

Irwin Leclere
Reel I
April 14, 1970
Summary

Notes: Richard B. Allen
Summary: Paul W. Smith

Also Present: Betty B. Rankin
Richard B. Allen

The interview with Irwin Leclere [His full name is given at the end of Reel II.] was taped at the Archive of New Orleans Jazz in the Tulane University Library. The interviewers are playing [tapes and phonograph records of] IL's own music including "Cookie" by [Dr. Edmond] Souchon made in 1959. It was issued on Golden Crest Records, CR 3065. He sang it well. This is the first time IL heard it. There is discussion of the book They All Played Ragtime [by Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis]. There is mention of Tony Parenti, who has his own [night]club in New York on 52nd Street; IL mentions Tom Zimmermann. TP was wonderful. IL says Eddie McCarty [sp?] and Guy McCormick [sp?] are gone. IL remembers Roy Barton [Cf. the above book.] and Henry Ragas. IL does not remember the ragtime contest mentioned in [the above book], but he does remember Kid Ross by name. IL mentions the Tango Belt. [Cf. They All Played Ragtime to see if he was reading.] He does not remember winning loving cups or medals. IL suggests that they did not give them in those days.

1:17 IL was born in New Orleans and spent [almost] his whole life here. He was born on February 21, 1891,* and still plays the piano. IL is asked how he got started playing. He states that he watched his mother's niece play the piano. He played "Chopsticks," and other pieces. One of the first pieces he learned was the very difficult "Maple Leaf Rag" or "something like that." IL learned by ear from a man with a French name. [Cf. RBA's New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival notes or tapes: the name was Louis Carpentier.]

* died 1981

1:42

IL got into vaudeville with Guy McCormick and a man named Fitzgerald from Chicago in 1912 or 1913. They were on the Orpheum Circuit. He was on [vaudeville?] circuits for two or three years. IL returned to New Orleans and played in cafes. He can not read music; he had no formal teacher. Joe Martinez, now dead for many years, wrote down IL's pieces. [Cf. sheet music.] It is stated on the sheet music of "Triangle Jazz Blues" that Joseph N. Martinez arranged the piece. He wrote down all of IL's music. IL played in Kress stores to sell records [i.e., sheet music]. "Triangle Jazz Blues: was too difficult for most to play. "Some Day You'll Want Me and I Won't Want You" sold on record; IL made a little money from this piece. JM played piano. [Chicken Henry] told [RBA] that JM played around Basin Street. IL does not remember this. JM taught piano and [directed] WPA band[s?]. He played everything except perhaps "ragtime" [i.e., jazz?]. IL does not remember JM playing in cafes. He mostly took down numbers; he was a "born musician." The orchestration of ["Triangle Jazz Blues"?] [in the Archive] was arranged by [Confair?]. [A check revealed that the Archive's copy was arranged by Jean Walz. October 10, 1977.]

2:55

Ernst Boehringer to whom "Triangle Jazz Blues" is dedicated was the manager of the Triangle Theater, a "wonderful old fellow." IL played the comedies [short films?], and Tony Parenti and the orchestra played the dramas, etc., [on film]. IL's drummer put in the effects. A man from the country, IL thinks from Donaldsonville, played drums. He died young also.

3:14

IL was out for two years on the Orpheum Circuit, the Sullivan [and] Consadine, and perhaps another circuit. He worked out of Chicago; he had a Chicago agent.

He also worked four weeks in Kansas City. IL then played parks in Chicago.

2:23 Guy McCormick, a singer and entertainer, opened Tony DaNapoli's Little Club after World War I. IL played there with him [in] after[noons?]. GM, IL, and Dick Fitzgerald of Chicago were in "show biz" together. They had a trio for about two years on the road [see above].

3:3? RBA asks about the Tango Belt. It was in the district. Cafes like [Tom] Anderson's (where Tom Zimmermann played), the Pup, and the Cadillac on Rampart and Conti (where IL played) were not in the district.

IL does not remember H.J. Boisseau. [Cf. Folkways LP.]. Leonard Bayersdorffer had a good ear as a pianist; he died very young. He was a "wonderful fellow." GM died at thirty-seven of a heart attack. EM died rather young. LB played in cafes; he was much younger than IL. There were singers in the cafes. They also played jazz; then it was called "ragtime." LB played "Maple Leaf Rag" wonderfully.

4:20 IL does not remember other classic rags, i.e., by Joplin and James Scott. [Their titles are not mentioned, only those two composer's names are.] IL wrote the second part of the "Purple Rose of Cairo" with A.J. Piron. Jimmy Dupre wrote lyrics [generally also]. IL does not remember Steve Lewis. AJP played at Spanish Fort. AJP had a good orchestra.

4:38 The part that IL composed may not be published. IL did not know that Jimmy Dupre wrote the lyrics. RBA tries to sing refrains of "Purple Rose of Cairo." The piece was composed [about 1920]. AJP was a very nice man. The work was published at the Pythian Temple.

IL compliments the Archive. He compliments the Sam Rosenbaum collection of manuscript copies of sheet music. There were no repeats on "Triangle Jazz Blues" [sheet music]; each strain was played once. IL discusses AH playing the above piece [on tape of Jazz Book TV show]. Interviewer plays Armand Hug recording [10" LP on Paramount] of "Purple Rose of Cairo." IL doesn't remember the verse; he plays the refrain now. AH plays IL's addition. [IL did not remember that JD wrote the lyrics, and he was not sure that it was published.]

5:42 [N.J.] Clesi was in the real estate business. He fooled around with the piano and wrote a big national hit, "I'm Sorry I Made You Cry." He was not related to Joe Clesi according to IL. NJC was in the real estate business all his life.

5:50 The interviewer plays a recording of "That's Why You Made Me Cry." [Cf. Archive card catalog.] [I'm Sorry I Made You Cry?] was a hit. [The Archive does have a copy of the sheet music: "Music and Words by Joe Verges, Henri Therrien and Irwin LeClere (sic)."]

6:09 Joe Verges wrote "Don't Leave Me Daddy." IL's "Why Should I Believe in You" was published but was not so successful. Henri [pronounced "Henry"] Therrien, a singer from Texas, had "a marvelous voice." HT met by JV. IL and JV probably wrote the melody. HT probably wrote the words of "Too Late to Be Sorry Now." The record [played above] has Therrien, Verges, and LeClere [sic] [on the label]. It is Cameo 460 by Fred Shaw; it is in the Archive.

6:35 IL wrote "Cookie" fooling around at the piano. He played quite a bit in the Army for singers and shows. In the Army he was in Little Rock first and then overseas for about two years with the Washington

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Artillery. He was a Sergeant First Class and not a cook. He joked about his work. He told them he would play the piano instead of doing other things. Nevertheless, he was called "Cookie." The soldiers sang his song "Cookie." IL answered that the phrase "ones and twos" refers to one-and two-dollar bills; it also rhymes with "blues." [Cf. the lyrics of the sheet music.] [Cf. "One and Two Blues" recorded by Bessie Smith.] Joe Verges wrote "Jelly Bean." IL did not listen to other pianists at the start. [Check this.] He liked LB, JB, and two or three others. He does not remember Dewey Schmid [Cf. Reel II.] a vaudeville performer [Wilbur Leroy]. "Those Three Fellows" was IL, GM, and DF. Roy Barton was probably older than IL. He was probably not from New Orleans. RB wrote several numbers. [Reading above book.]

4:40

Tom Zimmermann was from New Orleans. He played at Anderson's on Rampart Street after World War I. Kid Ross is not remembered well. IL knew Henry Ragas, a good pianist.

END OF REEL I

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There is discussion of four or five recordings made for [Dr. Edmond] Souchon. IL played all his compositions, he thinks, and thinks they are at the [New Orleans] Jazz Museum. Dr. Souchon's wife gave the recordings to the Museum when he died.

12:21 There is mention of Roy Barton. [Discussion is of a digest of the Armand Hug interview.] AH's grandfather was named [Dewey] Schmid, and his uncle, Jasper Hug, was a drummer. [Dewey] Schmid went under the name of Wilbur Leroy. IL remembers comedian Eddie Chittenden and also Paul Serpas (also probably a comedian), who, IL thinks, played vaudeville around the city.

12:37 Buzzy Williams was a very good pianist, but IL doesn't remember if he composed. IL does remember that he played piano. BW played "across the tracks" [in the "red light" district]. [cf. BW's biography in Second Line.]

1:01 There is discussion of "Someday You'll Want Me and I Won't Want You," which IL says he composed when he was "fooling around at the piano." He doesn't remember being in love when he wrote it. When radio station WSMB opened, the Fuzzy Wuzzy Twins (Eddie McCarthy and IL) performed there, along with an orchestra and the Boswell Sisters, who, IL recalls, were "very good." There was also a band, but IL doesn't remember the name. Clyde Randall, the announcer, gave EM and IL the name "Fuzzy Wuzzy Twins." IL was "Fuzzy," and EM was "Wuzzy." [Ted Frank, on May 1, 1970 told me that his father, Dave Frank, was one of a team Fuzzy and Buzzy at an earlier date. TF will allow us to copy DF's taped interviews (now in progress). RBA,

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May 5, 1970.] [Cf. 1970 letter from DF. RBA, August 22, 1970.]
WSMB was one of the biggest [radio stations in town] then. They
were on WSMB for quite a long time. [I believe it was a network
affiliate. RBA. May 5, 1970.] [He/they] may have played some other
radio stations. Clyde Randall died young. † IL doesn't recall playing
the "Bowery Buck" or "Harlem Rag." He also doesn't recall Brown's
[or Braun's] Naval Brigade Band, which played at the lakefront. [See
RBA's notes on Ragtime to Jelly program. NOJ&H Festival, April (25?),
1970.] IL does recall Norman Brownlee from Algiers, a pianist, with
RBA's help. IL never studied music. His cousin played piano. [IL
still doesn't read music. RBA. May 5, 1970] IL learned "Maple
Leaf Rag" as the first piece he played and one of the most difficult.
[Cf. Reel I.] He learned it from [Louis LeCarpentier] [See RBA's
notes of about April 25, 1970, NOJ&H Festival.] IL was young at the
time he learned this piece. He was educated in the New Orleans Public
Schools. He lived at 1325 Elysian Fields for twenty-five years, near
Villere and Urquhart. He lived at the corner of Broadway and South
Claiborne for thirty-six years.

2:30

The name of Jack Laine, who lived near him, is familiar to him.
He also remembers [Johnny] Fischer and [Happy] Schilling, who, he
thinks, played at West End. There is also mention of Steve Lewis.
Tom Zimmerman played only at Tom Anderson's on Rampart near Canal.
TZ played piano with a drummer. [He was not related to Roy Zimmerman.
RBA.]

In those days there were no bands in cafes, only pianos and
drums playing for three or four singers. IL remembers the "Gyp the

Blood" murder at the Tuxedo [dance hall]. [For some reason IL doesn't volunteer information on the killing.]

IL doesn't remember a black piano player called "Windin' Boy" [Jelly Roll Morton]. [Armand J.] Piron is the only colored fellow he knew; he was a "good character." AJP played at Tranchina's at the Spanish Fort for years and years.

3:18 He remembers the 1915 storm. During 1912, '13, and '14 he was in vaudeville. Then after a little while he went into the Army and was discharged in 1918. After quitting music he went to work for New Orleans Public Service, where he worked for forty-one years. He retired six years ago [i.e., 1964]. Therefore, he quit playing music in about 1923. [See city directories.] [Cf. other sources on his being on WSMB.]

IL now works at the Fair Grounds and Jefferson [Downs] track; he is a mutual auditor. He didn't like working behind the windows; some "slicker" could cheat you so he didn't want to handle the money.

3:55 His daughter still plays piano and is in the union. She's "very good, plays wonderfully." She is married now and has three children and lives on Green Acres Road in Metairie.

4:00 IL never played with string bands like the "6 and 7/8" though Dr. Souchon did. IL doesn't remember where rags changed keys. He used to play the black keys, as did [Leonard] Bayersdorffer. People who did so were called black-note pianists [or black-key pianists. RBA, September 28, 1977]. IL and RBA can't determine the key of one sharp on "Triangle Jazz Blues." IL thinks it is F# [i.e., G]. Joe Martinez took it down. It modulates to two sharps for the last [strain]. It was printed in Chicago. [N.J.] Clesi had Triangle

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Publishing Company at 821 Gravier Street, which was also where he had his real estate business. NJC published his own and IL's tunes and those of other musicians.

4:35 Joe Verges and IL were pals; they wrote some numbers together. Sam Rosenbaum was the manager of Triangle Publishing Company. NJC owned it. [They are looking at SR's manuscripts of sheet music in the Archive.] SR wrote only lyrics; he didn't play piano or anything else or write melodies. JV and IL wrote the melodies. IL doesn't remember NJC writing many numbers after his hit "I'm Sorry I Made You Cry." NJC made a tremendous amount of money on this song, which was his first. [RESTRICT UNTIL 2020:

END RESTRICTION.] IL says JV wrote "Jelly Bean." RBA adds that JV wrote "Camel Walk;" IL had forgotten it. IL says the Traingle [Publishing Company] published them. "Someday You'll Want Me..." was published by the Triangle, and "Cookie" was published by Universal, but IL didn't remember it. NJC wrote "When You Gave Me You " [See sheet music], but IL doesn't remember this either. IL changed the incorrect spelling of Leclere (as Leclerc) on [orchestration of "Someday You'll Want Me..."]?. There is speculation of NJC's owning Triangle and Universal Music Publishing Company. IL recalls with uncertainty that NJC owned both after a while. IL says Clesi changed the name of the company from Triangle to Universal Music Publishing Company.

5:20 "Bluin' the Blues" by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band is played. [from 10" "X" LP]. IL recognizes Henry Ragas. There is discussion of IL's appearance on Ragtime to Jelly Roll program at New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival April [25?], 1970, and the possibility of

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his playing. IL says he has no favorite tune now. [IL told me several years ago that "Melancholy Baby" was one of his favorite tunes. RBA. May 5, 1970.] RBA mentions "Melancholy Baby," and IL says he often plays it and "It Had to Be You." He likes sentimental songs [leading by RBA here].

5:54 IL comments on the problems he supposes the workers in the Archive must have searching for something. RBA gets IL to sign a release, gives him a copy, and thanks him. He does not want to accept the \$5 which RBA offers, but he finally takes it after RBA tells him that that makes it legal. IL signs his name, including his middle name, Percy, which he says was given to him by his aunt, a school teacher. His sentiment on using his middle name was "to hell with it." He said he had to use his middle initial when he worked for Public Service. They also note that IL puts an accent mark on the "e" in his last name.

6:30 IL said that he was glad to see the Archive. He remarks that he may have a copy of "Cookie" at home. On [Jazz Book TV program audio tape in Archive].

c.6:45 IL and RBA look at a picture of Original Dixieland Jazz Band [used as an advertisement by Buescher instrument company]. IL recognizes Eddie Edwards (but not by name). He recalls that Johnny Stein was a drummer. IL says that it has been a happy morning for him.

END OF INTERVIEW

