

CLARENCE GABRIEL

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August 19, 1961

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins,  
Harold Dejan

Clarence Joseph Gabriel was born June 3, 1905, at 409 North Miro Street in New Orleans. He got in the music business in 1925. His mother was from Mobile, Alabama; his father was from Santo Domingo. CG's first instrument was drums, taught by his father, who played trumpet; his father had [led] the National Orchestra. His father got his start at Freddy Grau's [sp?] and at [Ogle's?], at Conti and Liberty, and at the [Big] 25; his first instrument was accordion, but he was <sup>en</sup> encouraged to take up a wind instrument by <sup>[MARSHALL] KIZER</sup> Kaiser, a white man who owned the place. WR mentions that <sup>KIZER</sup> a Kaiser was owner of the Pig Ankle, near the 25; CG says that was the man to whom he refers. CG's father took up lessons, studying with Alcibiade [Jeanjacques?]. The father played only classical music, such as "the can-can business", waltzes and quadrilles for dancing. The father was still leading his own orchestra when he began to teach CG; the orchestra played at the lake, at places such as "Over The Rhine," Spanish Fort, Milneburg, and at a big restaurant in Bucktown which used to give dances. The trombone player in the father's orchestra was Vic Gaspard (brother of Oke Gaspard); the clarinetist was CG's cousin, Albert "Dude" Gabriel; Johnny St. Cyr played guitar; Alphonse Gaspard played bass. Alphonse was supposedly a distant cousin of Vic Gaspard. (HD recalls that Dude Gabriel played B-flat clarinet in the Holy Ghost [Brass] Band when he, HD, played E-flat clarinet; CG's father and [Alcide] "Big" Landry played trumpets in the band, led by Pinchback Tureaud. [CG's brother] Manny Gabriel also began music playing drums, but gave that up to play clarinet, as drums were too heavy to carry. CG's father's name was Martin-<sup>Joseph</sup> Manuel Gabriel; he died about 1932. *[Martin Joseph Gabriel is the father of Martin Manuel Gabriel and others. See Gabriel Family, Recd Jan 26, 1977, page 56.]*

CG learned to play drums by ear; when he gave up drums, he switched to banjo. He was fifteen -sixteen years old when he took up drums, around 1920. He learned to read music while studying banjo;

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he began playing piano when he was about ten, by putting his hands on the keys of a player piano, but he didn't learn to read until he took up banjo; he used the piano to help him find the notes on the banjo. He started on banjo in 1925 and played that until about 1934. (HD says he really could play.) In 1934, he began playing with big [seven to eight pieces ?] bands; the first band he played with regularly was that of Louis Dumaine; he did travel some earlier, with Sam Morgan, replacing Johnny Dave occasionally. The first little band "that we made up" was with Kid Howard on trumpet and (he thinked) George Lewis on clarinet; Rudolph [Beaulæu] was on drums; Sam [Ike?] Robinson (who quit playing long ago and joined the church), trombone; Steve Angrum, clarinet [not George Lewis, or a different band?]. Manny Gabriel, who began playing before CG, had played drums in his father's band before changing to clarinet. He was seven years older than CG.

CG played some with Kid Rena; he played for a while with HD's brother [Leo Dejan]'s band.

CG didn't record with Louis Dumaine's band; Leonard [Mithhel], [from New York or somewhere else "up the Line,"] came into the band and was on the records instead of CG. [Or was the recordist from "up the line"? RBA] Leonard was in the band from about 1926 to 1927; CG, out of Dumaine's band when, was doing dance hall and other work, at places such as Jack Shean's [sp?], the steamer Capitol, various restaurants, etc.?) At the dance halls, CG worked with Earl Foster, with [Willie] "Kaiser" [Joseph] (then leader of [manager?] Earl Foster's band?), and later, at another place, La Veeda, with Mike DeLay, where he remained until 1934 (La Veeda was next to the Fern, on Iberville between Burgundy and Rampart). (HD says he was playing with Willie Paoud at La Veeda when the place closed permanently.) There were three dance halls in that

block: the Fern was nearest Rampart, then another one, the La Veeda, nearest Burgundy; one of them later became the Budweiser. HD says he and [some of ?] his band, with Mike DeLay, went into La Veeda in 1930, when they came off the steamer Dixie job; Albert "Fernandez" [Walters] came into the band after HD had left; Fernandez and DeLay alternated on piano and trumpet; CG came into the band after Fernandez left it.

Louis Dumaine didn't play the originals he wrote when CG worked with him, as they were usually playing at the Southern Yacht Club or at some country club, and the people at those places wanted to hear the latest hits; so they played stock arrangements. John Robixhauz's band was often there on the same job with Dumaine's. HD says that sometimes Temple Roof Garden had six bands at once. Some of the men playing with Robichaux the time: Willie Pajaud, Albert Snaer, trumpets; [John?] Augustin (father of the banjo player Augustin), bass; Willie Bontemps (uncle of Zutty Singleton), banjo; Charlie McCurdy, Sam Dutrey, Sr., sax; Mercedes Thompson, piano. There were about ten pieces in Robichaux's band. Alec Bigard was the drummer.

Talk of spelling names, especially French; HD mentions that [Paul] Beaulieu is in the hospital; CG says Beaulieu was his father's piano player.

Talk about house parties [and lawn parties, etc.] : HD mentions Baby <sup>Brouse</sup> Bruce [piano], and "Little Red," kazoo; HD says the latter played kazoo like Kid Rena played trumpet. CG says "tonk" piano players worked at such affairs. CG says he played a lot of house parties, one every Sunday, in a group consisting of piano, kazoo and drums. "Little Willie" [piano] is mentioned. CG says Red <sup>Rayon</sup> Cayeaux was about the best [piano player]; he died recently in San Francisco, where he had made his home; he was older than most of the other players, who all wished they could play like he did. Dave Decona [sp?], a relative of Red <sup>Cayon</sup> Cayeaux, played only at

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house parties; his playing was more popular even than Cayeaux's. CG says <sup>Cayon</sup> Cayeaux played numbers like "Ma, He's Making Eyes At Me"; HD says he also played "High Society", and a schottische called "Five Little Blackberries." CG mentions "Blackberry Waltz." CG says Cayeaux's uncle, Billy <sup>Cayon</sup> Cayeaux, bartender at the [Big] 25, died recently. CG mentions hearing Caffrey (identified as Daren<sup>S</sup>bourg by HD) play banjo; he says Caffrey's playing inspired him to play banjo. HD says Caffrey was a cousin of Willie Darenbourg, violinist; Caffrey's family lived on Orleans near Miro, in the house where HD was raised; HD heard Caffrey on Monday nights, when Caffrey played on the Pythian Temple Roof Garden with Manuel Perez's band. CG says a trio consisting of Red <sup>Cayon</sup> Cayeaux, Caffrey and Lorenzo Tio [Jr.] sometimes played at the Big 25 and they sounded wonderful. CG says they played "Hello, Bluebird."

Louis Dumaine was a good musician; CG says his band rehearsed regularly, as they had numbers such as "[Back?] <sup>STAY?</sup> In Your Own Backyard", "Doll Dance", "Hello Bluebird", and "Wedding of the Painted Doll" in their repertoire.

CG says he didn't know Joe Howard had once been a cornet player until he found out Howard was teaching Louis Armstrong [to read?].

HD says that years ago bands would sometimes have two rehearsals a week. It was entertaining to walk around and hear the various bands. CG talks about how good the Louis Dumaine band was. He talks about a small tiff between Dumaine and Robichaux, apparently because Dumaine's band was playing better than Robichaux's.

The name of the place CG played near Bucktown was Bruning's, a big restaurant.

End of Reel I

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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins,  
Harold Dejan, Cecelia Gabriel Lane [~~later~~]

Bruning's [restaurant] was right on the Jefferson Parish Line  
[at Bucktown].

CG mentions playing at Buras, Pointe a las Hache, Burwood [all  
downriver from New Orleans]. HD says he used to play at Burwood  
with Paul Moliere, [also known as "La Croix"?]. CG mentions a band he  
was in: La Croix; "Big Fire", trombone; Isidore Barretier [sp?]; CG  
worked in the group when he was first learning to play.

George McCullum, trumpet, took over the Louis Dumaine band when  
Dumaine became ill; Oliver Alcorn, brother of Alvin [Alcorn, trumpet],  
joined the band on sax. McCullum and Alvin Alcorn were step-brothers.  
[Cf. Alvin Alcorn, reel ? and Mrs George McCullum reel ?]

CG's brother, Percy [Gabriel], began playing with CG in 1935;  
CG says his regular bass player took off one New Year's Eve from their  
regular job to play with Herbert Leary's big band; Percy showed up just  
before CG's job, ready to play bass, except that he had never played  
before. CG told him he would try to keep every tune in the key of C,  
so that Percy could play mostly on the open strings; CG even told him  
which strings to play. Percy became a good bass player in about two  
months. "The Music Goes 'Round and 'Round" was quite popular then,  
having just come out; it was easy for Percy, and popular with CG for  
that reason. When CG's regular bass player came back, Percy went  
with Kid Rena, his first regular band; they were working at the  
Gypsy Tea Room. HD says Percy became so good that he took Percy with  
him in 1936 to New York; Percy sat in with the band at the Big Apple  
there, and was hired there. Eugene Porter, then with Don Redman,  
wanted to return to New Orleans, as his wife was due to have a baby;

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HD took him into the band [on saxophone? RBA], replacing Percy, and Porter made the trip [aboard the Dixie] back. Percy's first instrument was trumpet, taught him by his father, but he ruptured his navel while playing, and quit. There was a lot of music at Gabriel house; the father would have the children play for guests.

HD mentions house parties and piano players' "bucking"; Bernell [Santiago] and [Lester] "Black" [Santiago]. The most bucking the piano players would do would be at places like Economy Hall and the Lions Club, where there were pianos in the back rooms; CG says more people would listen to the bucking contests than people who would be dancing. "Little Willie" <sup>[Farrist?]</sup> is mentioned. Baby <sup>Brousse</sup> ~~Bruce~~ is mentioned; he played in only a few keys; he especially liked B-flat and F-sharp.

CG talks about keys, and the ease and/or difficulty of playing in certain keys. Talk of the Popeye (Decatur, between Ursulines and Barracks), the Kingfish, Rosebowl, Mamá's, Black Cat--all on or near Decatur Street. Talk of trouble with entertainers at those places in regard to keys of the tunes they would sing.

CG played a couple of jobs with Chris Kelly [of the Wagon Wheel? RBA], but didn't get along with the carousing in the band; there was also some argument about some money, so CG didn't work with Kelly anymore. CG says the men in Kelly's band, including Chris, would make one think they could read a lot, but they really couldn't; CG says Chris had a big stack of music [on the job], but that he, CG, didn't play a number out of that stack all night. CG tells of his last music work, with Kid Rena at the Cadillac, in the Forties [Cf. photograph of Herb Morand band c. 1950]. HD says Rena didn't read much, either,

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but he could learn the tunes from the juke box. Mr. Joe [operator of the Cadillac?], was a musician himself; played clarinet and mandolin. CG talks of bands which do not play the music correctly. CG mentions playing at the Buena Vista Hotel [check name] in Mandeville, [Louisiana].

CG played banjo with DeDe Pierce; Billie [Pierce] was playing piano with the band. Cecelia Gabriel <sup>Lane</sup> ~~Lane~~, who played with DeDe at one time, mentions Raymond Glapion, Lionel Tappo [sp?] (banjo), Elliott Taylor (alto sax); HD figures out that another alto sax player she is talking about is Henry Casanave, who played in the first band HD was in. CGL played with Raymond Glapion, with Lionel Tappo, with Hypolite Francis, and with Albert "Fernandez" Walters. CGL also used to play with Richard [Alexis], Kid Rena, Gilbert Young (HD says she used to play with Chris Kelly, too), with [Oliver or Alvin?] Alcorn, with [Fred] "H.E." [Minor], George McCullum, John Casimir (who has a brother [William or Sam Casimir?] who plays music, too), with [Bill?] Willigan, [Ernie] Cagnolatti (who used to play trumpet with Herbert Leary and who belonged Mother Catherine's [church]). CGL says she saw Cagnolatti waiting [recently?] to go out of town with drummer Andrew Jefferson.

End of Reel II

