



# Frisko Cricket

Published by the San Francisco Traditional Jazz Foundation

FALL 2008

## BOB

by William Carter

Having known, and infrequently worked with, trombonist-bandleader Bob Mielke for nearly half a century, I take a particular pleasure in recommending a fine new book about him.

Compiled by Jim Goggin, the prolific founder of your San Francisco Traditional Jazz Foundation, *Bob Mielke: A Life of Jazz* is arguably Jim's best "scrapbook" yet. As such, it sums up two lives lived close to the heart of what this foundation is about.

Recommended bookends for the book, if you will, are: (1) SFTJF's very first CDs, *Bob Mielke and His Bearcats*, recorded in 1954 and issued in 1991, is currently still available (see order page); and (2) a hitherto unknown, later recording of Mielke's band code-named BCD-284 will be available both

from us and from GHB in December.

Afficionados need reminding, every now and then, of the enormous dedication, born of an almost helpless and often thankless love, it takes to devote one's life to this music. Born in 1926, the talented Mielke has lived that life since soon after 1942, when, at 16, he and some others (including the equally talented clarinetist Bill Napier) started a kid band called The Frantic Four. Sixty years and thousands of gigs later (and counting), the man is still going strong.

Goggin's valuable book features a plethora of rare pictures, amazing letters, offbeat and on-beat memorabilia of every description, and – most precious of all – interviews with

Mielke. Taped interviews with jazzmen are as close



Bob Mielke at a recent SFTJF event.  
Photo by Richard Ressman

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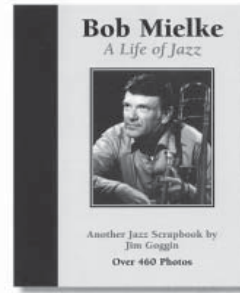
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to the real history of this music (with all its peaks and discontinuities) as one can get. Listening for hours at places like Tulane or the Library of Congress or Stanford, one hears accounts ranging from the nearly incomprehensible and irrelevant, to the fanciful and mythic, to the deeply thoughtful and illuminating. Mielke's reflections, as transcribed by Goggin, reside at the highest end of this scale - caring, sensitive, insightful, passionate, and larded with the kind of surprisingly unsparring realism that can only come from having been there, somehow getting through it all. What ears!

**SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE BOOK:**

I had never played with a professional rhythm section before; what I consider a professional rhythm section. There are pros and cons on that, by the way. It's a subtle matter, but some of the amateur rhythm sections can be marvelous. I am not putting them down, but these pros are into

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*About \$30*

To order the splendid new **Bob Mielke A Life of Jazz**, please write or email

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or carolclute@aol.com

Or, you may wish to contact the publisher directly (see page 9).

# The Frisco Cricket

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In an effort to help defray the costs of maintaining all the varied programs that SFTJF supports, including The Frisco Cricket itself, we're going to begin providing limited advertising space here. We want to be fair to everyone, so there are a few rules we'd like to follow:

- The advertiser should be in a music related (preferably Traditional Jazz related) business (band, club, cruise, radio station, etc.).
- No more than a total of 2 full pages will be used in any single issue of the Cricket, so ads will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.
- We need to be able to maintain the right to accept or reject advertisements at our discretion.

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per issue

*1/8 Page \$35, 1/4 Page \$50, 1/2 Page \$75*

# THE BILL BAILEY WHO DIDN'T COME HOME

By James A. Treloar

From the Detroit Sunday News Magazine Page

June 17, 1973

A Jackson saloon's piano player wrote the song, a drifter musician starred in it - while his wife cried because the lyrics were cruel.

*Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?  
Won't you come home?  
She moans the whole*

*day long.*

"Bill Bailey," the most popular ragtime tune ever written, was a cruel song.

It celebrated the real-life tragedy of a country girl who couldn't keep pace with her city sweetheart in Jackson, Mich. Yet, it's a song that America loves.

Honky-tonk singers - the ones who had voices big enough to hammer nails through cement - made it their specialty.

The piano player in every blindpig during Prohibition knew it by heart. Dixieland bands arranged it, an opera starr recorded it and during the 40s it was crooned for bobbysoxers.

Only one song in American history - "Stardust" - has been recorded more often.

But "Bill Bailey" was written in 1902 as a thoughtless joke, and 70 years later it still brings pain to the woman it poked fun at.

The former Mrs. Bill Bailey, who turned 100 years old in a Jackson nursing home this spring, will burst into tears if somebody mentions that song from so long ago.

Mrs. Bailey was a country girl. She was born Sarah Siegrist on a farm in Jackson County. Her parents were immigrants from Germany, and they

settled in what had already become a German community in Waterloo Township.

Sarah Siegrist had a strict up-bringing. In the German church she attended, men sat on one side of the aisle, women on the other.

Her schooling was spotty. Her parents preferred that she learn how to be a good wife, and her real education took place in the farm kitchen.

Her most vivid recollections today are of the warnings her mother gave her on how to behave like a lady, and not be taken advantage of by any smart-alec city fellow.

The warnings did no good. When she was about 18, Sarah moved into Jackson and got a job as a hotel maid.

Turn-of-the-century Jackson wasn't the peaceful town it is today. It was wide-open. "Little Chicago" they called it.

Jackson was a railroad town. It was the most central point on the track between Detroit and Chicago, and the Michigan Central Railroad had built its repair shops there.

It was also the collecting point for goods flowing north or south. The trains were made up in Jackson. The crews were quartered there, about 3,000 of them in 1900.

Custom dictated that any worthy man crippled in a railroad accident would be set up in business or politics by his friends. Many a fortune in Jackson today was founded on a crushed hand or an amputated leg.

Jackson's saloons catered to the railroad men.



Sarah Siegrist (Bailey) at 100 in 1973

The saloons began at the Michigan Central depot, and strung one after the other up Main Street, sometimes spilling off into side streets.

The best of these was Conrad Deidrich's Saloon, just two blocks up the street from the depot. Here's where the middle echalon railroad men came after work - the conductors, the engineers, the brakemen.

Here's where the song "Bill Bailey" was probably composed.

Deidrich's was one of the few saloons in town that had a piano. Men could get beer for 5 cents a pint, bar whiskey right out of the barrel for 10 cents, listen to a drifter named Hughie Cannon pound the piano keys, and later on begin eyeing the bawdy house upstairs over the grocery across the street.

Women never came to Deidrich's saloon. It was a man's haven. The only thing to mar masculine serenity was a hygiene problem that plagued men of the era - lice.

The remedy was to occasionally scoop the lice out of one's hair with a specially made comb. More men owned a fine-toothed comb than owned a toothbrush.

*Remember that  
rainy evenin' I drove you out,  
With nothin' but a fine-toothed comb?*

The Civil War had given a monumental lift to the budding art of photography. Every mother had to have a picture of her son in uniform. In Jackson, mothers took their sons to Bailey's photograph gallery, located on Main Street near Deidrich's Saloon.

The photographer's son, Willard G. Bailey, had no interest in taking over his father's business, how-

ever. People called him "Bill" and Bill Bailey was a musician. He worked as a music teacher by day and a dance hall musician by night.

How Bailey met Sarah Siegrist isn't known. Mrs. Bailey either can't or won't remember.

They were married in 1893.

"Bill was my sweetheart, but he was everybody else's too," Mrs. Bailey remembers. She wept over the memory. "I never felt there was a man who wanted just me."

"Bill Bailey was a nice guy. He lied to me all the time, but I was too young to understand much then. I was a country girl.

"It's not true what the song says. Bill was always late coming home, but I never asked him 'What did you do?' or 'Where have you been?'"

"I wanted to be a child's mother, but Bill didn't want a baby. He was out every night, playing at the dances. But he let me adopt a little girl."

*I know I's to blame,  
Well, ain't that a shame?  
Bill Bailey, won't you  
please come home.*

When Bailey wasn't playing a dance job, he'd hang out in

Deidrich's Saloon, listening to the music of Hughie Cannon, piano player and composer.

To the day he died in 1912 of cirrohisis of the liver, Hughie carried a boyish face, an impish grin, and had a bag on.

He'd go off on long bouts of drinking, and the piano at Deidrich's Saloon might be quiet for five, maybe six, months. Then Hughie would dry out, walk in like nothing had happened, and take



Hughie Cannon c. 1904 Photographer unknown.



Sarah and Willard Bailey, probably c. 1904. Caption on photo says, "An immortalized parting."

over the piano again.

Deidrich never paid Hughie anything. He'd keep Hughie's glass filled, and the impish piano man would play all afternoon and night for the nickels and dimes the railroad men would toss on his piano.

Ragtime was brewed from the same cauldron that produced spirituals, the blues, and jazz. Unlike its cousins, however, ragtime was unfailingly cheerful. It was the proper vehicle for making sport

of tragedy.

The first great exposure the public had to ragtime was at the series of World's Fairs near the turn of the century in Chicago, Omaha, Buffalo, and St. Louis where wandering pianists found employment along the midways.

People went home from their visits to the fair singing "Hello My Baby" or whistling "Maple Leaf Rag."

Hughie Cannon couldn't sing worth a lick,



# Bill Bailey, Won't You Please ---- Come Home?

Successfully Sung by  
**MISS EVA MUDGE**



Words & Music By

## Hughie Cannon

Co-Author & Composer Of

"I Hate To Get Up Early In The Morn"  
"Just Because She Made Dem Goo Goo Eyes"

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Original sheet music cover for "Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home" © 1904

but he knew all the ragtime tunes, and he could write them as well.

By the time he wandered into Jackson one day and dusted off the stool at Deidrich's Saloon, he'd already written a few songs, including "Goo-Goo Eyes."

Hughie was still single, and his mode of operation in a new town was to approach a widowed lady and ask for room and board, in exchange for which he'd take care of the rent.

"You do the cookin'," he'd say, "and I'll pay the rent." In song, it wasn't that fair.

Hughie was not only a drunk. He tried opium and cocaine as well. Eventually he was able to shed drugs, but never booze.

The relationship between Hughie Cannon and Bill Bailey can't be nailed down. Folklore has it that Bill admired Hughie's musical gift, and would often help him out of a jam or see to it that Hughie got a square meal.

Almost certainly, however, the pair of them got to talking about women one night, and Bill gave Hughie a pretty dismal account of his marriage to Sarah.

Hughie had never met Sarah, but he was inspired to rattle off a ditty about Bailey's irregular hours.

Bailey thought the song was a scream, and he brought home a dashed-off copy of the song to show Sarah.

Sarah couldn't see the humor.

"I liked the music," she said with farm girl simplicity. "But I thought the words lowered him."

For a while, she accepted without comment the picture it drew of her as a wife, though it lowered her as well.

Hughie eventually peddled "Bill Bailey" to a New York publisher for \$350. It was the most he ever got for a song. "Goo-Goo Eyes" went for \$35. "Ain't That A Shame" he gave away. His publisher made a fortune out of "Bill Bailey."

The song was given its formal debut during a musical review in Newburgh, N. Y. In a short time, it had become a "standard" with musicians everywhere.

Music writers tried to capitalize on the "Bill Bailey" craze with songs like "I Wonder Why Bill Bailey Don't Come Home" and "Since Bill Bailey Came Back Home."

A New York banjo player billed himself as Bill Bailey. A London music hall singer named E. William

Bailey claimed the song was written for him.

A disgruntled American landed in Singapore in the 1930s and opened "Bill Bailey's Bar." He always denied he was the genuine Bill Bailey, but in such a way that nobody would believe him.

Hughie Cannon moved to Detroit, and could be heard playing piano at a saloon off Farmer Street - when he wasn't in Eloise (Wayne County General Hospital), drying out.

He had a brief marriage to a girl who worked in a Detroit corset factory but, like Bill Bailey, he rarely came home, and his disgusted wife eventually threw him out.

Exactly 60 years ago today, Hughie died of cirrhosis of the liver in the Lucas County Infirmary Hospital in Toledo. On the same day, his wife was in Jackson, being given her divorce decree, but Hughie never knew it.

Willard Bailey opened a store in Jackson, selling phonograph records for a while, then in 1910 he took Sarah and his adopted daughter to Los Angeles.

Music continued to occupy Bailey's life. He played with bands on the West Coast, then became a salesman for the Southern California Music Co.

Sarah never did adjust to being a musician's wife. She divorced Bill in California, and moved to Oregon where she had relatives. There she met and married a farmer named Calvin Williams.

Sarah's escape back to the farm life apparently wasn't much of a success. She won't talk about Calvin Williams.

Bailey died in 1954 in California.


When Calvin Williams died, Sarah moved in with relatives in Jackson. Later she entered a nursing home. Today, she lives in the Cedar Knoll Rest Home northeast of Jackson, very near the farm where she was raised.

It's a peaceful life for Sarah. She can still chatter on about her childhood on the farm, the songs she learned in school, the poems she learned to recite in German, and how the men-folk would take their horses crossfields to church on Sunday.

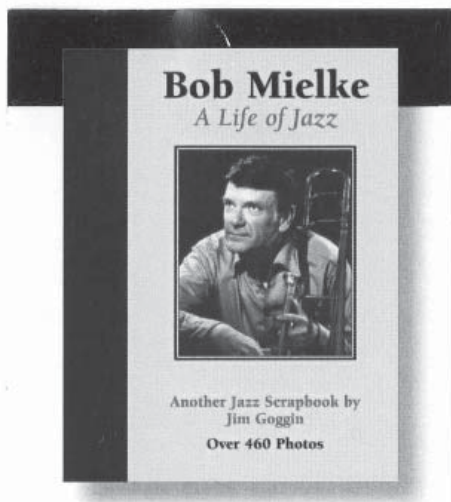
And she can be emphatic that she was raised to be a good girl and a good wife.

She remembers everything her mother taught her, even the lesson that city and country don't get along.

The joke Hughie Cannon wrote is as painful to her today as it was 70 years ago. And just as unfair.

"I waited," she protests, "but Bill Bailey never would come home!" 





# Bob Mielke A Life of Jazz

by Jim Goggin

ISBN 978-1-4251-3386-3

Available online:  
trafford.com/07-2418

This is about the life of a jazz trombonist written by Jim Goggin who has been a close friend of Bob Mielke for over fifty years.



## MUSICAL TID-BIT - HOW THE TROMBONE WORKS

from Bob Romans, Leader of the Cell Block Seven through the Dixieland Jazz Mailing List (DJML)

Dan Barrett lives in California now, but when he was around New York he occasionally played at the Cornerstone, in Metuchen, NJ.



One night there, a guy cornered him between sets, bought him a drink, and said, "I've been watching you for two sets now, and I think I've got it figured out. I'm a good observer. You change all the notes with just your lip, right?"

Dan said, "Not exactly," and began to explain the overtone system to him. But the guy wasn't interested. "You change all the notes with your lips, and this thing." He made the trombone slide in-and-out motion. "The slide," said Dan.

"Yeah, the slide. That's just there for show. You move it back and forth so everybody has something to look at, and when you want to get the audience all revved up, you move it back and forth real fast."

With a straight face, Dan asked, "You figured all that out after just two sets?"

The guy said, "I told you, I'm observant."

Dan leaned toward him conspiratorially. "Look, the other folks here are not nearly as observant as you, and they're still mystified by the whole thing. I'll ask you to keep it a secret, so you don't blow the magic for the others, okay?" The man smiled wisely and shook Dan's hand. "Don't worry, your secret's safe with me."

Dan returned to the bandstand and made sure to move his slide back and forth real fast on the next set. 🎵



Lu Watters with the VR10 Navy Dance Band. Photo courtesy Harry Oakes.

*In Memory  
of  
Lu Watters  
and his  
VR10 Navy  
Dance Band*

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*About the San Francisco Traditional Jazz Foundation*

**What is the Foundation?**

Created in 1981 as an archive of several thousand items relating to the jazz revival begun in San Francisco about 1939, the Foundation now seeks to enhance that collection and extend its uses. A wider aim is to help foster live, high quality traditional jazz, regionally and worldwide.

**What does the Foundation do?**

Current activities include archival preservation, supporting live events and broadcasts, collaborating with other jazz and educational institutions, and developing new products and media applications.

Although the Foundation lacks the funding to open its archive to the general public, other means are being found to make its resources available. For example, historic recordings and documents are being made available to radio stations; and consumer products such as posters, books and tapes are being publicly offered.

**Who is involved?**

You are. Membership is \$25 per year. Benefits include this quarterly newsletter, invitations to special events and availability of Foundation products (often at exceptionally low prices).

***Join us!***

**Donations welcomed**

The San Francisco Traditional Jazz Foundation accepts gifts and grants in many forms, including historical items which shed further light on the history of traditional jazz on the West Coast, such as recordings, music, newspaper clippings, photographs and correspondence. Contributions of materials or funds are tax-deductible under IRS ruling status 501(c)(3).

**SF Jazz on the Web**

The San Francisco Traditional Jazz Foundation has an ever-expanding web site. The site includes sound files and photos of many San Francisco (and other) jazz figures from the 1930s to the present. Please visit us at [www.sftradjazz.org](http://www.sftradjazz.org).

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