

RUDOLPH BEAULIEU
I [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
May 31, 1961

Also present: William Russell
Ralph Collins

Rudolph Peter Beaulieu was born in New Orleans, on Derbigny between Kerlerec and Columbus (about where Artisan Hall is), on July 23, 1899. RB had two brothers who also played music; Arnold Depass (actually, a half-brother) played drums. (George Guesnon, shown in a photograph, is mentioned.) Depass played with "some of the old aces." RB learned to play on Depass's drums, on the sly until Depass caught him; then Depass told him it was all right for him to play them, told him he should learn to play, and later began sending him on jobs. RB began getting work on his own, and he made up a band (he says he has made up four or five bands in his career). RB says he and Martin Gabriel (now away from here) "carried on plenty" [worked together a lot?]. WR says a Gabriel married the bass player, [August] Lanoix; RB says that she is a sister of Martin; there were other Gabriels in that family; one, Clarence Gabriel, was a fine piano player. . . . [Restricted] RB says he and others, including Clarence Gabriel, Charlie Armstead, and Maurice Durand, [trumpet,] had a band which played "back of Desire Street." He [owner of the place there?] died not long ago. The band worked there about three years. Talk of Durand, who lives [and died] in California. RB also worked with various other bands, including that of Papa Celestin.

RB began playing just about the time Louis Armstrong went to Chicago [1922]. RB tells of auditioning in a band (with the DuCongé brothers--band consisted of piano, saxophone, trumpet, [RB] drums, and others) for Butsy Fernandez, who ran a place at Burgundy and

and Conti; another band also auditioned; then Louis Armstrong [and the band he was with] auditioned, and RB knew that Louis had the job. RB used to get a lot of jobs; he went to Tom Anderson's on Rampart between Canal and Iberville, but gave his brother [no doubt Arnold Depass] the job, because he didn't think he himself could hold down the job. Depass played mostly in night clubs, so was just right for the job. There were two comedians with Depass; one was big and tall, the other was short; they went "up the line" [i.e., up North], may be dead. Depass was perhaps six or eight years older than RB. Another brother, Dave [Depass], played music, and still another, Octave Beaulieu, now living in Kenner, played banjo a while, but quit; Octave is two years older than RB. Octave began the same time as Johnny Dave, with whom RB played in Sam Morgan's band.

RB met Louis Dumaine, in whose band he later played, in Papa Celestin's band; he also met Frankie Duson, Sam Dutrey and "Red" Allen; he met both the father [Henry, Sr.] and son [Henry, Jr.] Allen. RB worked with Allen, Sr., over the river, playing funerals and parades. RB says the son is away now; WR says he has been in New York for years, at the Metropole, or some place like that. RB says the only one he doesn't remember very well is Freddy Keppard; he knew Freddy and his brother, Louis Keppard, very well [sic]; Freddy started playing before RB, when RB was still quite young. Freddy began playing about the time of Manuel Perez, [Andrew?] Kimball, [others]. Kimball played at the Lyric Theater. Keppard, a trumpet

player, had a good sound. RB says he has not ever heard any trumpet playing like that of Louis Armstrong, when Armstrong knew only one number; Armstrong was riding on the tailgate [of a wagon?] with RB, who was passing out dodgers [, i.e., handbills]; Joe Oliver was running the band; Oliver would let Armstrong play his number once in a while. "Sister Kate" and "Wind and Grind" are mentioned; the number Armstrong played was neither of them; it was a fast number. RB tells of Armstrong's playing with Celestin right when "The Sheik of Araby" had come out; Armstrong was so powerful he covered [i.e., drowned out] Celestin and Peter Bocage, the other trumpet in the band. Eddie Jackson was on tuba in the band, which also had alto and baritone horns, not saxophones. Celestin was not much of a trumpet player, but he always had a good man to play trumpet with him.

RB used to play at the Bulls, with Chris Kelly, a great man to play for dances; Kelly had a good drummer [sic]; had Earl Humphrey (brother of Percy and Willie Humphrey [the younger]) on trombone. RB says the father Willie Humphrey [the elder], clarinet, worked with him, too [in Kelly's band?]. Kelly had a real ragtime tone. There are no more bands like those of Kid Punch [Miller], Chris Kelly, Kid Rena, and perhaps a few others; they were the outstanding bands for dancing, around town. Papa Celestin also played a lot of dances, but the other three mentioned were the bands for barrelhouse dancing. Ricard [Alexis] also had a band; Ricard played trumpet at the time. Buddy Petit was also playing during that time. RB says Petit has a nephew with whom RB has arguments about bands a lot; the nephew, a

bass player, is related to John and Simon and Lawrence Marrero, the latter a banjo player recently deceased, and a good friend of RB. Most of Celestin's work was for whites, society people. He often lost contests with other bands.

RB mentions George Baquet, clarinetist, who left New Orleans quite early, so that RB didn't become well-acquainted with him; RB mentions Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], whom he knew well, but never played with. Jimmie Noone was the best friend of RB's brother [Arnold Depass?] [Compare Mrs. Arnold Depass, reel ?]; Noone, Albert Nicholas and Barney Bigard worked with RB; RB wouldn't hire Bigard sometimes, preferring to get someone better; after Bigard left town, he began playing so well that RB says Bigard wouldn't hire him [RB]. Bigard played saxophone before he left New Orleans; he worked with Hypolite Charles; Charles also worked with RB's brother. RB's brother played the Tom Anderson job with Albert Nicholas and the Mexican-looking fellow, Arnold Metoyer [trumpet]. WR mentions that the picture he has of a band at Anderson's shows Paul Barbarin; RB begins explaining that a lot of the men from the band left, in groups of two or three [and were replaced?].

RB says that the old-time, six-piece bands (guitar, bass, drums, trumpet, trombone and clarinet [no saxes--RB thinks Sam Morgan was the first in New Orleans to have a sax in his band, and the player came from outside New Orleans]) [Compare John Joseph, reel ?] made more music than the big bands of today. Piano was not used much, as most people didn't have pianos; there were no

electric guitars, either. RB says that one time the bands of Joe Oliver and Manuel Perez were playing on advertising wagons when they met at St. Ann and Prieur; Perez told his band that they would play just as they had been, not attempting to do anything spectacular; one man, hearing Perez play the blues, said Perez's playing made him feel that he could go home and beat his wife. RB says the music of the old-time bands sounded so good because, for one reason, when a man was playing a solo, the other horn players would play a background for him.

RB played with Frankie Duson; then he went with Louis Dumaine, where he was exposed to reading music; he says he never did learn to read, but he had a good head for music. Arnold Depass didn't read either.

Photograph of Arnold Depass and his drums is looked at and discussed; RB doesn't remember date of picture; he says the musicians wore the same uniform for dances that they wore for street jobs. RB came into music in later years; he says he didn't ever wear a uniform cap to play a dance, although he wore them for parades. Depass's cap has a sign on it which says "Eagle", the band with which he was playing then; Frankie Duson was leader. Talk of overhead drum beater; RB had one when he first began; WR says Bill Phillips had one, but lost it around 1930. RB thinks he began playing before Phillips. Talk of early cymbals.

RUDOLPH BEAULIEU
II [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
May 31, 1961

Also present: William Russell
Ralph Collins

RB spells the name of Arnold [Depass], who was a close personal friend of clarinetist Jimmie Noone; RB thinks Noone was related to Albert Nicholas, who played clarinet and saxophone. RB hadn't started playing when Depass and Noone were playing. Depass was a jolly fellow; he insisted that RB meet his friends, too. Noone was short and fat, built on the order of Depass. Depass had RB come to a lot of the various places he played, so that RB met many more people that way. Depass used the same set of drums most of his career; RB changed drums frequently. Talk of drums, of the Conn Company, of Werlein's. RB tells of the burning of a new bass drum he had bought.

RB says he was in the colored musicians union at the beginning; he thinks [John] Robichaux had something to do with that union; he thinks [Butler] "Guye" [Rapp] (who got killed) got some of the money which was in the union treasury when the union broke up; RB explains that some of the members divided the money at that time. Another union was established later, one with national affiliation; RB says things have been going well in it, so far. WR mentions the president of the union [Louis Cottrell, Jr.], saying that his father was a drummer; RB remembers that the elder Cottrell lived on the opposite side of the same street from RB, that he was a tall, brown-skin fellow, that he was playing with Manuel Perez's brass band; Cottrell was a very good drummer. Although RB doesn't consider his brother [Arnold Depass] one of the best drummers, RB says he was good, and

worked with people like Jimmie Noone and Albert Nicholas. Depass probably didn't work with Barney Bigard, but Bigard didn't begin playing well until he left New Orleans; WR says Bigard played with Duke [Ellington] for thirteen years. WR says Bigard was also with Joe Oliver, in Chicago. RB says Oliver could really play; he tells of hearing Oliver at the Big Twenty-five; RB was still young, not having taken up music yet, so he was standing on a barrel outside the place, listening through a window; [Ferdinand] Valteau was playing violin with the group, which was about five pieces; Valteau played very loud (WR says Professor [Manuel] Manetta speaks of Valteau); a policeman chased RB away, as youngsters were not allowed in that area.

RB tells of playing in the brass band of Red Allen's daddy [Henry Allen, Sr.], across the river, and of being fired from it because he would not spend his money on liquor; he says he got fired from two or three bands for that reason.

RB tells of working advertising jobs for Maison Blanche Annex, just opened; the band played in the store. He also played every Friday for Patorno's fighting arena, the Fifth Ward Athletic Club (which was Dumaine, downtown side of the street, between Decatur and Chartres). He played advertising, on a truck, for Frey's Grocery (Canal and Villere) once a week. RB had jobs almost every night. He talks about how school children and music boxes have cut out a lot of jobs for musicians; he says that in his early days every man stuck to his own trade, that musicians were musicians and carpenters

were carpenters, and that they didn't try to work in two kinds of jobs. RB says a musician could make a living then, but now everybody plays music. RB talks of how people have tried to get him to play just for food and drink; he mentions two policemen, Sergeant Morris and Captain Anderson, and a picnic RB played for them. RB tells of going to Delacroix Island with Kid Howard, although he had said he would never play there again. RB says Papa Celestin's band got beaten on Delacroix Island. The people down there are always drunk, always fighting. Kid Howard got hit with a bottle on the job mentioned previously; the bass player, Sidney Brown, got hit, too; RB has not been there since. Someone named Freddy Favrot broke RB's drum one night; Favrot tried to be a drummer; after that RB always collected five dollars from him before Favrot played the drums, to pay for any drum heads that were broken. Celestin and his band were beaten up before Celestin began playing at the Paddock [Lounge]; Fats Domino's nephew [or uncle? Harrison Verrett? (check obit)] was playing banjo with Celestin then. The rowdies cut the top of a band car off; they did pay for it, however, as charges were preferred and court trial held.

Talk of French names; those mentioned: Valteau, Volly DeFaut, Arnold Metoyer. WR says daughter of Metoyer pronounces her last name Meh toy [as child's toy] yah.

The Eagle Band in which Arnold Depass played was a six or seven piece "string" [,i.e., dance as opposed to brass] band, although the

men did play in brass bands. When the saxophone came into use, one was added to the Eagle Band, so that there were both clarinet and saxophone in it. RB explains that "string" bands were so called because they had guitar, bass, piano and violin [any combination] in them. [A. J.] Piron is mentioned.

RB says that drums can be played softly; he tells about a job he had, as leader, on which he proved to his client that drums are not necessarily loud. RB mentions that he substituted for [Ernest] "Nenesse" Trepagnier, with Papa Celestin's band, at the Moulin Rouge in West End.

RB describes his drum set, traps, etc.; "I had everything."

RB uses his entire leg to operate his bass drum foot pedal, not just his toe, as most drummers do; he says Roy [Evans?], who played with Chris Kelly, was another who played that way.

WR mentions Harold [Dejan], saying, "they must be pulling out his teeth."

End of Reel II

RUDOLPH BEAULIEU Also present: William Russell,
III [of 3]--Digest--Retyped Ralph Collins, Harold Dejan
May 31, 1961

Photograph of a George Lewis band, with [Albert] "Fernandez" Walters [trumpet] shown; photo taken on a trip to Chicago or New York [or California?].

(Harold Dejan enters.)

Photo of Arnold Depass, brother of RB, is mentioned. Dejan, who is fifty-two years old, played with Depass a long time, from the time Dejan was quite young; Dejan played with Depass in Raceland [Louisiana] every Saturday night. Dejan mentions that he sees Benny Benoit (now sick), banjo player, every day. HD says Depass was a fine drummer and had a very steady beat. Overhead drum pedals are mentioned; HD says RB had one at the Black Cat; RB agrees; HD, RB and Willie Santiago, guitar, had a trio there. RB says he has played "the biggest majority" of his jobs with George Guesnon [banjo and guitar].

RB played with Sam Morgan; in fact, that's who he started with. Johnny Dave was playing [banjo] with Morgan then; when he died, he was replaced by George Guesnon. RB quit playing after Dave died. Roy [Evans, drums, also in Morgan's band at one time] had also died by that time [when RB had quit?]. The Morgan band made out-of-town trips a lot during that time; often they didn't get paid, as they were playing for a percentage of the receipts.

Talk of the sound, the fullness of the old bands, as compared with present-day bands; HD says everybody in the old bands worked so hard.

HD doesn't know when Arnold Depass died; he says his widow should know; he says he works with his son [Arnold Depass, Jr.], the trumpet player, every day.

HD spells "V-a-l-t-o." RB is speaking of [Ferdinand] Valteau, who played violin at the Big Twenty-five. . . . [Restricted]

Looking at photographs: Earl Barnes (has a radio-TV shop) and Louis Cottrell [Jr.] are pointed out. Others mentioned: "Ankle", a singer; Sidney "Jim Little" Brown, bass; Charlie Hamilton, piano; Jesse Charles, [check this] guitar; Alvin Herman Franklin, trumpet (who used to play in circuses). The photo was taken in 1954; band was playing at the Labor Union Hall, on Decatur Street. RB mentions trumpet player Dave Bartholomew. HD says Herman Franklin was a powerful trumpet player, like [Ernie] Cag[nolatti].

HD mentions that Willie Humphrey the younger] and his wife, and other musicians, were at a [Memorial Day?] job at Chalmette, where HD played with John Casimir's Young Tuxedo [Brass Band], of which he is a regular member. It is mentioned that bass drummer [Emile] Knox has just left the Tuxedo Band. RB plays both snare drum and bass drum.

In RB's opinion, "Red Happy" [Bolton] was the best of the old-time drummers as Happy played theater shows that other drummers were not able to play. HD mentions "Black Benny" [Williams], another drummer. RB himself worked shows in night clubs; he says some of them were very difficult. RB worked one place called The Cat and The Fiddle; HD played there later, with Earl Palmer and [Joe Pass?]. RB says Red Happy was good because he not only could play shows, but he could play in orchestras. RB considers Ernest Trepagnier the best bass drummer for brass bands; he says snare drum is not so hard in brass bands if the bass drummer is good, because the bass drummer can carry the snare [with his playing]; bass drummer can drown out the

RUDOLPH BEAULIEU
III [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
May 31, 1961

sound of the snare drummer, but not vice versa. ...[Restricted]

The leading jazz bands during the time of RB's early career were those of Kid Rena, Chris Kelly, and Kid Punch [Miller]; [A.U.] Piron and Papa Celestin had good orchestras. Celestin's band, and others of the same type, couldn't compete with the jazz bands (Rena, Kelly, Punch, Jack Carey) in music contests, which were decided by public opinion, and the former type band seldom got into any contests. Punch was a fast-fingering trumpet player; Kid Rena could finger, too, but he could also play beautiful solos. Rena played clean; Louis Armstrong played clean, too, but they had different styles. HD says Rena played almost like Al Hirt does today; RB heard Hirt on a television show recently when Hirt sounded more like Punch. RB preferred Kid Rena's playing to all the old-timers; he said he also liked Chris Kelly, who was a good "ragtime" trumpet player; Kelly was more a blues player, according to HD; Rena had a good ear, and could play the latest numbers as they came out on records. RB didn't like Buddy Petit as well as he liked Chris Kelly, although he says Petit was good. ... [Restricted]. Buddy Petit was one of the best for playing second part behind another man's hot chorus; HD says [Louis] "Shots" [Madison] and Maurice Durand were good at that, too. RB says he had previously mentioned that he and Durand worked together at Charlie Armstead's place. WR says Bunk Johnson played a good second, too; RB doesn't remember who he was, although his brother [Arnold Depass] and George Lewis have talked about him; WR says Johnson

left New Orleans in 1914, ~~refusing to~~ play only in late years.

HD mentions that Durand played in The Alley, by the St. Bernard Market, where there was a band every night.

RB says Kid Howard had a band at the Popeye, on Decatur Street; HD says Howard had the band after he himself did; HD, recommended by "Big Foot Bill" Phillips, went to work there for Sam and Joe Peck; he had Ernie Cagnolatti on trumpet at first; when Cagnolatti left, Howard came in on trumpet; after a couple of weeks, Howard convinced the owners that he could run the band for less money, HD was paid two dollars a night, and the sidemen, one-fifty, so HD was out. RB, Adolphe "Tats" Alexander [Jr.], saxophone, and Son Thomas (who had been Kid Rena's banjo player) were working at Mama's which was next door to the Popeye, where Kid Howard was working; RB says people commented on the big sound RB's trio got. HD says Alexander was a fine musician; RB agrees. HD says Alexander was really great, a genius, when he played with Manuel Perez on the [Pythian Temple] Roof Garden. HD says Perez and Maurice Durand were the only two trumpets in the [Perez's] brass band, because they were so powerful. RB retells the story of Joe Oliver and Perez's bucking contest [see Reel I].

RB says he doesn't agree, but others have said that his other brother, Dave Depass, who gave up music, was one of the best clarinet players around New Orleans; HD says he was good.

End of Reel III