

ALBERT BURBANK  
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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Herb Friedwäld.

The interview, with Albert Burbank, Sr., was conducted at [his home], 1515 North Roman Street, New Orleans.

Answering RBA's question about the interest of AB's brother in some picnics, AB says his brother would organize the picnic, hiring the band, selling tickets, etc., not for the profit [if any], but for the pleasure of doing it and attending the picnics, which were held on a Sunday at Milneburg two or three times during a summer. AB does not remember which pavillion the picnics usually used; he says the name of one of the pavillions on the lake was Lucian's. AB tells HF that the pavillions [or camps] were just big rooms with tops; he tells RBA that there was not much difference between them and Mama Lou's and other camps at Little Wood and Citrus. The band at the picnics would choose a corner inside the room to set up; the people attending would not sit down (there were no chairs provided for them), but would dance, etc. At RBA's request, AB describes the food served at the picnics [apparently the people brought their own food from home]. There were [usually] long benches around the inside walls. Keg beer was served. AB says the band would arrive at the picnics about 11 AM, and would play until 5 or 6 PM. AB says Manuel Perez's band played picnics, and that he remembers seeing "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson] playing in bands at picnics; the bands were

all six piecers, and all used banjos in the rhythm section, never pianos, and AB does not remember having seen a guitar in any of those bands.

Answering RBA, AB says some of the clarinetist he admired in the old days were "Big Eye" Louis, Lorenzo Tio [Jr.] and [Alphonse] Picou. He says he has been told that he and George Lewis play in a somewhat similar manner, and he guesses the comparison is about as close [correct] as any. He answers RBA saying that he didn't hear George Lewis until later years. He listened to records before he began playing clarinet, being especially fond of blues singers, like Ethel Waters and Mamie Smith; he liked the clarinetists he heard on those records, too; he liked Jimmy <sup>-it</sup>Noone, although he didn't hear him much; he also liked Johnny Dodds.

Answering HF, AB says the bands at picnics consisted of clarinet, trombone, trumpet, bass, drums and banjo. Answering HF's request for a comparison of styles of the picnic bands and of latter-day Dixieland bands, such as the one in which AB plays, at the Paddock Lounge, AB says the music was pretty much the same, except that the tempos were slower and there were not a lot of solos taken by the picnic band players. The band just played along; nobody took solos, but some of the players would take their horns down, to rest, and leave the playing for the moment to the others; AB does not remember that any of

the rhythm instruments ever took solos then. The people would [sometimes] applaud at the end of the number; there would be about five minutes break between each number. AB says it seems to him that there is no break between numbers at the Paddock; tempos there are usually fast. AB answers RBA, saying that the tempos of the majority of tunes played at dances depends on what the particular crowd wants, and the way to find out what they want is to play a fast number and then a slow number, and observe the participation in dancing to each of the numbers. Answering HF, AB says that the bands he first played in were like the picnic bands rather than like the Paddock band.

HF asks about solos in tunes; AB says about the only solo he can remember as having been part of a tune is the clarinet solo in [the trio of] "High Society". RBA asks AB where he got the solo he plays after he plays the traditional clarinet solo; AB says he just makes it up; RBA says he has liked it, through the years. HF says there is a solo on "St. Louis Blues" which is played by AB, Picou, "Mehly" Barnes and George Lewis; he asks where it came from. AB says it was in an orchestration, and that is where he first knew it; he says it was the first solo he ever learned on "St. <sup>Louis</sup> Lewis Blues", and he still plays it, with some of his own slight alterations. He doesn't know how long ago the orchestration was published. Answering RBA, AB says he doesn't consider himself a reader, but a speller.

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Again answering RBA, he says he played his first professional job about 1920. Answering RBA, AB says his first band job was with Isaiah Morgan, at the Artisan Hall, but he reconsiders, and says his first job was with Omer Bernard, at the same place; he says Adolphe Alexander [Jr.] [in interview of March 18, 1959, he also mentions Barney Bigard], played regularly with Bernard, but Alexander would sometimes get a better job, so he would get AB to substitute for him. AB says he knew a lot [of] tunes then, but he could play only the melody on most of them; his improvising came later, by playing and practicing; when he heard others make variations he liked, he would whistle the variation until he could get home to his instrument; then he would play it until he had learned it. AB sometimes played with his brother, with whom he lived a while, at the brother's home; the brother played "a little piano". Answering HF, AB says he used to get most of the ideas he would whistle and them work out from records having Johnny Dodds on them. Answering RBA, AB says his brother, Paul Burbank, first played drums, then took up piano, but didn't play with bands, except for a few jobs. His father, a painter, had a mandolin at home, but AB doesn't remember that he ever played it; he doesn't remember that any uncles or grandfathers played, either; he says he just took up clarinet because he loved it; he says a band without a clarinet just wasn't

a band to him, and he still feels that way. Answering both, he says he got a soprano saxophone one time, but took it back to the store just two weeks later; he says it is just too different from the clarinet, and he felt it might mess up his clarinet playing. Answering RBA, AB says the personnel of Omer Bernard's band [Bernard, trumpet] were, besides AB on clarinet, Buddy Manaday, banjo; Ernest Rogers, drums; Ambrose [Powers] (who was Lawrence Toca's uncle), trombone; (AB thought the bass player may have been Thomas Hoaglund [sp?], but he is asked about a person and remembers that) the bass player was "Ottee" [Otey? sp?], but he doesn't know anything about Ottee or what his correct name was. The job at the Artisan with Bernard was for a dance. AB agrees with HF that he could just play melody then; he says it was when "Margie" had just come out. Answering RBA, AB says he doesn't remember the personnel of Isaiah Morgan's band; he says Jim [Robinson] played with him sometimes, and Andrew Morgan, too. Although the other members of Bernard's band were not too happy to see AB coming on the job, AB was sent so often, and was improving all the time, that Bernard finally asked him if he wanted to be a regular member; AB accepted the offer. AB says that after Adolphe Alexander, the regular clarinetist was Barney Bigard, who would also send AB as a substitute. After Bernard's band, AB went with the Olympia Band, an 8-piecer led by Arnold DePass, drummer; others in

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the band (2 trumpets, sax, clarinet, trombone and 3 rhythm) were Elmer Talbert and another trumpet player (sometimes Herb Morand), trumpets; AB, clarinet; Henry Julian, sax [and clarinet?]; others un-named. The band used [stock] orchestrations. AB played with that band until he got a regular [steady] job at the Alamo, a jitney dance at Burgundy and Canal, with Willie Pajaud, trumpet player. The Alamo band did not use sheet music; AB says they didn't have time to fool with music, because they would play one number after another; he says the average length of each number was 2 or 3 choruses. Answering HF, AB says he enjoys playing head arrangements more than playing written arrangements, one reason being that the written ones sometimes didn't sound half as good as parts AB could make himself.

Answering RBA, AB says Walter Duvernay, who started him on clarinet, used to play a few jobs, but not with any one band. Duvernay taught AB how to "lip" his instrument, among other things. RBA says AB plays very long phrases, and asks him how he breathes; AB says he doesn't know, and that he can't explain it. AB never heard Duvernay play with a band, so he can't tell HF if Duvernay sounds like AB's playing or not.

Answering RBA, AB says he was born in New Orleans, Seventh Ward, Allen and Prieur [Streets], not far from his present residence. The next place he knows about having lived was at 2021 Allen, between

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Galvez and Johnson.

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Herb Friedwald.

AB agrees with RBA's statement that AB played with a lot of bands, including those of Buddy Petit and Kid Thomas [Valentine]. AB doesn't remember if he started with Thomas before or after the Depression, but he was with him over a year; the jobs with Thomas were over the river, on weekends. The jobs with Petit were usually out of town--e.g., Bogalusa [Louisiana] and in Mississippi; Petit worked [some of the jobs in?] Bogalusa on a 60-40 gate split, the band getting 40% and the Bogalusa people getting 60%. Petit played the only trumpet in his 6-piece band; AB answers RBA, saying there is no one around New Orleans today who plays like Petit; answering HF, AB says Petit's style was not loud and that he was not a high note man, but he could play so much in the [middle and low] register[s]. Answering RBA, AB says Petit did not play lead all the time; he could play ad lib, playing a lot of [broken] chords. Sometimes, when AB had the lead, Petit would play a second harmony to him. Besides Petit and AB, some other members of that band were Sammy Penn, drums, and George Washington, trombone; AB doesn't remember the other players. AB answers HF, saying Penn played them about like he does now, except that he has improved in recent years; AB answers HF, saying he likes to play with Penn. In his younger days, AB might work with 4 [or more] bands during the course of a week; he would take jobs as

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they were offered him; he always had a day job, too; he was a stock cutter in a shoe factory. RBA asks AB if playing music is worth it; AB says it has been worth it to him, and that it is to any man who can make a living at it; he says he plays music because he loves it and enjoys it, and says he would not like any other kind of work. RBA asks if AB made enough money to live on when he was playing with Omer Bernard; AB says the amount was not as much as he receives today, but he could buy as much then as he can today. He answers a question by saying that not all musicians had day jobs in the old days, that some of them got by just playing music, because they "didn't have those juke boxes and things" competing; he says when the shoe factory closed, he himself just played music for a while. HF asks if AB worked with Danny Barker in the old days; AB says he thinks Barker played his first job with him, a 3-piece job at the lake, which was every night for a year or more. AB says Barker was playing banjo then. He says he himself would get tired sometimes, but not as tired as he does at his present job at the Paddock Lounge, although he played the only melody instrument in the trio [AB is considerably older today than he was many years ago, n'est-ce pas?]. Answering HF, AB says there were a lot of trios and quartets, because bar rooms used smaller groups. AB answers RBA, saying he didn't hear anybody in "tunks" [low dives] because he didn't go into those places. AB

answers, saying he didn't know any clarinet players who specialized in playing blues; he says "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson] and [Alphonse] Picou did not play the blues much. AB says he played his same style with the various bands he worked in. AB says there was a trumpet player from Slidell [Louisiana], Leonard Parker, who used to send for AB and Sammy Penn to come play with his bands, which travelled in Mississippi. RBA says George Lewis and Dan Moody [tb] played with Parker some; AB says Moody was in the band, too [when AB was with it]. Answering HF, AB says Parker was good, (when asked for a comparison) that he liked him better than Kid Thomas; AB tells RBA that Parker played a lot of fancy stuff, something on the order of Lee Collins. Answering HF, AB says he played with Collins, that Collins played second trumpet in the Olympia Band at the time AB played in it. Ike Robinson was the trombonist with the Olympia; Thomas Copeland was the bass player; AB says the banjo player was called Benny (possibly Benoît). AB says there were no clarinet players who were called "King", as were some trumpet players--e.g., King Oliver, King Keppard; he says the only clarinet player called "Kid" was Ernest Moliere [sp?] who called himself "Kid Ernest". RBA says he has heard people refer to AB as "The Clarinet Wizard". RBA says he heard AB on B<sup>b</sup> clarinet and George Lewis on E<sup>b</sup> clarinet playing a funeral near the Tulane Club; it is noted that the occasion was unusual.

[See photograph in Archive. Possibly Kid Howard Ross Band.]

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Ab says he has played in a dance band with two clarinetists, the other being Picou; he says each played his own variations; AB says he played a second part to "High Society", a part Picou had written for him; the band was the Olympia, and Picou had been brought in to play when the saxophone player got a regular job. RBA comments that he heard AB at a place [Bernard's? RBA] at Washington and Derbigny, when AB replaced [temporarily] Kid Howard; Emile Barnes, the regular clarinetist, and AB split the range, one playing upper and one playing lower. AB says he heard Barnes in the old days; Barnes played a lot with Wooden Joe [Nicholas]. AB played some jobs, not as a regular, with Nicholas, in the Camellia Band, in the old days. RBA asks how AB got with Nicholas for the recording session; AB says Bill Russell got him for that; AB says Rudi Blesh, who had heard him, told him he was going to see to it that, the next time Russell came to do recording, AB was recorded, and that is how AB got on records [cf. WR's notes]. AB doesn't remember where or with whom he was playing at the time he made the records, but he was not playing with Nicholas or with Jim [Robinson]; they had no rehearsal for the records--they just made them, because, as AB says, the bands around New Orleans mostly have the same routines.

AB moved from the 2000 block of Allen when he was about 9 or 10; he thinks the family moved to Robertson, between St. Bernard and

Annette then. He lived on Prieur, between Lapeyrouse and Onzaga, when he got his first clarinet, and he thinks he was about 17 then. He was supposed to take lessons from Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], but when he went for his first lesson, with book, Tio told him he was going away. AB moved from that place when he got married, in 1923, to Aubry and Prieur; he thinks he was playing with the Olympia Band when he got married. AB has children; a daughter took up piano, but doesn't play much now; one of the sons played a couple of jobs here on bass; AB says he went to California, where he has taken up guitar, and he now plays both; AB lived on Aubry Street five or six years; he doesn't remember where he moved to from there.

RBA asks about AB's nephews; Clement Tervalon plays trombone and bass; Homer Eugene plays trombone, guitar and banjo; Wendell Eugene plays trombone; Charlie Burbank (last with Tommy Ridgley's band) plays sax.

AB answers HF, says he enjoyed playing with all the bands. They have been all just about the same style; they all have read a little, including the Kid Thomas band; the Thomas band would refer to the music until the band had the number committed to memory. The Buddy Petit band did not use any orchestrations at all. Asked about Bush Hall, AB says some things Hall played would remind him of Petit; Hall did not worry much about orchestrations. AB played with Hall just a

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few jobs. Questioned, AB says he would just as soon play with one band as another around New Orleans now; he says there is not much difference, that some bands may have better tempos than others....

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Herb Friedwáld.

AB doesn't remember any other members of Bush Hall's band. [Cf. written interview with Lawrence Marrero by RBA].

Asked about his Mardi Gras venture as a lone musician, AB relates again [see previous interview] that his sister, and friends, asked him to mask and go with them as they walked around the streets; AB did as asked, and played his clarinet the entire day, the only instrument, except for a couple of tambourines. AB says he could play only melody at that time; that was the first time AB played on the street. "Margie" was new then, and AB says "I blowed the devil out of 'Margie' all day." AB doesn't remember the band he was playing with when he first began making variations, instead of just playing the melody.

AB says he worked with the Eureka [Brass Band] about a year; RBA had said that it must have been around 1944-45, because AB was in the book, "Jazzways", with the Eureka. Although there were no B<sup>b</sup> clarinet parts in the Eureka music then, AB did OK, as he would play his own ideas, and he could use the tenor sax parts. RBA says AB has mentioned that he played in the D'jalma Ganier band, and AB says he did, but it only played at Mardi Gras time; AB agrees that DeDe [Pierce] also played with that band. AB says he played with DeDe several times, but not regularly. AB says he worked at the Happy Landings with George E. [Georgie ?] Parker, and that DeDe worked there quite

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a while with them. RBA asks about Parker; AB says Parker played nice Dixieland piano; he could swing and play with feeling. RBA says he wishes someone had recorded Parker; he says he met him at Eddie Pierson's funeral. HF asks AB if he has played with Ernie Cagnolatti; AB says Cagnolatti played with them [at the Paddock]some, and says he used to hire Cagnolatti on some of his own [pre-Paddock] jobs; RBA says AB and Cagnolatti played together in Paul Barbarin's band. Answering HF, AB says he likes to play with Cagnolatti. RBA asks if D'jalma Ganier, a trumpeter and brass band leader, also played dance jobs; AB says Ganier did, and would hire him sometimes; he answers RBA's further question, saying Ganier was a [more] straight trumpet player; he infers that Ganier used orchestrations, and also played some Dixieland. Answering HF, AB explains his statement that some bands have better tempos than others by saying that some bands keep the time steadier than others. HF asks which drummers kept good time; AB says that in the old days most all the drummers kept good time, and that the banjo players did, also. RBA asks if the banjo players played a lot of "double raps" or played a straight four; AB says they made a lot of raps. AB agrees with RBA that he used to play a lot of double time on some tunes; he doesn't now, because he doesn't get a chance [tempos too fast]. Answering HF, AB says he thinks all the drummers here now are good. HF asks AB which

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drummer he would hire if he had his own band; AB says there are so many he knows, but then he says that there are drummers here who are not known much for their Dixieland drumming, but who are, nevertheless, good Dixieland drummers, and he names Ernest ["Kid"] Milton and Albert Jiles. AB agrees with RBA that he worked with Jiles on Magazine Street once upon a time. Answering HF, AB says he would rather have a piano in a band than a banjo, because the piano would be more support; answering further, AB says all the piano players are about the same. RBA asks about Johnny Dave's band, in which AB played, and Henry Landry, trumpet, who was also in the band; AB says Landry just couldn't make it as a trumpet player; AB doesn't remember others in that band; the band operated in the Twenties, before Dave played with Sam Morgan; AB says he, AB, and Dave were just "coming up" then. AB says he believes that was the first band he started with; the band got some jobs, and would rehearse once a week at Dave's house. RBA asks about Kid Ory; AB did not know Ory until Ory sent for him to come play in California where AB played for 3 months. Ory heard AB when AB went to California with Octave Crosby's band, to Los Angeles, where they made some records, and also worked in the place where Ory had been working [Beverly Cavern?]. Others in the Ory band at the time were [Minor] "Ram" [Hall], drums; [Ed] "Montudi" [Garland], bass; Alvin Alcorn (who joined at same time AB did), trumpet; Don Ewell, piano (now with [Jack]

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Teagarden). AB did not record with Ory. Answering HF, AB says that for his own playing, of the records he has appeared on, the ones he likes best are the [Riverside] Kid Thomas records; AB says he has been told that the record is the best seller [of the Riverside series], and HF says that is so in New York, too. HF says it got a good review in the New York Times [John S. Wilson]; the reviewer said AB was about the best clarinetist playing. RBA asks about Bob Lyons; AB said he had a band, that he played with Lyons for a short time, but not with the group that he had when he had Lee [Collins] and others...; Rudolph Beaulieu played drums, but AB doesn't remember any of the others. Asked about Manuel Perez, AB says he played with him at Milneburg 2 or 3 times, in a band led by Henry "Booker T" Glass. AB says Perez played straight, and was strong; he did not play "ratty" [dirty]. HF asks if AB was the strongest clarinetist in the old days, as he is today; AB says he thinks he was. RBA asks how long AB has been playing "Eh, La Bas"; AB says since he began playing clarinet. There is talk of AB's speaking French; AB says his mother would talk to them in French, and they would answer in English, not liking French. AB does not use French now, except sometimes when singing. AB says [as far as he knows] that "Eh, La Bas" has always had the same melody. Answering RBA, AB says Lionel Dupas [sp?] was Henry Julian's god-father; Julian [saxophone] recommended that AB go to Dupas for lessons; AB did

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for a few lessons, and doesn't now remember why he stopped going to him. RBA asks if AB still has the home recording made by himself, [Elmer] "Coo Coo" [Talbert], Albert Jiles and some pianist named Lester; RBA says Jiles still has a copy; AB says he never got a copy. HF says he heard AB play one of his own tunes at the Jeunes Amis [Hall]; he asks how many tunes AB has written; AB says he has only one copyrighted, but that he had another. He says it is a Dixieland tune, and that no bands play it; he says he would play it if he had his own band, but that he wouldn't ask any other leader to play it. The name of the tune is "Lucky Me"; upon request, AB sings it. RBA asks about AB's playing on Decatur Street; AB says that at one time Decatur Street was just like Bourbon Street is to-day; there were a lot of three and four-piece bands working there, every night. Asked about some places on Decatur, AB says he worked in a lot of places there, saying he might have worked one night at Popeye's. The bands played for dancing, not shows. RBA asks about AB's playing at the Preakness and the [Kentucky] Derby; AB says the band plays a number between races, and plays a dance the night before the big race. Most of the time, the band is on a float, and is moving around the field to various spots. AB goes with Octave Crosby's band to those events; before Crosby, it was Bill Matthew's band. RBA and AB agree that Papa Celestin's band probably did not go to those races. HF asks if AB has

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any favorite tunes to play, and comments that he always seems to have "Weary Blues" on his records; AB says he likes to play that, and all of them. He then names "High Society". He says he doesn't like a lot of marches. AB agrees with RBA, saying he likes "Ting-a-ling". Answering HF, AB says he likes "Gettysburg". AB answers RBA, saying the only time he ever played with Punch [Miller] was on an advertising job, when AB had just started playing. AB answers HF, saying he played a lot with Percy Humphrey, on spot jobs, before AB went to work regularly at the Paddock [Lounge]. AB answers HF, saying he never played with Louis Dumaine. Answering RBA, AB says he played one job with Chris Kelly, but he doesn't remember where it was or anything about it. Answering RBA, AB says he never played with [Kid] Rena. Answering HF, AB says the Kid Thomas band sounds about the same today as it did years ago, and that he doesn't think Thomas has changed his own style.

End of Reel III