

"WILD BILL" DAVISON
I [only], tracks 1 & 2
November , 1961

[Cf. Paramount CJS 102, The Wild Horns 1
10" LP]
Also present: John Steiner

...Bill Davison is saying [he heard Pops Foster when he was?] 15-17, never dreaming that he would record or associate with him, years later, in New York.

BD was born in 1906, in Defiance, Ohio, the son of Anna Kreps and Edward Davison; his mother is still alive (and, in fact, spent the past summer with him). His mother was musical; his paternal grandmother was a piano teacher. Bd was not encouraged to play music--just the opposite, in fact. He was raised in a Carnegie Library; (his parents having separated when he was 6,) he was sent to live with his grandparents, who [operated the library?] and lived in the apartment under the library. When he wanted to practice, he would take his cornet, banjo, mandolin and music, get a boat, and row along the river banks and practice. He wasn't taking lessons, but picked it up himself.

His first band [was he the leader? or was it his first job?] was in Defiance; it was the Ohio Lucky Seven, which he says was a very good jazz band, and that it was a shame they didn't get to record for Gennett, as some of the other bands did. He says the band was proof that to play well a musician didn't have to come from New Orleans or certain other parts of the country; he says there were a lot of good jazz men not from New Orleans, and they developed their own styles without being influenced by New Orleans musicians. Bix [Beiderbecke] is mentioned as an example of a musician not from New Orleans who developed his own style, because he had no one to follow [i.e., use as a model]. JS asked if Bix might have used records, as BD did, to help him develop his style; BD says he might have. JS says then that Bix might have been influenced by recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band; BD says the ODJB is more famous for starting a style than any other band; he adds that

the New Orleans Rhythm Kings were also famous for [furthering] that style. BD came up with the people in those bands; he agrees with JS that jazz would have developed without New Orleans, as it was coming around in other parts of the country at the same time. BD says he thinks everybody had to be influenced a little bit by records; the first records he heard with any jazz on them were by Ted Lewis, records made before [Georg] Brunis joined his band; most of his men then were from New York. JS says the success of the ODJB at Reisenweber's [Cafe, New York] was the reason bands like Lewis's got a chance to record. BD says that he remembers that any hot solos on [his?] recordings made in the early days (he mentions Victor specifically) were cut out, because everything had to be ensemble, with the exception of a vocal chorus.

Years ago, when BD was working with the Chubb-Steinberg band on the boat, Island Queen, in and around Cincinnati, he heard Pops Foster many times, when Foster was working with Fate Marable; BD says one boat Foster was on was the _____ Belle, and that the other one was the Capitol (which has recently been purchased by someone in St. Louis). BD says Foster now looks exactly as he did those many years ago.

Another musician from New Orleans, Steve Brown, was bassist in the Wolverines, [Cf. Steve Brown, reel ?] then working around Cincinnati (according to JS, Brown was in that band); BD says Min Leibrock was the bassist with the Wolverines when he knew them, but he knew Brown well; he got him a job with Phil Spitalny some years later. Spitalny some years later. Spitalny complained to BD that Brown faked, that he didn't play his part; BD told Spitalny that Brown also played good jazz.

BD knew the recordings of the ODJB in his youth; he thinks he

still has copies of all the early ones. The most exciting occurrence of his younger days was in 1921, when he was playing a job with the Ohio Lucky Seven at the Miami (Ohio) School for Girls; his band was at one end of the Gymnasium, and the Wolverines, with Bix Beiderbecke, were at the other. BD comments about the impact of hearing the open horn of Bix, because everyone else in those days used mutes (he says he had 10 different kinds himself). Bix became BD's idol. Later, in Cincinnati, BD played in jam sessions with Bix (BD played melophone, which he used a lot in those times), at a place called the Garden of Allah. BD became a friend of Bix through a mutual friend, Carl Clove [Spelling?] a great banjo player. The three of them would also jam at a place called the Hole in the Wall--melophone, banjo and cornet; BD says Bix played more [i.e., better] there than he did in the band. (BD remarks that the Hole in the Wall bill of fare consisted of Pork Chop Sandwiches and gin.) Bix was in the Wolverines at the time; they were playing at the Stockton Club in Cincinnati. BD got to hear Bix every night for about two years, BD was then with the Seattle Harmony Kings in Cincinnati. When they left the Stockton Club, the Wolverines booked into Doyle's Dancing Academy, also in Cincinnati; playing for dancing, they played their best, according to BD, because they could play without restraint, not like at the Stockton Club, where they had to play subdued. BD mentions some others in the Wolverines at the time: Jimmy Johnson [Spelling?] Dick Voynow (later head of Brunswick in Chicago); Bob Gillette; perhaps trombonist [Bill] Rank, but JS says it may have been a bit early for Rank to have been in the band.

BD recorded with the Chubb-Steinberg band, at the same time the wolverines did their recordings. BD says that if anyone made

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a mistake, or there was some noise in the studio, the take was destroyed by bringing a big heating device down on the recording being cut; the record could then be used again, but the erasures could be made only a certain number of times. Drums couldn't be used on the recordings, because the needle used in the process would jump the grooves when a drum beat; cymbals were used instead.

Beiderbecke was playing like no one else then; later, everyone copied him. Discussion of influences in jazz. BD says that all of the oldtimers he came up with--the ones still playing--can still play either Bix's chorus or [Frank] Trumbauer's chorus from their recording of "Singin' The Blues." BD says he probably heard Bix at his greatest some of the sessions [previously mentioned] in Cincinnati, and that it's a shame that recording facilities were so poor and limited then, because all the early things are gone forever.

End of Reel I