

*Interview with Jack Kerrigan*

JK: I have been requested by Hayward Hillyer to give you some history on the New Orleans jazz, of the city of New Orleans. This is Jack Kerrigan speaking. I was born March 13, 1900, and my first contact with jazz was when I lived in Hammond around 1917 at the Old Folks Hotel. Saturday night dances used to be given quite often, and my first opportunity to hear New Orleans jazz was played by a band from Baton Rouge, known as Johnson's band. Later on, after finishing my high school in Hammond, I moved to New Orleans, and entered Tulane in the year 1918. And at that time, jazz was beginning, and becoming the most popular type of music to be enjoyed by the Tulane students. And in fact the gym dances given at the old gym was a very, very popular spot, and only jazz was wanted by the students.

Later on, I became a member of the Southern Yacht Club and every dance there we always had jazz music. Of course the dances stopped at 12 'o'clock in those days, and there was a very lively spot located in the Spanish Fort known as Tranchina's. To me, this was the hottest spot in town, due to the fact that they had the old Piron band playing there every Saturday, on into Sunday morning. This band, in my opinion, in later years became the outstanding jazz band in the city of New Orleans. In addition to playing there on Saturday night, as this type of music became very, very popular, Piron's was, his band, was used by the New Orleans country club for their Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon tea dances. As this music became very popular, the old Louisianne Restaurant had dances on Wednesday evenings and Saturday evenings, and at this place, the band used was known as Robichaux, an all-colored band. The leader was a left handed violin player known as Robichaux -- that's where the band got its name. Numerous times, we all gathered at the Louisianne, especially on Wednesday night, or when there was a private party at the country club, which prevented us from going there, we went to hear Robichaux play.

Another spot that we had the opportunity of hearing outstanding jazz music was at the Halfway House, which had a very, very popular Dixieland jazz band. Another spot was at Kolb's Restaurant, and at that spot, Johnny DeDroit started his jazz band. I recall that from the early 20s on into, let's say as far as 1926, 27, all debutant parties, the country club, the St. Charles Hotel, and the Gold Room, were spots used to give the debutant parties, also the Roosevelt Hotel and private homes requested and used jazz bands at approximately 98% of the parties given. I'm now living on the coast of Pass Christian, and whenever they want to put a dance over at the yacht club here, jazz is called upon. And at the present time, we are still using Celestin's band, which was one of the outstanding colored bands in the later years of jazz in the city of New Orleans.

HH: Well, do you remember if at any time if they stopped using it at parties and then when it started again? If the people stopped liking it and stopped listening to it, and then started again? Talking about the death of jazz and its revival in the early 40s and so on? Do you remember anything?

JK: No, I don't know recall any of that because I moved away from New Orleans. I went to Texas to live for five years. I just don't know anything about -- I know some things about the revival but it takes somebody like Edmond Souchon, or John Curran, or oh, what's her name, Loker. They're the ones who brought the jazz back and got everybody interested and stuff like that, but I wasn't present for that kind of stuff.

HH: Well do you remember when they first started having it at Pass Christian Yacht Club again?

JK: When it was reorganized back in 1947. We started off having what jazz bands we could secure on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and later on as the crowd grew and we got larger space, we were able to obtain the jazz band known as Celestin's.

HH: Were there actually Gulf Coast jazz bands then?

JK: Oh yes, there were Gulf Coast jazz bands. There was one located in Bay St. Louis, I don't recall the name. There was one located down in Biloxi, known as, I think it's known as Brunies...

HH: Merrit Brunies?

JK: Yeah, Merritt Brunies -- very good jazz band.

HH: Were these Coast groups for the most part colored or white?

JK: No they were white, mostly handled by men who had really retired from bands, and retired altogether and got over on the coast and just have something to do, some of the old friends got together and brought their instruments together. I know one man here at Pass Christian, I can't remember his name, but he got some of his old cronies to come over from New Orleans and they were a five piece band and they knew the old beat, and they practiced for a few weeks and they just put on very, very good jazz. They still have you hoppin' like they used to have you hoppin' in the old days.

HH: Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.