

# Pacifica Tribune



courtesy photo

Legendary ragtime/boogie-woogie pianist and historian Bob Milne relaxes at the keys.

## 'Carnegie at the Moose'

### Popular ragtime/boogie-woogie pianist returns

By Jean Bartlett

Tribune Writer

World-celebrated ragtime and boogie-woogie pianist Bob Milne has never taken one piano lesson. In fact, he never practices piano. Why? "Because that takes all the fun out of it," he noted.

Yet, here he is, playing in Pacifica on July 17 at one of the City's most anticipated yearly events – "Carnegie at the Moose," aka "Beer, Brats and Bob." It's a benefit for the Pacifica Historical Society and the legendary musician is donating his concert time for the cause. This same pianist: plays over 200 concerts a year, served for six years as the U.S. Department of State music ambassador, was declared a "National Treasure" by the U.S. Library of Congress, and has performed for such paying audience members as President George H. W. Bush.

His donated Pacifica concert is a "no-brainer." He's a huge fan of the PHS and all they do. He is also cousin and cousin-in-law to longtime Pacifica residents Bill Hall and Kathleen Manning. Manning is President Emeritus of the PHS. More than 16 years ago, she suggested the pianist give a ragtime/boogie-woogie concert to help benefit the Society's historical projects. He's been playing annually since. But what about this "never practicing or taking a lesson" business?

Let's go back to when the native Michigander was four. From another room, he would listen to his mother play something on piano. When she was done, he would go to the piano and play it.

At age five he listened to Mozart on the family's hand crank record player.

"I understood Mozart's music was perfectly balanced and I could anticipate what he was going to do in the next passage, even though I didn't know the piece."

He began playing in an orchestra in third grade and continued playing in orchestras for 15 years. The first four years were on violin and the next eleven were on horn. By the time he was in tenth grade, he was playing French horn professionally in the Pontiac Symphony.

"See, I wasn't a piano player," he laughed.

Nevertheless, he got his first piano job in 8th grade. A dance instructor was teaching his fellow classmates to dance to various songs, including "St. Louis Blues." When her piano player quit, she asked Bob to take over. Those were \$5 gigs. That was a lot of money.

Back to tenth grade. The professional horn player was riding in the car with his parents. It was a two-hour, roundtrip ride and the radio dial was set to classical music. Suddenly, Milne heard Beethoven's "Emperor Concerto." "I thought it was stunningly beautiful."

When they got home, Milne discovered his parents had a record of it. So he had his second listen. Then he sat down at the piano and played it.

In 1959, he headed off to the prestigious Eastman School of Music to play horn. In his second year, the 19 year old was named assistant principal French horn in New York's Rochester Philharmonic. One night, he and some fellow students went to a local spot called the Treadway Inn. It had a piano on wheels and a guy playing pop standards. Milne had never listened to pop standards. But everyone, including Milne, gathered 'round the piano and sang along.

"I thought, 'I can play this stuff.'"

The next thing you know, the Treadway hired him to play piano, \$10 bucks a night, Fridays and Saturdays.



(Courtesy photo.) Bob Milne at the Rathskeller, 1964.

By 1963, Milne – now the assistant principal with the Baltimore Symphony and attending Peabody Conservatory of Music – hated all the politics of the symphony and he didn't like playing modern music with the orchestra. In the summer of 1964, he quit the Baltimore Symphony and headed back to Detroit. One night he and his cousins went to Detroit's legendary Dakota Inn Rathskeller. At one point, the piano was just sitting there, player-less. His cousins, which included Bill Hall, pushed him up on stage to roll out some standards. He was hired on the spot and played there for 25 years, five to eight hours a night.

In 1974, he went to his first ragtime festival – a famous festival in Toronto. Big names played there. Off the cuff he got up and played. To his surprise, he was liked. The next year, he went again to the festival and got up on stage and "winged" it. He played a number by ragtime luminary Eubie Blake. While he was playing, someone came up behind him and started singing the lyrics. The crowd went wild. It was the composer himself. Milne was mortified. But when the song ended, Eubie turned and said, "Not bad, kid!" All these years later, Milne is still wowed by those words. "They just made my life."

"Carnegie at the Moose," Bob Milne Concert and Benefit for the Pacifica Historical Society, [www.pacificahistory.org](http://www.pacificahistory.org). Wednesday, July 17. Pacifica Moose Lodge, 776 Bradford Way. Doors open 6 p.m. Tickets, \$25, include: Bob, one brat and one beer (or two soft drinks). Additional refreshments available for purchase. Concert begins at 7 p.m. Runs about two hours. Contact: 650-359-5462 or 650-355-5268. Tickets through Brown Paper Tickets: <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4279110>.

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