

MUSIC

PHILIP ELWOOD
JAZZ BEATLocal artists
get their day
at all-star fest

CONSIDERABLE concern has been shown over the years by performers and fans regarding the inability of members of the large community of local jazz musicians to land gigs, let alone earn a living by playing in the Bay Area.

The situation, of course, is not new — and it is hardly unique to the Bay Area.

There are dozens of excellent local jazz musicians (some with a lifetime of experience) whom I hear nowadays only at benefits, memorials, tributes or as members of ad hoc dance orchestras, pit-bands or small combos backing a headline star.

If there is any faulting to be done on this issue, certainly it is the public's increasing reluctance to go out to hear live music that has curtailed the number of job opportunities for local jazz players.

Club owners cannot be blamed for not presenting bands of local jazz instrumentalists since the combination of expenses required to just open doors for business (let

alone the musicians' fees) requires a club owner to hire only talent that is likely to draw a considerable audience — one that is willing to pay a number of dollars for admission.

And, the typical jazz fan seems to reason, "Why should I pay big bucks to hear 'Hot Lips' Smith's band at a club when I can hear him (or her) somewhere else around town during the year for less money?" A number of organizations have been addressing this dilemma for some time — Jazz in The City, Jazz in Flight, Bright Moments Music Club, City Celebration and many schools, college and museum jazz concert series, and jazz societies have done splendid work to spread the local-jazz gospel.

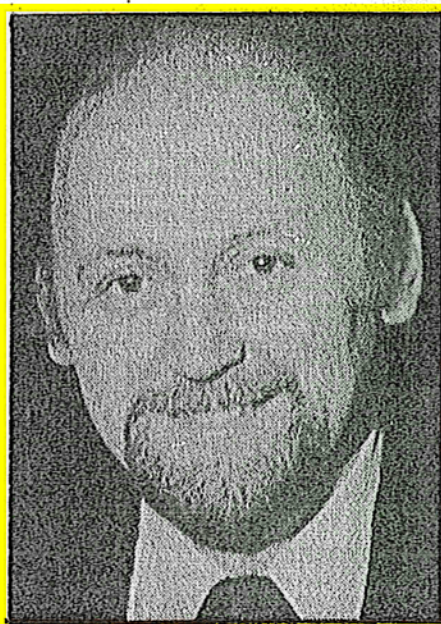
This week, running from Wednesday through Saturday, Kimball's is taking a risk by plunging into a first annual "San Francisco Retrospective All-Star Jazz Festival" — four nights of mainstream jazz played exclusively by Bay Area musicians.

Featured will be some of the Bay Area's finest, if unheralded jazz stars, backed by pianist Larry Vuckovich (who sold Kimball's on the festival idea) and bassist Al Obidinski.

Wednesday night's minifest presentation is called, "A Night of Classic Jazz and St. Louis Blues," and will feature tenor saxist Pee Wee Claybrook (who played the riverboats out of St. Louis in the late 1930s, alongside bassist Jimmy Blanton), clarinetist Vince Cattolica and drummer John Markham — with, of course, Vuckovich and Obidinski.

Markham, a San Franciscan for years, seems to be unknown to most jazz fans — suffice to note that he toured with Benny Goodman at one point in his career and was, for a long while, Frank Sinatra's drummer-of-choice for concerts and recordings.

On Thursday, the Kimball's



Pianist Larry Vuckovich

show is called "Tenor Battle" and features tenor saxists Benny Miller (veteran of the bands of Ellington, Basie, Fletcher Henderson, Andy Kirk and Jay McShann) and Chuck Travis (with 50 years playing with the Dorseys, Goodman and Charlie Barnet) as well as drummer Harold Jones, a veteran of many seasons with Count Basie's orchestra.

Next Friday's show is a tribute to Benny Goodman, featuring Cattolica and trumpeter Allen Smith. Cattolica is among the world's foremost Goodman-style players and Smith played in BG's band many a time. Besides being a (recently retired) school administrator, Smith — a grand trumpeter — has played everywhere around the Bay Area and has been featured soloist with both Sinatra and Tony Bennett.

Next Saturday night the Kimball's event closes with a "Now and Then" show featuring trumpeter-saxist Peck Allmond, guitarist Carl Lockett, drummer Omar Clay and Smith, Travis, Claybrook, Obidinski and Vuckovich.

Now, let's see if Bay Area fans will support the idea of presenting local jazz stars in a club-festival presentation.