

August 8, 2016

1	Location:	3325 Grand Avenue (APN: 010-0826-008-03)
	Proposal:	Heritage Property Nomination by owner: The Alley, 3325 Grand Av.
	Applicant:	Jacqueline L. Simpkins and Winn Schwyhart
	Contact Person/Phone:	Winn Schwyhart, (510) 541-1120
	Owner:	Jacqueline L. Simpkins
	Case File Number:	LM16005
	General Plan:	Neighborhood Center Mixed Use
	Zoning:	CN-2
	Environmental	Exempt Sec. 15331 CEQA Guidelines, Historical Resource
	Determination:	Restoration/ Rehabilitation; Sec. 15183 Projects consistent with General Plan or Zoning.
	Historic Status:	Preliminary (field) survey rating C2+
	Service Delivery District:	2
	City Council District:	2
	Action to Be Taken:	Determination that the property is eligible for Heritage Property status, and designation as a City of Oakland Heritage Property
	For Further Information:	Contact Betty Marvin (510) 238-6879 , bmarvin@oaklandnet.com

Heritage Property nomination for The Alley, 3325 Grand Avenue, is before the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board at the owner's request for review of eligibility and designation.

HERITAGE PROPERTY STATUS

Chapter 4 of the Historic Preservation Element (HPE) defines Heritage Properties as "Properties which definitively warrant preservation but which are not Landmarks or Preservation Districts." Heritage Properties may be designated by the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board or the Planning Commission (in contrast to Landmarks, S-7, and S-20 districts which are designated by City Council ordinance). Heritage Properties may also be designated by the Director of City Planning, subject to confirmation by the Board or Commission. At a minimum, demolition, removal, or specified major alterations of Heritage Properties may be postponed for up to 120 days. Heritage Properties are Designated Historic Properties (HPE Policy 1.3) and under Policy 3.8 are on Oakland's Local Register of Historical Resources for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and similar purposes including State Historical Building Code. They are subject to the Category 1 demolition findings and are eligible for Mills Act contracts.

Per HPE p.4-19, a property is eligible for Heritage Property designation if it (a) has an existing or contingency rating of A (highest importance), B (major importance), or C (secondary importance) "according to the methodology of the Intensive Survey"; or (b) has an existing or contingency rating of A or B from the Reconnaissance survey; or (c) contributes or potentially contributes to any area potentially eligible for Preservation District designation (API or ASI). The Landmarks Board evaluation sheet is based on "the methodology of the Intensive Survey."

Heritage Properties may be designated at the owner's request or at another's nomination after owner notification and acceptance. Landmarks Board designations are appealable to the Planning Commission. Heritage Properties may be de-designated by the Board at the owner's request or at the initiative of the Board, but only upon documentation that the property does not meet Heritage Property eligibility criteria, unless the designation was to be only for a limited time.

THE ALLEY

A Heritage Property nomination for The Alley was filed by the owner in July 2016 after several months' consultation with staff. Since this is an owner nomination, the Board may designate The Alley a Heritage Property based on review of the nomination if the Board finds that it meets the eligibility criteria. The property is eligible for consideration based on its 1986 reconnaissance survey rating of C2+, "secondary importance or superior example" (C), contributor to the Grand Avenue Commercial Area of Secondary Importance (2+), with a field note "good storefront c.1940s." This meets the third standard set out in the HPE, contributing to an ASI.

The Alley is unusual among existing Heritage Properties in that the outstanding feature, the business and its premises (inside and out), occupies the ground floor of a fairly generic building, a three-story structure of apartments over stores constructed in 1920 with the overall address of 3321-27 Grand Avenue. The business and building are currently in the same ownership, but ownership has been separate in the past and could be again in the future.

Preservation Element Goal 2 is "To preserve, protect, enhance, perpetuate, use, and prevent the unnecessary destruction or impairment of properties or physical features of special character or special historic, cultural, educational, architectural or aesthetic interest or value. Such properties or physical features include buildings, building components, structures, objects, districts, sites, natural features related to human presence, and activities taking place on or within such properties or physical features." Table 2-1 of the Element provides definitions and examples of all these property types. Relevant to The Alley are *building components*, including storefronts and "privately-operated interiors normally accessible to the public" (with a photo of Dahlke's bar interior at 7th and Broadway, a "Victorian saloon inside a totally remodeled, undistinguished shell") and *activities*, "a store, business, institution or other ongoing land use typically characterized by distinctive merchandise, materials, or manner of operation or by special historical or cultural associations."

Physical Description (summary – see application for more detail):

Except for the storefront the building exterior is boxy, clad in plain stucco, with a flat or low hip roof and two- and three-part windows now replaced with aluminum sash. Steps to the second floor apartment entrance run up the left side, alongside an alley that leads up to other structures behind. The commercial façade has a carefully designed ramshackle roadhouse look created with rough vertical and horizontal boards below a faux gable and pent roofs, faux windows, and a graphic of a cat. A recessed entry on the right leads to swinging wood doors. Red neon spells out "cocktails" and "dinners" and there is a projecting neon sign with two alley cats.

The 1934 permit for the interior (designed by prominent period revival architect Francis Harvey Slocombe!) is still recognizable today: "The work to be done consists of installing booths and a counter to be used as a restaurant. Also an exit stairway is to be built in the rear which connects with an alley which in turn connects to the street. Along the walls on each side, work will be done to represent the front of the building. The booths and counters are to be built of 1" lumber" (permit #A53780). Details include an "Alley Loan Company" sign, a woman's silhouette at another fake window, lingerie on a clothesline, and a shack around the classic wooden bar. The wallpaper is thousands of business cards, pictures, old playbills, and memorabilia. A grand piano with its own bar is where Rod Dibble has played for community singing since 1960.

Significance (summary – see application for more detail):

The Alley derives its historical significance from its association and preservation of piano bar music and from the many famous patrons who visited to play, sing, leave a business card, or enjoy a drink. It has been in continuous operation since reportedly being the first Oakland tavern to open when prohibition ended in 1933. It was part of the Golden Age of Radio with a live broadcast in 1946-1948. The Alley's architectural design and interior décor are also unique. A 2012 documentary *The Alley Cats* by Cary Virtue (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2317145/>) was screened at the tenth Oakland International Film Festival and received a Partners in Preservation Award from Oakland Heritage Alliance. The *East Bay Express* (Oct. 16, 1992) rated The Alley "Best Home Away from Home."

As a longstanding neighborhood bar, The Alley serves a valuable function as a "third place" separate from home or work, as described in Ray Oldenburg's 1991 book, *The Great Good Place*. Third places host casual gatherings of people beyond the boundaries and increasing privatization of home and work. They contribute to the social viability of the community by leveling the status of guests and provide settings for civic engagement, political discourse, , and psychological support. They remain an important element for community vitality.

Recognition of vernacular commercial resources, businesses, and specifically restaurants and bars is increasing. In Oakland Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon has long been on local and national historic registers. More recently the Landmarks Board found the Kingfish Pub eligible for Heritage Property status. San Francisco Heritage has an active project to recognize and support "Legacy Bars and Restaurants" (<http://www.sfheritage.org/legacy/news/>) with a "Legacy Business Registry" and potential financial incentives (<http://legacybusinesssf.com/>). The business and the building at The Alley are currently in the same ownership, so displacement issues addressed by San Francisco's Measure J do not apply now, but they could in the future.

EVALUATION

Based on the above information, staff's Landmarks Board evaluation and tally gives the property a Landmarks Board "A" rating, eligible for designation, based on its imaginative vernacular stage-set exterior and interior design, its long history as a neighborhood and Bay Area institution, and its continuation of the piano bar tradition. Landmarks Board evaluation differs somewhat from the Cultural Heritage Survey system in giving greatest weight to history, and somewhat less to architecture. The evaluation sheet is attached for Board review and modification.

EFFECT OF DESIGNATION

Heritage Properties are Designated Historic Properties and are on Oakland's Local Register of Historical Resources for purposes including CEQA and State Historical Building Code. They are subject to Category 1 (strictest) demolition findings and are eligible for Mills Act contracts.

The CN-2 zone on Grand Avenue already requires design review for exterior alterations; Heritage Property designation would make it explicit that The Alley's existing commercial exterior is significant and should be maintained in keeping with its historic character. Oakland does not have formal design review over interiors, but again Heritage Property status would officially signal the importance of the interior.

The Oakland Planning Code, pages 795ff, provides these Local Register design review criteria:
<http://www2.oaklandnet.com/government/o/PBN/OurOrganization/PlanningZoning/s/codes/OAK053289>

Planning Code Sec. 17.136.050, Regular design review criteria. ...

C For Local Register Properties that are not Landmarks or located in the S-7 or S-20 Zone:

1. That for additions or alterations, the proposal will not substantially impair the visual, architectural, or historic value of the affected site or facility. Consideration shall be given to design, form, scale, materials, texture, lighting, landscaping, Signs, and any other relevant design element or effect, and, where applicable, the relation of the above to the original design of the affected facility.

The same section contains what might be a tangential reference to review of interior features:

Sec. 17.136.050 B. For Nonresidential Facilities and Signs.1. ... Only elements of design which have some significant relationship to outside appearance shall be considered

RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that the nominated property meets the criteria for Heritage Property designation as provided in the Preservation Element and recommends that the Board:

1. Receive testimony from the property owner and interested citizens;
2. Review the nomination and evaluation for accuracy and make any necessary revisions;
3. Make the determination that the property is eligible for Heritage Property designation;
4. Designate The Alley, 3325 Grand Avenue, a City of Oakland Heritage Property, specifying protected features to include the storefronts and the bar/restaurant interiors "normally accessible to the public."

Prepared by:


BETTY MARVIN

Historic Preservation Planner

Approved by:


ROBERT MERKAMP
Development Planning Manager

Attachments:

- A. Landmarks Board Evaluation Sheet and Evaluation Tally Sheet
- B. Heritage Property application and attachments

**City of Oakland – Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board
EVALUATION SHEET FOR LANDMARK ELIGIBILITY**

Address: 3325 Grand Avenue

Name: The Alley (storefront + interior)

A. ARCHITECTURE

- | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|----|---|----|-----|
| 1. | Exterior/Design: <u>imaginative stage-set vernacular storefront on generic bldg.</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |
| 2. | Interior: <u>old-fashioned bar, u u u + interior with additions by patrons</u> | E | VG | G | FP | E ? |
| 3. | Construction: <u>wood frame, generic</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |
| 4. | Designer/Builder: <u>Francis Harvey Slocombe¹⁹³⁴ - well known for Period + Moderne</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |
| 5. | Style/Type: <u>theme bar, fine + long-lived example</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |

B. HISTORY

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|----|---|----|-----|
| 6. | Person/Organization: <u>The Alley, orig. Grand Alley Cafe, since 1933; Rod Dibble, pianist</u> | E | VG | G | FP | G ? |
| 7. | Event: <u>end of Prohibition, performances + broadcasts</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |
| 8. | Patterns: <u>end of Prohibition, n'h gathering places, piano bar tradition</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |
| 9. | Age: <u>1920 (building), 1934th (bar remodel)</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |
| 10. | Site: <u>original site</u> | E | VG | G | FP | |

C. CONTEXT

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|----|---|----|------|
| 11. | Continuity: <u>contributes to Lakeshore Comm'l ASI (establishes character, VG?)</u> | E | VG | G | FP | VG ? |
| 12. | Familiarity: <u>"conspicuous + familiar in context of the city" (...neighborhood, G?)</u> | E | VG | G | FP | G ? |

D. INTEGRITY

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| 13. | Condition: _____ | E | G | F | P | |
| 14. | Exterior Alterations: _____ | E | G | F | P | |

Evaluated by: Beth Marvin Date: 7/29/16

STATUS

Rating:

- City Landmark Eligibility: ☒ Eligible ☐ Not eligible
- National Register Status: ☐ Listed ☐ In process
- ☐ Determined eligible ☐ Appears eligible
- ☐ Appears ineligible

Site of Opportunity ☐

This evaluation sheet was accepted by the landmarks Preservation Advisory Board at its meeting of _____ (Date)

Attest: _____
Secretary

att. A

City of Oakland – Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board
EVALUATION TALLY SHEET FOR LANDMARK ELIGIBILITY

Address: 3325 Grand Avenue

Name: The Alley (storefront & interior)

12	(6)	3	0	1. Exterior/Design	
6	(3)	2	0	2. Interior	
6	3	(2)	0	3. Construction	
4	2	(1)	0	4. Designer/Builder	
6	(3)	2	0	5. Style/Type	
				A. ARCHITECTURE TOTAL (max. 26)	15
30	(15)	8	0	6. Person/Organization	
30	15	(8)	0	7. Event	
18	9	(5)	0	8. Patterns	
8	4	(2)	0	9. Age	
(4)	2	1	0	10. Site	
				B. HISTORY TOTAL (max. 60)	34
4	2	(1)	0	11. Continuity	
14	(7)	4	0	12. Familiarity	
				C. CONTEXT TOTAL (max. 14)	8
PRELIMINARY TOTAL (Sum of A, B and C) (max. 100)					
-0	-3%	-5%	-10%	13. Condition (From A, B, and C total)	
-0	-25%	-50%	-75%	14. Exterior Alterations (From A, B and C total excluding 2)	
				D. INTEGRITY	-0
ADJUSTED TOTAL (Preliminary total minus Integrity)					57

STATUS/RATING

Present Rating (Adjusted Total): ☒ A(35+) ☐ B(23-34) ☐ C(11-22) ☐ D(0-10)

Contingency Rating (Preliminary Total): ☐ A(35+) ☐ B(23-34) ☐ C(11-22) ☐ D(0-10)

City Landmark Eligibility: ☒ Eligible (Present Rating is A or B) ☐ Not eligible



Oakland Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board

OAKLAND LANDMARK, S-7/S20 PRESERVATION COMBINING ZONE, AND HERITAGE PROPERTY APPLICATION FORM

This form is for use in requesting the City of Oakland pursuant to its Zoning Regulations to establish a landmark, landmark site, or Heritage Property or to rezone one or more properties to the S-7 or S-20 Preservation Combining Zone.

1. IDENTIFICATION

- A. Historic Name: Grand Alley Cafe
- B. and/or Common Name: The Alley

2. ADDRESS/LOCATION

Street and number: 3325 Grand Avenue (3321-27) Zip Code: 94610

3. CLASSIFICATION

A. Category

- ☐ District
☒ Building(s)
☐ Structure
☐ Site
☐ Object

B. Status

- ☒ Occupied
☐ Unoccupied
☐ Work in progress

C. Accessible

- ☐ Yes: restricted
☒ Yes: unrestricted
☐ No

D. Present Use (P) and Historic Use (H)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> P, H Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> P, H Private Residence (upstairs) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> P, H Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government | <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify): |

E. Number of Resources within Property

- | Contributing | Non-contributing |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <u>1</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> buildings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> structures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> objects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Total |

F. Application for:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> City Landmark | <input type="checkbox"/> S-7 District |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heritage Property | <input type="checkbox"/> S-20 District |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTYName: Jacqueline L. SimpkinsStreet and Number: 9566 Crow Canyon Rd.City: Castro Valley State: CA Zip Code: 94552Assessor's Parcel Number: 10-826-8-3**5. EXISTING FEDERAL/STATE DESIGNATIONS****A. Federal**

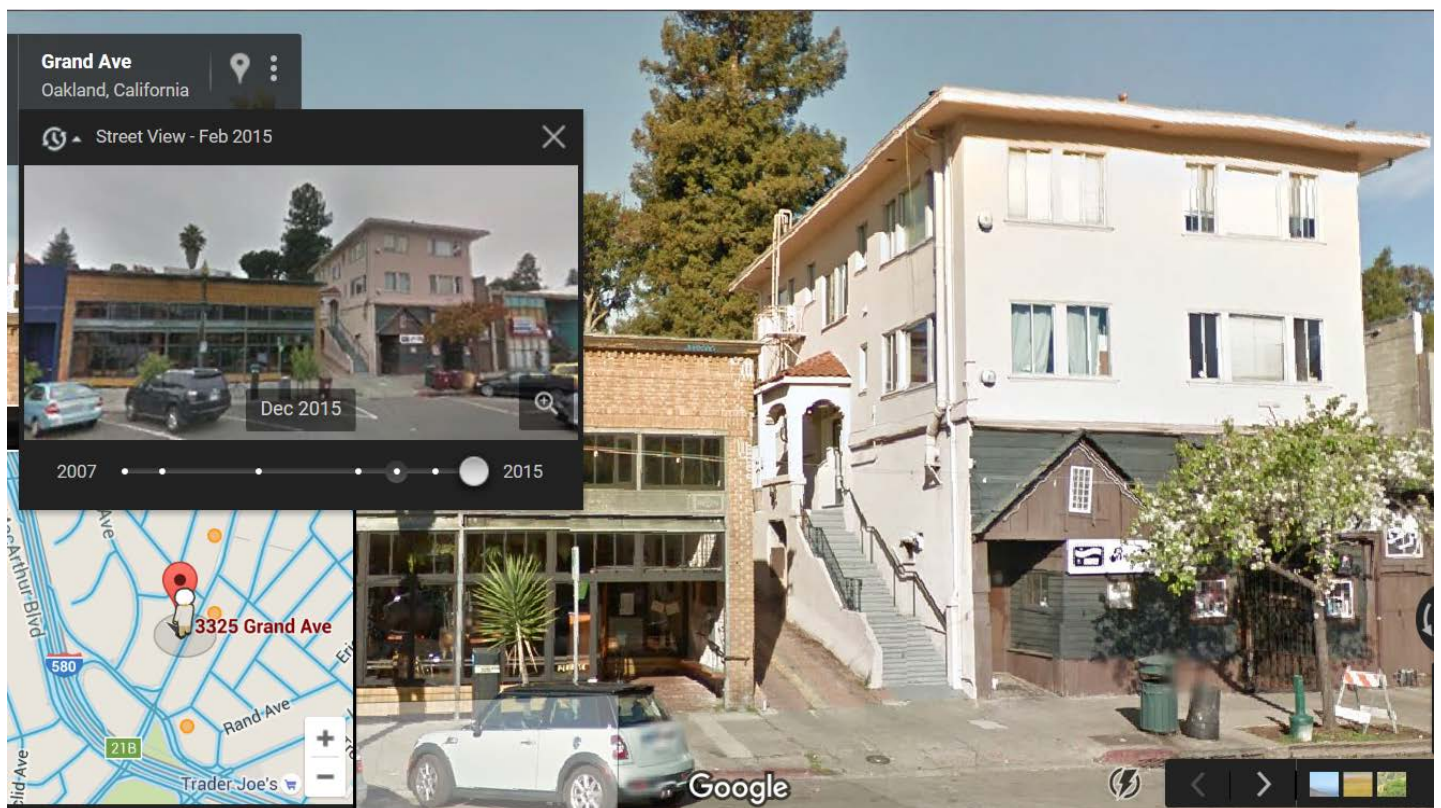
- ☐ National Historic Landmark
☐ Included in National Register of Historic Places
☐ Determined eligible for inclusion in National Register of Historic Places

B. State

- ☐ California Historical Landmark
☐ California Point of Historic Interest
☐ State Historical Resources Inventory

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Name of Survey	Survey Rating (if applicable)	Date	Depository
Citywide Preliminary Inventory	X	1986	Oakland City Planning



7. DESCRIPTION**A. Condition:**

☒ Excellent ☐ Deteriorated
☐ Good ☐ Ruins
☐ Fair ☐ Unexposed

**B. Alterations:
(Check one)**

☒ Unaltered
☐ Altered

**C. Site
(Check one)**

☒ Original Site
☐ Moved (Date _____)

D. Style/Type: early 20th c. vernacular apartment blg. with rustic-theme bar front

E. Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance:

The Alley restaurant and bar at 3325 Grand Avenue occupies the ground floor of a 3-story building with four apartments on the upper floors at 3321-27 Grand Ave between Elwood Street and Santa Clara Street in the Grand Lake Commercial District near Lake Merritt. The front of the building is 38 feet wide and abuts the sidewalk. Except for the storefront (described below) the building exterior is boxy, clad in plain stucco, with a flat or low hip roof, and two- and three-part windows now replaced with aluminum sash, mostly sliders. The building is on a steep upslope lot, with steps to the second floor apartment entrance running up the left/southeast side, alongside an alley that leads up to other structures behind. The southeast side is stucco and also has a fire exit door from the commercial space and a door to the electrical room under the stairway leading up to the residential units. The residential entry has a small tiled roof. The northwest/right side is nearly flush with an adjoining building, separated by a narrow walkway. The rear/southwest side is unremarkable stucco.

The style of the commercial façade is best described as Berkeley Eclectic, with a carefully designed ramshackle roadhouse look. Above a wood skirt of rough vertical boards 2 feet high (the storefront base or bulkhead) are horizontal 6-inch wide beveled clapboards covering the display-window area to a height of 10 feet. Above that, the transom area is clad in vertical boards. A recessed entry on the right leads to swinging wood doors. On either side of this entry is a 6-pane window 30" x 30" with red neon "cocktails" shining thru one and "dinners" thru the other. There are two more 6-pane 30 x 34 windows in the entry recess on either side. At far right is a vertical-board gate with a shingled pent roof and a faux window with a graphic of a cat. On the left front is an unused recessed entrance capped by a fake gable with wood shingles and trimmed in red and green neon which extends over the main entrance. On either side of the gable are horizontal 8-inch clapboards. There is a 6-pane window 24x30 on the right side in the unused entry. Mounted at a slight angle in the center of the gable is a window sash with 18 small 4x4 panes. Above 10' are vertical 8-inch wide clapboards to a height of 20' where the stucco clad residential units begin. There is an 8-pane 24x36 window above the entrance. A prominent neon sign of two alley cats is centered perpendicular to the wall above the main entrance.

Interior Design

Building permit #A53780 was issued to proprietor F. Hoffman June 12, 1934, for altering a store to a restaurant at 3325 Grand. Designer was F.H. Slocombe. The permit states "The work to be done consists of installing booths and a counter to be used as a restaurant. Also an exit stairway is to be built in the rear which connects with an alley which in turn connects to the street. Along the walls on each side, work will be done to represent the front of the building. The booths and counters are to be built of 1" lumber." The result included vertical 1-inch redwood planks of various widths along interior perimeter walls. In June 1935 permit A58177 was issued to building owner Dr. G.E. Kleeman to install a steel I-beam for the first floor café.

In a description still true today, the interior was described in 1948 as a reasonable facsimile of the original DeLancey Street (25) bar in NYC, right down to the “Alley Loan Company” fake window, a woman’s silhouette at another fake window, lingerie on a clothesline (15), and a shack around the classic wooden bar. It is designed like an old saloon with semi-private diner-style booths beneath a 20-foot ceiling. A mezzanine (strengthened by Gamble in 1944 using Curtola Company, permit B4041) is accessible by a stairway at the rear above the kitchen. The walls have varying widths of vertical redwood planks as wainscoting to complement the exterior façade. The wallpaper is 9000 business cards, pictures, old playbills, and memorabilia(see photos) contributed by patrons as a way of saying, “I was here.” In 1941 the business expanded: Cliff Gamble installed five interior redwood partitions and two doors connecting 3323 and 3325 Grand (previously two different premises), seating arrangements, and a store room for liquor storage (permit A93822, November 14, 1941).

8. SIGNIFICANCE

- A. Period:**
- ☐ Prehistoric
☐ Pre-1869
☐ 1869-1906
☒ 1906-1945
☒ Post-1945
- B. Areas of significance--check and justify below:**
- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape architecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Music |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | |
- C. Period of Significance:** 1934 ff
- D. Significant dates:** 1934 (opening)
1946-48 (radio broadcast)
- E. Builder/Architect/Designer:** John D. McTeer (building owner-builder, 1920)
Francis Harvey Slocombe (bar design, 1934)
- F. Significant persons:** Rod Dibble, piano bar, 1959 ff
- G. Statement of Significance (include summary statement of significance as first paragraph):**

The Alley derives its historical significance from its association and preservation of piano bar music and from the many famous patrons who visited to play, sing, leave a business card, or enjoy a drink. It has been in continuous operation since becoming the first Oakland tavern to open when prohibition ended in 1933. It was part of the Golden Age of Radio with a live broadcast in 1946-1948. The Alley’s architectural design and interior décor are also unique. Although not significant historically, the residential units above the first floor are part of the same parcel built as 3321-3327 Grand Avenue, so may be included in the designation though not as protected features.

PERMIT HISTORY

The 1934 vernacular space housing The Alley was designed by nationally known architect Francis Harvey Slocombe, who also planned the Chapel of the Flowers in Berkley(25) and other fanciful Period Revival structures. The original building permit #55276, no designer mentioned, for owner-builder John McTeer, was issued May 16, 1920, and a certificate of final completion was filed July 7, 1920. A review of building permits indicates that 3323 and 3325 Grand were originally separate ground floor units. Permit # 41516 to owner Dr. Kleeman in 1929 was for an office at 3323 Grand. Then in the same year another permit to Western Union Telco to alter store at 3323 for office, two new plastered partitions, new hardwood floor, and change front door to side entrance. The 1936 reverse directory shows Pop's Grand Avenue Liquor at 3323 and Grand Alley, beer, at 3325.

OWNERSHIP

It is noteworthy that The Alley business and property have been owned by the same family for over 50 years since Jody Kerr bought it in the 1950s. A review at the county recorder of property ownership before then reveals several owners, with G.E. Kleeman owning it for 20 years. The Alley occupies Lot 13 in Block 826 of Subdivision "U" which was part of Oakland Heights, annexed by the City of Oakland in 1891. The original building permit number 55276 dated May 16, 1920, for 3321-3327 Grand Avenue shows owner Louise Mc Teer and builder John D. Mc Teer and the 1921 Block Book indicates they lived there. In October 1922 McTeer borrowed \$12,000 from W.W. Garthwaite on a deed of trust secured by Lot 13 (Book 281, p. 390). McTeer deeded it to Richard and Primrose Perrott February 21, 1924 (Book 661, page 39). The 1923-24 Block Book shows Lot 13 owned by R. and P.C. Perrott. In July 1924 ownership transferred from Perrott to George and Etta Kleeman (Book 717, page 229) for a Deed of Trust in favor of Perrott in the amount of \$32,750. The 1925 block book shows owners George and Etta Kleeman. In 1929 Dr. Kleeman altered 3323 Grand from a store to office and installed two partitions (permit A41516, December 18, 1929). In 1935 Dr. Kleeman installed a steel I-beam in the first floor café (permit A58177, June 4, 1935). In December 1938 a gift deed was recorded from George to wife Etta (Book 3714, page 188). In October 1944 Etta Kleeman deeded title to Abraham and Sarah Penn (Book 4599, page 259) and in September 1944 Gladys McElhimey deeded a "Right of Way" to George. In 1945 a five-year lease extension of apartments to B. Frost was recorded (Book 4638, p. 470), and six months later in July Frost quitclaimed all interest in the Grand Lake Apartments to Penn. (Book 4720, p. 413). In 1952 the Penns gift deeded the property to Beatrice Greenfield (Reel 6772, p. 279). In 1959 Beatrice deeded it to Bramer & Elizabeth Hood (Book 9017, p.485). On December 30, 1964 Hoods deeded the property to Jo Kerr, who had owned the Alley business since 1950. In 1995 Jody Kerr, 74, was called to that big alley in the sky (7), leaving The Alley to her long time companion Charles Castrovine, who followed her in 2009. His niece, Jackie Simpkins, long time bartender at The Alley, inherited the property and the business and vows to continue to preserve its traditions. Mountain View Cemetery is the final resting place for George and Etta Kleeman and Charles Castrovine.

CULTURAL HISTORY

In 1934 The Alley was said to be the first Oakland bar "of any great consequence" to open after repeal of prohibition (1,2) and has operated continuously since then. Evidence of difficulty complying with the new liquor regulations is shown by a news item in the *Oakland Tribune*, March 17, 1934. BOE and OPD officers arrested Alley operator F.J. Hoffman on charges of selling to minors and according to a March 21 item for having the liquor license in his brother's name, Harry W. Hoffman. The restaurant/tavern was originally named "The Grand Alley Café".

Polks 1938 City Directory lists proprietors of The Grand Alley Café as R.J. McCormick and Maurice Parker. Originally it was a "choose and barbeque your own steak place." In 1939 Cliff Gamble took over and hired a first rate chef, Jaques Negley, whom he had worked with at Hotel Lake Merritt where Joe "Luke" Lukanish played a 14-month engagement. After touring top night spots around the country, Joe Luke came back to

Oakland where he sold office equipment for Win Phillips on 17th Street and hosted "Sunday Breakfast At The Alley" show created by Marge Trumbull on Radio KLX from 1946-1948 (25, photos). The first show MC was Bill Gwen from KFRC where he did "The Bill Gwen Show" and "Quiz of Two Cities." The breakfast show aired on KGO at first. Tapes of some shows are available, and a transcript of several 1948 shows is included.

Many famous musicians have dropped in The Alley and performed. Neil Teixeira, grandson of Joe Luke who emceed the radio show in 1948, remembers hearing about singer Patsy Ortega who, as Peggy Lee, went on to perform in radio's syndicated "Don McNeil and the Breakfast Club." Ella Fitzgerald sang at the Alley (picture). Merv Griffin played piano at The Alley; Lionel Hampton performed, Nadia Cannon sang; others included Herb Jeffries (soloist with Duke Ellington), Edgar Hayes, Eddie "Bozo" Miller (Broadway singer) (7,11), Lafayette Langston, Slim Slaughter, Odetta Felius, Donald O'Conner, Ralph Edwards ("Truth Or Consequences", Sally Rand, Patsy Parker (Gay Nineties), Dorothy Shay (Park Avenue Hillbilly), Vivian Green (Trilon Records), Hadda Brooks (recording star), Ray Hackett (CBS musical director), comic Jack Marshall. The NY casts of "Oklahoma", "Up In Central Park," and "Anna Lucasta" visited "Breakfast In The Alley." Orchestra leaders who visited include Stan Kenton, Eddie Orta, Murray Arnold, Del Courtney, Jack Fina, Red Nichols, and Henry King. Accordion artist Aldo Roselli appeared, as did the original Pete Eastman Trio, the Russ Bennett Trio from the Lake Merritt Hotel, and the Page Cavanaugh Trio(25).

The Alley was noted for having the longest Happy Hour, 5:30-7:30, with free tasty hors d'oeuvres from chef Negley and hosted by Singin' Bob "Nobody Here But Us Chickens" Harris for six years after he returned from playing Reno clubs (25). About 1954 the upright piano was replaced with a baby grand and Verdi Carpenter was the piano man with 70,000 songs in filing cabinets (2). The chef was Dick Anklidge as reported in the *Tribune* June 9, 1954. Veterans from Oak Knoll Naval Hospital came to The Alley for a free drink or the Hollywood breakfast: a black coffee, a cigarette, and a bromoselzer for 25 cents. A newspaper ad from 1954 shows a steak dinner at The Alley was only \$1.00.

In 1950 Jody Kerr, an Alley waitress for four years, and partners Maggie and Walt Williams took over The Alley, but Maggie divorced Walt when he went to Alaska looking for gold. In 1960 Jo Kerr obtained a cabaret license, still current, for The Alley. Jody Kerr, whose portrait still hangs at The Alley, ran it for 45 years with an iron fist in a velvet glove. In 1959 Jody hired Rod Dibble who began playing duets with Bob Harris.

Now 56 years later Rod continues to perform and encourage patrons to sing along the old standards of Tin Pan Alley from the 20s, 30s, and 40s. He has a repertoire of 7000 songs, knows 4000 by heart (16), and learns a new one every week. He prefers Sinatra, Bing Crosby, or Ella Fitzgerald to any rock or country artist. An exception is "The Oakland Song" written in 1965 by the Goodtime Washboard 3, which you might not hear anywhere else. Rod learned many songs from his mother who sang around the house and from his uncle before he was coached in high school by music store owner Chuck Dutton (12). His first job was at Larry Blake's Rathskeller in Berkeley for six years where he learned more songs (10). Today he often accompanies his songbird wife Linda McCormick (10) and other regulars and newcomers around the piano. He has become a musical icon. He holds the record for the longest running piano player. He could be the best in the country according to Dave Newhouse (8, *Tribune*, Feb. 18, 2007). He walks ten miles a day to practice at the Claremont Resort or Berkeley Marina. Noteworthy was his incidental accompaniment to "The Shooting of Dan McGrew", narrated by "Tex," a former Texas Ranger (24). Filling in for Rod in the 70s was Larry Ivey on guitar (6) and today in 2016 Paul Hlebear on guitar.

The Alley is significant for providing and preserving a venue for music from 1920-1949 when songs by Cole Porter, George Gershwin, and Hoagy Carmichael were popular. It is also significant for preserving the piano bar style in which the entertained become the entertainers and vice versa. In 1964 when people tired of TV, they sought live music venues where they could sing along (4). Rod recalls that there were six piano bars in the

Grand Avenue area, of which The Alley is the sole survivor. Singing a favorite song with good arrangement provides a sense of individuality and satisfaction, even better than karaoke. There is something charming and comforting, even mysterious, about the retro ambiance of a bar frozen in time when modern life proceeds faster and faster.

FAMOUS VISITORS

The significance of The Alley is enhanced by visits from prominent politicians, athletes, businessmen, and clergy. These include Governor and former Mayor of Oakland Jerry Brown, Mayor of Berkeley and former assemblyman Tom Bates, former Attorney General Ed Meese (11), former Port Commissioner Walter “Wally” Abernathy, Al Davis, Abe Rose, Sam Bercovich, Jackie Jenson (Cal football), Billy Martin (NY Yankee), Al Kayo Harris (General MacArthur’s photographer), Superior Court judge Lewis Lercara (7,11), Father Lacey of St. Leo’s, former Nevada Senator Don McGuirk (25), reporter Herb Caen, and Oakland Councilmember Abel Guillen. Other recent patrons include Greg Allman, Steve Bowman from Counting Crowes, Adam Levine from Maroon 5 and Green Day, and Dave Brubeck.

RECEPTION

There are two recent documentary films about the Alley. *The Alley Cats*, by Cary Virtue (copy submitted with this application; <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2317145/>) was screened at the tenth Oakland International Film Festival in 2012 at OMCA. The film received a Partners In Preservation Award in 2012 for education from Oakland Heritage Alliance (program attached). *The Last Piano Bar* (2013) is a short film referenced by the Smithsonian (24).

Several films have shot scenes at The Alley including “The Deserter” (1970) and “Diary Of A Teenage Girl” (2015). Many travel guides have referenced the Alley including Rough Guides (2003, 2011), Lonely Planet (2010), Grass Routes (2007 Travel Guide to Oakland: The Soul of the City), San Francisco’s Best Dive Bars (2009), and The Underground Guide To San Francisco (2003) (24).

COMMUNITY VITALITY

As a longstanding neighborhood bar, The Alley serves a valuable function as a “third place” separate from home (“first place”) or work (“second place”), as described by Ray Oldenburg in his 1991 book, *The Great Good Place*. Third places host casual gatherings of people beyond the boundaries and increasing privatization of home and work. They contribute to the social viability of the community by leveling the status of guests. The existence of bars like The Alley provides settings for civic engagement, political discourse, habits of public association, and psychological support. They remain an important element for community vitality. The *East Bay Express* (Oct. 16, 1992) rated The Alley “Best Home Away from Home” (19).

Recognition of vernacular commercial resources and resources of cultural importance is increasing. In Oakland Heinold’s First and Last Chance Saloon is on the local and National historic registers. The Kingfish Pub and Café has been certified eligible for heritage status. Sam Jordan’s Bar in San Francisco has been designated historic, and San Francisco Heritage has an active project to recognize and support “Legacy Bars and Restaurants” (<http://www.sfheritage.org/legacy/news/>) with an official City “Legacy Business Registry” and potential financial incentives (<http://legacybusinesssf.com/>). Recognition of these resources broadens our understanding of history and preserves a representative culture. There are layers of cultural content and connections to the past embedded in The Alley. It deserves to be recognized.

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Rod Dibble at the piano



Alley interior (internet images)



Going Places

A ROUNDUP OF NIGHT LIFE
GOSSIP . . . by Don Steele

When the house movers first started jacking up the Villa de la Paix for its trek down 6th Street from Alice to Oak, the Bargiacchis figured they would be open in time for Thanksgiving dinner. They won't even make it for Father's Day, the year following. But things look good for the 4th of July!

In fact, you can call up Auntie Jane and Cousin Joe and make a Villa dinner date for a week from tomorrow (which is the 18th) and not be disappointed. The Gentlemen Chefs, those sturdy midriff'd stalwarts, the Minute Men of Cuisine, are all set to handle christening chores next Thursday. They will pay their check with a thousand dollar bill, representing the first money taken in at the Villa. Most spots exhibit a two dollar bill over the cash register. Dewey, Harry and Josephine can humb-tack a thousand dollar bill to the wall—unless the insurance people say no.

The Chefs have some crafty ideas a-brewing for this event. And when these fun-lovers start brewing ideas—roofs have been known to have blown off buildings as a result. This is just a form warning to Dewey.

You'll like the way they fixed up the Villa. Almost identical to the place you used to enjoy so much on Alice Street. Some attractive new chandeliers in the main dining room. A garden outside the new banquet room windows which is spotlighted at night and makes you feel like you're outdoors-indoors. The dozens of overstuffed chairs have been freshly done over. Even



Doodles and Skeeter are appearing at the Cable Car Village in San Fran-

reed section with maestros like Meredith Willson. In case you're wondering about Kenny McCall—the All Baba steady—he goes to Tahoe for three weeks.

OAKLAND UNIQUE

Oakland has more restaurant and bar individuality than any other city I'm aware of. Where else have you ever seen overstuffed rocking chairs circling a roaring fire in a four-way fireplace like at Oscar's and Berkeley Square? Where else have you ever seen so many open barbecue pits where you can get steak, chicken and rib dinners at prices that hardly cover the cost of the meat like Panda, Terrace Club, Dee's, Oscar's, Pioneer Village, 316 Club, Topp's and so on?

Take a trek down Broadway to Panda one of these eves and you'll see what I mean. There is something about this Bohemian atmosphere that is going to click solidly with all who like to gather for gab and gossip in candlelight. Places like this make dining at home—a luxury. And don't take that the wrong way. I mean you can't serve the same meal at home any cheaper.

The first place of any great consequence to open after the repeal of prohibition was The Alley on Grand Avenue. I'll bet many a million has gone through the Alley cash registers—since. And today, the Alley rates as one of the showplaces of the neon trail. A nice place to go for an inexpensive dinner. Popular with the after-movie crowd which packs in for hamburgers.

NEW IDEA CLICKS

I had my first dinner at Trail's End day before yesterday. This

2 Arrested on Liquor Charge

Officers of the State Board of Equalization and Oakland police, in a co-ordinated campaign to wipe out the sale of hard liquor by the drink in the Eastbay, today had two Oakland cafe proprietors under arrest for violating the State liquor law.

F. J. Hoffman, owner of the Alley Grand cafe at 3325 Grand Avenue, was taken into custody by agents of the State Board, and James Thompson, 41, of 425 Seventh Street, was arrested by Oakland police.

Hoffman, earlier in the week, called police when a "drunk" to whom he had refused to sell more liquor obtained revenge by crashing a stolen car through the front windows of his cafe. Agents said the arrest had nothing to do with the auto crash incident, but followed complaints that Hoffman had sold liquor to minors. He was released on \$250 bail.

1-A

10A
Oakland Tribune
March 7, 1934

Liquor License Is Surrendered by Cafe

Surrender of the "on sale" liquor license held by the Alley Grand Cafe at 3325 Grand Avenue, whose operator, F. J. Hoffman, was arrested a week ago by state agents, was reported today by State Board of Equalization headquarters here.

The license had been issued in the name of Harry William Hoffman, a plasterer, and brother of F. J. Hoffman, according to the board's agents. After the arrest of the operator on a charge of violating the state liquor law, Harry William Hoffman brought the license to the board's offices and surrendered it, according to the agents.

Another attempt to obtain a license for the place in the name of a girl, Helen Ashmore, failed when the agents investigated and reputedly discovered that F. J. Hoffman was still operating the establishment. Hoffman is facing a police court trial April 6.

-A

Oakland Tribune
March 21, 1934

10A

Oakland Tribune, June 9, 1954

Verdi Carpenter has 70,000 M songs—words and music—in neat ge filing cabinets beside his piano at The Alley on Grand Ave. Pretty hard to stump him on a request. He not only plays each and every one, he sings a very torchy lyric. Verdi played slip-horn with some of the top Dixie-bands for many years. "When I got these store choppers I lost my 'lip' and turned to piano and vocals for a livelihood and actually I enjoy singing more than anything!" he candidly confessed. You can hear him any Friday or Saturday night at the most Bohemian bistro in the whole Bay Area, The Alley.

The Alley is also our most mature nitery; started back in '34 a few days after repeal. The present owners are two Oakland gals: Maggie Williams and Jody Kerr. Was a third member of the firm until recently—Walt Williams. He is in Alaska gold dredging and Maggie is waiting for their "final."

This is one of the "dollar steak" spots of the neighborhood. Chef Dick Anklidge presides over the spotless little open kitchen . . . John Coppola is the handsome young Latin who handles the bottles and stoppers. And next time you want to get off the beaten path while neonning, try The Alley and tell Mag and Jo I sentcha.

2

GOING PLACES

Sandy Barton is the prototype of the perfect roaring 40s singer. Swinging along with her at Domino Penthouse is like listening to the other half of your life—if you roared through the '20s.

o o o

The players on Eddie Erdelatz's new Oakland AFL grid-iron machine can look forward to a pre-season banquet to end all at House of Harvey this fall. Harvey Binns' annual kickoff parties for the 49ers were the talk of the league. With Harvey an owner of the new club, Toots Shors himself could eye with envy the sports celebrities Harvey will have at this year's first professional football kickoff dinner.

o o o

Dimond Horseshoe's chef Bill Williams, the big gent with the connoisseur's eye for prime rib, is once again turning out lunches and dinners at Sylvia Paillon's Dimond District recting place. Syl says she receives dozens of calls every week from folks wanting to know if Bill is back. He has a Bay Area wide following with the prime rib set.

o o o

Remember Jody Kerr's Sunday morning breakfast broadcasts at the Alley? Pianist Bob Harris was an integral part of beaming happy sounds over the air. And also every night for a record six years at the Alley pianobar. Before March roars in, Bob will strike up the music at the Alley once again. Jody will let us know the exact date next week.

o o o

Kirk Hayes, the soft spoken



MILT NELSON, EVELYN ELLIS, KATHY BRIDGES

Gold Nugget Host and Waitresses

the day is here when Oakland has an internationally known jazz club like New York's Embers, the Blackhawk and Fack's II. It's the names like Previn, MJQ, Diz and Franny Faye that reap in the nationwide attention. Jim is dedicated to bringing them to Oakland via his two jazz outlets: Lucky 13 in Oakland on MacArthur and 38th and Lucky XIII, San Leandro's MacArthur and Estudillo. Right now the top local names are presiding at his clubs. Jim took a cue from The Embers and brought his decor in tune

physical condition with a superb recreation staff. Under Frank's direction, too, the cuisine is the finest of any athletic club in the nation. Many members who regularly dine in the top five restaurants in San Francisco do the bulk of their entertaining at the Athens which is quite a compliment to chef Beyl's artistry. Reservations are always a good idea on special occasions like Valentine's Day when dinner is served from 5:30 to 8:30.

o o o

Highly recommended: La Manno's in El Cerrito — 9935

Herb Michelson

Stage and Screen

Show Biz Armies

For years now, I have hoped people would grow weary of watching television's passing parade, get off their duffs and try another form of entertainment.

"Bubble gum for the eyes" is what Carl Sandburg calls TV, and too many of us have been chewing too much of it for too long.

Now, at last, there's a hint that a revolt of sorts is in the making. The insurrection is taking an interesting turn—not toward movies or the theater, either. (Legitimate theater business is, in fact, in the doldrums across the Bay.)

No. What's happening is that everybody's looking for a new kind of entertainment by entertaining themselves, and others.

★ ★ ★

Bill Rice has been in various forms of show biz for years and thinks he can spot a trend. He's in a position to. But what's more important, he's smart enough to.

Rice looks more like a quarterback than a pianist. His fingers appear more adept at making handoffs



PIANIST BILL RICE, DISC JOCKEY JIM LANGE
Analysts of new "entertainment syndrome"

than tinkling the ivories. Essentially, he's a modern jazz man who has faced the facts of musical life: there's steadier employment and better bread in plinking and planking at The Alley over on Grand Avenue while everybody and his missus sings along.

And the key phrase is "sings along."

Then take handsome Jim Lange, KSFO disc jockey and a smooth, wry ad libber. Lange has formed a "Show Biz Army" via his radio show. He asks anybody who's ever performed in anything, be it high school play or Elks Club musicale, to join. Membership entitles them to stage their act anywhere, anytime.

Darned if 4,000 people haven't signed up for the Army.

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Earned a 2,000 people haven't signed up for the Army.

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"Few people want to sit around and just listen anymore," says Rice. And six nights a week at The Alley, and scores of joints like it throughout the Bay Area, people come in and grab the mike from the entertainer and sing themselves. They don't sing good; but they're happy. And, generally, others in the crowd are just as pleased.

It's live entertainment. It's personal entertainment.

Says Lange: "Many people are hams at heart. They want to participate in show business in some way. I don't know if it's because all of a sudden everybody's tired of watching TV. I wish it were true. I know I'm sick of it.

"It seems to be an entertainment syndrome."

Rice, an inventive piano man, would love nothing better than to play jazz all the time. He's even written a few tunes.

"If that's all I did, though," he says, "everybody would walk out in five minutes. They want something they can sing."

★ ★ ★

The success of Mitch Miller and his sing-a-long stuff has to be attributed to the syndrome Lang's talking about. What more perfect arrangement: TV plus the opportunity to ham it up yourself.

Lang's Army soon may be called out of the barracks for a talent show. "Just average guys and girls would take part," he says. "The butcher, the baker, anyone."

The times, as well as TV, are stimulating the things Rice and Lange discuss.

There's a desperate search by many of us for individuality, for a semblance of identity. Smothered in a sea of numerical classifications (social security, telephone, zip code et al), we're all grasping at any straw that will pluck us from the pack. I, fortunately, have a column. Maybe you have a license plate number that makes you distinctive—or that you think makes you distinctive, which is all that matters.

TV, movies, theater, jazz, none of it, will die. I don't foresee a slew of amateurs hours a la Major Bowes returning.

But the bubble gum is growing tasteless and stale. And furthermore, as Dane Clark bellowed in "A Thousand Clowns" to a non-existent crew of entertainers: "All right, everybody, get down here in 10 minutes for the Hawaiian number."

I hope you have one.

'High Spirits.' Best Musical

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Tribune 4-8-64

Perry Phillips
Oakland Tribune, Aug. 25, 1964

5

★ ★ ★

Jody Kerr's Alley on Grand Avenue is one of the more quaint little spots here in the Eastbay. Jody is practically a one-woman crew. Everytime I go into the place I never find her working at the same job. One night she'll be behind the bar pouring drinks and the next she'll be cooking up a steak for some hungry patron. Currently pianobaring for Jody is Rod Dibble who has a big Eastbay following. While Dibble is dabbling at the keyboard Jody is all over the place making everyone happy. A gay spot that should be on your list.



DIBBLE

5

Perry Phillips

... night sounds ...

Jody Kerr continues to come up with the unusual for her Alley on Grand Avenue. I mentioned Jody many times here over the years — and once pointed out she started as a waitress at the Alley, saved her money and then bought the place, building and all. She's quite an unusual gal and recently even took a turn at farming out at her Crow Canyon farm. She gave it up though. Anyway, the Alley remains one of the town's colorful landmarks, and Jody has a lot to do with the relaxed atmosphere in the place. Her latest unusual move has been to book Larry Ivey. Ivey sings and plays guitar, looks like a young Yul Brynner, hails from New York and sings Western tunes. That's quite a combination, one that only Jody Kerr could come up with. Jody is probably his biggest fan. She thought enough of Larry to sign him through January of 1972. Any performer who can come into an engagement with a long term contract like that deserves a good look and listen. I'll do just that and hope the picture Jody sent me is a suitable likeness.

And speaking of singers who play guitar, Robin De Silva is currently featured in the lounge at Paul

and now has two rooms going with entertainment. The Victorian Room continues with Friday and Saturday night supper club entertainment. Edgar C. Williams Jr. and his Jazz Dynamics play for dinner dancing and Lynda Sellers is back and featured on vocals as before. The lounge is quite intimate, incidentally, the addition of Miss De Silva should make it a much frequented spot. The regular Blue Lion menu is served in the Victorian Room, just in case you're wondering.

Pete Zane is getting a Holiday award for his L'Odeon restaurant in San Francisco. Pete is one of the classiest restaurateurs around and is most deserving of the honor. I mention this today because Pete told me yesterday he is seriously thinking of opening a restaurant here in the Eastbay. In fact, he's been scouting locations — so he's obviously quite serious about it. "It's amazing how the Eastbay has grown," Pete remarked. He could just be the first of many gourmet restaurateurs to invade the Eastbay. To say the least, an invitation by Pete Zane would be more than welcome.

PERRYGRAPHS: Ted Ince, who recently left Solomon Grundy's on the Berkeley Marina, is now the new manager at Ben Johnson's in San Francisco. Never

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The Alley's owner, Jody Kerr, dies

By Heather Angney

STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — Ina Jo "Jody" Kerr, who rose from waitress to owner of The Alley — Oakland's widely known piano bar — died Monday in San Francisco, three weeks after being diagnosed with leukemia. She was 74.

Born in Vernon, Texas, Ms. Kerr moved to California in 1942. She bought The Alley, at 3325 Grand Ave., in 1950 after working as a waitress there for six years. In addition to owning and managing the bar, she cooked and served drinks until her recent illness.

The Alley opened in the 1930s. Known as a cozy hole-in-the-wall, the bar attracted a range of customers from local workers to city leaders. They flocked to The Alley for Ms. Kerr's trademark martinis, her no-nonsense banter and tunes played by pianist Rod Dibble.

"Everyone who ever lived in Oakland" has been to Ms. Kerr's establishment, said Dibble, who was hired to play on the bar's baby grand some 38 years ago.

Patrons included Broadway singer and oyster-eating record holder Eddie "Bozo" Miller and Alameda County Superior Court Judge Lewis Lercara. The piano bar at which Dibble first played duets with Bob Harris was added in the late '50s and survives to this day. Although Ms. Kerr favored the country music of her Texas roots, she hired Dibble to play Tin Pan Alley standards from the first half of this century. She forbid any risque

lyrics.

Once through the wooden swinging doors, customers encounter walls papered with patron's business cards. At one point, Oakland Fire Department officials asked Kerr to stop the practice because it created a fire hazard. Lingerie hung from a mock clothesline on the ceiling. A circa 1920s cash register made almost as much noise as Dibble's piano playing.

Despite her rough exterior, Ms. Kerr had a heart of gold, said Rose Pang, a customer and occasional waitress at The Alley, and a friend of Ms. Kerr's for more than 20 years.

She shunned celebration of her own birthday, refused official landmark status for The Alley, and never hesitated to eject belligerent patrons from her bar.

Ms. Kerr was known to help out people who needed money or a place to stay, offering them the room above her bar.

Charles Castrovence, known as Chuck, will manage The Alley when it reopens next week. He was Ms. Kerr's companion since they met in 1955. Ms. Kerr is also survived by a sister, Nell Dale, of Texas. Married and divorced three times, she had no children.

Friends are invited to the viewing on Friday from noon to 8 p.m., and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Chapel of the Chimes at 4499 Piedmont Ave. in Oakland.

Staff Writer Ben Charny contributed to this report.

SUNDAY
February 18, 2007



Dave Newhouse
GOOD NEIGHBORS
dnewhouse@bangnewspapers.com

Pianist plays on, and on and on

ON Grand Avenue in Oakland is something grand in the funkiest sense of the word.

It's The Alley, the quintessential dive bar, featuring Rod Dibble, the ultimate lounge singer.

Dibble and the condor have something in common: they're becoming extinct. Dibble is among a dying breed of piano bar players who've given way, grudgingly, to the less lyrical hip-hop generation.

The Alley and Dibble, so very traditional. The Alley opened in 1934; Dibble has been taking piano requests there since 1960, the same year the Raiders started in Oakland. He's 74, and he's not slowing down.

Dibble did have a three-year hiatus when The Alley's late owner, Jody Kerr, told him to shave his mustache. He replied, in effect, "Take This Job and Shove It," one song out of the 4,500 he knows that he refuses to sing.

Dibble and Kerr made up, finally, and he returned to his upset loyal fans, who crowd around the piano bar when he plays Tuesday through Sat-

Please see **DAVE**, Metro 3

Alameda

■ Council expresses concern regarding potential developers' devotion to sustainable growth

By Alan Lopez

MEDIA NEWS STAFF

ALAMEDA — Amid a flurry of non-stop questions, comments and concerns coming from elected officials as well as residents, the City Council has postponed selection of a potential master developer for Alameda Point.

The week last included developer tense qu public co dozen re

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as taken into custody Friday. He was booked on suspicion of making terrorist-death threats and vandalism, and jailed in lieu of \$12,500 bond.

Police said Scott was at a psychiatric facility in Vallejo on mental-health hold by Concord police. He reportedly was kept into custody by Concord officers after creating a disturbance at the Rainbow Center on Willow Pass Road. Like Pacific Center, Rainbow Center serves lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community.

The Pacific Center had been targeted with a series of threatening e-mails, culminating when the front door of the center on Regraph Avenue was smashed. "Staff became increasingly alarmed when the e-mails progressed to death threats against staff members and their children," Kusmisse said. The front door was smashed on Jan. 3 and a man who generally matched Scott's description was seen nearby, she said.

Scott was identified through internet screen name, then detectives served a search warrant on a computer, which led to Scott, Kusmisse said.

Community Calendar

TODAY - FEBRUARY 18

Children's Book Release — Children's Fairland celebrates the release of "Adventures of Penny, the Rhodie Islander," by Children's Fairland emcee Yvonne Backman and Annie Backman. With readings, meet and greets and 2 to 3 p.m., Children's Fairland, 699 Oak Ave., Oakland, 452-2259; fairland.org.

Film Festival — Human Rights' 2007 International Film Festival will have a showing of "Conversations with a Woman," 5:30 p.m., Film Archive, 2575 Bancroft Way, 642-1124, bampfa.berkeley.edu/

New Year Celebration — Haberdashery Museum celebrates Lunar New Year with dragon parades, story-telling, dancing, tea, and more, free, 5 to 5 p.m., 2065 Kittredge St., 647-1111, www.habitat.org.

Park Opening Celebration — Must be on leash but their humans are to be at the new dog park celebration featuring owner-dog contest, pet parade, games and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Joaquin Miller 350 Sanborn Drive, Oakland, 530-www.odogparks.org.

U.S. Potomac — Delano Roosevelt's "Floating House," offers doctored duck and goose to 3:30 p.m., \$5-7, children younger free, Jack London Square, 1001 St., Oakland, 627-1215; spulomac.org.

Oakland Artisan Marketplace — In Jack London Square, the Oakland Cultural Marketing Department hosts artists selling their unique arts and hand-crafted items year-round, 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 4848.

Anonymous — A group of people who eat compulsively meets, 7 p.m., Mandana House, 3989 Howe



ROD DIBBLE, piano bar player extraordinaire, is in his 44th year of entertaining at The Alley, a popular Oakland hangout.

RAY CHAVEZ — Staff

Pianist brings life to Oakland bar

▶ DAVE, from Metro 1

urday. Now in his 44th year at The Alley, who else has that kind of staying power?

"It is a record for a piano bar," he believes. "I'd love to sing until my 90s. I'm in good shape. I go around Lake Merritt twice every day."

Dibble could be the longest-playing, and the best, piano bar player in the country. And boredom and cabin fever offer no threat.

"Every night is different," he noted. "It's like playing at home, having a party in your own home."

Dibble, who grew up in Berkeley, lives around the corner from The Alley. He shows up for work just before he goes on at 9 p.m., makes a cup of coffee, then resurrects the works of Cole Porter and his contemporaries.

"I play only standards," he said. "I like the old stuff, the 1920s and 1930s. I have songbooks for young people, but they know a good tune when they hear it. They appreciate a Gershwin lyric."

Dibble was king of the road during the 1950s, singing mostly Louis Armstrong songs. But imitating Satchmo left him with a gravelly voice, which he preserves these days by letting customers do most of the singing.

"You've got to pull it out of them, though some are slow-offs," he said. "This is not like karaoke."

Dibble dislikes karaoke and the piano bar image portrayed in Billy Joel's song "The Piano Man."

"I'm not the piano man, the garbage man, the laundry man," he said. "The bartender in the song wants to be someplace else and the microphone smells like a beer. The song says, 'the piano man, you entertain us. That isn't my job. I encourage people to sing.'"

And sing they do — into three microphones set up on the piano bar. The best night for singers is 9 o'clock on a Thursday when the sorry, Rod — regular crowd shuffles in.

In heavy rain a week ago Thursday, they arrived from Benicla, Marin County, San Francisco and San Mateo. Some stayed until closing at 2 a.m.

"The appeal is Rod Dibble," said Paul Rose. "I've traveled around the country, and there are few piano bars like this one."

"This is his life, and he wants to make people feel good," said Lynn Robinson. "I'm a therapist, and I tell Rod he's a therapist's therapist."

"A lot of my friends that I've been friends with for years, I met here," said Art Mahoney. "We hang out together outside (The Alley)."

Mahoney can sing pop or "Rigoletto," which he did this particular Thursday. Not every amateur crooner at The Alley is so melodious.

"If a guy can't carry a tune across the street in a wheelbarrow," said Dave Chapman, "Rod hits the melody for him and makes him feel like he's Frank Sinatra."

Then there's The Alley, which resembles, well, an alley.

"The atmosphere, it's unique," said Dibble. "The (business) cards on the wall, the dark wood, nothing's changed. We had a clothesline with red, flannel underwear. The fire department made us take it down."

Dibble doesn't accept alcoholic drinks from customers. He said he gave up booze when his daughter was born 28 years ago. He'll make an exception with a glass of champagne on New Year's Eve, when he's normally at The Alley.

Playing from 9 to 2 nightly, he used to take three breaks. But he cut back to one break because he didn't want to lose rapport with his customers.

"I'd love to sing until I die at the piano bar," he said.

Dave Newhouse's column appears Monday, Thursday and Sunday. Know any Good Neighbors? Phone (510) 208-6466 or e-mail dnewhouse@oaklandnewspapers.com.

Artis expe

M

sel design, soft administration. But this time, Sydner's on the story from the American portrait. Sydner has lectured, digital canvas graphics, transit symbols, travel.

The exhibit, — Restoring and incorporates, so as a passenger, vented by a woman of Sarah Good, — used by the their "kids," a so the cutlery and used in the dining as various hats, tickets and other.

Sydner wants come to the gallery with their Southern Pacific taking oral histories," he explains.

During February of Christine Land Library, with various branches lives and even for traditions of African.

Sydner says in 1991 project titled "Black." "I worked with create grant image upon the front of Sydner."

The "sound and natives that told the animal (designed by times; there would and folks would station, and time the images flash further explains.

"Through helping piece, I came to played with respect and also how close Americans are felt.

He believes the oral histories "The components a part historical fact, dition of the African.

Sydner plans to land Living History.

The artist has always that seek to estion. "It is my feeling destination, not just.

"If we incorporate be there; it could all safety in that area."

In the future, Sydner the mix. By creating

America's News

CELEBRATING A 50-YEAR GIG AT THE ALLEY

Oakland Tribune, The (CA) - May 4, 2010

Author/Byline: Alan Lopez Correspondent Page: 4A Readability: 10-12 grade level (Lexile: 1160)

10

Abstract: Pianist says he'd like to work at Oakland bar for two more decades

By Alan Lopez

Correspondent

The Alley, a bar on Grand Avenue in Oakland, was built in 1934 and offers a distinct ambience. Its walls are plastered with thousands of business cards, and old wooden tables and booths are laid out almost like a labyrinth.

At the center of it all is Rod Dibble, who takes his place at the piano five nights a week, playing pop music standards, primarily from the 1920s to 1940s, while customers sing along on one of four microphones.

Dibble has been playing at the Alley for 50 years. Now 77 years old, he said he intends to play for at least another 20 years.

"I play the American songbook, and I want to keep the standards going as long as I can," said Dibble, who speaks in the same relaxed enthusiasm that he brings to the piano. "There are not many clubs that have live music that play the old tunes.

"As the years go by, every night I get a younger crowd and they're not familiar with those tunes. I want to play them and have the kids listen to them and appreciate them. That's my reward, my goal."

Dibble's work has had an effect. About a dozen people -- many if not all of them regulars -- crowded around the piano one recent nippy night.

While the waitresses doled out chopped sirloin and drinks, each of the customers had a chance to sing along to Dibble's piano -- old standards such as "Crazy," "I've Got You Under My Skin" or the "Chattanooga Choo Choo," with train sound effects enthusiastically provided by the small audience.

The music, atmosphere and sense of camaraderie are what draw 24-year-old Colin Cahill to The Alley after he discovered it nearly four years ago.

He said most of the regulars are in their 50s or 60s, and that's allowed the recent college graduate and downtown Oakland resident to make friends with people outside his generation.

"The place brings people together," Cahill said, adding that he initially wasn't familiar with many of the songs but has picked many of them up over time.

"Rod Dibble is an institution," said Alley regular Dave Chapman, who has known Dibble for 52 years and regularly drives to Oakland from his home in Rio Vista.

Dibble was born in Berkeley to a musical family during the Great Depression and began playing piano in 1938. His uncle sang in vaudeville, and his mother and uncle would often sing songs around the house.

10

He got turned onto local music director Chuck Dutton, who taught Dibble how to read music out of a fake book, which gives musicians the chords, melody line and lyrics to play quick arrangements of songs.

In the early 1950s, he began playing background piano five nights a week at Larry Blake's on Telegraph. He learned thousands of tunes on the job, he said.

"Ten dollars a night, all the beer you can drink," he said. "It was great." From there, he got a booking agent and for the next 10 years played all over the state for short-term gigs.

While playing at the Palm Gardens cocktail lounge in downtown Oakland, Dibble was approached by Jody Kerr, longtime owner of The Alley, and was asked if he wanted to play at her club. Dibble agreed and stayed in part because it allowed him to be close to the audience.

"It was perfect," he said.

Dibble said he never gets bored with the job because every night brings a different crowd.

He has to work a little harder to carry the singer if the person is singing out of key or can't stay on the beat. People who have had too much to drink and take over the piano also can make the job difficult.

But overall Dibble loves what he does. He has three pianos in his Berkeley home and practices two hours a day in addition to the five hours he plays at night. He has a library of sheet music and fake books that add up to about 20,000 songs, and he learns a new tune a week.

"I like to accompany singers," Dibble said. "That's fun for me. A good singer is like working with an instrumentalist, like they're playing an instrument."

Among the singers is Dibble's fifth wife Linda McCormick, a former piano tuner and rebuilder who met Dibble several years ago after she went to The Alley with a friend on a lark. The two married three years ago.

"He's such a wonderful accompanist," said McCormick. "He's really there to make the singer sound wonderful and manages to do that."

Dibble, who has two children from a previous marriage and four grandchildren, said he's never been happier. Having recently overcome prostate cancer, he said he's healthy and walks about 10 miles a day.

"I want to play at least another 20 years. That will get me to (age) 97 or 98, and if I have to slow down at that time, that'll be OK," he added with a laugh. "I would like to do it at The Alley -- I'm so at home there, it's like another home. It's like a party in your own home every night."

Record: 1391054

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Martín Salas 11-21-00



STEVE MASLANKAVSKI

RODNEY DIBBLE listens for a requested tune at the Alley. He's been tickling the ivories there for 40 years.

The strange charm of the Alley

By Alina Larson
STAFF WRITER

It's difficult to choose the most peculiar thing about the Alley, a bar on Grand Avenue. The outside looks fairly normal — with a neon sign an-

nouncing the bar's name, along with the figure of an alley cat — but the wooden shingles indicate that the joint is in no way modern.

Enter, and while you swear that you just came in the door, you are met with

yet another roof, which protects the heads of those drinking at the bar. Waiting for your drink you will squint at the wallpaper, which turns out not to

See ALLEY, Page A12

11

Glenview station requests postp

By Matthew S
STAFF WRITER

With litigation still p between all parties acir tamination levels in dis a former gas station in t trict remains in limbo.

Lawyers for both the razian, owner of the pr dueling in and out of cou the latest fight taking pla day's Planning Commis

The commission was ify conditions of approv reopening the gas stat Boulevard and rule on is still contaminated. T been closed since 198

Two ne for do

By Matthew
STAFF WR

Two new office p downtown Oakland ai neighborhoods they wi ect will cater to the e sector downtown, whil the landscape along La

Bringing new life Broadway block near t ing, San Francisco-ba plans to create a new that site. The project i surface parking lot and itomo Building with a n foot office building adja way. In addition, the replace the facade on Broadway Bank of An

"This is a project de needs of the new econ nounced to the Planni Wednesday as he intro



were going to the restroom for getting food, he was still working, making calls on his cell phone. And at the end he said, "That was fun!"

The slides of art submitted for the show covered a wide range of mediums, including ink, graphite, oil, watercolor, collage, ceramic, and digital works — an inkjet print and a photographic print.

The artists chosen to participate are equally as diverse. Luker wears the requisite all-black attire, two braided buns and a wide-eyed innocence. The 30-year-old San Francisco native moved to Oakland a year ago after earning two degrees from the San Francisco Art Institute.

She is volunteering at the gallery, she says, because she likes to get involved. "I like meeting other creative people. It's enjoyable, unwrapping the pieces and seeing what's inside. It's a creative

to bebooks! — throughout the Bay Area, including those roosting at Lake Merritt and the streets of San Francisco and Marin and Sonoma counties.

"Recycling is important to me," she says. "I was collecting and stitching as I went along so the piece inherently reveals the birds' migratory habits."

Gallery visitors will also see the work of Irwin Luckman, 78. Gingerly he holds up his abstract sculpture "Preform II," an unglazed ceramic work resembling a jellyfish.

Luckman returned to sculpting last year, after a career as a registered architect with the State of California and later, the general manager of the East Bay Regional Park District. Among his architectural designs are the environmental center at Tilden Regional Park and the equestrian center on Skyline Boulevard.

who joined Pro Arts when he heard of the juried annual show. He began taking classes in ceramics last year at Laney College, and now also works in a studio in his home in the Waverly neighborhood north of Lake Merritt.

Winners of the show will be announced at a reception at the Pro Arts gallery on Nov. 30, where the first prize winner is awarded \$300. The second prize is \$200 and three third prize winners receive \$100 each.

The Pro Arts "Juried Annual" show runs from Nov. 22 to Dec. 30. The public can meet the artists at two free events at the gallery: 6-8 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 30 is a reception for the artists; and an afternoon artists' talk is held 1-3 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 9. The Pro Arts gallery is located at 461 Ninth St. in Oakland. For more information, call 510-763-9425.

Alley

FROM PAGE A1

be wallpaper at all. Closer inspection and a tour of the whole place reveals the wall is papered with thousands of business cards, some bright and others, near the back, tea-colored with age.

Apparently patrons began putting up their business cards as soon as the place opened for business in 1934, right after prohibition.

"I don't know why," says Chuck Castrovince, who has owned the Alley since 1996. Jody Kerr, whose painted portrait still keeps an eye on the place, owned the bar from 1950 to 1995; she willed it to Castrovince, her boyfriend since 1955.

"Nothing has changed here since it was originally built," adds Castrovince, a mild-mannered gentleman with snowy-white hair.

The unchanging nature includes the last unusual feature of the Alley: It is a piano bar. The piano player, Rod Dibble, has worked there for 40 years. To accommodate aspiring singers a bar sur-

rounds him, with stools for 10, a movable microphone, songbooks to peruse or to help those who would like to back up the soloist and brushes for a drum accompaniment. Lingerie hangs from a clothesline above.

Last Friday night, women and men, young and old, vied for the microphone, belting out song after song, usually the whole semi-circle singing and swaying along, drinks and songbooks strewn out before them.

At the bar and tables nearby, crowded by 10 p.m., patrons ate (there is a kitchen, too!) and drank, cringing, humming or singing along as well.

"My mom sang all day long," says Dibble, who played duets with Bob Harris at the piano bar, installed in the late '50s.

The Alley's most requested song, he says, is "Oakland, We're For You," although the song he is most tired of is Patsy Cline's "Crazy."

As if on cue, five minutes later the song is requested.

His favorite? "My Canary Has Circles Under His Eyes." Dibble

says he only plays songs he likes, which do not include contemporary tunes.

Among the more famous patrons are Broadway singer and oyster-eating record holder Eddie "Bozo" Miller; Alameda County Superior Court Judge Lewis Lercara; and Edwin Meese, attorney general under former president Ronald Reagan.

Castrovince's niece Jackie Simpkins, who began sharing managing responsibilities with her uncle three years ago, will soon take over operations. Nothing will change, though, she assures.

Which is good news, especially to regulars like Michael McCarthy, who has warmed a piano-side barstool for 25 years.

He passes on the microphone after a rousing rendition of "I Love a Piano," to express his appreciation of Dibble: "He's a sweetheart. Even after 40 years, he's better every day."

The Alley is located at 3325 Grand Ave; phone 510-444-8505. Rod Dibble performs Tuesdays through Saturdays starting at 9:30 p.m.

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L. MANN
media Notes

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Piano king still providing magic

■ Dibble has been a professional musician since he was 17, covering gigs his music teacher couldn't

By Pat Craig
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The king, clad in jeans and a checkered cotton shirt, looking for all the world like he slipped out of a Saturday morning behind the power mower, strolls into his castle without fanfare.

He nods almost imperceptibly to the cognoscente, as he moves through the Depression-vintage room festooned with generations of gewgaws, posters, pictures, and blizzards of nicotine-brown business cards, aging into the wooden walls. Tacking your card to the wall has been a tradition here longer than most marriages.

Ascending his throne — a piano bench in a cockpit behind a baby grand piano, surrounded with bar stools and decorated with four microphones — Rod Dibble begins the ancient ritual with a bit of Gershwin, rippling chords forming the familiar melody.

The mood immediately elevates — the piano bar king is on the job, repeating what he's done, five nights a week, from 9 at night 'til 2 in the morning, for the past 45 years.

"I'd like to make it an even 50," says Dibble, 72, who has been a professional musician since he was a 17-year-old kid in Berkeley, covering gigs his teacher couldn't fill. "Fifty would be nice. Fifty years at the same place."

Fifty years to become one of the last of a certain breed of musician.

In the old days, there were two or three other piano bars on Grand Avenue near the Alley, the Oakland nightspot that has been Dibble's musical home since 1960, eight years before the A's came to Oakland, and only two after the Giants moved to San Francisco.

Vanishing scene

Now there are few others in the Bay Area. There's Lefty's and Martini's in San Francisco, the town where the legendary Wilbur Stump claimed to have invented the idea of the piano bar.

But the all-night piano player has been supplanted most places where customers are invited to sing by the much less personal and personable karaoke machine, with its cheesy arrangements and lyrics on video.

With Dibble, there's nothing on video. If you don't know the words, he'll hand you a sheet of paper with the lyrics on them. Don't try to stump him, either, at



ROB PLIPPING/STAFF

ROD DIBBLE plays piano and sings May 19 with all who drop by The Alley piano bar in Oakland. Dibble is the East bay's longest-running piano bar player.

least on the tunes that filled the air before rock altered the heart and mind of popular music.

Dibble, if pressed, could knock out a convincing version of "Take Your Girlie to the Movies (If You Can't Make Love at Home)," a pre-WWI knee-slapper that probably few if any other East Bay musicians know.

"I know a lot of songs, 3,000 maybe," says Dibble, without as much as even a sixteenth-note of gloating in his voice. "I like to

play, and I like to learn new songs. I try to learn two new ones every week."

"New," of course, is a relative term. Right now he's working on "Flying Down to Rio," from the 1932 Fred Astaire movie of the same name, and "Alone Together" from the 1932 Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz show "Flying Colors."

"I like stuff like that, all the stuff from the '20s and '30s," he says. "I've always lived in the past; I don't have a computer, and

I've only talked over a cell phone once."

An early start

Most of the tunes he plays, though, were the songs he learned as a boy, the tunes his mom sang around the house, and the ones he yearned to play when he began taking piano from the family's landlady in Berkeley, where they moved from Pasadena in 1938, when Dibble was 6.

See DIBBLE, Page C9



JACK TUCKE
Community Theatre

1978 musica back to Pine

DID YOU EVER r that when you h say something y rather not say, there's a — verbally in this case — shuffle your feet and cl throat? Like now, for in Well, let's get it over wit

It's about revisiting hold the cute, please — Best Little Whorehouse Texas." The 1978 musi been brought back, 14 ter its first performanc Pinole Community Pla a return engagement a Community Playhouse Tennent Ave., Pinole.

Unfortunately, the t took its toll in sizzle ar In fairness, I saw the s its second night, notor: cast letdowns after the

There are cast diffe well between then and And while comparison odious, they are also i when a show comes b the same stage.

This would not be t time that the show ne tweaking. The name v changed to "Cathouse before it could be per Canada and England. 2002, a Houston, Texa tor and cast resigned i than remove "goddam the script. The theater tuted "Pump Boys and Dinettes," which, inci Pinole also did so wh well a few years ago a its regular season.

A quick refresher: "le Whorehouse" is bas the true story of a lege Texas brothel known a Chicken Ranch, so nar cause, during the Depi customers were allowe with poultry. The [anc] operated from the 184 1973 when it was final down by the efforts of ing Houston radio con and his conservative au

Given this situation — in the character of : Ed Earl Dodd — becor tral to the plot, and hi to a large degree sets i of the show. Michael C played the role in the duction, directed by D. Clark. Kyle Johnson fil same role in the prese directed by Gregg Klei

While some of the l is still rough as a cob, pulled it off with such shucks affability the oi words — at least in me were comical.

Johnson takes the r seriously, playing the s with foot-stomping pet and seeming self-assur

Kerry House attracts a pretty hip mix

Dibble

FROM PAGE C10

Almost immediately, the landlady knew the young pianist needed a different teacher, somebody who was more interested in pop tunes and boogie-woogie. So Dibble went to hand-leader and music store owner Chuck Dutton, who would take students "who had a good ear." He'd teach them seven different ways to play a chord.

"He taught me for the years from junior high to high school," he says. "He got me jobs playing house parties and jobs he couldn't make. By that time, I had a 200- to 300-song repertoire."

Not long afterward, he landed a steady gig at Larry Blake's Rathskeller in a cellar on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley.

"That was a great way to learn music; all the college students would turn out to sing, and they'd just shout out titles," he says. "They'd sing all those fun songs, from before rock 'n' roll."

The 'won't do' list

Not that Dibble has anything against rock, as long as he doesn't have to play it.

And, don't ask him to play "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Old Oak Tree" or "Feelings": He's sick of those two.

And whatever you do, don't even whisper the words "Piano Man." Not only will Dibble refuse to play the Billy Joel tune, but he might also explain to you all the things that are wrong with it.

"I never liked it in the first place," he says. "To begin with, it has a dumb melody."

But what really frosts Dibble's mug is the attitude the lyrics have toward piano bar guys — he hates the idea that the microphone smells like a beer. And he's not particularly happy about the fact that the guy seems to hate his job.

But the thing that really bugs him is the title.

"I'm not the piano man. God, if somebody calls me piano man, I tell them I'm the pianist, my name is Rod Dibble," he says. "I don't do the laundry, so I'm not the laundry man, I'm not the elevator man. Actually, I kinda like saying I don't play it."

His distaste for the tune is not shared by others who perform at piano bars. "In fact," Dibble says sadly, "whenever I let someone play at the Alley, the first thing they do is 'Piano Man.' I don't understand it."

That's rare, though — sick or well, the king shows up for work. When he's feeling good, and that's most of the time after his daily laps around Lake Merritt, Dibble likes nothing better than to cruise into the Alley and climb behind the piano. When he's not feeling well, despite the problem he has singing, a night at the piano bar is good medicine.

"It's like going to a party

every night — sometimes it doesn't turn out so hot, but most of the time it turns out," says Dibble. "I've always played; I've never done anything else. There's nothing else I ever wanted to do. I love the interaction of the job."

The set list

By about 10 p.m., the regulars begin wandering in, sliding onto the stools that surround the piano, and mulling over the tunes they want to perform.

David Jackson, now in his 24th year as an Alley regular, takes a position at Dibble's left hand, and fills in with a little percussion as he waits for his turn at the microphone.

Jackson, who now sings professionally, credits Dibble and the Alley for giving him his start as a singer. But he's a little surprised his Alley crooning began at all.

"When I came in, there was a man named Tex, at the end of the bar, dressed in Levi's and Tony Lama boots," he says. "He was singing 'Streets of Laredo,' and there wasn't one other person of color in there. And I kind of wondered if this really was where I needed to be."

He hung back on the sidelines, but was finally overwhelmed by the friendliness of the crowd, which was encouraging him to sing.

He finally got enough courage to pick up a microphone, but soon realized he and Dibble were generations apart in musical knowledge. The only tune they both knew was "Since I Fell For You."

Jackson was overwhelmed by the applause and good wishes.

"This was the nicest I've ever been treated anywhere across the country or in other countries," he says. "It was, and continues to be, the most welcoming environment of any public establishment."

The regulars — who celebrate their birthdays with the Alley, purchase cakes, and find their names on stockings hanging around the piano at Christmas — make a practice of enthusiastically welcoming "Alley virgins" to the fold.

And Dibble is the chairman of the welcoming committee.

"A good singer is like a good musical instrument, and it's fun to play with them," Dibble says. "I have a couple of pros who come in and it's fun to work with them, too. But what I really enjoy are the ones who aren't sure if they can sing or not. That's the most fun and the most challenging. And when they try it, they have much more fun than the seasoned singer."

Dibble courts the newcomers, particularly the shy ones, who seem to be on the verge of either singing or running away. He'll chat them up, then offer them a few lyric sheets. And, when they take the leap of faith and actually try to vocalize, he'll sing with them for a few bars, before letting them solo.

He smiles like a proud father when a tyro sails on "Moon River" or discovers it's only a



ROD DIBBLE estimates he knows how to play about 3,000 songs — and he's still learning new ones.

"Paper Moon."

Regulars get encouragement, too, but of a different sort. Dibble will lightly tease them as much as urge them to sing. They appear to feel like part of the big show.

The singers represent what a kindly soul would call a wide range of abilities. There are some beautiful voices in the Alley, and some others whose talents would scare alley cats. But the point here is not to become the next "American Idol." This is what you do for fun — it's do-it-yourself entertainment, and Dibble wouldn't have it any other way.

Crowds at the Alley are getting younger, particularly on weekdays, when a good number of the customers are college age, singing tunes their grandparents considered oldies.

"A lot of the young people have never heard these songs, or have only heard one version of them," he says. "They come in here not only to sing, but to learn what the music of people like Gershwin or Cole Porter is like."

While Dibble claims to live in the past, he seems to be energized when the crowd around the piano is young and enthusiastic. He delights in making the old Alley rattle with song and laughter. And the place feels very much like it was built for that, in a day when entertainment and marketing was a lot simpler.

Proper setting

The inside of the bar carries

out the alley theme. The bar itself is in a little shack at one side of the building, and the tables, where patrons can eat as well as drink (burgers are only \$3), have an old comfortable feel, as does the piano, with its chipped keys and potpourri of this and that — from bells and hats to flags and playbills — that surrounds the piano bench.

Nothing in the bar has any particular reason for being placed in a particular spot. An ancient X-shaped tin sign for Lucky Lager Beer looms over one of the tables, and if you glance a few feet above Dibble's head, you'll see a poster of a woman standing between two men at a row of urinals — a souvenir from the nascent days of the women's movement.

For Dibble, it's been his performing home for longer than most people's entire careers. And the memories aren't far from the surface. Entertainer Danny Marona played with Dibble early in his career, and Dibble himself performed in numerous locations before settling in the Alley, decades ago.

But Oakland is home, the Alley is his castle, and the king is pleased.

"I live three blocks from the club in a court with little 1920s stucco houses, all with fireplaces and hardwood floors. My view is the whole lake," he says. "God, it's great. Man, I'm so lucky."

Reach Pat Craig at 925-945-4736 or at pcraig@cetimes.com.

NORTHERN CAL

Compiled from sales at 45 pertinent bookstores in Northern California

Fiction

1. "A Long Way Down," by Neil Hornby. (Riverhead, \$24.95)
2. "The Mermald Chair," by Su Kidd. (Viking, \$24.95)
3. "Zorro," by Isabel Allende. (Collins, \$25.95)
4. "Gilead," by Marilynne Robinson. (FSG, \$23.)
5. "Specimen Days," by Michael Cunningham. (FSG, \$25.)
6. "In the Company of Cheerful Ladies," by Alexander McCall. (Pantheon, \$19.95)
7. "The Closers," by Michael C. Little. (Brown, \$26.95)
8. "The History of Love," by Nick Krauss. (Norton, \$23.95)
9. "Never Let Me Go," by Kazuo Ishiguro. (Knopf, \$24.)
10. "The Da Vinci Code," by Dan Brown. (Doubleday, \$24.95)

Nonfiction

1. "Freakonomics," by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen Dubner. (William Morrow, \$25.95)
2. "1776," by David McCullough. (FSG, \$32.)
3. "On the Glory of It All," by S. Wilsey. (Penguin Press, \$25.95)
4. "You: The Owner's Manual," by Michael F. Roizen, M.D. and Michael Oz, M.D. (HarperResource, \$24.95)
5. "Blink," by Malcolm Gladwell. (FSG, \$25.95)
6. "The World Is Flat," by Thomas Friedman. (FSG, \$27.50)
7. "On Bull," by Harry G. Frankfurt. (Princeton, \$9.95)
8. "Plan B," by Anne Lamott. (Random House, \$24.95)
9. "French Women Don't Get Fat," by Mireille Guiliano. (Knopf, \$22.)
10. "Coach," by Michael Lewis. (Simon & Schuster, \$12.95)

Trade paperback fiction

1. "The Kite Runner," by Khaled Hosseini. (Riverhead, \$14.)
2. "Skinny Dip," by Carl Hiaasen. (Warner, \$12.95)



BARTENDER ALAN BRUCH but if you're more in the mood

Yadegaran

FROM PAGE C10

most true dives, people come here for stiff, cheap drinks, to be left alone or to engage the company they came with.

Craving some dahl with their Guinness? No problem. Next door's Kerry House Raj Indian Cuisine, which shares the san-

Retro Favorites

In a world where Louis Prima gives the Gap good buzz and platforms never go out of style, everything old is hip again.

What's so appealing about the stylish curves of a genuine '50s drive-in? The funky, fascinating accumulations at an old cobbler's shop or typewriter store? The homey atmosphere of a coffeeshop? The weird beatnik vibe of a cocktail lounge?

The vintage fonts on their dated signs and disappearing architecture beckon with promises of rare workmanship. Their mold has been broken, yet they seem comfortingly, charmingly familiar, hinting at a mysterious history or an exotically wholesome past.

Blame it on postmodernism or a kind of conservatism. Blame it on the ever-accelerating pace of technology or the speeding vehicles on the

highways, full of Type-A achievers yakking on their cell phones, racing toward the future faster than ever before. Blame it on Y2K.

Until modern life gives us something better than outlet malls and sport utility vehicles, these fixtures in the East Bay landscape will have to do. They may not be historical landmarks — yet — and they may not offer deep discounts, generic packaging or Web pages. But we love them.

Send in your favorite East Bay retro landmarks by February 15. And we'll write about them. After all, newspapers are something of a retro institution themselves.

— Kimberly Chun



LIZ HAYATA / The Chronicle

Piano player Rod Dibble has been tickling the ivories at the Alley in Oakland for 40 years, drawing regulars such as Paul Rose (middle) of San Francisco, who sing along.

THE
Alley

PIANO BAR & RESTAURANT

By Kimberly Chun
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Most of Oakland has had its first drink there, say the regulars at the Alley piano bar and restaurant. And just as many have been thrown out by its longtime owner Jody Kerr.

The rest just pass by the pink and green neon-trimmed cottagelike facade on Grand Avenue day after day and never go in.

They ought to. They would enter a dim wilderness of sensory overload.

Imagine an alley, re-created by a drunken Walt Disney, lined with dark wood, Fornica street signage, weird paper ephemera and thousands of business cards. A clothesline above the bar dangles '60s-era chiffon slips. Beside it are a tele-

phone pole, a street lamp and a lighted window showing off a curvaceous silhouette. The store window facade of an "Alley Loan Co." houses a mysterious collection of clothing and a ukulele.

It's a trip — back to the time you, and maybe even your mother, had your first drink. "My mother came in in 1947, and she was only 17. She brought her sister's ID, and they used to carve their initials straight into the wall," says Nancy Gordon of Oakland.

Now business cards bedeck the walls. Brown, oily specimens sport phone numbers like Kellogg 2-7300. Crisper ones list all sorts of occupations including one former presidential candidate: Jerry Brown.

"We had to take 'em down to fireproof 'em at one time, but from now on we spray 'em with retardant," says Charles Casprovinc, 75, whose wife, Kerri, died four years ago after owning the bar for 45 years.

Behind the piano, Rod Dibble plays pre-'50s songs, as he has for 40 years. During "42nd Street," regulars will beat their change against the piano top to imitate tap dancers. "I'll never retire. No, I'm having too much fun," says Dibble,

66, a Berkeley native who walks to work five days a week.

The lowest point in Dibble's Alley days was the sad, songless night after President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. The most memorable moment was undoubtedly when a woman came in with her dog who she claimed could sing and dance.

"She put the dog on top of the piano bar, she started singing in a high-tone pitch, the dog started yelping and knocking over drinks and peeing and it was complete chaos!" Dibble says, chortling.

Today the 1933 bar attracts its share of college-age hip cats and kittens, drawn by the surreal atmosphere and retro beatnik cool.

Casprovinc's niece, Jackie Simpkins, 34, bartends part time and will take over when her uncle goes to the big alley in the sky. She certainly isn't going to stand in the way of tradition.

"We say, 'Let's redo the bathroom.' But then they say 'No, leave it alone!'" she says. "It's old and they like the way it looks. That's why they come in here and that's the purpose of the place: not to change a thing."

INSIDE

More of our retro favorites

Page 6

SEND IT

Send us the scoop on your East Bay retro favorites by February 15, and we'll publish some in an upcoming issue. Suggestions can be faxed to (510) 834-5556 or mailed to: The Chronicle East Bay Friday Section, 901 Mission St., San Francisco, Calif. 94103. Or e-mail suggestions to: ebayfriday@sfgate.com.

BEST BETS

Refreshments as a benefit for the Women's Division, Juliet and Vincent

at UC Berkeley this week. The Bay Area. Footprints and Memorable Moments" at

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SFGATE <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Piano-man-Rod-Dibble-s-got-em-feeling-all-right-2476570.php>

Piano man Rod Dibble's got 'em feeling all right

MUSIC MUSIC

By Peter Hartlaub Published 4:00 am, Friday, February 11, 2011



IMAGE 1 OF 3

Rod Dibble claps in approval after a woman finishes singing to his music at The Alley bar in Oakland Calif, on Friday, Feb. 4, 2011. Dibble jokes with fans throughout the night and rings a cowbell when he he ... more

They sit at the bar and put bread in his jar, but regulars at the Alley know better than to ask Rod Dibble to play "Piano Man." And the newcomers quickly learn.

Dibble has played at this Oakland bar for more than 50 years, and the key to his - and the Alley's - longevity is a complete lack of compromise. To watch Dibble at the piano is to walk into a time warp of a "Twilight Zone" episode. Or maybe it's heaven. Either way, there's no Billy Joel.

"I always lay out the ground rules: If you want to play in my backyard, you sing my songs," Dibble says during a break between "Fly Me to the Moon" and the 1937 jazz standard "Caravan." "As the years go by, the younger crowd doesn't know the older tunes. But they come in and they listen and they learn them. Cole Porter and Gershwin and Hoagy Carmichael ..."

The Alley is the last of the original Oakland piano bars, outlasting most of the others by 30 years. Dibble, 78, started playing the Grand Avenue bar in 1960, and the scene hasn't changed. There are 12 seats around the heavily lacquered wood bar, four microphones and songbooks - patrons are encouraged to sing alone or as a group. Dibble sits in a well at the far end, crooning in a voice that falls somewhere between Louis Armstrong and Tom Waits on the raspy spectrum. The battered black Baldwin is his sixth piano at the bar; he wore out five others.

Eclectic mix of regulars

Dibble knows more than 4,000 songs by heart, without sheet music, and can adjust the key on the fly to accommodate each singer. As songs end, cheers can be heard across the bar and restaurant, where a post-work crowd saws through \$10 steak dinners.

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The regulars are as eclectic a mix as you could imagine. Customers from the old days. Hipsters in their 20s and 30s who just moved to the neighborhood. Karaoke ringers from out of town. Young couples out on a date away from the kids. Every race, age and level of singing ability is represented.

When they gather around the U-shaped bar, the differences melt away. As long as they play by the rules, singers are quickly assimilated into the Tribe of Rod. He has smiles for everyone, encourages the weaker singers and rings a small cowbell when one of the regulars achieves a personal best.

Bill Danenhower, 74, was a beat cop in this neighborhood when Rod started playing. He's been coming to the Alley since he was in his 20s. Danenhower gives off a Clint Eastwood vibe, drinking his Pabst Blue Ribbon in a bottle and keeping mostly to himself - which makes it all the more haunting when he belts out a beautiful version of the 1940 song "Because of You."

"Rod hasn't changed at all," Danenhower says. "The neighborhood has changed. Oakland has changed. But Rod's the same."

A link to the past

Sitting across the bar is Matthew Newton, a 36-year-old writer and copy editor who lives nearby.

"I was never really a bar person, but there's something about this place. If I don't want to be alone, I can come here. There's always a good vibe," Newton says after his rousing performance of "The Oakland Song." "There's something different and special about Oakland that a place like this can survive. We're good to a place like this that has good bones."

There are no signs of the 21st century in the Alley, and only three from the latter half of the 1900s - an old 27-inch television at the end of the bar, an ATM on the other side of the restaurant, and a 1980s stereo amplifier that Dibble mostly ignores.

The Alley is dressed up to look like a 1920s alley, with wood-shingled roofs, railroad-crossing signage and a window featuring the silhouette of a busty dame. The walls are covered with business cards, making the entire establishment look as if it has psoriasis. More often than not, the Oakland business cards feature a 415 area code. Cards from Gov. Jerry Brown and Gregg Allman are somewhere on the wall. Many of the cards have been here longer than Dibble.

Regulars say the Alley survived because of the talents of Dibble and the unstoppable force of former owner Jody Kerr, who ran the joint with tough love from the 1940s until her death in 1995. Jackie Simpkins, the niece of Kerr's husband, took over a few years ago. One of her first orders of business was to remove the cards. She backed down when the regulars threatened a revolt.

"People really don't like it when I change things," she says. "They like it when I decorate for the holidays, and that's about all they want."

Dibble doesn't change much either. The father of two and grandfather of four lives in Berkeley with his wife of four years, Linda, less than six blocks from where he was raised. Dibble says he started playing in 1938, when he was 6 years old.

"My uncle was in vaudeville," Dibble says. "My mother toured with them and taught me all these great old tunes. She'd sing around the house, and then I'd pick them out on the piano."

Keeping in shape, tune

Dibble walks 10 miles every day (often heading to the Claremont Hotel or the Berkeley Marina), practices piano in multiple 10-minute clips, and tries to learn at least one new song every week. When asked if he owns an iPod, it's unclear if Dibble is aware of the device's existence.

"I don't even know how to use a cell phone," Dibble says, laughing. "I wouldn't know how to turn on a computer. I'm a dinosaur and proud of it."

Dibble plays Tuesday through Saturday nights. Longtime fans say he's still full of surprises.

"I'm 74 years old. I know a lot of songs. And he's playing songs on that piano that I've never heard in my life," Danenhower says. "It's amazing. They should do an autopsy on his brain when he dies."

Hopefully that won't happen anytime soon. Simpkins acknowledges that it's impossible to imagine the bar without Dibble.

The piano man says he'd like to play for another 20 years, "at least."

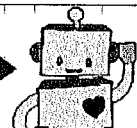
"I'll never retire," Dibble says. "I'll be very happy to die right behind this piano here."

Rod Dibble: 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. Tues.-Sat. The Alley, 3345 Grand Ave., Oakland. (510) 444-8505.

To see a fan-made video of Rod Dibble at the Alley, check out today's Culture Blog on SFGate.com; www.sfgate.com/blogs/culture.

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BEST OF THE EAST BAY 2004

Best Bar/Pub Food: Oh, you foolish
thing

The Alley

Sure, the Alley's impressive rep among locals is rightly attributed to Rod Dibble, the crusty piano man who has been tickling the ivories through booze-soaked renditions of "These Foolish Things" and "Summertime" for the past five hundred years or so. But the lovable dive is more than just a place to tie one on and howl through the show tunes; it also turns out some of the tastiest bar food in the East Bay. This might be the beer talking, but the blissfully greasy cheeseburgers and assorted deep-fried goodies that are born in the "Alley Galley" are unrivaled in the world of drunkard snacks. When you get a little cocktailed, it's almost impossible not to fall prey to the enticing aromas wafting from the galley. One bite of that scrumptious, cheese-covered fryer food and you're hooked -- for a measly \$3.50, you've stumbled into your temporary nirvana.

Readers' Pick: **Cato's Ale House** 3891 Piedmont Ave. Oakland, 510-655-3349
MrCato.com/chome.htm

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bottla white, a bottla red

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Best Soul Food: You'll
never need to eat KFC
again

Best Korean Restaurant:
Bada bi, bada bim, bada
bap

Best Taqueria, Contra
Costa County: A killer
burrito? In San Ramon?

Best Nopales: Carnitas y
cactus

Best West African Peanut
Stew: Good for your neo-
soul

Best Gelato This Side of
Italy: Pear, fig, black
sesame -- mmm

Best Waterfront Dining:
But you'll have to beg for a
window seat

Best Chinese Restaurant:
Don't call the fire squad;
just eat some rice

Best Steak House: Can't
compete with local talent

Best Breakfast/Brunch:
Repress that bacon guilt

Best Restaurant Cooking
Classes: Do try this at
home

Best Bar: Music's in the
cafe, revolution's in the air

Best Draft Beer Selection:
Tap into this rotation

17.

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Best String Quartet

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Best Painter

Best Latin Artist

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Best Jammed-Out Kraut-
Rock Funk Combo

Best Publishing Company

Best Classic Mix on a
Mainstream Radio StationBest Cover Act or Tribute
BandBest Hard-to-Categorize
Roots-Rock Band

Best String Band

Best Actor

Best Yard Art

Best Assemblagist

Best Political
Activist/Artist

Best Local Book

Best Early Music Ensemble

Best Director

Best Theatrical Production

Best Turf Dance Crew

Best One-Woman Arts
Booster

Best Local Album

For a fancy dress-up piano bar experience, there's always Bing Crosby's in Walnut Creek. But if you want to relax and howl along, the classic spot is Oakland's the Alley. A battered place decorated with hanging laundry and a grimy fake pawnshop window, the Alley doesn't appear to have changed since the 1930s when it opened on Grand Avenue and people started attaching their business cards to the walls. Rod Dibble's been behind the Alley's piano for nearly fifty years. The neatly organized three-ring binders list about four hundred songs, but rumor is that Dibble knows at least 5,000, with emphasis on the Great American Songbook. He can effortlessly find your key, regardless of how wobbly you might be. Just don't ask for anything much newer than the Beatles; the most recent song in the book is 1982's "Memory," from *Cats*. We wish we could report more, but just one of the bartender's \$8 triple-strength Manhattans (prepared classically with bitters, if light on the sweet vermouth) obliterates the details. Happily, before 9:45 p.m., there's food to soak up all that alcohol. A grandpa-pleasing steak dinner is available complete with baked potato and salad for just \$9.75. Other choices include chopped sirloin, fried chicken, or those new-fangled hamburger sandwiches. It's good that the food's so cheap, because the Alley is cash-only.

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EXPRESS October 16, 1992

BEST HOME AWAY FROM HOME

If you ever find yourself longing for a bar like the one your father frequented long before "No Smoking" signs and Calistoga inhibited decadence, The Alley is the place for you. The Alley has a timewarp quality about it. When you open the door, it feels and smells like a bar. Its high-backed wooden booths promise to keep the secret of a late-night tryst. The counter has carried thousand of drinks and absorbed as many tales of woe. You cannot help but feel the life that has passed through here. The Alley is, after all, fifty years old: it first opened as a bar in 1934. If you sense a continuity it is because Jody, who started working there as a waitress in 1946, took over as owner in 1949 and she's been there ever since. "This was a good little spot during World War II," she reminisces. "The old owner had good food for the money and good drinks for the money and no cheats. And that's the way it still is today." This is true: drinks start at \$2.50, food prices range from a couple of dollars for a sandwich to six dollars for the New York steak (comes with salad, potato, garlic bread, and coffee).

Its dim lights offer anonymity for

those for seek it, but the Alley also gives anyone who so desires the opportunity to go public. Hundreds of calling cards are tacked, tucked and taped to every vertical surface, some of them yellow with age. And then there is the main attraction: Rod Dibble, who invites you to take center stage. He accompanies on the piano any and all who want to sing. For the last 32 years he has played the requests of those who sit or stand

around the piano, eager to join in the singing. If it is your secret wish to go solo, Rod will indulge it. And his repertoire is endless: Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, and Paul Robeson songs, "Red Roses for a Blue Lady" and "Crazy," Beatles and folk tunes, and even German Lieder. I know of no other sing-along bar in the East Bay, but, since the Alley is perfect, it's all we need. 3325 Grand Avenue
—Christine Schoefer



continued from page 12

found in the basic structure; the en

Bow." An old, eerie shipwreck painting in the front hall serves as a clue to this symbolism. All the west-facing

the **Oakland Museum** has opened up a whole new world of sensual pleasure for the sybarites among us

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BEST OF THE EAST BAY 2011

Best Retro Karaoke Bar

The Alley

Before the karaoke machine there was the piano bar, a laid-back, convivial hangout with an enormous Steinway around which the lonely or the restive or the celebratory could gather, sip, listen to the noodlings of the artist-in-residence, and, when the mood struck, croon along. There were no tinny synthesizers or oblique video accompaniments and very few showboaters to deal with, just a crew of wannabe Sinatras passing the mic, sharing the velvet hour, and rallying under the banner of Porter, Berlin, and the brothers Gershwin. Against all odds, the warmth and immediacy of the piano bar endures in this detached and phobic era, at least in Oakland, where Rod Dibble presides at The Alley's community spinet, just as he has for more than half a century. Pull up a stool, rifle through one of the songbooks, pick a tune in your general vocal range, and wait for your turn at the mic. Dibble has some 4,000 songs in his repertoire, and he's adept not only at guiding the inexperienced past a variety of vocal landmines, he's a marvelous accompanist and an encouraging audience to boot.

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Best Art in a Restaurant

Best Bar That Also Looks Like Your Living Room

Best Barbecue Place You've Never Heard Of

Best Boba Drinks

Best Burger

Best Cal-Med Comfort Food

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Best Deep Dish Pizza

Best Fried Chicken

Best Frozen Dessert

Best Ethiopian

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Best Garlic Fries

Best Grub at a Nightclub

Best High-End Vegan Dish

Best Indian

Best Jalisco Home Cooking

Best Korean Dive

Best Laotian Cuisine

Best Locally Made Sausage

Best Morning Buzz

Best Neighborhood

Hangout

20

20

16-211

EXTRA

1000'S FIND ALLEY BEST PL

Alley Comes From Famous N. Y. Street

How'd The Alley get this way? That's a fair question, and deserves a fair answer. It "just grew"—something like Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Not entirely. The original idea of this unique little joint was no accident. Oh, no. The Alley was a brainchild, conceived and designed by John Slocum, a famous architect, who did it all with malice aforethought, and knew right down the alley what he was doing.

Just to show you that you CAN go from the sublime to the ridiculous (or should it be vice-versa?), this same nationally-known architect also planned and built Berkeley's beautiful Chapel of the Flowers. Don't know exactly what that proves. Draw your own conclusions.

But we were telling you how The Alley got this way. It's really quite a story, and to make a good short story long... some day when you're visiting in old New York, take an hour or so out and look up Delancy Street. Climb on a sub or trolley and see it. Go ahead, you'll find it worth your while. Excepting for The Alley's super food and drink, on which you're this very moment dining and winning, you'll think you're back in The Alley. You really will.

Right down to the little shack housing the bar, to "The Alley

Alley Crowds Sure Go for Singin' Bob

Bob. Nobody Here But Us Chickens! Harris has made himself a spot at the Alley. The crowds have gone for his songs in such a big way that he's remaining here for Cocktail Hour entertainment even though he's now a restaurant owner in his own light.

A native of Seattle, he came to Oakland as a kid, and his first job was as a bellboy at the Hotel



St. Mark. The music in him had to come out, however, and Harris soon found that there was demand for a youth who could popularize serious concert music. That's what he began doing. Reno called him, and he played in

The Alley Irish-Imp

Vol. 1, No. 2

More Types Wine than Bumps On Pickle, but All Enrich Meal

Wine is as old as civilization on the average table, as regular and no drink except water and milk has won such universal commendation through the ages, sugars in wine are ready absorbed by the human system and churches; to observe memorable are desirable in the diet, that occasions; to launch ships; to the alcohol in wine is a quick minister to the sick; to welcome source of caloric energy for guests, to inspire the mind. It wine is drunk for its own sake, it is essentially a drink of modern civilization. When used to excess, wine itself is abused.

Get in the

Throughout the middle ages the church was the greatest single factor in the spread of vineyards and development of wines. Some of today's most famous European vineyards were established by religious orders centuries ago. The hand of the church was felt later in some of the newer wine-producing areas in California, for example, viniculture was started by the 13 monks of San Francisco. Some of the 13 monks of San Francisco were established by religious orders centuries ago. The hand of the church was felt later in some of the newer wine-producing areas in California, for example, viniculture was started by the 13 monks of San Francisco.

Most of the world's wine are as fine as the Alley's. Some of the 13 monks of San Francisco were established by religious orders centuries ago. The hand of the church was felt later in some of the newer wine-producing areas in California, for example, viniculture was started by the 13 monks of San Francisco.

PLANKED NEW YORK STEAK	1.25
Cut From Bonded Kansas City Steer Beef	
French Fried Onion Rings	1.10
FRIED CHICKEN	1.00
Cut From Bonded Kansas City Steer Beef	
ALLEY CHOPPED SIRLOIN	.85
Green Salad, Sautéing Potatoes	
PLANKED CHOPPED SIRLOIN	
French Onion Rings, Bouquet of Vegetables	
EGGS	
French Onion Rings, Bouquet of Vegetables	
EGGS	

Here's More About

THE ALLEY

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 1)

no station at all. As a matter of fact, you're getting in on a family secret now! Breakfast in The Alley is better OFF than ON the air. Tell you why. More people get into the act when it's NOT on the air. So, more people have fun, and it's MORE fun, which is an Alley must.

This Breakfast show—excuse please if we seem to dwell on it—but it's one of The Alley's main attractions, and you know this is THE Breakfast Show. Don't know how many of them have started up and then folded around here, but this one, THE one, is still going. And it's still got that Joe Luke, than which there is none whither, for M.C.

Maybe you've been noticing all the names carved and written on the walls and ceilings. Those are authentic. Happy customers did them. More than 9000 of them, by actual count. Had to count them to write this story. Turned out to be fun, too. You'd be surprised at some of the names up there.

Know who some of them are? Well, just to give you an idea, the whole New York cast of Oklahoma was here and autographed the Jernit one night. Herb Caen, the Chronicle's ace columnist, wrote: "The Jernit's swell." Inga Aarvad said: "Let's build one in Hollywood."

And there's been Paul Speegle, another Chronicle writer; Henry King, the orchestra leader, and Stan Kenton, and Leighton Noble, and lots of others. More about them elsewhere, but there's some mighty fine names overhead.

Funny thing about The Alley. The Jernit always has drawn celebrities, like a blonde does



IN TIME to pick up Vol. 1, No. 1, of the Alley Trib-Enquirer, Herb Jeffries, who gained fame as soloist with the Duke Ellington aggregation, was a recent Alley visitor. He is shown with Cliff Gamble (left) looking over a copy of the menu-sheet. Jeffries now is on a personal appearance tour taking him all over the country at top night clubs and theaters. His records are best-sellers.

Here's More About

HOST'S SPIRIT

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 3)

For years he was with the Hotel Del Coronado, and you, here in Oakland, will remember him at the Hotel Lake Merritt. Cliff simply decided that people, including himself, ought to have fun. Well, The Alley was the answer to that decision.

Your host, Cliff, took over The Alley in 1939. Say what you will, everyone's had fun since then, even during the couple of war years that Cliff took off to go to sea. His loyal employees, who have the same idea as Cliff (and, incidentally, have been here ever since Cliff took over)

Here's More About

JOE LUKE

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 3)

erlands Plaza; the Roosevelt in New Orleans; the St. Anthony in San Antonio, and both the Hotels Baker and Adolphus in Dallas. Top-notch engagements, every one.

You're getting a special treat when you hear Joe at The Alley because except for the fun he has and dishes out at The Alley, Joe's thorough with show biz. But you can catch him every Sunday at Breakfast in The Alley.

Joe says: "Show business is the nuts." Showbiz

THE ALLEY TRIB-ENQUIRER

Appears Alley Employees Are Here To Stay!

There isn't much turnover among The Alley's friendly employees. Day after day and week after week you'll just about always see the same cheerful faces.

But you must meet them first. chef, who turns out that marvelous food known all over the country is Jacques (Jack) Negley. Behind the bar are a famous pair, Walt and Jaxay, so good that like Walla Walla they named him twice.

Those crisp, easy-to-look-at gals serving you are Margie, Jo and Berenice.

There's a story behind Jacques and Cliff Gamble, your hosts. They met some years ago when both were at Oakland's Hotel Lake Merritt. Jacques asked Cliff as manager of the hotel's catering department.

When Cliff took over The Alley back in 1939 it was inevitable that Jacques would wind up here, too. Cliff knew them that come what may, food at The Alley would always be tops—tops in quality, tops in flavor, tops in cuisine.

Thoroughly familiar with Jacques' work at the Lake Merritt, and aware of his long-ont ground at the Waldorf-Astoria, the Ritz, and other leading hotels, Cliff sent for Jacques, and the genial chef has been here ever since.

He's responsible not only for the superb food, but those choice hors d'oeuvres served here each Cock-fail Hour.

We don't know how it has been with you, but it has been our observation that where there is small turnover among employees, that's a fine place to do business. If the employees are cheerful, friendly and hard-

1 EAST SIDE WEST SIDE

East side, West side, all around the town The Ol' sang "Ring-a-Rose," London Bridge is falling down Boys and girls together Me and Mamie O'Rourke Tripped the light fantastic— On the sidewalks of New York.

2 MY BONNIE

My Bonnie lies over the ocean, My Bonnie lies over the sea, My Bonnie lies over the ocean, Oh bring back my Bonnie to me. Bring back, bring back, Bring back my Bonnie to me, to me, Bring back, bring back, Oh bring back my Bonnie to me.

3 IN MY MERRY OLDSMOBILE

Come away with me Lucille In my merry Oldsmobile Down the road of life we'll fly Auto-mo-bubbling, you and I To the church we'll twitly steel And the wedding bells will peal You can go as far as you like with me In my merry Oldsmobile.

4 PUT ON YOUR OLD GREY BONNET

Put on your old grey bonnet with the blue ribbon on it While thick old Dobbin to the shanty And through the fields of clover We'll drive up to Dover on our Golden Wedding day.

5 IN THE EVENING BY THE MOONLIGHT

In the Evening by the Moonlight You could hear those dainties singing In the Evening by the Moonlight You could hear those banjos ringing How the Old folks would enjoy it They would at all night and listen As we sang in the Evening by the Moon light.

Food Gains Fame All over Country!

We hope you've had fun reading
 this. What a day! What a question.
 Did we make it? We go now
 and see if it's important.

W'd like to follow up on the
above lead that's under the
Alley Ramon.

It's a singularly informal atmosphere in The Alley. Partitions between the booths look like an alley fence. Red Tannells and wooden underwear hang from the line overhead. Useless junky items behind the Alley Loan Company pawnshop window. The big-bosomed silhouette behind the tenement window upstairs. It's planned that way. It's The Alley's charm.

But note the food. You'll mark the menu simple, not cluttered up with fancy but trivial hors d'œuvres, soups, salads, trimmings. Featured most prominently is the **'Alley Special Planked Steak**, which comes to you as easy to look at as to eat, flanked with a colorful bouquet of garden-fresh vegetables.

Frankly, we hope you'll try it because it's a superb treat, an alluring, tempting dish that will compare with steaks served in the nation's finest dining rooms. Your chef, "Jack" Negley prepares each order as though it were a work of art.

A glance will show you there are no steam tables in The Alley kitchen. Each order of vege-

Host's Spirit Reflected In Alley's Mood

Ever stop to think about the personality of cafe-bars?

Not only The Alley, but all
jennits. You know how it is,
you'll think to yourself, "Yep,
that one's fun, but this other
one—pooey!"

They either have charm, atmosphere, personality, character . . . or they lack it.

Now, take The Alley. Its fun. It has a world of charm and personality. Why?

1 Credit 99.44/100's of it to the
2 character of your host, Cliff
3 Gamble. You have fun here be-
4 cause Cliff has fun running the
5 place. And if you can't have fun
6 here, you don't belong. The
7 Alley's for fun, and that's for-
8 sure!

Cliff, you see, started out to be a lawyer. Couldn't have any fun. Quit it and wound up in the wrong bar association. Maybe it's for the best!

Cliff decided, fella ought to stay with the trade he knows best. Well, Cliff knows the restaurant business best. Ever since he can remember he's been around hotel dining rooms or restaurants.

(Continued on Page 2, Col. 1) (Continued on Page 2, Col. 2)

As the KKK march had a way to the Alley, shining bright like a torch, just about as you see it tonight. And The Alley began to "grow."

Matter of fact, the place grew to beat the band. Crowds grew. Alley had to grow. Well, Cliff knocked out a wall here and a partition there, added a booth here and a booth there, and The Alley got like so. Just grew. But remained The Alley.

You can see for yourself how it is now. There aren't many walls or partitions left to knock out. Guess you can figure that. The Alley's just about full-grown now. But her ornery old atmosphere is just like it used to be back in those early days, and you can bank on this: It's going to stay that way. Cliff's word on that.

Want to tell you something about this fella, Cliff, your host. You ought to know him better. Cliff has a funny idea about things, like for instance, making money. You think he wants to make all the money in the world? Nope. Just . . . enough, and if he can't have fun trying it, the hell with it!

That's why The Alley's like it is and always has been. Take back in the beginning, for example, when the now famous Sunday Breakfast - in - The - Alley radio show began.

Marge Trumbull, a right sharp radio gal, brought it into being.

Experienced in Big Time radio, she put her talents into a show that still stands up, for a little station, big station, or

(Continued on Page 2, Col. 1)

Enjoy Prime Rib? Then Join New Club

The Alley's newest feature is the Prime Rib Club, where devotees of beef as it should be served may have a weekly rendezvous on Wednesdays.

Yes, in The Alley's usual king size, Cliff offers roast beef at its supreme best to the select members of this newest club. If you're a real prime rib connoisseur you're eligible to join. For membership... and a reservation, call TEMplebar 2-9505.

It's a special merchants' noon deal — each Wednesday noon.

ALLEY SELECT
White Dry

Wente
Dry Semillon
Chateau Wente

Champagne
Radic Sec
Korbelt Se

**"Wine which Music is,
Music and Wine are one,"
Ralph Waldo Emerson**



A PROMINENT Alley visitor, not too long ago, was Dorothy Shaw, the famous Park Avenue Hillbilly, whose glorious self is shown here between your genial host, Cliff Gamble (left) and Joe Luke at a recent Sunday Breakfast. The photo notch was taken by Albert (Kaye) Harris and Associates, Alley Trib-Enquirer staff photographers.

and have fun. You might think that Cliff would resent all those imitating breakfast shows. Not Cliff. He just figures "sincerest form of flattery," watches them come and go, and goes on giving stuff away like crazy on his own show. Sure has fun, that Cliff.

Well, that's just about the story of The Alley. Just can't think of another thing you might want to know.

Oh, those cards tacked up every where?

Some fella walked into The Alley one day, asked Cliff if he could put up a card. "Sure," Cliff told him. Another fellow came along, tacked up another. Then another and another. More than 3000 cards up there now. Counted them along with the chalked names.

And that's 3000 not counting the ones that yellowed, withered, died and fell on the floor.

Just one thing more, though. Have fun! It's an Alley must.

Here's More About

STEAK

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 2)

tables is custom-cooked, just for YOU. You may have to wait five or six minutes for your order because JUST ENOUGH vegetables for YOU go on the stove when your order is called, and that's why they come to you with garden freshness, tantalizing color, and that's why they're hot, to match your steak.

And the steak itself? As tender as a virgin's kiss, as juicy as back-fence gossip, as tasty as a grass widow's love. Yes, sir! out of this world.

If you're not up to an entire steak dinner, try the Alley Fried Chicken, or the Alley Planked Chopped Sirloin, or the French Fried Prawns, or even the Alley DeLuxe Hamburger. From the steak to the sandwich, everything's prepared the same — each order a work of art.

But don't take our word for it; try them!

You cannot get food here in The Alley that won't prove different, better than that served anywhere in the East Bay.

The chef makes the difference.

"Eat thy bread with joy and drink thy wine with a merry heart." — Ecclesiastes (Old Testament).

quite to his liking, as did Ray Hackett, CBS musical director. Among orchestra leaders who have come in on the downbeat at The Alley's 11:30 Breakfast are Eddie Ortiz, Murray Arnold, Del Courtney, Jack Tina, Red Nichols and Henry King. The guest register contains such names as the Russ Bennett Trio (featured at the Lake Merritt Hotel for two and a half years), the Original Pete Eastman Trio with Pete Eastman in person, the Phil Ford trio... and, at a recent Breakfast in The Alley, Joe was privileged to introduce the Page Cavanaugh Trio — now opening with Frank Smatra at the Wedgwood Room of the Waldorf Astoria in New York.

If you've breakfasted in The Alley of late, you've heard Aldo Roselli, one of the Bay Area's outstanding accordion artists, who specializes in chasing those "afternoon-after" blues. Or you may have chuckled at the wisecracks of Jack Marshall, famous comic. Or you may have seen Eddie Gilmartin of the Post-Enquirer, or Wood Soanes of the Trib, or Herb Caen of the Chronicle, jotting down some notes. Or you may have recognized the voices of such local disc-jockeys as KLX's Glen King, KROW's Lex Boyd and Ed Hewitt, KRE's Bert Axelrod, or KLX's Craig Harris.

They come from far and near to Breakfast in The Alley. One of the show's most regular visitors is Senator Don McGuirk of Nevada, who drives the 250 miles from home in Storey County at least once a month, and sometimes oftener than that, just to attend the Alley Breakfast show.

Maybe you think we're kidding, but we're not; this one's straight.

Unless Hollywood happens to be there on location, Storey County's population is next-to-nothing. Its biggest town is Virginia City, the ghost town, and it took just 32 votes to elect McGuirk, an Oakland boy, to the Legislature. Guess you could say, McGuirk is a big boy who made good in the little county.

We haven't the foggiest idea what took him to Storey County after his graduation from Oakland High in 1930... but we know what keeps bringing him back today... Breakfast in The Alley.

We hope you'll join the Senator, or the orchestra leaders, or your best friends... or whoever might be here... at Breakfast in The Alley.

You, too, can let your hair down and have fun.

So Joe came back home, and he's here to stay. He joins Cliff in the theory that if you can't have fun, the hell with it.

Joe puts it this way:

"People, celebrities, any and every one; they all have fun in The Alley. It could be anybody, it could be YOU... next Sunday... any Sunday... at Breakfast in The Alley."

Come on down and watch Joe at work and join in the fun.

You'd never guess that when Joe's not having fun in The Alley he's selling office machines and equipment... for Win Phillips... 17th Street Between Harrison and Alice.

So it's a plug! Whose sheet is this, anyway?

Here's More About

SUNDAY SHOW

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 8)

big breakfast... like Mother used to make... it's also music, fun, laughter... anything goes... from 11:30 on, every Sunday... at Breakfast in The Alley.

Anything can happen... and usually does. Script? Nope, nothing's planned... just fun, that's all.

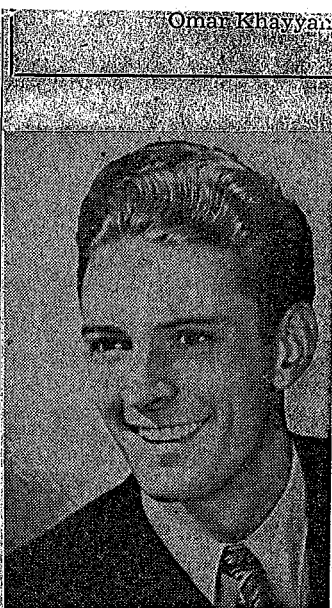
Fact is, from one week to the next... no one knows or cares much who's going to be on hand. There's always SOMEone here. You're invited. So are your friends and neighbors. If you have no friends, bring a neighbor. You'll find someone here you know, and you'll have fun.

This Breakfast Show... it's Oakland's first and oldest... first opened in January, 1946... when it was aired on KGO with KFRC's Bill Gwen as emcee... don't know how KFRC's boy, Gwen, got on KGO, but that's the way it was... know you'll recognize Gwen from the famous "Bill Gwen Show" and "Quiz of Two Cities" on the networks... same Gwen.

Anyhow, after the first 13 weeks... Oakland's own, Joe Luke... mebbe known to some of you as Lukenish... took over... and he's still here.

You say you're not having any fun? Tell you what we're going to do. You come to The Alley Sunday... any Sunday... next Sunday.

You'll have fun... at this great breakfast show.



LEX BOYD (KROW), a regular Sunday visitor. Voted "America's best-looking Disc Jockey" National Radio "Best" poll.

SEE

"JOE LUKE" Lukanish

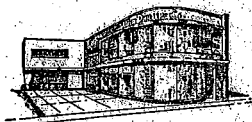
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Tables
Chairs
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ALLEY

3325 GRAND AVENUE

STEAK DINNER

Choice of:

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DINNER

STEAK

or

GROUND

SIRLOIN

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Includes:
Salad
Ketchup
or French
Dressing
Potato and
Garlic Bread

Phil Molino Presents the

TRIB 9-7-54

The Alley

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Alley is a restaurant and piano bar located in the Lake Merritt neighborhood of Oakland, California, in the United States. It is known for its nightly singing by patrons who take the microphone accompanied live by veteran pianist Rod Dibble, who also sings.

Contents

- 1 History
- 2 Rod Dibble
- 3 Reception
- 4 References
- 5 External links

History

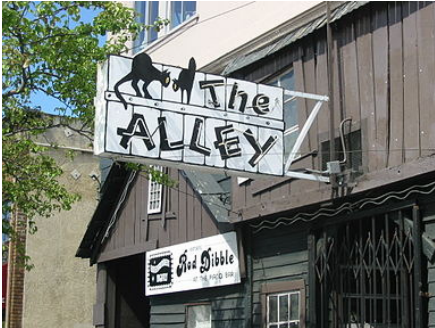
The Alley is one of the last remaining Oakland piano bars.^[1] It was founded in 1933.^[2] Most of the previous piano bars closed upwards of thirty years ago.^[1] The bar looks like a saloon or 1920s alleyway with wood shingles and windows in the interior.^[1] Writer Kimberly Chun has described the interior as being designed by "a drunken Walt Disney".^[2] It has booths throughout it similar to those found at a diner. Approximately 40,000 to 50,000 business cards from visitors are displayed all over the walls, attached with staples.^{[3][4]} Business cards from Jerry Brown and Gregg Allman can be found.^[1] Dinner, which is served nightly, focuses on American cuisine such as steaks and burgers.^[3] An average steak dinner costs around \$10. A piano is located past the main bar surrounded by a lacquered wood bar. Twelve seats sit at the bar and a pianist sits on the far end. Songbooks and microphones also rest on the bar.^[1] They primarily play songs from the Great American Songbook.^[2]

The bar used to be owned by Jody Kerr, who owned it from the 1940s until her death in 1995. Kerr's relative Jackie Simpkins owns the bar today. When she became the owner she wanted to remove the business cards, but the regular bar guests protested.^[1] In order to keep in compliance with the fire code, the bar sprays the business cards with fire retardant.^[2] In 2010, an apartment next to The Alley caught on fire. The fire destroyed the apartment but did not spread to the bar.^[5]

Rod Dibble

Pianist and singer Rod Dibble performs nightly at the bar.^[3] Visitors to the bar can sing solos accompanied by Dibble. He started playing piano in 1938 when he was six years of age. He has performed at The Alley for over fifty years starting in 1960.^{[1][6][7][8]} Dibble walks to practice ten miles every day. He often practices at the Claremont Resort or the Berkeley Marina. When he practices, he plays in 10-minute increments and learns one new song a week. He knows more than 4,000 songs by heart and changes the key based on the participating singer. *San Francisco Chronicle* writer Peter Hartlaub describes Dibble's voice as a mix of "Louis Armstrong and Tom Waits on the raspy spectrum." He plays a Baldwin piano. When a participating singer does exceptionally well Dibble rings a cowbell in their honor.^[1] When a participating singer

The Alley



The Alley piano bar in Oakland

Restaurant information

Established	1933
Current owner(s)	Jackie Simpkins
Food type	American
Dress code	casual
Street address	3325 Grand Avenue
City	Oakland
County	Alameda
State	California
Coordinates	37.813100°N 122.247130°W﻿ / ﻿37.813100°N 122.247130°W﻿ / 37.813100; -122.247130
Other locations	none

makes his or her debut at singing at The Alley, Dibble rings a much smaller bell in honor of the singer being an "Alley Virgin" regardless of whether the singer does exceptionally well. In the 1980s, Dibble accepted a recurring request, providing "frontier-style" incidental piano accompaniment to the poem "The Shooting of Dan McGrew", recited by "Tex", a regular patron who said he was a Texas Ranger.^[9]

Dibble is married, has two children and four grandchildren. He lives in Berkeley. When asked if he would ever retire, Dibble stated "I'll never retire, I'll be very happy to die right behind this piano here."^[1]

Reception

The Alley has been mentioned in travel and restaurant guides to Oakland and the San Francisco Bay Area. The book, *GrassRoutes Travel Guide to Oakland: The Soul of the City Next Door*, said of The Alley that it was "an old-time alternative to karaoke" and that it represented "Oakland at its friendliest."^[10] The bar attracted "a wacky mix of hams and crooners", said the Lonely Planet, and there were no beers on draft but the mixed drinks were "stroooooong."^[11] Rough Guides listed The Alley as a bar in 2003 then as a live music venue in 2011.^{[12][13]} A guide to dive bars in the San Francisco Bay Area listed The Alley among five of Oakland's dive bars, the group including Smitty's, a local bar several doors up the street from The Alley.^[14]

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External links

- The Piano Bar* (<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/category/arts-culture/the-piano-bar/>), a 2013 film about The Alley
- The Alley Cats* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2296985/>), a 2012 film about The Alley

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Alley&oldid=720660899"

Categories: 1933 establishments in California | Culture of Oakland, California
 | Food and drink in the San Francisco Bay Area | Music venues in the San Francisco Bay Area
 | Restaurants established in 1933 | Restaurants in the San Francisco Bay Area
 | Drinking establishments in the San Francisco Bay Area



2012 PARTNERS IN PRESERVATION AWARDS
June 14, 2012 • 7:00 p.m. CHAPEL OF THE CHIMES, OAKLAND, CA

Jennifer Gates,
California Preservation Foundation
Advocacy and Leadership

Adam Lamoreaux,
Linden Street Brewery
Advocacy and Leadership

Tony Meadow,
Samuel Knight Chapter of the Society for Industrial Archeology
Advocacy and Leadership

Alfonso Dominguez and Sarah Filley,
Popuphood
Advocacy and Leadership

“The Alley Cats” documentary
Education
“The Alley Cats” Film Production Team and Supporters
Accepting award: Cary Virtue, Director and Producer

“Oakland Landmarks: An artistic portrayal of history” book
Education
Heidi Wyckoff, artist, and Annalee Allen, writer

“10,000 Steps: Walking the Invisible City” program
Education
Marksearch Team
Accepting award: Sue Mark and Bruce Douglas

Jane Powell
Lifetime Achievement

Deborah Cooper
Lifetime Achievement

Ray Raineri
Lifetime Achievement

April 2, 2012*

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this application for the 2012 Partners in Preservation Award for my 33-minute documentary, "The Alley Cats". I have included a brief synopsis, and two copies of the DVD, for your review. I believe this project fits in the "Education" category.

The purpose of the project was threefold:

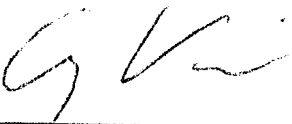
1. To capture and share some of the wonderfulness of Oakland and its history.
2. To bring focus to The Alley and how unique it is. Many people think of it as "just a bar". This film shows it is much more, and is a time capsule in and of itself preserving history.
3. Bring awareness to what some would call a dying art form, live performance at a piano bar.

It takes a village to complete something like this (Please see the list of "credits" and people involved in the project). The project was begun in May 2010, and recently completed in March 2012. Of course, there were challenges. Most of the filming was done without any budget, so I am happy to say that people gave their time freely. Getting licensing agreements for the pieces included was a big effort. Mostly getting over these obstacles took perseverance. Also, an initial bit of money from Kickstarter.com helped the film get completed.

I do not know the historic status of The Alley. One of my interests/goals was to tie the film into greater Oakland history. I believe the film brings to light some interesting facts that many people probably are not aware of.

I hope that you will consider this for your award. If not, I hope you enjoy the film. I think it is a sweet, fun story on its own. The Alley is truly a gem in Oakland history and a video of this length, 33 mins, is rare and can keep The Alley and those who love it alive for many years to come.

Thank you,



* I realize that this will have a postmark date one day after the "official" deadline. I am sending this anyway, with the hope of leniency for the reason that it was impossible to get a postmark on April 1, given it is a Sunday. I also understand, rules are rules, so do what you feel is best.

The Alley Cats
Oakland Heritage Alliance
2012 Partners in Preservation Application

Contact information: Cary Virtue, 510-717-7133, caryvirtue@gmail.com
<http://thealleycatsfilm.com>

Project synopsis:

who "The Oakland Song" opens this short documentary to images of Oakland at nighttime, setting the place for the story about local piano bar "The Alley". The central character in the film, Rod Dibble, piano player of over 50 years is introduced by Bernice, aka Big Red answers questions about Rod and the piano bar on the phone at the bar.

"Regulars" share their stories about when they first discovered The Alley and how their love of singing came about. Thembi stumbled upon The Alley while waiting for a movie to start at The Grand Lake Theater; Paul was told by co-workers; Arthur was told by Paul. James first came to The Alley as a patron when he was underage, and Bernice, has worked off an on for over 35 years as bouncer, waitress and bartender. She remembers when Rod first started working at They Alley.

The singers perform some of their favorite songs while talking about how they developed an interest and love for Tin Pan Alley and the American Songbook songs. Thembi is a California girl, growing up in Berkeley and Oakland, whose parents were musicians. Paul grew up in Cleveland in the 1950s and which was influenced by Broadway. Arthur is originally from New York and being influenced by Jazz, and sings 'Ace in the Hole', because it is about NY. Rod Dibble remembers that there were 6 piano bars at one time on Grand Ave, and now The Alley is the only one in Oakland.

James, an Oakland native, tells his story and history at The Alley throughout the film. He also gives an historical overview of what Oakland was like just before The Alley was built, around the time of the end of prohibition, when it was built, up until the time of the oldest known family member, Jody Kerr, of the current owner (Jackie Simpkins). This is done with archival footage and photos of Oakland and the bay area. The film ends with the regulars wondering what is next for the one remaining piano bar in Oakland.

Featuring

Rod Dibble

and "The Alley Cats"

Dave and Sally Chapman

Norman Gee

Arthur Hurwith

Thembianne Jackson

Linda McCormick

Bernice Pryor aka "Big Red"

Paul Rose

James Serwa

"The Oakland Song"

Written by and Courtesy of
The Goodtime Washboard 3
Bruce Bratton, Dick Fagerstrom, and Wayne Pope, 1965

Edited by
Carlo Kamin

Camera
Ilja Sarro
Cary Virtue
Rich Wells

Lighting
Rich Wells

Color Correction
Craig Mieritz

Sound Mix
Charles Stella

Production Assistants
Jennifer L Davis
Erin Lucas
Guenet Sebsibe
Lisa Turnipseed

Writer
Linda Norton

Historical Photos Courtesy of
Oakland Museum
Photo Collections of
Moses L Cohen
Harry Courtright
Dorothea Lange
Herbert Mitchell

Oakland Public Library Main Branch
Oakland History Room

Cliff and Judy Gamble

Jack W Lilywhite, Roger Woods

Songs
ACE IN THE HOLE
Sung by Arthur Hurwith
By Cole Porter

Published by Chappell & Co. Inc. (ASCAP)

BLUE LIGHT BOOGIE

Sung by Rod Dibble

Written by Jessie Mae Robinson

Used by permission of Cherio Corp (BMI)

BLUE SKIES

Sung by Norman Gee

Written by Irving Berlin

CHARLESTON by Victor Silvester (archive.org)

I DON'T KNOW WHY, I JUS DO

Sung by Dave and Sally Chapman

Written by Roy Turk and Music by Fred Ahlert

Published by Bluewater Music, Songways Inc., Pencil Mark (ASCAP)

IF I ONLY HAD A BRAIN (AND A HEART AND THE NERVE)

Sung by Paul Rose

Written by EY Harburg and music by Harold Arlen

Published by EMI Feist Catalog, Inc. (ASCAP)

I'VE GOT A FEELING IM FALLING

By Harry Link, Billy Rose and Thomas 'Fats' Waller

Published by Chappell and Co., Inc (ASCAP)

LOVERMAN (OH WHERE CAN YOU BE?)

Sung by Thembianne Jackson

Written by James O Davis, Roger J. Ramirez and Jimmy Sherman

© Universal Music Corp (ASCAP)

"Old Time Jazz" by Apple Loops

"52 Street" by Jeremy Sherman

Historical Video from archive.org

Bay Bridge being built 1937

San Francisco 1906 post earthquake

Newspaper Clippings Courtesy of

Contra Costa Times

East Bay Express

The Montclarion

Oakland Tribune

The San Francisco Chronicle

Breakfast in the Alley
KLX radio, 1948

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8-15-48

Side 1 - 3rd Broadcast

Side one - Bob Harris sings - "That's your Red Wagon"

Side two - - Guests

Side 3 - Leda
Nadia Cannon ~~Nadia Cannon~~ "It's a most unusual Day -"
Talking about television coming up - KGO

Side 4 - - Jack Bennett - "Oh you beautiful Doll" - 78 yr. old singer

Side 5 - Lois Ann Gates - "That's the beginning of the End"
Talks about King Cole Trio - might be there next week
8-22-48

Side 6 - Talking with Layton Noble - Band Leader
Nadia Cannon - sings Night & Day

4th Show - 8-22-48

Side 1 Bob Harris - Lovers - on the piano -

Side 2 - Win Phillips Plug - - Irish Whinny Taylor, Boxer

Doty Black sings - "Fellow with an Umbrella" - April showers

Side 3 - Black Label Ad - Joe Sue - Recording star

Nadia Cannon - sings "Stormy Weather"

Side 4 - " " " "
Talking about Babe Ruth - and his death -
East side - west side - sings along

Side 5 "Prisoner of Love"

Side 6 - Nadia Cannon - sings -

Celebrating here & come - sings along -

(2)

8-29-48 - #5 Show

- Side one Bob Harris - "Ain't mis Behaveu" sings
" 2 Nadia Cannon - "All of Me"
" 3 " " " "
" 4 Down at The Fat Man - Bob Harris
Joe Luke Sings -
" " "What a difference a day makes" "
Dick Dildine - Band Leader - Interview
" 5 Nadia Cannon - "Love some ~~Bob Harris~~ Body"
" 6 Bob Harris - Body & Soul

9-5-48 -

6th Show -

- Side 1 - Lionel Hampton ^{looky}
Bob Harris → OH - aint she pretty - Sings
Side 2 Joe Interviewing People -
Nadia Cannon - It only happens when I ^{dance with} ~~look at~~ you
Side 3 - Jack Bennett - I've been working on the Railroad -
Bob Harris - You came a long way from St. Louis -
Side 4 - " "
- Lionel Hampton Interview -
" " Playing - "12 Street Rag"
Side 5 - Lionel Hampton Plays w/ Bob Harris
- Tea for two -
Nadia Cannon - "Blue Skys"
Side 6 - Last Part Bad shape - didn't Record - it

9-12-48 #7 Show

- Side 1 - ~~Edgar Hayes~~
 Bob Harris She's a rambling Rose
 Side 2 - Interviews - Barbara Cruise
 Nadia Canon - Bob - Don't be modest me
 Side 3 - Bob Harris - Till the Real Thing comes along
 Side 4 - ~~Bob~~ Bob Hayes - Singer - "Throw away your memories"
 Side 5 - Edgar Hayes - "Stardust" on the Piano - ~~Edgar~~
 "Tea for two" on the Piano -
 Side 6 - Nadia Canon - "Solitude"
 Bob Hayes Sings ~~Bob~~ "Donkey Serenade" - Sings
 Ray Baldwin on the Piano -

9-19-48 - 8th Show

- Side 1 Bob Harris - Honeysuckle Rose - Sings
 Side 2 Nadia Canon - Mood Indigo
 Side 3 - Bob Harris - Everyday - I love you - a little bit more
 " 4 Nadia Canon - "You call everybody darling"
 " 5 Isaac Walton League party - Environment Cists
 Bob Harris - "Temptation" on Piano
 6 " " " on Piano
 Nadia Canon "Don't Blame me"

9th Show
9-26-48

4

Side one - Joe talking about Newspaper
sings along { OLD Gray Bonnet
Oth you Beautiful Doll
Mrs Del Courtney -

Side 2 - Black Atkins - sings "Night And Day"
Nadia Canon { Red Thing comes along -
{ Don I Love

Side 3 Tune mixers from Theater Club - Play = my Happiness
Side 4 " " " "
" " " " acur dion - Violin -

Frankie Matches -
Masters - w/wife Philis Miles
Talks about Lorry & Ruth Heavens -

Side 5 - Frankie Masters and his wife sings
Dorothy Donigan singing and playing
Prelude in G sharp minor
Great Piano Playing
Tea for Two - on piano -

Side 6 - End of - Tea for Two -

Side 6 - Dorothy Donigan - Singing & Piano - Great
Prelude in G Sharp minor

years - 12 weeks

9.

10th Show
10-3-48

Side 1 Talking about Carlitz Black Label - Renewal C for 1 year -
E. K. Fernandez - of Hawaii

Bob Harris - on Piano - Long Solo } Point Secana
" " " " " }

Side 2

Side 3 Nodia Canon - "Serenades"

Side 3 Ed Hewitt - Old Man River -

Side 4 " " " " " "

Anita Claire - "It's magic" singer

Side 5 -

E. K. Fernandez - of Hawaii - talks about Pearl Harbor!

Side 5 Nodia Canon - "How deep is the ocean"

Side 6 " " " " " "
Bob Norris - "Memphis in June"

11-7-48 - #15

Side one - Bob Harris - at Piano -

5 Solos with

Side 2 - 5 Solos with

Nodia Canon - Sentimental Journey

Side 3

Side 4 Irene Knox Tea for two
all of me

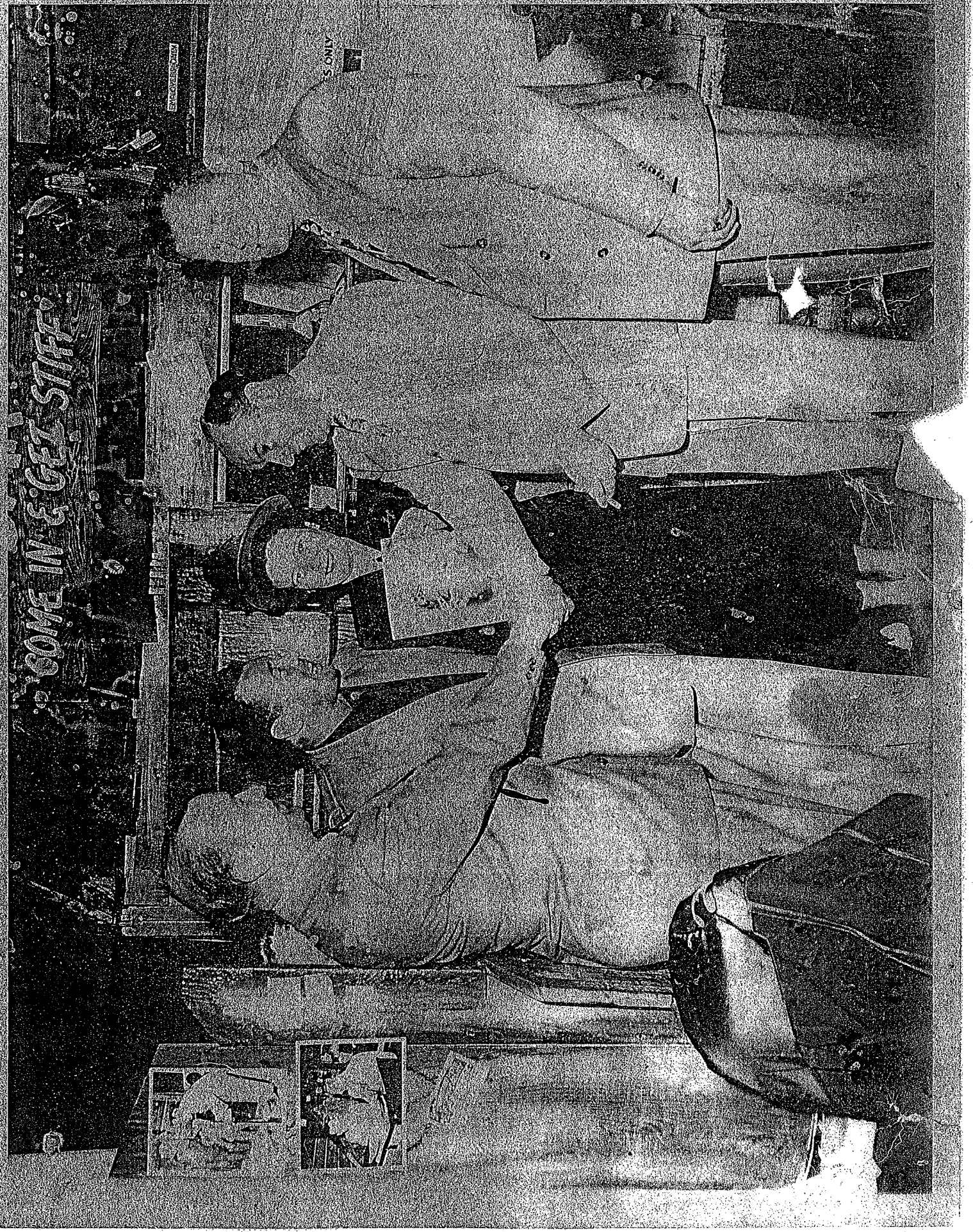
Bobby Bloncher on organ

Side 6 -

Nodia Lovers Blues

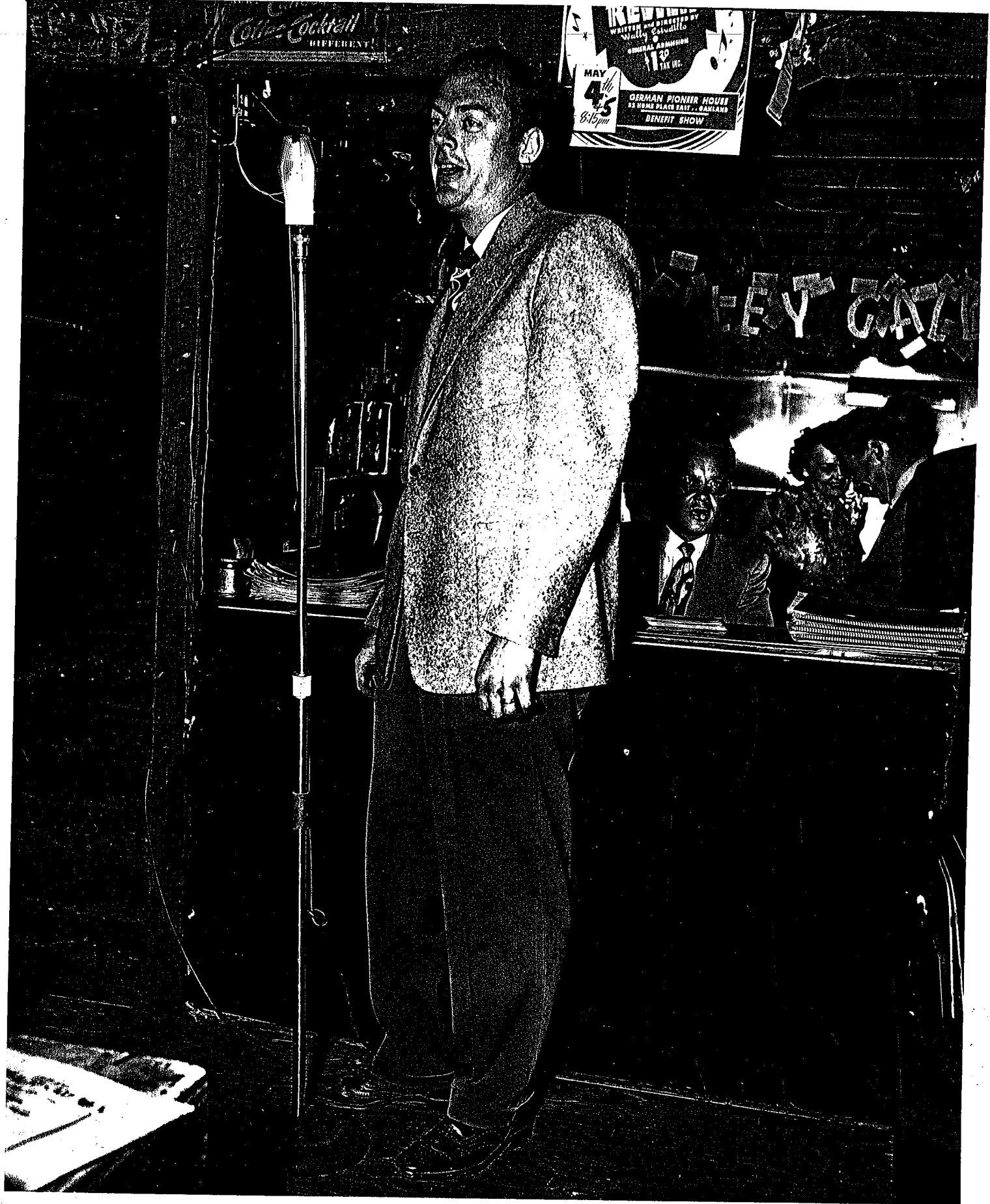
! FUN!
Entertainment
1812 TE-2 9-505
P. 15-16
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CLIFF GAMBLE,
left

BOB HARRIS,
right

