

DON ALBERT  
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Also present: William Russell, Mack Fairhurst

This interview was conducted at the home of Don Albert,  
715 St. James [Street], San Antonio, Texas,

"Don" Albert (Dominique) was born in New Orleans August 5, 1908, at 1719 N. Robertson, where his father, 84 years old, [Fernand Dominique] still lives (although he has never owned the house). The father and Don's uncle, Natty Dominique, have the same birthday. The father wanted Don to play violin, but Don could not endure the sound, so he decided to become a singer. His father would take him to various [social] clubs, such as the Autocrat, where he would enter talent contests; he says he did very well, but later decided he did not have much voice. (He says his father had a very fine tenor voice, and sang with the likes of Bert Williams, and sang some where the Old French Opera House was.) Deciding to take up trumpet, (at age 8-10), he went for lessons to Nelson Jean, whom Don Albert "wanted to play like." For the first lesson, Jean had Don clean his instrument. The next week Jean, being a lover of the grape, again had Don clean his instrument. Don told his father he did not want to learn music, that all he was learning to do was clean his instrument. However, he went with his cousin, Barney Bigard, [sometime] clarinetist with Louis Armstrong, to the home of Luis "Papa" Tio, [not Lorenzo, Sr.] who began instructing Don in music fundamentals. Don Albert says that Tio was from Mexico City originally. Don thought Bigard was laughing at him during the lesson (as it turned out, Bigard was

snorting to clear his nostrils of some sand), so he never went back to Tio. He decided to learn music, so he went to [Milford] Piron, who instructed him in solfege for one and one-half years before he began studying cornet. WR says Natty had to do that when he studied with Manuel Perez; Don says Natty lived opposite Perez on Urquhart, and he used to see Perez there. [DA also studied under Perez. See reverse of release, May 11, 1961, for this interview.] Don liked to follow parades, and liked the Jones's Home band where Louis Armstrong got his start. The method Don used was by Cloudimiere, and most of the text was in French.

Don's father was born on August 2 [no year], the same as the uncle, Natty. The father took some violin lessons from old man [or Valteau? RBA] Voltan [sp], and got the rest of his training on violin from his own family; an uncle, called "Na-velle" ["a" as in "at"], who died young, was a great violinist; another uncle, Wilson, was a trumpet player. WR says Don's father mentioned a Mr. Augustin or Augustine, and Don thinks he may mean George Augustin, a bassist. Don says his father probably played with him at some of the social clubs, like the Autocrat Club, in bands made up of the members, which got together in leisure moments in order to play for relaxation. WR and Don discuss George Moret, old-time cornetist and musician; the consensus is that Moret was one of the more capable and more neglected players in early New Orleans jazz and brass band music. Don says Moret played mostly at

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West End and Spanish Fort, having musicians such as Peter Bocage and Barney Bigard in his band; Don does not know that Moret had a brass band, but says he played in all the best ones.

Don and WR chit-chat about Paul Barbarin and Manuel Manetta, Don claiming personal friendship, etc. WR confesses that he has over a hundred tapes of Manuel Manetta, the complete story of his life.

Don played his first job with [Big Foot.] Bill Philips, a drummer, in a Mardi Gras parade; he says he knew three tunes-- "Sheik of Araby," "I Love You" and one other. When the band got to the Irish Channel, a member of the hiring organization discovered Don's shortcoming.

Don left New Orleans with his own trio, taking Richard McCarthy, banjo, and Lucien Johnson [alto sax]. They played first in (Houston,) <sup>Texas</sup> Texas. Lee Collins was playing in the same neighborhood. Don went to a party for Troy Floyd; while there, Chester Clark told Don he should try for the vacancy in Floyd's band, with Claude Kennedy leaving. Don got the job, playing first in Eastland, Texas; he says he got the job for his "tonation" (tone) and sight-reading ability.

Don says the recordings of his band, including, among others, "True Blue Lou," "Rocking and Swinging," "Deep Blue Melody" and "Liza" were from arrangements by members of his band with some of

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his ideas; the records were cut in San Antonio at the old Bluebonnet Hotel (still standing), in 1930 or perhaps a little later. [Compare discographies.] The other records [other than with Troy Floyd], made with Hattie Burleson, and the ones with Ben Norsingle, were made in Dallas. Charley Dixon, of the Troy Floyd band (with whom Don recorded earlier), also lives in San Antonio. Louis Cottrell [Jr.], an original member of the Albert band of the 1930's, lives in New Orleans, as does Alvin Alcorn. WR says Louis Cottrell says that he was with Don Albert's band for nine years. Don says Cottrell's father was a great drummer. WR says he has heard that Cottrell [Sr.] had a collapsible [bass?] drum, made out of aluminum. Alvin Alcorn was nicknamed "Mickey" in the Albert band. Don Albert says Alvin Alcorn was with him for 8 or 9 years. MF mentions that Alvin Alcorn played in Columbus [,Ohio] with George Lewis.

[Albert] "Fats" Martin, of Albert's band and from New Orleans, died about 3 or 4 years ago; Martin took the remnants of Don's band and kept it awhile. Don says the Vocalion records of his band were made in San Antonio in 1935 and 1936.

Don and WR mention Herbert Hall, a younger brother of Edmond Hall, who played clarinet and alto [also baritone] in Don's band. Herbert Hall plays with Jimmy [i.e., Eddie] Condon. WR says another brother, Clarence, a mailman, still lives in New Orleans; Don says he still plays tenor. Don's band traveled almost every night for

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almost ten years, covering 38 states, and playing in all sizes of towns. The band played mostly for percentages, guarantees being scarce. The reason Don quit having Joe Glaser as booker was that Glaser tried to get so much money for the band that it was not working; Don says they were doing better playing for percentages in the South. The band did play in New York City, having gone there from Buffalo, New York, about 1932 or 1933. Mention is made of the Follies Theatre, Charlie Johnson, the Cotton Club, Duke [Ellington], Small's Paradise, Jabbo Smith, Jonah Jones, Sidney DeParis, Wilbur DeParis.

Don first opened his Keyhole Club, San Antonio, in 1944; it was open until 1948, when he sold out to go to New Orleans to open another club. Not finding conditions to be suitable there, and losing a lot of money in three months time, too, he went to work for the post office in New Orleans, coming back to San Antonio in 1950 and opening the new Keyhole Club. He has had "all" the major entertainers play the club, and has started some good ones on their careers, one being Nan Henry.

Don intends playing music again, because of some interest from some friends in New Orleans [The interest was from San Antonio, although the project did not pan out; Don has since recorded several times for Joe Mares in New Orleans.--PRC] Don says his friend in New York, Frank Driggs [now of Columbia Records--1964] has been trying to get someone interested in him. Driggs' interest in music of the Southwest is discussed.  
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Don remembers hearing the band from Jones's [Waifs] Home playing what he describes as "ordinary" parades, when he was a small boy; he doesn't remember what other kinds of jobs they played, if any.

Don played on the boat "Susquehanna," going between Spanish Fort and Mandeville [,La.], when he had become a professional. The band played on the trip over; then had the time the boat stayed in Mandeville free to do as they pleased; Don says he got to know Buddy Petit, whom he describes as one of the greatest trumpet players he ever heard, who lived in the nearby town of Covington. Don says "Kid Punch [Miller] was around then, and was known as a great "finger man" [fast technician], and Chris Kelly had the most beautiful tone of any. Don used to sit in the "buzzard roof" [inside balcony] of the dance halls listening to bands, especially bands with Buddy Petit in them. He says Manuel Perez was playing at the [Knights of Pythias] Roof Garden during this time, and that the banjo player with Perez was the greatest of all in New Orleans, Caffrey Darensbourg, although not many musicians ever talk about him. WR says George Guesnon talks about him, [in praise]. Don says perhaps the reason most musicians don't say anything about Caffrey is that he was sort of "touchy" [probably quick-tempered]. Fairhurst asks if Caffrey was related to Joe Darensbourg, clarinetist; Don says he thinks not much relation, if any, and not much, if any, to another Darensbourg

who played violin. Don says Caffrey had a brother, Percy, but they both died in Dallas. Don says there were two great banjo players in New Orleans, Caffrey and John Marrero, brother of Lawrence (with whom Albert played) and Simon Marrero, banjo and bass, respectively. Don says the Marreros' father [Billy] (was a great bass player?) and that the father [Isidore] of the Barbarins [Paul and Louis] was a fine musician. WR says Isidore Barbarin died last year, and had a big funeral. Don says [Alphonse] Picou had one, too, and WR says it was very big, perhaps the biggest [at least that he had ever seen]. Don says he played some jobs with Picou, some at Delacroix Island, and some on trucks in town during some of Don's later visits to New Orleans. Don mentions a cousin of his, Armand Piron, and says he has an arrangement of a Piron-[Peter] Bocage number, "Mama's Gone, Goodbye," which Crawford wants him to record for the Archives [this repository--It is true that Don had the arrangement, written by Crawford; the arrangement was the property of Charles Reiley, D.D.S., of San Antonio, a trombonist; the recording was a speculative session promoted by Trin Dumlao, then of San Antonio, and Dr. Reiley (the tapes were auditioned by several companies, but no takers) Copies of rehearsals for the actual recording are in the Archive; although copies of the actual session were promised, none have been sent. signed--PRC]. The group discusses getting lip in shape and various brands of trumpets.

Don says he liked to get with Bunk Johnson [not lead into by WR]; they met in Port Arthur [,Texas], played at a session together, and became good friends. Don says he knew Oran "Lips" Page, who was with Walter Page and his Blue Devils orchestra, which also included Count Basie on the roster. Don says the Page band and the band of Troy [Floyd], in which Don played, had contests. There is discussion of the only recording the Page band made. Don mentions Chester Clark as being a good, sweet trumpet player. Don says another good trumpet player from New Orleans, Arnold Metoyer, is hardly ever mentioned in jazz histories, nor is [George] Moret. He says that Fred Murphy, a great alto player from Dallas, was playing then [middle twenties] on the same order of Johnny Hodges' present style and is not mentioned. Don says that Buster Bailey, of Dallas (not the well-known who played with Fletcher Henderson), was a fine clarinetist who went to Europe and never came back. Don mentions Buster Smith, still playing, has been fine musician for years, but is said to be not as good now that he is having trouble with his teeth. WR says Don's uncle, Natty Dominique, now has all false teeth, and is playing well; Don says he himself is fortunate to have his own natural teeth. Mention is made of Bunk's false teeth and his one great failing,<sup>drink.</sup>↑ Bunk's death is discussed, WR and Don saying they saw him shortly before his death, in New Iberia [,La.]. Rock-and-roll and bop are "put down." In answer to Fairhurst's question,

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Don says he thinks Leroy's Dallas Band was a group from the Blue Moon Chasers, a group of young musicians including tenor sax player Budd Johnson, who is still active [around New York]; the band was active during the days of Troy Floyd, around 1926-28. Don didn't know Tommy Howell. He knew Sonny Clapp, white trombonist. Fairhurst says Howell played trumpet with Clapp, and played like [Bix] Beiderbecke. Don says the other [another good] trumpet player in the Southwest was T. Holder, who was leader of the original Clouds of Joy, taken over later by [Andy] Kirk. Holder's first name was Torrance.

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