good professional groups. Two of these were outstanding: Bob Mielke's Bearcats and The Bay City Jazz Band.

The first outstanding band to surface was Bob Mielke's Bearcats with PT Stanton on cornet, Bunky Colman on reeds, Dick Oxtot on banjo, Pete Allen on string bass, and (usually) Don Marchant on drums. Except for Bunky, the Bearcats were a few years older than the rest of us. Most of them already had professional experience. They played generally in a George Lewis tradition. Rhythmically they leaned toward "straight four". They weren't afraid of Whiteman and Ellington numbers, latin tunes and hillbilly. It was (to me) the first Berkeley band that was an ongoing, professional sounding group. All subsequent Berkeley traditional jazz bands seemed to have roots in the Bearcats.

The roots of the Bearcats go back through The (Dayton) Dixieland Rhythm Kings, the Watters Band, The Polecats and a group of Berkeley teenagers in the late 'thirties. PT Stanton and Pete Allen were the teenagers. In 1953 PT met Oxtot and all the players knew one another. PT and Oxtot took turns on banjo and cornet in early sessions. Bill Dart

from the Watters band became the first drummer. There was never a piano. As "The Superior Stompers" the band played at The Rancho in Lafayette for two weeks, between the engagements of Ory and Hines. In mid '54 the Stompers played a concert at Jenny Lind Hall in Oakland. This was a huge second-story dance floor with bandstand. A successful engagement at The Tin Angel followed. Here the band was renamed The Bearcats by Peggy Tolk-Watkins. Here also Oxtot became a full-time banjo player and left the cornet to PT. Eventually Don Fay, a product of The Foggy City Seven, took over the drums and was in turn succeeded by Don Marchant. The rest of the group remained remarkably stable although Mielke, PT and Colman might be replaced by Bill Bardin, Bill Erickson and Bill Napier on specific occasions.

I dimly remember hearing The Superior Stompers and touting them to others. I have stronger recollections of The Bearcats playing at The Lark's Club, a predominantly black bar on Sacramento Street near the Berkeley-Oakland line. Nobody could agree on the year in which The Bearcats started at The Lark's. We all agreed it was 1955 until some harder evidence indicated 1954 (probably September). The job lasted until late '55 or early '56. At the time black people were not welcome in most "white" bars. Lots of white jazz fans missed these bands at the Larks, fearing that they would be unwelcome. I was a regular although I confess to some trepidation at times. The Bearcats (at The Larks) were the first professional band to ask me to sit in while they were working. In later years they sometimes worked without a drummer, so I was often asked to sit in with them (to my everlasting delight).

The Bearcats left few presentable recordings. A Dayton group tried to make an LP but it sounded like it was pressed eccentrically. A clean 45 rpm record, some noisy acetate discs and some privately recorded tapes made in various jazz clubs are all that remain.

In 1954 a bunch of aspiring jazz musicians were playing in two or more groups in Blakes basement. They included Barry Durkee, Harry Ironmonger, Walt Yost, Joe Holmes and me from The Northside Gang. Earl Scheelar was a recent arrival from Seattle. Pete Clute and Don Keeler were from Marin County. Roy Giomi was from the city. Frank Goulette and Fred Bjork (who supplanted Holmes on the trombone) were from the South Bay. Ev Farey recalls that he and Sanford Newbauer were playing at Blake's in 1953 with Bill Mulhern, Lloyd Byassee, Scheelar and an older pianist named Herb Buck. Buck was on the Blake's payroll, if I recall. We both remember rehearsing in Marin County. They don't remember me and I don't remember them until 1955.

In 1953, Sanford Newbauer a 23 year old San Francisco trombone player, formed the Canal Street Jazz Band. This was the tap root of the Bay City Jazz Band. It included Farey (cornet), Giomi (clarinet), Byassee (drums) and Mulhern (piano). This band worked various jobs and was credited with opening The Lark's Club to jazz in 1953 before

the year-long Bearcats engagement started. Ev Farey left the band to join Turk Murphy's band in June '54. I didn't hear this band until the final week despite the fact that it was on my turf, and I was "Mr. First Nighter".

After the Lark's engagement, the Canal Street Jazz Band moved to The Italian Village, replacing Scobey's band. This "big time" job lasted until about December, '54.

A second group formed from Blake's hangers'on in late '53. It called itself the Original Inferior Jazz Band and originally included Goulette, Bjork, Scheeler, Yost and others. I was very loosely associated with this band. I occasionally rehearsed with bands but avoided getting involved in paid jobs where I would have to show up on time. On my day job, I tended to work long but irregular hours and didn't consider myself a musician.

Yost remembers the time that the Musicians Union agent came in to Blake's unexpectedly and was appalled to find that we were playing for free beers and nickels and dimes collected in a hollow plastic woman's leg. Various locals were soon doing a land office business in new members.

About this time, the two bands that hatched at Blake's were playing at the original Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Sacramento. I went once and dozed off while driving the return trip on Highway 40. I confined future night life to the Bay Area.

In late 1954, The Original Inferior crowd was playing The Honeybucket on upper Fillmore Street. This was a "fun" beer-and-peanuts place, but it also gave polish to sidemen in the upcoming generation of bands. Besides the aforementioned members of the Original Inferior Jazz Band, Yost and I think the following people played at The Honeybucket: Don Keeler, Pete Clute, Barry Durkee, Bill Carroll, Mielke, Harry Ironmonger and Ray Giomi. I sat in sometimes. So did Lee Valencia.

After Ev Farey was released from Murphy's band in early '55, he and Sanford Newbauer organized the Bay City Jazz Band. I attended at least one of their rehearsals at The Patri Art School. I was with Yost and I recall that PT Stanton tried out for second horn. Yost recalls that I played one or two rehearsals. I was never associated with the band though.

The Bay City Band was well rehearsed, spirited and loud. It was mainly stocked with players from The Canal Street Jazz Band but also drew upon the Honeybucket Gang. The Honeybucket drew its people from Blake's, therefore, the Northside Gang was a root of the Bay City Jazz Band. I personally think that The Bay City Band was the best of the bands that emulated the Watters tradition. They made two LP's which still sound good today.

The Bay City was originally an eight-piece two-cornet band with Al Cavallin or Walt Yost playing second horn. Walt also played tuba but was employed intermittantly. In 1956

Walt went with Turk. Jack Beecher played string bass when there was no tuba. The original front line of Newbauer, Farey, Cavallin and Giomi had known one another at Galileo High School in San Francisco. Like most bands, the personnel kept shifting. The Bay City also went through a basic reorganization in 1957, in which Newbauer and the second horn departed. Newbauer was replaced eventually by Bill Carter (and probably others). Don Keeler, Pete Clute and Art Nortier played piano. Tito Petri, Barry Durkee, Jack Vastine, Randy Wilkinson and Lee Valencia played banjo. (Fortunately they usually played one at a time.) Lloyd Byassee and Bob Storm played drums. The average age of the band was 24 in 1955.

The Bay City band worked hard at injecting fresh material. Whereas the parent Canal Street band had charts for about 40 to 50 tunes, the Bay City had 150 tunes charted by 1957.

In July '55, The Bay City Jazz Band found a home in San Francisco on Friday and Saturday nights. The Sail'N became the Hambone's of the mid-fifties. I gave it four stars. Located at the southeast corner of Front and Broadway, it was on the first floor of a grubby residence hotel known to us as the "Evans Apt". The band wives did an excellent promotion job. The place was crowded from day one. The management probably didn't know what was going on but had sense enough not to change anything. Though smaller than Hambone's, The Sail'N had an elevated bandstand, a good-sized dance floor and a good physical layout for listeners as well as dancers. Prices were reasonable. The crowd was composed of straight, well-dressed, jolly people in their late twenties.

The Bay City played at the Sail'N for four years. Finally the place changed management in 1959 and became in quick succession a gay bar and then the first Earthquake McGoons in early '60. A year and a half later the Murphy band moved to the second McGoon's in the William Tell Hotel on Clay Street. Later the Evans Apt Hotel was demolished.

Local jazz musicians of the '50s were prolific song writers in the tradition of the Watters Band. Most of the tunes were pretty good and had imaginative titles. I was present when Harley Carter sold his latest composition, "Castling With The King of Kish," to Lu Watters "for a song". The Northside Gang had charts for "Custom House Up and Down" and "Green Hammer Days". Dr. Bunky Colman wrote "Blue Guaiac Blues". His opposite number in The Bay City, Roy Giomi, wrote "Arab Strut". The Bay City's compositions are played around the world by Watter's imitators. Most new tunes passed into obscurity. The best the composer could hope for was exposure on a short-run LP. An exception was Dick Oxtot, who combined talents as a musician, singer, composer and promoter. His "My Lovin' Imogene" and "Ain't Nobody Got The Blues Like Me?" are known outside the Bay Area.

In 1956 several more places opened up. The Lark's engagement ended and the Bearcats moved to a new beer and peanuts place called The Monkey Inn on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley south of Ashby. This place employed jazz bands

until well into the '60s. Later the Bearcats moved to Reno's which was a white working man's bar-nightclub in Oakland. They drew a regular, appreciative crowd of neighborhood types as well as jazz fans.

About 1956, The Blind Pig opened on San Pablo Avenue in Oakland. It was not far from the old Jug Club. I know I went there but cannot remember who played there or what they had to offer. A poll of musicians drew a blank.

Bunky Colman has fond memories of Storyville on Grand Avenue. Scobey opened it to jazz in '56. The posh but pleasant place lasted about a year. Bunky was in Marty Marsala's band which replaced Scobey for a time. I have no recollection of the place.

Meanwhile Frank Goulette was opening the Burp Hollow to jazz. This was decked out like a beer-and-peanuts place but had a liquor license. The Burp was comparatively small and did not have an elevated bandstand. This meant tourist dancers could scatter musicians like ten-pins, if I hadn't jabbed them in the kidneys with my washboard. A gorgeous manikin sat at a barstool as a come-on for male tourists. A hard-bitten jazz hound once bought it a drink. (Very embarrassing!) The Burp could stretch one bottle of booze over about 200 drinks so it was smart to order beer. They hired the Bearcats, various Oxtot combinations and also Le Sharpton's group. Almost everybody worked or sat in there in the next eight or ten years. The management insisted on matching vests or blazers. Whereas bands nowadays go out and buy matching clothes voluntarily, you practically had to hogtie the guys from the '50s to get them into their vests. They were forever apologizing for their funny clothes.

Lots of musicians (particularly leaders) and fans didn't like the Burp, but I had some rapport with the management. The rapport came after I innocently walked in, was identified as a look-alike troublemaker, and was about to be launched across Broadway by two burly Sicilians. (My feet weren't touching the ground.) Two musicians came running off the stand and saved my skin. After that I was known as "The Distoiber" and occasionally got a free drink that had actual booze in it. Russell Glynn was called "Shirts" (pronounced "Shoits").

A sign hung over the Burp's bandstand for several years. It said "Bob Mielke's Bearcats", which caused some confusion when other bands played. On one such night Russell Glynn sat at the bar. A gentleman of the tourist persuasion asked, "Which one is Mielke?" Not wanting to start a dull conversation, Russell pointed to Oxtot and said: "The guy with the white hair." Since then I have enraged Mielke by shouting, "Which one is Mielke?" on every job he plays.

Things were active in 1957 but I show only three comparatively unimportant clubs opening. Jack's Waterfront Hangout was a small bar with a stage on the Embarcadero near California Street. Charlie Tye's in Oakland impressed me as having kind of a mellow skid row crowd that had a penchant

for hurling themselves at the bells of the horns. When I sat in I was used mainly as a blocker. I don't remember Crim's.

In the '50s the Berkeley Gazette had three young reporters who were jazz hounds. They were Dave Greer, Ed Salzman and Ron Fimrite. On October 26, 1957 Salzman wrote a feature about the musicians from (just) Berkeley. He identified Bob Mielke, Dick Oxtot and Le Sharpton as principal band leaders of the time. Sharpton talked "magnolia" and played string bass and trombone. He returned to the South after a couple or three years around here. Jerry Butzen was with Wally Rose; Walt Yost was with the Bay City Band and Bill Napier (then a Berkeleyite) was with Turk. Earl Scheeler, PT Stanton, Jerrold Stanton, Don Marchant and Pete Allen were identified as Berkeley side men. Jerrold normally "worked the boats" on the Atlantic and had pretty much gravitated to Europe. He had been one of the last piano players in the Watters band.

The following lineup of Berkeley-based bands was interesting:

<u>Band</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Days</u>
Bearcats	Pioneer Village	weekends
Oxtot's Traditional Jazz Trio	Crim's	weekends
Oxtot's Polecats	La Val's Gardens	Wednesdays
Barbara Dane	Jack's Waterfront Hangout	Wed-Sat
Le Sharpton's New Orleans Band	Burp Hollow	weekends
Le Sharpton's New Orleans Band	Monkey Inn	Tues-Thurs

That's a pretty active week! Every jazz player in Berkeley was working regularly at least two days a week in late 1957. Salzman forgot Bill Erickson, who was accompanying Barbara Dane at Jack's Waterfront Hangout. I sat in at Jack's almost every weekend.

Incidentally, PT Stanton, Oxtot and Sharpton had just made an outstanding LP with George Lewis. It was released only in England where it started a "PT" cult. Ironically Stanton was (and still is) better known in Europe than in his own home town. They still think he is black.

Through the mutual connivance of Bob Scobey, me and

another Hexcel supervisor, Mielke, PT, Mel Doyle and Jerry Butzen had day jobs at Hexcel in Berkeley. Almost everybody had a day job of some kind. Yost was an accountant. Pete Allen was a TV repairman. Farey and Neubauer were printers. Oxtot was sometimes a mailman and had a string of nut vending machines which always got a laugh. A few of the musicians of the 'fifties were college students or teachers. Pete Clute graduated from Stanford while working with Turk and then the Bay City. After graduating, he became a full time musician, working in Turk's band for more than 20 years. Dr Bunky Colman was serving his internship when the Bearcats were hatching.

On a Friday or Saturday night in 1958, I could park at the Sail'N, listen to a set, then hike up Broadway to The Burp Hollow and catch the Bearcats. Using one of a number of washboards stashed around town under bandstands and behind pianos, one might sit in with said Bearcats, if they gave the nod. Or one might walk one block further to the southwest corner of Columbus and Broadway and catch the Marsala Brothers at The Kewpie Doll. Then back to The Sail'N for a few tunes, before driving to Pier 23 and hearing (or sitting in with) Burt Bales. Then maybe walk (or stagger) across the tracks and see who was playing at the Tin Angel.

Red Nichol's band appeared periodically at the Palace. It had a slick studio sound which fit with the decor.

Around 1957 or '58 Sam Charters lived in Berkeley and was a working musician. He and I were on good terms but considered each other atrocious washboard players.

About 1958 "Big Boy" Frank Goudie began to play with the Oxtot and Mielke groups. Originally from Louisiana, he had led bands in France. He was a top clarinet player until his death in 1963. I got to know Frank pretty well and sometimes drove him around. I never called him Big Boy. Besides being my senior, Frank was six feet five inches tall and about a third as wide. Frank was proud of this nickname but it didn't seem like a good idea at the time.

Between eastern tours, the Murphy band opened Easy Street in 1958. It was a nice compact nightclub layout and was reasonably posh. If it had a disadvantage, it was that no other jazz spot was within easy walking distance.

The Wagon Wheel was a large barnlike restaurant in Hayward with a bandstand and a generous dance floor. The Bearcats played there for a limited engagement in 1958. They also worked El Rancho in the late '50s.

One of two places I gave four stars was the relatively small back room of Nod's restaurant in Berkeley. Nod's Tap Room opened to Jazz in late 1958 or early '59 by an Oxtot group. Featuring beer and peanuts, it was owned by Don Thoza, who hired bands to the limit of his small cash gross. For a

while he had jazz on two nights a week (mainly Oxtot groups), a progressive band, a cowboy band (we called them "the-you-know-what-kickers") and a Peruvian band. On the seventh day we rested. The jazz format was a small cadre who worked for a percentage of the bar, augmented with numerous sitters-in. The atmosphere was not unlike the Bull Valley Inn of today but the people were younger. Everybody had fun playing "chase choruses". The local people who played there (besides Oxtot) included Bill Erickson, Frank Goudie, Davon Harkins, Scheelar, Red Honore, Bunky Colman, Byron Berry, Carol Leigh, Bob Mielke, Russell Glynn, Don Rose, Walt Yost and me. I almost always played but was never on the payroll. Ted Butterman and Frank Chase from Chicago were semi regulars. Jessie Fuller played a short engagement at Nod's Tap Room.

The women in Nod's were so good I eventually married one of them. One Sunday afternoon, Bill Young (a modern drummer of the time) and I met in another bar (strange bandfellows!). We composed a tune entitled, "How Would You Like It If Your Sister Married Donald Duck?". We moved to Nod's to use their piano because we felt the composition had to be heard. I played a chair seat with sticks while Young accompanied our vocal on the piano. The recital was short and was attended mainly by outraged parents.

Nod's took up where La Val's Garden's left off. Most people who played or heard music there in the early '60s have forgotten it was a going jazz operation in the mid-fifties. Again Oxtot was the usual prime mover. At LaVal's I met the English piano player, Cyril Bennet. I was privileged to sit in with Norma Teagarden and Don Ewell at La Val's.

The Bagatelle on Polk Street had an Oxtot band with Frank Goudie and other good people on Sundays. It was a good sized bar with a generous bandstand and (I think) a dance floor. It was famous for a phantom flueglehorn player. The guy had been told he wasn't good enough to sit in. He managed to conceal himself and appear in every set like a stigmata. Dave Greer and I used to sit in the Bagatelle and try to think of some useful purpose for fluegelhorns. They'd make an ideal rain guage for arid regions. The other applications were pretty frivolous.

In 1959 at roughly the time the Bay City Band was breaking up, the Great Pacific Jazz Band was beginning to get jobs. This band formed around Charlie Sonnerstein and Robin Wetterau in 1958. These were two more of the Dayton gang that had helped spawn so many bands around the country. The Great Pacific was a Watters-like band that had arranged some off-beat tunes like "Mojo Strut". I first heard them in '59 at Muir Beach but had rehearsed with them (or one of their roots) once in '58 at the Patri Art School. In 1960 I rehearsed with them in Lee Valencia's garage. They tried without success to teach me to read music and play drums. In 1960 I jeopardized my amateur standing by working jobs with The Great Pacific once or twice at The Monkey Inn. I took home nine bucks and a hangover. The band broke up permanently when the organizers moved to England in 1961.

I remember too little about the Copy Cat to write about it, except that Oxtot played there. He also played at Zack's in Sausalito. I found this place to be too slick and un-jazzlike for continued patronage.

In 1959 or '60 The Black Egg opened in San Mateo. I probably went once and probably sat in. I can't remember so I didn't rate it. Oxtot had a trio including Mielke. Carol Leigh sang.

Burt Bales and Bill Napier seemed to get banged up in vehicular accidents with some regularity. The end of the '50s was punctuated for me by a large benefit for Bales after he was badly hurt in 1960. He was hit in front of a Chinese restaurant where I had dined with him and Stan Page exactly one week before. In the Sunday, March 20th edition of the Chronicle, Ralph Gleason listed every club and every band member scheduled to play on the 22nd:

<u>Club</u>	<u>Band</u>	<u>Number of Pieces</u>
Pier 23	Polecats	seven
	El Dorado Jazz Band	six
On The Levee	Kid Ory's Jazz Band	six
	Great Pacific Jazz Band	nine
Kewpie Doll	Marty Marsala's Chicagoans (with Mugsy Spanier)	seven
	Wally Rose and His Jazz Band	five
The Cellar	Bob Mielke and His Dixieland Group	(?)