

ERNEST ROUBLEAU

I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped

October 18, 1961

Also present: William Russell

1.

[Interview recorded at 2513 Dannell Street, home of Ernest Roubleau]

Ernest Roubleau was born December 26, 1896, in St. Charles Parish, about forty miles up the river from New Orleans. His father, Charlie Roubleau, played trumpet in a fifteen piece brass band in the town of ER's birth. The band, which sounded like the New Orleans brass bands of today, played occasional parades, but not for dances, of ER's memory is correct. The dance bands, four or five pieces, played the same Dixieland music that is played now. The father played in dance bands, also. There were good musicians in the town. Musicians from New Orleans also came to the town, which was Killona, Louisiana, about nine miles from Luling, Louisiana on the west side of the river. ER's mother sang [secular] songs and sacred songs, mostly in French; she couldn't speak fifteen words in English. His family were and ER is Catholic. There was a benevolent society for whom the brass band played; they had parades just like the ones the societies here have. ER doesn't remember that there were funerals with music, such as there are in New Orleans. The brass bands played pretty good jazz in the streets, much the same as the New Orleans brass bands do. One of the trumpet players in the band a man named Dejan, [Alexander, Cf. Reserve, Louisiana, interviews RBA] who drowned, was a very sweet trumpet player, something like Buddy Bolden, although ER didn't know Bolden. A younger brother of ER, [Otto?], played violin, encouraged him to learn to play something; he would get his father's violin after he had gone to work; after a couple of months, he played better than his father, so he was given the instrument. ER quit playing violin about sixteen years ago. ER and his brother would play for parties in Luling; the two pieces were violin and guitar.

When ER got out of the army, in 1919, he came to New Orleans, where

where he has lived ever since. He bought a tenor banjo in 1920, which he learned to play. The first band he played banjo in was Jack Carey's band (ER knew Jack's brother, Mutt Carey, mentioned by WR). From Carey, ER went with Chris Kelly. In Carey's band with ER; Jack Carey [Trombone]; Punch [Miller], trumpet; Joseph "Babe" Phillips (who died last year), bass; (although there was no regular drummer, Carey sometimes used Vernell Joseph, drums; [Albert] Burbank, clarinet, sometimes and sometimes, Georgie Boyd, clarinet. The band played frequent out-of-town jobs, going as far away as Lake Charles, Louisiana and Biloxi, Mississippi. Later, ER took up guitar. He had a teacher for banjo, but picked up guitar by himself. Dave Perkins, who lived on Sixth Street between Dryades and Baronne, was his banjo teacher. Perkins, very light-skinned taught both white and colored. Perkins played all the instruments; he played in parades with white bands. After being with Kelly's band, ER played with Kid Rena a couple of times. In Kelly's band; Kelly, trumpet; Chester Zardis (ER thinks), bass; different clarinetists, including Georgie Boyd; ER, [banjo]; others. The bands were six or seven pieces, usually; at that time, a seven piece band was really a Dixieland band; today, bands are usually cut to six pieces, but they leave out the main instrument--the banjo. The bands in the old days always had a banjo; the banjo was never cut out of the band. ER began playing guitar in 1943; he prefers guitar to banjo; says guitar is easier to play. He now also has a steel guitar, a Hawaiian guitar, which he taught himself to play. [in late 1945 he was still playing only banjo on the job with the Avery-Tillman band RBA] Kelly's band had a regular job at the Bull's Club (Eighth Street, just of Dannel]; ER played there with him, and also with Carey and Rena. Kelly's band also made trips out of town, going to Magnolia and McComb, Mississippi. Kelly's style of playing was

the same as the Dixieland of today. When "Careless Love" Came out, Kelly was the first to use a toilet flusher [i.e., plunger] as a mute; he used the flush[er] on many numbers, but he could really play the trumpet. Kelly could play high notes. Kelly's band also played at the Sans Souci Hall, on LaSalle Street; he had that job "sewed up"--when Kelly wasn't there, Jack Carey had it sewed up. ER played with Buddy Petit "a solid two weeks in Mandeville;" Petit had that area sewed up. ER played with Buddy Petit. Petit lived in Mandeville for a while. Petit was a great trumpet player. The Petit band, with ER, played in a dance hall in Mandeville, in a dance hall in Bogalusa, and a couple of times in the hotel in Mandeville. The Year was around 1921-22. Some of those in Petit's band then: Petit [cornet]; ER [banjo]; Earl Foster [drums? vocal?]; Isidore Fritz, clarinet. [Cf. Earl Foster, reel?] ER says Fritz was the greatest clarinetist he ever heard; WR says George Lewis has said the same thing. Fritz never played in New Orleans. ER says Fritz played in all registers of his clarinet; "that man could make monkeys jump out of his clarinet." Fritz was something like [Sidney] Bechet, although ER didn't know Bechet, having heard only his recordings. Petit was a faster fingerer than Chris Kelly, but Kelly had a stronger tone. In Kid Rena's band, varying personnel: Chester Zardis or Simon Marrero, bass; [Emile] "Mealy" Barnes [clarinet]; others. Petit, Kelly and Rena had the same style, the same Dixieland jazz. Rena had a drummer from downtown; it might have been Cie [Frazier], or somebody else; WR says Rena's brother, Joe Renè[sic], might have played drums with him some. When Rena couldn't get Albert Burbank on clarinet, he would sometimes have Georgie Boyd. ER then remembers that Rena's regular clarinet player was Zeb Leneries.

ER was playing banjo in those days; he didn't see anybody playing guitar in bands then.

ER likes guitar better than banjo for use in a Dixieland band; he says it is easier for him to play. After ER took up guitar [1943--see Reel I], which he taught himself, he played with various small bands; he also played with Kid Thomas [Valentine] for two or three years, at Specks' Moulin Rouge [in Marrero]; the band was eleven pieces; ER played guitar in it; his stay was during wartime [World War II]. After Thomas, ER joined the band of Foster Lewis; Lewis was a sweet [i.e., good] trombone player.

The banjo players ER liked to hear, in the old days: his cousin, Caffrey Darenbourg, who played with [A.J.] Piron on the [Pythian] Roof and Garden, was fast as lightning. WR mentions George Gresnon; ER says he and Gresnon started playing banjo just about the same year. Caffrey played chords and solos; he began playing lead on the banjo, a practice picked up by the rest of the banjo players in town. ER was about three years older than Caffrey. Caffrey learned to play mandolin in ER's hometown, also the hometown, also the hometown of Caffrey; when he moved to New Orleans, he learned banjo. ER mentions Joe Darenbourg, clarinetist, [from Baton Rouge, PRC] with Kid Ory. ER remembers Willie Foster, brother of [bassist] George "[ops]" Foster; Foster (now <sup>L</sup>iving in Baton Rouge) first played violin, says ER, then took up guitar and later, banjo. WR mentions that Foster told him there were some Darenbourgs in Baton Rouge who played music; ER says they are the same family, that Caffrey's father, originally from Killona, Louisiana (ER's hometown), played mandolin and guitar. Caffrey's uncle was a trombone player. None of Caffrey's musician relatives are still living nor is Caffrey, who died in Texas.

ER didn't play in the W.P.A. Band; during the time it was operating, ER was working in the city with small bands, three or four pieces; he was playing guitar then [W.P.A. Band ceased to exist about 1942, or earlier, and ER says he took up guitar in 1943--PRC].

Another banjo player ER liked, during the Twenties: John Marrero, who played with Papa Celestin (Marrero was a brother of Lawrence Marrero, also a banjo player. WR mentions talking to bass player, Eddie Marrero, another brother, still alive; WR mentions brother Simon Marrero, bass, who is dead.).

ER had so much work he didn't get a chance to hear many other bands; when he was not working with Jack Carey, he was with Chris [Kelly] or with Buddy [Petit]. Jack Carey's band had six nights [per week, or one week only?] at the Sams Souci; ER says Carey's band was extremely popular then. "Tiger Rag" was one of their numbers. Pundh [Miller] was the regular trumpet player with Carey; sometimes Buddy Petit substituted for him, and sometimes Peter Lacaze, a blacksmith and a sweet trumpet player, substituted. ER says Lacaze is dead, but WR says he is still living on St. Bernard Avenue. ER says Lacaze was something like Manuel Perez in his playing. Perez was a very sweet trumpet player, a Dixieland trumpet player.

ER mentions that he [banjo], Harold Dejan (sax), Jake Coodhy [sp?], piano, and a drummer played at the Cottage Inn (Rampart at about St. Louis in 1921.

ER liked Bunk Johnson, trumpet, who, before he went North, played several times with Jack Carey's band.

After the decline of the popularity of the banjo, guitarists ER

liked to hear were: Johnny St. Cyr [also plays six-string banjo]; Homer Eugene (also plays banjo and trombone); [Narvin] Kimall (a left-handed player [also banjo and string bass]). ER preferred St. Cyr to any of them. WR mentions Jeannette Kimball [piano], [once] wife of Narvin; ER says they were courting when they were in the Papa Celestin band.

The brass bands [in and around ER's home] played marches and songs; he doesn't recall having heard blues much, from any source. His mother was a good singer, who sang in French, and mostly opera songs.

During the depression, ER gave up music, selling his banjo; when the war broke out, ER bought a guitar and began playing again (around 1942-1943).

ER father died in 1939, aged eighty-one; he had quit playing music. His mother died at age seventy-eight. Both died at Third and Danneel. ER made his home in New Orleans, always uptown, and near where he now lives, since World War I.

End of Reel III