

BUDDIE BURTON
Reel I--Digest--Retyped
September 7, 1959

Also present: William Russell
Interview conducted in Chicago.

Evans Burton used his old nickname, "Buddie," when he began recording; his recording manager, Mayo "Ink" Williams, suggested he use the nickname; Williams was BB's manager for about ten years, when he was with Paramount. For Paramount, BB recorded with Jimmy Blythe, and with Jimmy O'Bryant ("great clarinet player"). Jasper Taylor had already recorded on washboard, but he was out of town when Blythe and O'Bryant wanted to record again, so they asked BB to play washboard; BB says he had been playing washboard before Taylor, but he hadn't become popular. BB recorded occasionally with Blythe and O'Bryant; he also began hanging around with Jelly Roll Morton, and began fooling around with the kazoo. BB took an old clarinet and reshaped it into something resembling a bass clarinet [with kazoo mouthpiece?]; Morton liked that, saying it sounded like a comb and tissue paper, but with more power. BB made a couple of records with Morton, with another man playing comb and tissue paper. BB played and recorded such novelty music for a few years; in the meantime, BB tried to get Mayo Williams to let him record solo, playing the piano and singing, but Williams always had some excuse not to let him. BB got Lester Melrose, whom he had met when recording with Morton in the early 1920's, to listen to some of his numbers; Melrose came to Jimmy Blythe's home, at 45th and Michigan, for that purpose. At the time, "Papa Charlie" Jackson was going big with his playing the guitar and singing "Uncle Bud" [an obscene song, according to Alton Purnell--RBA] and that type of blues; Melrose asked BB to come with something like Jackson was doing, and BB thought he could. At a party shortly afterwards, BB made up the "Ham Fatchet Blues," which was very well

received at the party. He reported his success to Melrose, who set up a recording next day for Gennett. BB was supposed to record six parts of the blues, but Melrose, who assured him it was all right, had him record the same piece for Paramount the next day, so the market for that tune by the same artist blew up. Williams was present at the Paramount session; he regretted that he'd never given BB a chance to record solo. BB recorded often then; they used Johnny Dodds on BB's sessions a lot; although O'Bryant was well-known for his recording with washboard bands, Dodds was well-known too.

BB was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1888. His mother played organ and mouth organ [harmonica]; she taught BB how to play it. He took up organ, learning on a pump organ; he was self-taught, except for "what I had taken in school"; his father didn't like or approve of his playing jazz, although playing sacred music was all right; BB soon found pleasure in playing church music in a jazz style. BB has seen Glover Compton recently; he knew him in Louisville; Compton was playing piano then, but was more interested in playing billiards, at which he was a champion. BB says Compton was one of his favorite piano players in the style he was playing at that time [in Louisville]; Compton was playing in a [whore?] house, Jerry [?] in another, and BB in a small house, all at the same time. Compton is not much older than BB. Compton went to Paris, where he stayed a long time [see Compton interview]; Compton was a good entertainer, and so was his wife. Talk of Compton's recent stroke.

BB mentions the personnel in [Joe] "King" Oliver's band: Oliver; Johnny Dodds, drums [sic]; Baby Dodds; Louis Armstrong; Lil [Hardin] Armstrong, piano, when they first came here [Cf. W. C. Allen and Brian Rust, King Joe Oliver]; [Honore] Dutrey, trombone; Bill Johnson, bass. Talk of Roy Palmer, whom BB hasn't seen in years. Mention of Palmer reminds BB of recording sessions they did together in New York, for Lester Melrose: long, all-night drive in snow through Allegheny Mountains to get to New York on time; BB drove, as he was very experienced; strain too much for BB, who was to do some solos also; his voice failed him. There were two other groups in the entourage; a man in one didn't show up; BB advised sending for Alex Washington, who had recorded with Ma Rainey, to play sax; Washington lived in New York then (BB says he lives across the street, in Chicago, now). "Big Bill" Broonzy and another guitar player were to record, in that order; when they had finished, BB sat down at the piano to do his solos; he couldn't talk above a whisper. He did go ahead with the novelty recordings he was to do with the band, however. Some others who made the automobile trip mentioned: [Alfred?] Bell, a trumpet player, from New Orleans; Roy Palmer; Broonzy. There were quite a few more, but BB can't remember who they were. [Cf. discographies on Alabama Rascals, Memphis Night Hawks, and Big Bill and His Jug Busters--RBA.]

The last time BB played in New Orleans was with the Butterbeans and Susie show; BB played drums in the band, which was led by Eddie Heywood [Sr.]. The show band also carried trumpet and sax; they would pick up other musicians to play the shows in the various

towns they played. They played at two different theaters in New Orleans, and then played a return engagement [at both]; the last time was around 1931 or 1932.

BB says that present-day rock and roll is the same music that he and others played years ago, before World War I, from New Orleans to Memphis and Louisville; he says one of his recordings, "Barefoot Stomp," was so named because if a person was going "rug cutting" (a slang term BB got from his younger brother) he would say he was going to a barefoot stomp. BB says the music was originally called jazz, but that with each succeeding generation the name of the music is changed, but not the music itself.

Jelly Roll Morton is mentioned. BB had a five-piece band, the Kentucky Midnight Serenaders, which played at a place at 31st and State [streets] Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong--in fact, the entire Oliver band--would come to hear the way Raymond "Shorty Mack" [unintelligible] played trumpet with the band (George Mitchell, another Louisville musician, known by BB since boyhood, is mentioned) Shorty Mack could play everything Oliver and Armstrong could, but he could play it softly. BB was playing drums then; a woman, pupil of Clarence Jones, played piano; she knew classics, but BB taught her how to swing. BB wanted to swing the classics (including marches, etc.), to have his band feature that style; he had his cousin, Charlie Cook, who operated an arranging service, make him a jazz styled arrangement of "Melody in F"; BB mentions that his bandsmen did a lot of doubling, and that the pianist, Margie Lewis, could play anything. BB says that was the first instance of a jazz arrangement of that type of tune. (Cook died last year. WR mentions that he met him in New York, when he was arranging for

Radio City [Music Hall]; WR says Cook had Freddy Keppard and Jimmie Noone in his band at the Dreamland.) Cook was from Louisville too, born three doors from where BB's sister lives now; he was about one or two years older than BB. BB, on trumpet, began studying in a group which included Cook on violin. Cook went further with music, eventually moving to Detroit, where he was one of three pianos in a large white orchestra. Cook specialized in piano and organ; he was the first to use organ in a dance band (WR remembers hearing Cook, with organ, at Paddy Harmon's Dreamland [Chicago]). BB says Cook didn't know he played drums until the time of the swinging-the-classics band; BB went to the Dreamland, invited by Jimmy Bertrand, who was drummer with Cook then; Keppard and Noone were in the band then, too. Norman [Buster?] was playing bells, vibraphone, and doubling on drums. BB sat in; Cook offered him job playing drums; BB refused, saying he preferred staying with his small band. Cook would give BB his second jobs, and BB played drums at the Lorraine [spelling?] Garden, filling in for Cook [and his band?] until Cook arrived from his other job; BB was filling in for Norman [Buster?].

Jimmy Blythe was born in Lexington, Kentucky; youngest in family; had two sisters; was raised in Chicago. Blythe was working for Mavis Talcum Powder people; began studying with Clarence Jones, who had the Metropolitan Theater orchestra (also played piano at the Owls Theater); became very good; wrote, arranged, good reader. Died probably in the early 1930s, as BB says he himself was out of town at the time, and he had left Butterbeans and Susie and was living in New York, where he remained for quite some time. BB

played drums in the six-piece band Blythe had at the Apollo Theater (in Chicago, Forestville and 47th) in the late 1920's; the theater had first-run movies and a small stage show. Blythe arranged the music for the band; Jimmy O'Bryant was on clarinet; (Clarence Black, violin, is mentioned;) Pick Jones, violin (from St. Louis; made recordings with BB, also worked with Erskine Tate at the Vendome Theater). BB also played drums with Glover Compton, who had a band at a place on State Street; BB had to hurry to get from one job to the other; it was during Prohibition. BB doesn't know that Blythe had a dance orchestra, but he did use his small band some in taverns.

When Joe Oliver took his band from the Lincoln Garden to California, BB took a twelve-piece band into the Lincoln Garden; Margie Lewis played piano with that band, too. BB had a nine-piece band before then, playing the State ² and Congress burlesque wheel [i.e., circuit]; the Conn [musical] instrument company wanted to book the band all over the country, giving the band Conn instruments to advertise for them. Jones, master-of-ceremonies at the Lincoln Garden, got BB to add three more to his band: Marie Lucas, of New York (BB had played with her on a show), great pianist and trombonist; Geraldine, violin; young boy, violin. BB had been asked to get rid of Margie Lewis, but he figured it out that Marie Lucas could play with the orchestra for the shows, that Margie Lewis would play with the orchestra for dancing, and that he himself would play piano and sing during intermissions. Marie Lucas also arranged and directed the orchestra. WR mentions Virgil Williams. King Jones, the m.c., was a clown; he became 2

famous as a spieilèr; he was from New Orleans; he would spiel from a wagon carrying a band, which would be advertising the place he was working; Jones brought the advertising wagon idea from New Orleans. Jones was the first m.c. of his type.

WR mentions Natty Dominique, trumpet player, who speaks some French; BB knows him, says Dominique played with Big Bill and people like that. BB played a four-piece job with Freddy Keppard at a place he thinks was called the Funky London [i.e., the London Cafe? --RBA]. BB says he encouraged Louis Armstrong to leave Oliver so he could be on his own. BB says Oliver made a lot of money, but lost it trying to keep a band together and trying to promote dances; BB tried promoting dances in Illinois and Indiana, before he decided to play in Chicago and before World War I. Oliver had BB with him to look after the tickets and the money; Cliff "Snags" "Gowapper" Jones was playing drums with Oliver at the time. . . . [restricted excerpt] Jones was also with Jelly Roll Morton at one time, and was with New Orleans trumpet player Bernie Young, in Milwaukee. WR knew Jones for the last couple years of his life, about 1946-47.

Bill Johnson is mentioned; WR says he is now in San Antonio, Texas, and about eighty-six years old.

End of Reel I

