

July 12, 1919 - April 6, 2003

We dedicate Jubilee XXX to the memory of Bill Borchert, who, along with a stalwart band of true believers, founded the Jubilee back in 1974 when Memorial Day was just a solemn occasion for cleaning up cemeteries and mourning those who had gone before.

Today, we mourn former Jubilee director Bill Borchert, who died earlier this year at the age of 83.

Borchert, we like to think, could have been the biggest Dodge Dealer west of the Mississippi, or the guy who went looking for Kurtz in darkest Africa, or maybe a lumber baron in the northwest. He was bigger than life, and if we'd been asked, we probably would have opined that the grim reaper would never get him — he was too big.

He was big — at six feet, five inches, he was a highly talented basketball player; and it was that talent that led him to jazz. During his stint in the navy, he served aboard ship alongside a kid who wanted to learn the hook shot. The kid was a trumpet player and so Bill worked a deal: he'd teach the kid the hook shot and the kid would teach him how to play trumpet.

"He never became much of a basketball player and I never became much of a trumpet player," Borchert told me one time. It was true that he was possessed of a lip that never really did respond to a silver mouthpiece, but that didn't stop him, for half a century, from fronting the Oregon Jazz Band an aggregation that could be said to be as much a musical manifestation of his personality as anything else. He loved to entertain; he had a certain concept of what would entertain people and he stuck to that to the end — barroom songs, danceable music and lots of schtick.

But he also had the sense to surround himself with people who could play and the band was about as successful as a Dixieland band ever gets, touring foreign countries, sailing the high seas and entertaining any pig roast and county fair that he could gain entry to, often to the chagrin of his band members as he drove them hundreds of miles in acute discomfort, but always with the exhortation that this was going to be a blast.



Borchert had an entrepreneurial bent, a ton of energy and a physical presence. A fountain of ideas, he was constantly on the lookout for ideas from others. The result was that in the years he was the Jubilee's director, it pioneered myriad features that are now copied in festivals around the world. Where most folks saw the State of California's unlovely parking lot under Interstate 5, he saw Freeway Gardens, and we can't think of a better example of the panache he brought to this festival than that. He and his merry band saw the wisdom of both concert sites and cabarets, and concerts that featured elegant pianists as well as clattering

washboards. They loved the notion of music in the streets and a good party. It's impossible to say which ideas were his and which were those of his fellow pioneers — they worked because he gave them the room to work.

And if anyone wants to salute Bill Borchert during this festival, we'd suggest filling up a tankard with Coors Beer and drinking it down fast. You might want to hitch up your pants and clear your throat at the same time, grin and pronounce that life is good.

It was good for Bill Borchert and he made ours better, too.

...Gene Berthelsen



Bill with "Bartender's Quartet"
Gene Berthelsen on trumpet, Maren Berthelsen
and Jan (MacKenzie) Sutherland



Photo by Maggie Hull