

The San Francisco Harpoon Fish Trap



Shown in the Sprung Position



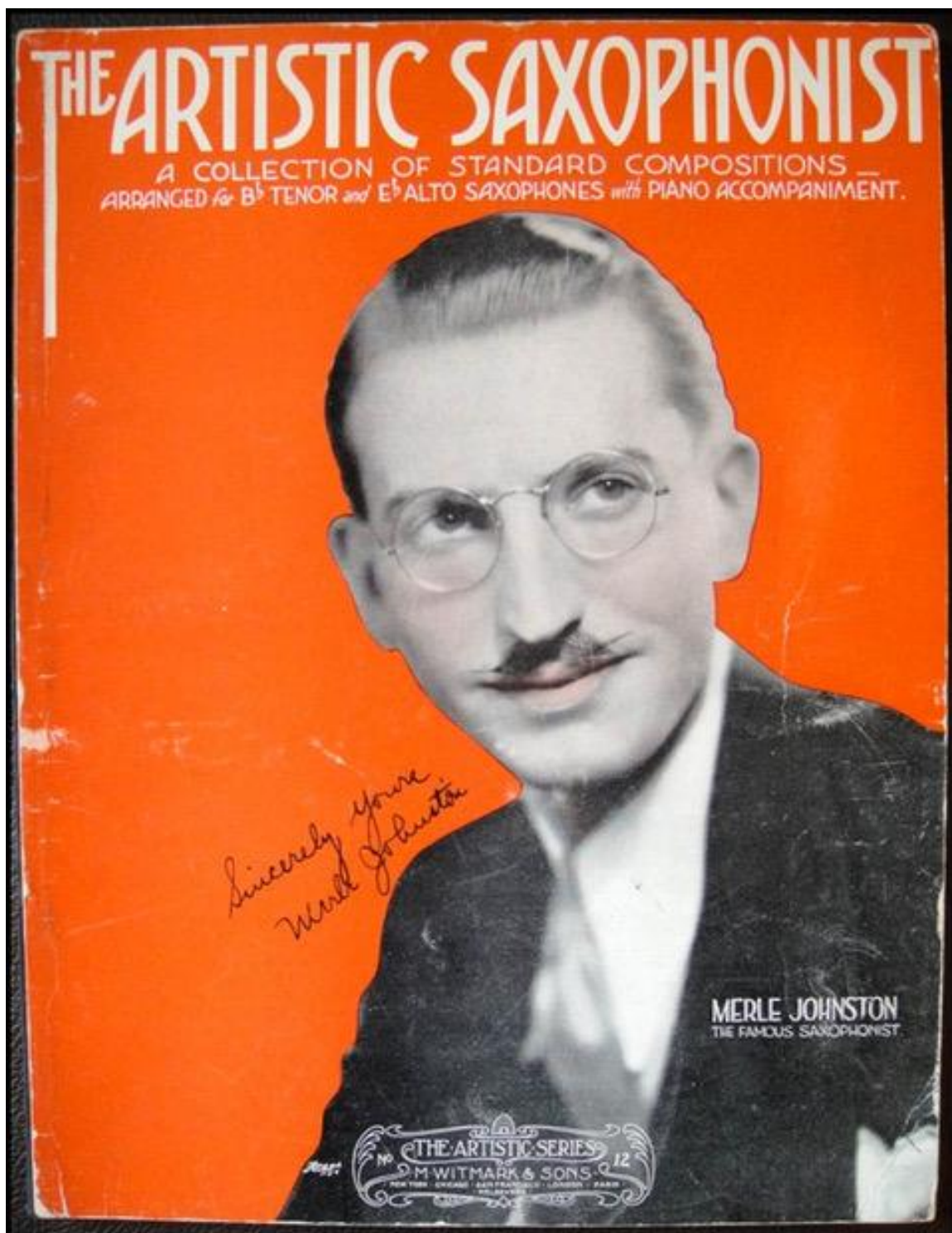
Inventor Earl Sylvester Professional saxophone player 1932



Shown in the set position.



note quarter for scale



Merle Johnston 1934 (Earl's mentor)

Background of the Inventor and Trap

Patent is titled..."Latch and release mechanism for harpoon and fishhook combination." Granted November 20, 1973, being US patent # 3,772,814

Earl also patented a break-down saxophone, which he titled for his patent..... "Wind Instrument and Key Mounting For The Same." Granted Sept. 25, 1951, being US patent # 2,569,029

Earl moved cross country to New York City in 1930 from southern California and took saxophone lessons from Merle Johnson.....Merle's son was the movie actor Troy Donohue (this was his stage name).... (no relation to Al Donohue).

Played in the Al Donahue Orchestra at least through the 1930's.....during which time they played on many cruise trips to Bermuda.

Earl preferred not to play his own saxophone, but rather a 1933 Selmer "Super Sax".

Earl O. Sylvester Born 1910.....died Jan. 31, 1983

Family story....in 1959 or 1960, Earl was working in Kenosha, Wisconsin at the La Blanc Music Company, where he tested and was quality control for their saxophones coming off the assembly line. This factory also made clarinets, and Pete

Fountain was one of their customers. One time when Pete was at the factory (either picking up a new licorice stick, or getting one repaired), he heard Earl playing in the back of the factory, whereupon he said "who is that?".....he was told it was

their quality control guy, and then Pete went back and, after listening outside the room for a while, went in and said "What the hell are you working here for?".....they proceeded to play (jam) with each other for the next 2 hours, during which time

the entire factory shut down...and everyone just listened to them.....(personal communication)

The "Harpoon and Fishhook Combination" shown here was made by Earl in 1952, but he did not patent it until more than twenty years later....and is the only one he ever made.....(personal communication)

This trap was designed for striped bass in San Francisco Bay and its tributaries. Earl used to go fishing with a friend there in a boat, and was frustrated that they were "missing" so many bites(from the collection of William Blausen).

...and for a man as skilled as Earl must have been in working with brass parts and soldering them and fitting them together, I would think that building this "Harpoon Trap and Fishhook Combination" out of odd brass parts from the saxophones he

was building would have seemed like child's play.....he made between 2-300 of his break-down saxes, which can be found for sale occasional on eBay.

You'll note that the patent drawing from 1973 looks absolute nothing like the trap that Earl made 20 years previously.....with the reason for this being unknown.

<https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/17/41/4c/47689610b65bfa/US3772814.pdf>

.. along w/ breakdown saxophone patent link.....Pat. #2,569,029.....Sept. 25, 1951

<https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/89/2e/54/7d56337017ca89/US2569029.pdf>