

unedited first draft

ALCIDE "SLOW DRAG" PAVAGEAU
REEL I [only]
September 1, 1957

INTERVIEWER: William Russell
ALSO PRESENT: Charlie Devore
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

[WR begins asking Mr. Pavageau can you tell me when you were born...]

Yes, Mr. Bill. I was born in 1888, March 7. I...learned how to play guitar in 1906, up 'till 1927. On 1928 up to 1957, I was playing bass.

That was 30 years ago, and 21 years playing guitar. Makes it 51 years with the guitar, and bass, I was playing.

I took a soap box, and put twine on it so I learned how to play bass. [No one showed me how to play guitar and bass.]...

I took soapbox and took some twine and learned myself. I showed them boys how to play guitar [].

AP describes the process of building a homemade bass. There were three strings. He also played a big one with three strings. A man called August [forgot his name] his aunt's son.

Marie Laveau was AP's father's first cousin. She died on St. Ann between Burgundy and Rampart.

It was a great big house, and nobody's lived in it yet. The house is still there.

His father, his mother, and his sister are buried right next to Marie Laveau on Iberville Street between [] and Claiborne. That's St. Louis Cemetery #2. She's buried right next to his sister, mother, and brother.

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He just knows her as Marie Laveau because when she died he was too young to remember. That was his father's first cousin. His father's name is Joseph Pavageau, and his name is Alcide Louis Pavageau.

AP pronounces it. He thanks WR for doing a lot for him, and WR says it's in the bass. AP says he more he plays with a bow, the more he likes to play it....

AP says he plays the bass with the bow, and works sometimes with the bow.

They called him "Slow Drag" because they used to have about 10 different dances like mazurka, polka, waltz, schottische...and slow drag. He was the best slow drag dancing in New Orleans. that's why they called him Slow Drag.

They say, 'Here comes Slow Drag.' They kept on calling that name, 'Here comes Slow Drag. Here comes Slow Drag. Here comes Slow Drag.'

He won many dancing contests. But when they had a prize for the best dancing it wouldn't be for the men, it would be for the ladies.

The man don't get nothing. The lady you're dancing with, she get something. She get an umbrella for the prize.

Sometime they would ask me...they take a chalk, and mark it to show AP dance steps. They had dances at Economy Hall, Hopes Hall, Bull's Hall, Masonic Hall, Perseverance Hall, St. Cere

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Hall, and all them halls. They had that new hall on Bourbon Street.

On the Mardi Gras days they had a song they used to sing in French. Gus Boudreaux was playing guitar. Eudice Picou, Alphonse Picou's brother, used to sing "Eh Las Bas."

He composed that song but they sing it differently. He used to sing that only in French. That would be some years back when AP was 18, or 19, years old. He's 69 now.

AP remembers the bands that would play. Manuel Perez' band. Then, they had Buddy Petit band. You take the Manuel Perez--they had the Golden Rule, Imperial, and then they had Buddy Bolden Band, a street band down there.

Manuel Perez, Buddy Bolden and the Golden Rule Band. Frank Bubu was the trombone player in Golden Rule Band. Adolph [Alexander Sr.] was the cornet player. He was a shoemaker. They all are dead now.

Manuel Perez was the leader of the Imperial Band. The Boys in Blue was the Superior band. That's the name of Manuel Perez' band when it first come out.

They were the first band to come out with uniforms on. They had blue suits on. The Boys in Blue, and they changed that to the Superior Band, and the last was the Imperial band.

Boys in Blue, and then Imperial, and then Superior. That was the last name.

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They played cakewalk, schottische, [], slow drag, everything you asked for, mazurka. They'd say the name, and the band would throw that out.

Quadrilles, cakewalks, I danced all that dance. Johnny Foster was a cake-walking dancer, too, at the San Jacinto Club. I dance there.

Then I danced at Hope's Hall. It be Hope's, then it come to be Cooperator's. It's a church now [on Liberty and Dumaine, WR says.]

We had a boy called [] Picou playing Kazoo. I was playing guitar. A boy, Joseph, playing sandpaper. Buddy Johnson was playing washboard. We used to call it a sandpaper band. I just know him by Buddy.

That be on a Monday, Blue Monday. We used to work on Monday. Have banquets on Monday, too--everything free.

You got that invitation to go there. I was glad to be one of the people around there at the Economy Hall.

[Buddy Tureaud?] was at the Economy Hall, and Manuel Perez band was playing at the Economy. At that time it was called the Imperial Band.

I got on the [horse?], and started dancing. This man took an orange, throwed it, and hit Buddy Tureaud in the eye. He jumped, and the person put me out.

I come back again, and jumped on the fence, and was hanging

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on the fence. The wire cut the hem of my coat, and I was hanging on it.

I get down. The person down there he had to laugh. He said, 'I can't put you in jail. That's the last of it.' I'll never forget that day as old as I live.

[I won those dance contests,] I was about 21, 22, around there.

I'll tell you what happened to me. My cousin August, and I used to kick the ham that was at the 28 [Club] Frankie [Duson], and them used to [play].

The guitar player got sick. He took me, and I put long pants on then because I was not of age.

We played three nights. I played three nights, and surprised them, on the guitar. They was days that time.

My friend John Hudson made [bazooka] for rooty-dooty [bands]. That's where I learned the bow.

I played guitar. that's where I learned how to play bass-- rooty-dooty.

That's the club we called it. We get a band. Rudi Doody's Club. It was the name of a club, a speakeasy that was in 1929-1930. That's when that was there.

I had another boy get me called Buddy Davis. He's dead....I used to play guitar right there out by the lake at Milneberg.

We used to get the streetcar at Claiborne and Elysian

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Fields, go out to the lake. I used to sing, and I used to play guitar.

I used to know all the people out there. Used to eat at the picnic grounds out around there. I went out on all the clubs, and everything out there. Place - his name was Johnson I believe - we couldn't pass that place without going in there....

My birthday is March 7, 1888....I was born--March 7 past I'll be 69.

My father used to play cornet at that time. He was a cigar maker. After he got up to the age where he couldn't play no more, he took a fishing pole, and made a flute out of it.

He used to play guitar too. He'd play guitar left-handed. I take my guitar, and play it right.

He turned it around, and played it the same way I played it but the top string would be at the bottom, and the bottom string would be on top.

He was left-handed. I couldn't understand how he could make it.

I was working in 1900. I was 12 years old. I was working at 515 Bourbon Street at Mr. E. Christian [?]. That's where I learned my trade from a paper hanger, painter.

And I used to do a little grand work in the town [making houses in the woods?]. Take a rubber, and make knots, panels in the wood.

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I worked at [Delacroix Restaurant?]. I worked at Constance, and I worked all around Bourbon Street doing a lot of plastering work, slating work, and bricklaying work.

Fixed chimney, and everything in 1900's. Twelfth year I learned my trade.

I met up with George Lewis. He turned around, and asked me, 'Man, you're getting too old now. You want to play with me?' I said, 'Yes, George. Any time you want.'

I stop [day] work, I believe, in 1942. I start working [in a trio] there in 1942, string bass. Just job around after I turn around.

I went to New York in 1945 with Bunk Johnson, 1945-1946, and I been travelling since then. That's the bass I had in 1945 [from] George Morris.

He had three basses. His mother died, and actually he joined the church. After Lawrence Marrero told me about this bass, [I said] if I didn't buy this bass, I'd buy the other bass.

He had three basses. One bass he didn't want become the other bass I wanted to buy.

He didn't want to sell. He wanted to keep it. He said I'll sell you a new bass.

That bass was new when I bought that bass almost. 'I say Joe,' I said, 'What do you want to do with two basses? You can't play two basses at once.'

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I said, 'You're going to go back to church. Your mama told me you going to join the church.' He said, 'Yes.'

I said, 'Why don't you sell one bass, and keep one bass?' He said, 'Well, if I get the price for it I will sell it.'

I asked him what did he want for it. He said he wanted \$90 for it. That's what I paid for it [his best bass].

He wanted \$90 for that bass. I didn't want to jump right on it, and tell him yes. I wanted to look at it, and turn it around.

'That's alright George. You're my friend.' And I glanced all around it talking until I said make me a little C. He give a C, and I give him \$90.

He didn't even give me the bow. He didn't even give me the strap that goes down the bass.

When I got to the town, we had some recording to do, and George Lewis asked me at Dauphine and Bourbon. I took that bass by my home, and that's where we had this friend of mine called Joe Petit.

He played one, or two, numbers. I believe it was "Careless Love, AP says, and "St. Louis Blues" WR adds. "St Louis Blues," yeah. Old Joe Petit, Buddy Petit's stepfather.

We played more for good times when I was young. I had Albert Glenny on the bass one time. He's the oldest bass player ever around. He was on the bass.

I was on the guitar. Alphonse Picou's playing clarinet, and

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Eudice Picou was singing....

Eudice Picou was younger than Alphonse. After Alphonse they got that's what they called Cecile. After Cecile came Eudice Picou....

I'm going to tell you the best bass players. The best I heard yet--old [Vic] Gaspard he was a great too.

Gaspard, and then came Bill Marrero's son, Simon Marrero. He's dead, and his brother John Marrero which played banjo, died; and Simon played bass violin.

At the time when I joined the band with Buddy Petit, Simon's playing violin, and I was playing bass. It happened we started fooling around, and this was a Monday.

We was young, and they wanted to go around somewhere else. They were looking for me, and I didn't show up for two Sundays.

That's when they put Simon on bass when they couldn't depend on me. 'Cause I was actually go out fishing then.

Gaspard, and all that, Billy Marrero, they always used four string [bass]. Now, Jimmy Brown used to use three string bass. He was a very good bass player too, Jimmy Brown, he used to play with Golden Rule band.

Golden Rules was older than the Boys in Blue. That's the oldest band. Golden Rule, and then comes Boys in Blue.

After they changed the Boys in Blue, comes the Superior Band - that's Manuel Perez, too - and then Imperial Band, after he

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died.

Only one player slapped the bass in the old days, and that was Jimmy Brown. And then, they had another bass player but he was with bows--[Batiste?].

He used to be a good bass player too. That's all I know is his last name....He died over the river, yes indeed.

I'm going to tell you a guitar player I used to like, Raymond Clem. He was just like a Mexican. He was a guitar player. He used to be half and half all the time.

He stayed with Manuel Perez band, [which] at that time was Boys in Blue. He used to be drunk all the time. That's why they got rid of him.

Then they used Joe Brooks. After Joe Brooks, they had Rene Batiste. Then went to San Diego with the last [].

After me, Billy Marrero was the best bass player. He has a touch on the bass that went to you because he played with a feeling--the spirit, yes.

He picked and bowed too. That's where I copied, watching him. Nobody [taught me. I had no lessons.]

(Sound drop-off.)

(AP illustrates technique, and plays bass.) Good, sounds nice, WR says, and asks how they tuned three strings when all they had was three strings.

Three strings tunes it from the A, AP says. Then, D string,

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then the G.

(Inconsistent sound.)

Now they got the four string player--that's G, D, A, and E.
Now they got five string bass--it's G, D, A, E, and a C string.

(Illustrates bass slap.) (Tape off.)

WR says he was going to ask about his fingering too. Do you use fingertips, or the flat part of your hand?

My finger, AP replies. (Illustrates.)

WR describes AP's technique as he plays. He keeps right hand down on fingerboard, WR says, and picks with first finger; sometimes with first and second together, and takes his thumb away from fingerboard when he gets active.

This is supposed to be a 3/4 bass, AP says, about six feet. WR asks him to show about snapping. (AP plays.)

WR asks about counting, your left foot. That's my time-keeper, AP replies.

WR asks about slapping with the bow. (AP illustrates.) WR describes his taking stick of the bow, and hitting the back of the bass. (More playing with picking with end of bow.)

WR asks about holding the bow. That's the French system, sometimes the German way, WR notes. This is the Dixieland way to play, AP says.

[AP usually uses tape] or that second finger would be split open. [Puts tape on both first and second fingers]. WR describes

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how AP holds the bass. (AP plays.)

Is most of that snapping noise from the string snapping back, and hitting the fingerboard? WR asks. (AP illustrates slapping.)

WR describes G string out an inch, and the other is higher. All four gut strings, WR says, just plain ordinary gut strings. Anything else you want to demonstrate?

I tell you, AP says. First, I took a soap box. I should have brought a guitar.

I met Billy Marrero, and they were playing. Billy was saying, 'Give me an A string on his guitar.' I pull a piece of paper.

He transposed chords. I played guitar, and we turned around on a Blue Monday.

I took a soap-box, and put twine on it. They let you have a red bean dinner today, and I said alright.

Took my box, and my rope, and made me...took a piece of wood, tied it up for a bow. I said, I'll give you an A string, give you a D. Went up there, and put my G string up there.

They said play C, and I didn't know what C was. At last I saw. Hit C again. They say make F.

It took me about a month. I made all the chords but couldn't make G. I said something's wrong.

He said G is all the strings. Oh, so I made G. (Demonstrates

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scale.) After that I knew my way on the bass, and I knew the scale.

I turned around and one day. I forgot myself. I was playing at the Autocrat. I was smoking a cigar.

I had about three strings on that bass, sat around, and I played. My wife kept going around, and she plenty good [playing guitar?].

Picou was singing, playing kazoo too, and a boy called Terrence Fine [?] - he's dead now - used to play clarinet. And I forgot myself having my cigar like that, and burned the G string. It went boom....

(Tape off.)

WR says, when you had the big flood. That was I believe the first flood was in 1945, AP says. 'Cause that's where I was playing at Manny's.

The whole thing [neck] came off. [It took] three hours and a half myself [to put it together]. Lawrence Marrero and myself played there.

The next time again I did that in New York. I had my case, and when I took my bass out of the car, ran into the post.

Most now I play on Bourbon and Iberville for Cero's Wolf [?]. Have this bass, and play for Frank at 200 Bourbon Street.

I had my bass tied up to a chair, and this boy he's dead now, John Touche. He's the janitor there. He took my bass off,

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and put the front like this, and broke the strings.

My favorite bow [strings] was all broke. Bow was all bad. George, Joe, and Frank gave me \$50 and \$40.24. It cost me \$90.24 all together for the work.

[I made the copper neck myself]. Describes how he remade the bass. (Knocking on door.)

AP describes how his bass was broken. WR asks if he wants to finish his drink.

He bought that bow for \$18. WR says it looks like a nice bow, and asks if AP wants to sit down a minute, and rest.

WR wonders. AP was talking about his father being the first cousin of Marie Laveau.

Do you remember anything they used to tell you about her? She really was a voodoo queen?

Yes, she was, AP replies. She really was. Marie Laveau was my father's first cousin.

I was too small to remember her, but she died on the corner of St. Ann between Rampart and Burgundy. The house is there yet. [I don't know when she died.]

They used to have a tree. Used to call it Congo Square. That's where the auditorium is.

They used to have a big tree there. Used to have a great big hole. She used to go there, and put dimes, nothing but dimes, silver dimes, or quarters.

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She had little mesh boxes, put some pins in there, and dimes around there, and a little doll in there. Everybody would get scared. I used to go there, take the dimes, and put them in my pocket.

The tree was on St. Peter near Saenger [Theater]. That was before they had that...

And then where she's buried right now, the people go there, and put a quarter for the tomb....I go there all the time looking for the quarters.

My tomb is near this side. Marie Laveau's is near the gate, and my tomb is down on this side. My tomb is right there.

[Her tomb] is higher than mine. [It has] the name Marie Laveau.

She must have been dead about 70 something years. I'm 69. My father talked about her all the time. My grandma used to talk about her too. I couldn't remember because I was too young, see.

WR says he was always interested in her, and different things. He read books about the voodoo, too.

She was, AP says. I'll show you the house. Sometime we'll get the number, WR says look at it, and look at her tomb over there where she's buried.

I'll take you anytime you want, AP says. Because I'm not so sure where she's buried, WR says.

I'll take you right there, AP says. You want to go tomorrow?

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I'm not sure, WR says. We'll see, maybe some other day.

How about Tuesday? AP asks. Maybe Tuesday morning sometime, WR says. If I can't do it, maybe we'll do it sometime later. Just ring me up and let me know, AP says.

Maybe we'll wait until it's a little bit cooler so you don't have to walk around in the hot sun, WR says. It's not so far from here, AP says. It's not. It's just a few blocks over there WR says.

Did she really make a lot of money out of the voodoo? WR asks. Did people pay her a lot for the different charms?

Yeah, AP says, she used to make good money....They used to give her money--rich people I mean.

She gone around making people believe she could do this, and that. People would fall for that. She make good money too.

That house belongs to her....One time the deed was in her sister's name, but she's dead.

[ML had no children]. All I know about she had nieces, nephews. But I don't know if they're living, yes or no. My Pa told me that right before he died. My pa died in [19]33....

My Ma was Catholic--Catholic born, and everything. We were living...her and her two sisters walked all the way to church, and she was old.

She died 78 years old. My ma just died maybe about 12 years ago...

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I used to say, 'Oh mama, please.' She said, 'I wish you to be a nice boy.'

All my brothers dead, just me myself. I got two sisters, and everybody's nieces, and nephews.

I don't go up there. When they see me, they think about their dads, think about their papa; they start to crying, and that makes me feel bad.

My brother was like an Injun, had straight, straight black hair. I'll show you a picture of him. He died....

But I don't eat much. I don't eat much now. I get fed up. When I think of all the travelling I done, and never been sick. You've been lucky, WR says.

I got hit by a car in 1945. I made the recording the same day.

I got hit Monday morning, and they say, talk about getting Pop Foster make the recording. I said, 'No, I'm going to make it.'

The cab hit me, and knocked me down. I had to go to the hospital.

WR says he wanted to ask [about] one time he went to AP's house on Mardi Gras [Day], and AP's wife sang, and had a group. You did something with your hand, with your thumb to make it sound like a bass?

Oh, like this, AP says. WR forgot the first thing about it,

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and asks AP to demonstrate.

(AP demonstrates making a bass sound with his finger on the door) while WR describes it. WR says he can't do it, but he will try it sometime....

I used a broomstick, or something. It has to be on a door, or on a wood wall, a piece of wall.

You can do it on a chair. Don't do that, WR says. You'll get splinters. (Tape off.)

(AP demonstrates making bass noises with finger on wood.) WR describes process. You're using the broomstick like a violin, or a bass bow, WR observes. This time you're rubbing the bottle.

(Demonstration continues.) Just holding the bottle up against your finger, and holding the finger. I think we better quit, and let you cool off for a while....

Use a G string, a bass string. (Clanging sounds.) I'll hold your bass, WR says, and arranges for CD to hold the bass. Discussion of where to put the bass. (Street noise.)

AP picks makeshift bass. WR describes the playing process for the makeshift bass. Sometimes it sounds just like a bass, CD observes.

WR thinks they better quit, and thanks Drag for his time on the hot afternoon.