

ABBEY "CHINEE" FOSTER
I [only]
March 21, 1961

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins

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~~EE~~ Chinese Foster describes the technique he used when singing into his snare drum: he sings and blows against the drum head, snare side. He may sing the song the band is playing, or imitate one or more animal sounds. He stands, but keeps the beat going on his bass drum; he also continues to beat the snare drum with one stick on the batter head of the ~~XXXX~~ snare drum. ^[with his right hand, RC] RC mentions that Sammy Penn sometimes sings into his drum; CF says Penn got the ~~X~~ idea from him. CF tightens or loosens the snares with his right hand, ~~XXXXXX~~ to coincide with the ~~XXXX~~ pitch of the animal sounds he makes; he does not beat on the drum with his stick when actually manipulating the snares. CF says he and Punch Miller, playing together in Jack Carey's band, were the originators of the idea of singing and/or ~~XXX~~ making animal sounds ~~XXX~~ through the drum; they were on the way home from a job at National Park when they stopped at [Favalo's?] Bar, at Third and Franklin; they consented to play a couple of tunes at the place; Punch suggested that CF try singing or shouting ~~XXXXXXXX~~ across his snare drum for special effect; CF did the ~~XXXXXX~~ tiger's roar, usually done by the trombone, in "Tiger Rag." They later did [Nick] LaRocca's "Livery Stable Blues," with CF doing the imitations of the various animals in that tune. The year was 1919. The job Punch and CF had just played at National Park was for a dance.

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especially those for colored,
Almost all dances, ~~were~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ advertised by bands playing on
wagons. Personnel of Jack Carey's band: Carey, trombone; CF, drums;

Punch, trumpet; Walter Robichaux, clarinet; Lorenzo Staulz, banjo;

Chester Zardis, bass violin. Punch later formed his own band. CF

says a six-piece band was a big band then; & they could play as much

music as a twelve-piece 'band of today) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

~~XXXXXX~~ "because mans [sic] was very powerful at~~XX~~ the time, and

everybody was on his own bottom, see what I mean." CF explains that

"everybody was on his own bottom" meant "every man for hisself."

"You see, in [] ?] I tell plenty people, to my estimation,

jazz--there's no such thing about--jazz is what you make it. See,

because there's no writing for jazz, there's no music for jazz; jazz

comes out of your head; you never know what you're going to do till

you stumble up on it. In other words, I would call it a gang of mistakes,

a gang of mistakes with quick [re]covery." CF explains that in the

early days of jazz, a non-reading musician would hear a reading musician

play a piece and try to imitate it; in doing so, he would naturally make

some mistakes. CF says that's what he calls jazz.

(WR takes photographs of CF pretending to play a set of drums.)

CF talks about shifting 2/4 or 4/4 ~~XXXXXX~~ beats from his foot, on the

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bass drum, to his hands, playing the rest of the traps. (CF plays and scats "Down In Honky Tonk Town," and repeats it.) Four-beat bass drum may be used at any time, but it is usually reserved for the last chorus, which is loud; purpose of the extra volume is to make the ^{dancers} people feel good, "to get their mind upset." *Talk about dynamics.*

(CF demonstrates how he sometimes leaves his drums, walks over to the bass violin and ~~XX~~ beats his sticks on the strings of the bass while the bass player fingers the strings. WR provides a [soprano] violin for the purpose, and does the fingering.) CF first used the routine while playing in Jack Carey's band, which was a barrelhouse band; barrelhouse music was later called jazz. Carey's band couldn't play in some places because the people there didn't permit barrelhouse music. Punch Miller could play anything he heard; he might change it a bit, but it would be basically what he heard.

CF was an inmate of Jones [i. e., Waifs] Home before Louis Armstrong was sent there; there was no band there when CF was, not even a pair of drumsticks. There was a bugle, which was played by Ikey Smooth [sp?] while the other boys drilled in the manner of soldiers. CF considered Smooth a better trumpet player than Armstrong. ^{but not early -} Smooth played in a band of youngsters which was to ^{be} ~~have been~~ called the [Pearlington?] Band, but

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he was shot and killed in a fight before the name was applied to the ~~XXX~~ band. CF left the Home about 1 1/2 years before Armstrong arrived there. CF visited a brother in the Home during the interim, and ~~CF XXX~~ says the band at the Home was established about 1 year after he had left. He rehearsed with the band on his visits. Instruments/^{first}available to the inmates at the time were: snare drum, tub (used as a bass drum), clarinet, ~~XXX~~ two old trumpets and a bass horn. Armstrong's first instrument was that bass horn. [Kid] Rena was in the band then, but playing clarinet [he later became a trumpet player]; Ikey Smooth was playing cornet; George Washington, a small fellow about CF's size, was playing trombone. ■ WR mentions that he has seen a picture of Washington when he was with Buddy Petit's band. "Shots" [Madison] was not in the Home when CF was. Other musicians in the Home were "Red Happy" [Bolton, drums], Henry Foster (CF's brother), baritone horn, "Old Folks," alto horn, [Jimbo?] Brown and Henry Mahoney. Mahoney, a dark fellow who now has no legs and who ^{panhandles} ~~XXXXX~~ around the Boston Club on Canal Street every evening, "was a great drummer, too, at one time." CF says "Old Man Dave" [i. e., Peter Davis?] got the idea of organizing a band at the Home because CF and Mahoney drummed on tubs, walls, etc., with railroad spikes, forks, spoons, etc. CF's mother got him out of the Home, ^{he made his first} ~~in 1910, when he made~~

communion, in 1910, about the same time. The band from the Home made its first appearance in 1913, in an Odd Fellows parade. CF figures the band was started between 1911 and 1912. Armstrong and Rena were in the band's first appearance. "Shots" was not; CF says "Shots" didn't begin playing trumpet ^{publically} until around 1922, when the band in which CF was playing, led by [Wscar "Papa"] Celestin and [William "Baba"] Ridgley, broke up. *[CF's discographies, 1922]*

CF still has a loving cup he won by blowing across his drum. He, playing with Celestin's Tuxedo Band, competed with "Red Happy," playing with [John] Robichaux's band, at the Southern Yatch Club. The band won the cup, says CF.

CF says there were two "Happy's;" there was "Red Happy," whose name was James William [actually, probably James William Bolton?], and *["Brown Happy" was Robert Mathews, RBA]* "Black Happy," still alive, whose name is [Christopher] Goldston. Both played either snare drum or bass drum in parades. "Red Happy" was CF's stiffest competition. He was older than CF. The first person to recognize CF's ability was Emile Bigard [violin, uncle of Barney and Alex Bigard]; Manuel Perez was next. After CF had left Punch Miller's band, he was playing with Celestin; Celestin had a job at the lake, but CF heard that "Red Happy" was playing at Italian Hall; "Black Happy" wouldn't compete

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against "Red Happy," but CF did; he won the cup there. [how many cups did he have, and what was the story about the SYC?].

CF played at the Lusitania[n Portuguese] Hall, Elysian Fields at Dauphine, with [Johnny] Fischer's band; there was also another band, [George "Happy"] Schilling's; both were white; CF was the only colored person there. CF was only a boy then; he wasn't a regular member of the band, but as the bandsmen knew him, he could play with them. Colored and white often played music together in those times; CF says Johnny Wiggs can verify that.

WR shows a photograph of a Masonic Hall; it was once used by white, then by colored; it is located on Dauphine near Ursulines.

CF says there is another hall at Rampart and Mandeville [streets]. Another place, a schoolhouse where people danced on the first floor but school was held on the second, ^{was} ~~IX~~ at Touro and Dauphine. CF first played at the hall at Mandeville and Rampart with Chris Kelly.

There was another "white" hall at Prieur and Elysian Fields.

End of Reel I