

April 21, 1957

Also present: Nesuhi Ertegun, Robert Campbell

Darnell Howard was born July 25, 1906, in Chicago [Illinois]. NE says Muggsy [Spanier] told him he [also] was born that year, but DH says Muggsy is older. DH was born at 3528 Federal Street (two blocks from Armour Institute, which is now Illinois Institute of Technology). DH began studying his first instrument, violin, at age seven; he studied with the same teacher who gave his father some lessons; his father played violin, cornet and piano, and worked in night clubs around Chicago; he was working at [Pony?] Moore's at 21st and Wabash, when he became ill.

DH says Bob Scobey or Turk [Murphy] told him that NE was a first-rate photographer.

DH's father played all kinds of music, as DH has. DH studied violin until he was fourteen years old, when he ran away from home. His violin teacher was an old man named Johnson. DH joined the union when he was twelve; he was sponsored by Clarence Jones; DH went to work [with Jones?] at the Panorama Theater; instrumentation was violin, piano, cornet and drums. The school board made DH quit because of his age. The band played for motion pictures; they read their music. DH made his musical debut when he was nine years old, playing in a church, with his mother playing the piano. DH was induced to run away from home because he couldn't work in Chicago; he went with John Wycliffe's [cf. Willie Hightower Reel] Ginger Band to Milwaukee Wisconsin, where they played at Schlitz Palm Garden. DH says he was fourteen then, that the year was 1920 [?]. The band was first billed as a "^{jazz}~~jazz~~" band, but the management objected to the word, so they became the Ginger Band. They worked at Schlitz Palm Garden for nine months, then went to

Minneapolis [Minnesota]. Two men in the Wycliffe band had played with DH's father, so when DH's mother come to Milwaukee, they talked her out of taking him home. His mother and her sister had been a song and dance team, the James Sisters, working on Pantages "time" [i.e., vaudeville circuit]. The James Sisters had played with Rosamond Johnson, had been in "Shoo Fly Regiment" and "Red Moon"¹. DH, with the Wycliffe band, played at [Tuttman's?] Gruenwald Cafe in Minneapolis. The band was eight pieces.

DH just picked up jazz as he went played. The Wycliffe band played all kinds of music; one tune they played was "Back Home In Tennessee." The band played ^{stick} arrangements. Instrumentation of the band was violin, cornet, trombone, sax, piano, bass and drums [Total of seven].

When they left Minneapolis, they returned to Milwaukee, playing at Lamb's Cafe, which was in the Randolph Hotel, next door to Schiltz Palm Garden. (All the places DH had played with the band were for Whites). When he left Wycliffe, DH returned to Chicago, where he joined Charles Elgar's band; DH was then sixteen years old. [Cf. discographies] The Elgar band was working at the Dreamland² (not the one on the Southside where Joe Oliver worked), a ballroom like the Roseland [New York], where Fletcher [Henderson] worked. DH later took his own band into the Southside Dreamland when Oliver left to go to the Pekin; DH played ~~cornet~~ ^{garnet} there, playing the same kind of music Oliver played; he says Eddie Garland can confirm that statement. DH ~~was~~ ^{is} still working with Elgar; DH explains that he had the band which played the late shift at the Dreamland, and that Oliver, still playing the earlier shift

there, played the late shift at the Pekin. Elgar's band played jazz, with the exception of waltzes. They alternated with a band led by Cavallo [sic], who was a cousin of [J. C.] Petrillo. Paddy Harmon, who built the Chicago Stadium, owned the Dreamland on the Northside. Some others in Elgar's band, which then consisted of twenty-two pieces, were Cliff King, clarinet, Buster Bailey [clarinet?], and Laine, from New Orleans (who was a cigar maker), clarinet; when the band broke up, Laine didn't play anymore. The Elgar band also played every summer at a pier which is now the Navy Pier. DH learned to play bugle in the Army, so decided he could play cornet; he joined when he was under-age; he joined as a drummer. He began playing saxophone after hearing Sidney Bechet at the Deluxe; he went in one night to hear him, found that Bechet offered it, and began playing; he later bought a clarinet; then he bought fingering charts, although he could already play a few tunes.

DH was playing violin, in addition to cornet, at the Southside Dreamland; NE says Ben Pollack told him DH was the best fiddle player he had ever heard. DH says he was playing clarinet and violin in a four-piece combination just before he came to California. DH doesn't have time to practice as he sells hi-fi equipment now; Earl [Hines] has been asking him to bring it on the job, but DH doesn't feel that he can play well enough now.

DH was with Elgar's band over three years, he thinks.

DH went to New York in 1918 to record with W. C. Handy; five or six musicians [from Chicago], including DH and Willie Tyler, violin, joined at the time; they recorded thirty-three sides for Columbia. [Cf. discographies ?] The band was about fourteen-fifteen pieces; it includes two clarinet players, King Phillips and

Nelson Kincaid; [Cf. discographies?] there were three violins [DH and Tyler], one of whom Handy brought with him; Handy played cornet and [someone else] trombone; Jasper Taylor played ^{snare} drums, *and perhaps a tuba*. The recordings were made acoustically; DH accidentally hit one of the three megaphones used with his bow several times. They recorded every tune three times, the best one being selected for issue. DH remained in New York, being placed at the Ziegfeld Roof by Will Vodery and Ford Dabney; DH received one-hundred dollars a week, but he became homesick; on his way home he went to work for Will Marion Cook, in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]; Cook didn't pay off the band; DH tells of his difficulty getting back to Chicago. DH tells of ~~his~~ *his*. DH, while traveling in later years with a show called "Plantation Days", ^{*} tried to find a baggageman who had been nice to him in 1923 on his trip away from Will Marion Cook, but the man had retired.

End of Reel I

** (Broad version first directed by Chas. Elger,
and later by show's pianist James P. Johnson -- about 1924
J. Steiner)*

When he returned to Chicago [see Reel I], DH went back to work with [Charles] Elgar, working at the same place [Northside Dreamland?] as before; when that place closed, DH went on the road with the show, "Plantation Days," which took him to Europe in 1923. When he returned from that, he worked with Carroll Dickerson; Jack Carter, drums, offered him a job in China, but DH didn't want to leave just then. A bit later, while working with [Joe] Oliver at the Plantation [Club], he became dissatisfied; discovering that the job with Carter was still available, he took it [Cf. Walter C. Allen & Brian Rust, King Joe Oliver, page 18]; the band played all over the Orient, in the hotels of the chain owned by Oriental Steamship Lines; the band's headquarters was Shanghai. DH went to Moscow twice in 1925, with the New York Binging Syncopaters; besides DH, other musicians with the troupe were Jack Carter, Bill Hagaman [sp?], and the pianist, [Bailey Jackson?]; there were six [from the U. S.] in the band, plus two Filipinos, making a total of eight. Each member of the band prepared a special number, featuring himself, which he presented for one week out of eight.

DH was working with Dave Peyton at the Pershing [sp?] Palace just before he joined King Oliver's band; personnel of Oliver's band then: DH, Barney Bigard and Albert Nicholas [reeds]; Bud Scott [banjo and/or guitar]; Oliver and Bob Shoffner, trumpets; George Fihle [trombone]; Paul Barbarin, drums; Bert Cobb, bass (there were ten in the band, but DH lists only nine; the band played shows and Dixieland music; they were called the "Dixie Syncopators." They played stock and special arrangements; DH did some arranging [for that band?]. DH played violin, clarinet and 1st alto sax. (DH was surprised to be told to play first alto sax when he

Fletcher Henderson's band, as he replaced Buster Bailey, who was playing third alto. DH and Albert Nicholas played all the clarinet solos in Oliver's band; Bigard played clarinet only on arrangements; he played tenor sax mostly, taking all the tenor solos. The Plantation, a nice place, was across the street from the Sunset Cafe, at the 35th and Calumet in Chicago; SH describes the interior of the Plantation. DH says Oliver first played at the Royal Garden when he first went to Chicago; NE says he thinks he first played at the Deluxe [Cafe], but DH says it was Freddy Keppard at the Deluxe. [Cf. Allen & Rust, King Joe Oliver.] DH first heard Sidney Bechet at the Deluxe [and got a soprano sax through him--see Reel I]; Minor Hall and "Tubby" Hall also worked at the Deluxe. The Dreamland dance floor was lighted from underneath. DH says there was always something going on at the Plantation; if the band and/or floor show were not on, female singers wandered among the tables, singing for tips, which they split with the band. May Alix was the most honest of the singers; she always split all tips with the band; she was a good dancer, too; she was good looking then, and is still good looking; she lives in Chicago. NE says she recorded with Louis Armstrong; DH says she did, and one title was "Big (Fat) Butter and Egg Man."

Joe Oliver was a good man to work with. He had an enormous appetite. Oliver's only child, a daughter, died six or seven years ago. SH worked with Oliver at [] Club, Wallace Tyler's place, sometime [before he joined him at the Plantation]. SH mentions that [Gene?] Starr and Justine [sp?] McKinney made a lot of money out of "Someday, Sweetheart." The last time DH saw Oliver was in Nashville; SH says he seemed ill then. Talk about Barney Bigard, Oliver, Albert Nicholas, DH. [RESTRICT: Obscenity (on tape).]

DH never took a clarinet lesson. The first job he had on clarinet was with Erskine Tate; he bought a clarinet in the key of A to play some of the parts with Tate, but the instrument sounded so much different from the B flat that he took the A clarinet back and transposed the parts, something he has done, when necessary ever since. DH says he is fortunate in that he has almost always had music work, except in the Forties because he wanted to stay in his [photography] studio and not go on the road to play.

Lionel Reason was the pianist with Oliver when DH saw him in 1937. Reason played intermission piano at the Hangover [Club, San Francisco] for a while when DH was in the [Kid] Ory band there. Joe Sullivan and [Bob] Scobey are mentioned.

Leonard Harper produced the "Plantation Days" shows. James P. Johnson led the band; it was really Charles Elgar's band, but Elgar could not leave Chicago. The band played in the pit and on the stage; there were at least twelve pieces, perhaps more. The Five Crackerjacks, acrobats, were featured in the show. Johnson wrote and arranged music,

George Wein is mentioned.

The bulk of the "Plantation Days" show came from New York, but some members, including DH, joined in Chicago. The show was all colored. DH talks about some of the acts. He mentions Naomi Thomas, a singer. The show played all over the East Coast, but didn't play New York City. DH talks about some of the acts. DH says Josephine Baker in a show in New York; when his troupe arrived in Paris, she was very big in Paris, at the Folies Bergere. Florence Mills is mentioned. The "Plantation Days" show opened in London, and later played in Paris, Germany and Belgium. The band was featured, on

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stage in a cabaret scene; they played hot music; in fact, the whole show was hot. James P. Johnson wrote the song, "Old Fashioned Love," on the beat on the way to England.

End of Reel II

From England [see Reel II], DH went to Paris, Belgium and Germany; he then returned [with the troupe] to the U. S. ; they were out of the U. S. about three months.

DH played with Bix Beiderbecke, with Muggsy [Spanier], sat in the band, which was just a "patched up" band with no name [or regular personnel?]. The band had to play soft; the place was small and the doors were open, as it was summer. DH says when [Sidney] Bechet played, he could be heard five blocks away. Beiderbecke was on his way to New York about that time.

In 1928, when [Joe] Oliver took his band, including Barney [Bigard] and [Omer] Simeon to New York, DH worked with Louis Armstrong and Earl [Hines] across the street [from the Plantation? at the Sunset Cafe?]; various musicians, such as Jimmy Dorsey, [Harry?] Hoffman (a violinist), and the Mound City Blues Blowers would come in; the house band would let the visitors take over the bandstand. DH was with Armstrong about one and one-half years during that time; DH went to the Regal Theater when he left Armstrong; when the Regal "went sound" [i.e., began showing movies with recorded sound?], DH joined Earl Hines.

When Jelly Roll Morton worked at the Elite Number 2, 35th and State in Chicago, DH was in short pants, but was allowed to play there because his aunt worked there; DH thinks Morton was wrong in his book ^{ROLL} [Mr. Jelly ~~Roll~~, by Alan Lomax], that Morton never worked at the original Elite. Morton was playing the Elite number 2, when he wrote "Jelly Roll Blues." Morton was playing in the band, which was perhaps led by trombonist Harry Massingale [sp?]. SH's aunt, Florence Mills and Cora Green were singing and dancing there. Morton was a good guy at the time, "but full of notoriety." He had his own style of piano playing. There weren't many solos in that band, as they played mostly for the girls to

sing; the girls sang most of the time, as they got money from the customers for request songs. The bands made plenty of money from tips.

DH recorded with Jelly Roll Morton in 1925 or 1926, he thinks; he thinks it was immediately after he returned from his trip to the Orient [see Reel II]. SH made two sessions with Morton, but he doesn't remember any of the tunes; he says he does not remember playing a violin solo on "Someday, Sweetheart." [Cf. discography.] DH mentions John Steiner, of Chicago. DH also recorded with [Joe] Oliver during the same time; they recorded for Gennett, in Richmond, Indiana. He also recorded with Roy Palmer; one of the tunes was "Biscuit Eater," [Cf. discographies under State Street Ramblers, and Big Bill and His Jug Busters.] DH says the reason he doesn't remember the names of a lot of things he recorded is that they didn't have any names until after they were recorded; he says he made some records with Tiny Parham, the last time Parham ever recorded, as he died three months afterwards. DH heard one of the records later over the radio; he called the station (WAAF, Chicago) and asked if the record which had just been played was a Decca record by Tiny Parham; assured that it was, DH asked the name of it, and was told "Frogtown Blues;" that was the first time DH knew the name of the tune; however, he never found out the names of the two others on the same session.

DH got along with New Orleans musicians and bands very well, although his background was different; he says he just

played and they got along fine, musically and personally; he says he was fortunate to have played with some of the earliest New Orleans bands [to go North]. He played with [Freddy] Keppard at the Deluxe [Cafe]; Keppard was a marvelous trumpet player, with a sweet tone and great lip; he didn't make many records "to amount to anything" because he was afraid somebody would "steal his stuff." One of Keppard's sweet [specialty] numbers was "Only A Rose." He was a nice man. Keppard drank gin from a pitcher. DH also knew Jimmy Palao; he says Palao played more tenor sax than violin when he knew him; he doesn't remember Palao's violin style. DH knew [A.J.] Piron, who was a good violinist. DH says those violinists didn't play very hot, that they stuck mostly to variations as obligato. DH himself plays Violin like he does clarinet, using the same ideas, etc.; he says he has a better technique on violin than on clarinet. NE says he wants to record DH playing violin. When he played with Oliver, DH played violin only on shows; he led the band when they played shows.

SH was playing in a small band (about five pieces) at the S Schiller [sp?] Cafe on 31st Street in Chicago the last time he saw Jelly Roll Morton; others [in the band?] were Freddy Keppard and Ralph Emerson Brown; DH doesn't remember what year that was, and doesn't know where Morton was playing at the time. [A. N. O. J. has interview with Ralph Brown.] Morton always dressed nicely; he was built something like Earl Hines.

Dh saw Al Capone; as a matter of fact, he went to school with his baby brother, "Itchy" Capone, who is in some kind

of business in Chicago, and is strictly legitimate; DH doesn't think "Itchy" was ever messed up in crime. [Al Capone and the "syndicate" had a part^t [or all?] of the Grand Terrace; they had Ed Fox operate it, as front man. DH mentions another "beer runner" who became big [in crime rackets]; he was Joe Fosco. DH tells about two gunmen who shot down two policemen in 1919.] (Joe Oliver could read music.) [DH says the gunmen never served a prison sentence for the killing; In fact, they weren't even taken to a police station.] DH says musicians didn't carry weapons then; gangsters didn't bother them.

DH didn't take any lessons on clarinet or sax. DH did play with Manuel Perez at the Pekin; Lorenzo Tio [Jr.] was in the band, on clarinet; DH played violin; Tio was a lazy clarinet player. [i.e. Apparently relaxed in manner.--RBA] DH says that Barney Bigard had a newspaper on his music stand, instead of music; he says Tio also had a newspaper, and would stop playing to ~~turn~~^{turn} the page. Tio was DH's favorite clarinetist. Tio taught Bigard, [Omer] Simeon and [Irving] Fazola; DH didn't study with Tio, but Tio complemented him on his clarinet playing. DH thinks Tio died in New York, DH learned the "High Society" [solo] he now plays^a [on clarinet] on violin; Tio wrote the variation for him, and DH still plays it. DH and Tio played duets in the Perez band. Perez was a great trumpet player, very strong. Eddie Atkins, trombone, Louis Cottrell, drums (NE and DH agree that Cottrell was an old man then [but he was only about forty-five when he died-- see ? interview] and Frank Ahanyou [sp?], piano were also in the band. Charlie Elgar was responsible for bringing the band to

Chicago. They played at the Arsonia, on Madison Street, before moving to the Pekin, where DH joined them; DH was then working at Dreamland; would go directly from his Dreamland job to the Pekin. [George Wein has entered.] The year was about 1921; it was before DH went to the [other, the Southside] Dreamland, where he played trumpet [see Reel I]--about six months before. DH was sixteen or seventeen years old in 1921; he was fourteen years old when he began playing professionally [see Reel I], Clarence Jones, pianist, sponsored DH when he joined the union; Jones was a fine pianist; he played in theaters.

DH first saw Louis [Armstrong] in 1923, at the Dreamland which was his first [?] job [in Chicago]; Oliver was at the Royal Garden then. DH tells how Johnny Dunn, a well-known trumpet player then working with Florence Mills show, challenged Armstrong and was put to shame by Armstrong's trumpet playing.

End of Reel III

