

Don Albert
Reel I
May 27, 1972

Also present: Richard B. Allen
Mrs. Annie May Cyprian
(RBA's maid)

Notes by Richard B. Allen
Checked by Richard B. Allen

Digest by Bonnie C. Nelson

DA gives the date as May 28.

The interview takes place on Saturday at 910 Royal Street,
RBA's apartment.

RBA asks what some centers of jazz were when DA was coming
up. DA says that there were not many places.

DA then wants to discuss "the time of my birth." He was
born at 1719 N. Robertson St. in the "old French Quarters" [sic],
and the house still stands. His youngest brother, Leo, still
lives there. Leo was born late in his mother's life. She was
about forty-seven, DA thinks. "He is a lovable little fellow,
but has his own ways.... "

DA says that his father was a singer and violinist. DA
tried the violin, but he couldn't stand it. DA sang, and from
there he learned [notation of] music, and then the horn [cornet]
from Milfred Piron, the brother of the violin player. DA
learned how to blow the horn fairly well and then took a job
with "Big Foot" [Bill] Phillips. Piron discharged DA at this
time, telling him that he knew enough. So DA began in New
Orleans.

RBA asks if there was much music in New Orleans to listen
to at that time. DA says that there is more music now. In
those days [when he was growing up], music to musicians "was

joy and happiness." "Just to get to play the music and make other people happy--that was the aim of those old musicians..." In early days, musicians were paid , but not nearly so much as musicians of today. DA says that he is not condemning musicians today, as he believes they should be paid for their artistry. DA concludes that in those days, music was beautiful because it was what the musicians felt; it was soul.

RBA asks who DA listened to when growing up. DA replies that Manuel Perez, [tp.], lived across the street from his grandfather, and was part of the family. DA also remembers George Moret, tp. Moret's wife "practically" helped DA's mother raise DA. Creole families were very closely knit. DA often went to the houses of Manuel Perez, George Moret, and Barney Bigard, his first cousin.

DA says he went to West End to hear George Moret play. He walked parades with Manuel Perez or followed him, and sometimes carried his horn.

RBA asks if he was related to Moret or Perez. DA says that he is not related to George Moret, but DA understands that his grandfather was a distant relative of Manuel Perez.

DA says that his grandfather's grandfather was from the Dominican Republic. He was Dominique You, the pirate on Jean Lafitte's ship. A close cousin, Mrs. Thomatise [or Thomastaise? RBA, Aug. 8, 1974.] told DA about his grandfather's grandfather,

Don Albert
Reel I
May 27, 1972

-3-

and so he knows it to be true. The family members are reluctant to discuss their background as they think it is shady. But DA doesn't consider it shady. Even though the older people were poor, they carried themselves in an aristocratic way, and their heritage was rich.

RBA states that many people came to New Orleans because of the revolution in Santo Dominigo. DA answers that New World dreams also brought people from the Dominican Republic. Dominique You's family probably followed him wherever he was going to be. Dominique You is buried in St. Louis Cemetery [No.2]. DA says that someone takes care of the grave, but doesn't know whom. Dominique You was a Mason, and DA thinks that the Masons may keep it up. RBA states that he will check with Buddy Anspacher, the sexton, as BA is a friend of musicians.

DA says that he would like to know "who he is", that is, more about his background and heritage. DA's family is so vast. The McKennas were his grandmother's people, and the Torreganos were part of his grandfather's people, but there are many branches of the family, all having children of their own.

RBA says that DA's uncle, Natty Dominique, in Chicago [see Reel?] says that the family was Italian. DA says that this is incorrect, and that ND doesn't discuss the family background.

RBA asks the name of DA's wife. DA replies that her

Don Albert
Reel I
May 27, 1972

--4--

full maiden name is Hazel Augustine Gueringer. She calls herself Mrs. Dominique, although DA is known as Don Albert in San Antonio and is listed in the telephone book as Don Albert. His son is listed as Albert Dominique.

RBA discusses the street where DA was born. DA says that the street [Robertson St.] is two blocks or "one long block" from St. Bernard and is the same as it has always been for over 64 years. DA remembers going to Francis Amis Hall, a full block away. He listened to bands there from a balcony with the Manuel Perez, the Chris Kelly, or the Marreros band. DA got in easily. DA says that he guesses he "has always been likable" and has no trouble meeting people or making friends.

RBA asks if he has ever been shy. DA says that he has never been shy, but he has been afraid. DA says that maybe he is crazy, but not shy. He remembers going into the woods alone and meeting his father at Lake Pontchartrain at two in the morning when just "a little kid."

RBA asks about DA's backyard. DA thought it immense, but he realizes upon seeing it again that it is actually "the size of a matchbox," though unchanged. DA has a picture of himself at age eight with his horn by the washtub.

RBA discusses the area where DA lived and says that it is still beautiful except for what was done to Claiborne Ave.

^{Annie May}
✓ (Mrs. ^ACyprian, RBA's maid, leaves.)

Don Albert
Reel I
May 27, 1972

-5-

DA says that in one of his dreams of boyhood days, he remembers beautiful oak, called acorn, trees [on Claiborne Ave.] that was a playground for poor Negro kids. DA mentions how the expressway has changed this. He also remembers the Circle at St. Bernard and Claiborne Ave. with a large palm tree. The neighborhood children used to sit there and exchange stories. There were few cars then. The St. Bernard Market was at the Circle. It was quite different from the present Circle Market. Butchers, vegetable men, fish vendors, and poultry people all had their own individual stalls. Outside was a water trough for horses, and the "kids" who worked around the market drank the fresh water before the horses. The Market was enclosed with entrances on three sides. Behind the Market was a place called the Alley where "wineheads" and hustlers went. DA's family was close to the De Masiliere [sp?] family. [See Creole Fiesta Association folder.] who ran the Alley. DA was paid an apple or orange for working in the Market.

RBA asks about DA's father's occupation. He was an amateur musician. DA's father was a cigar maker by trade, and traveled to different parts of the country. He also sang, as did DA's ✓ grandfather and grandmother. DA's father had a great voice.

Many of DA's uncles played music. His Uncle Wilson Dominique played the cornet, but he was killed after a job uptown. DA's father and Wilson Dominique were older than their

Don Albert
Reel I
May 27, 1972

-6-

their brother, Natty. DA thinks his father was the oldest. Another uncle, Naval Dominique, was a great violinist, but he died of tuberculosis. DA remarks that his grandmother had ten to fourteen children, and he doesn't know all of their names.

DA's mother's maiden name was Georgianna Rotleff. [DA pronounces it Ratliff.] The Bigards are on the McKenna side of the family. Barney Bigard's mother was DA's grandmother's sister. There were five sisters and about four or five brothers, so it is difficult to go through the family offspring. Alex Bigard was Barney Bigard's father; and BB's uncle, Emile Bigard, was a singer with DA's father; and played the violin, although not professionally. [CF. other sources on Emile Bigard's career. RBA, Aug. 9, 1974.]

✓ The Dumasilier [sp?] family ran the Alley and another place on Claiborne Ave. where a mortuary (Geddes and Moss's DA thinks?) is today. This place was a saloon, run by a man named Zeno [sp?] DA's father went to saloons, and DA had to go and get him out. DA says that his father drank. He was unable to work on Mondays because he had to recuperate and usually worked half days on Friday. He supported the family, but there was no excess money.

DA went to St. Francis Catholic School on Villere and Marigny Streets, and often visited friends at Marigny School, where he was allowed to visit different rooms. DA then went to Jones

Don Albert
Reel I
May 27, 1972

-7-

School on Annette and Galvez Streets. Part of the school was called the Bucket of Blood, a long house with many rooms where first, second, and third grades were held. DA doesn't know the reason for this name. His last principal at Jones School was Miss Williams. DA says that she is just "as beautiful and young as ever."

DA then went to Joseph A. Craig School, transferring from Bayou Road School [sic. Unclear on Bayou Road School.] Barney [Bigard] was going to Straight University, and DA went there with Barney. Straight U. merged with, DA thinks, New Orleans University and became Dillard University. DA didn't study at Straight too long, as he had learned to play music by this time, and decided to leave New Orleans. DA says that he has acquired knowledge through his travels. He has acted, in addition to playing music. DA has a high school degree, and considers himself self-educated at the college level. RBA asks if he likes to read, and DA replies that he loves to read.

RBA asks how DA's family feels about different kinds of people. DA says there was always a bridge between families. There were feuds among people of different colors or races. Hatred seems to be instilled, and DA doubts that this will ever be eliminated. RBA says that there are people who are just going to be hateful, and that this is not necessarily racial.

Don Albert
Reel I
May 27, 1972

-8-

DA agrees.

RBA comments on the variety of people in New Orleans, some loyal, some shy, some friendly, some mean-- DA says that in certain parts of New Orleans there still exists loyalty "among relatives and close friends, and neighbors." DA thinks this is great. DA comments that his grandmother was a midwife and brought more white people into the world than Negroes. There were less prejudices in those days although some friction was there. RBA comments that the laws have changed, thus forcing changes. For example, racial inter-marriage was legal in Louisiana at one time [many years ago.] DA comments that there were many common-law marriages.

End of Reel

DON ALBERT
REEL II
MAY 27, 1972

Also present: Richard B. Allen
Notes: RBA and RA
Digest: Ralph Adamo, Sept. 9,
1974

check Richard B. Allen

DA and RBA continue their discussion of the racial mix in New Orleans. DA remembers when the streetcars became segregated, but not when they were unsegregated in early years. He says that New Orleans is a 'melting pot.' DA offers his wife's ancestry as an example: some ~~Philippine~~ ^{Filipino}, Chinese, and Turkish. Speaking of those with Turkish blood ("dark-skinned, reddish complexion, jet-black straight hair -- beautiful"), DA says that "Turk" was a common nickname. RBA says that one still hears people called "Chinee," "Turk," and "Dutch." He adds that DA's sister is called "Dutch." DA says that nicknames came from people's background or looks. RBA says that these names were never meant to be insulting, and DA agrees.

DA is asked if he ever left New Orleans before he started playing music. He didn't because his people were poor. When he played on the ^{ap?} Sesquehana [Cf. notes] [See Riverboats & Lakeboat folder.], he thought it was the farthest he'd ever travel. The boat went from Spanish Fort across Lake Ponchartrain.

On the north shore of the lake were beautiful homes and big trees. Also there were slums, DA says, but he hates to use the word. Buddy Petit was a great trumpet player who was about twenty-five or thirty years ahead of his time. He lived there

Don Albert
Reel II
May 27, 1972

2

in a one-room shack with a wood stove. DA would visit him as soon as the boat made its crossing, and "ask him questions about his horn." DA says it is too bad there isn't much on record to preserve what he did.

✓ Much credit is given to Bunk Johnson ("he deserves it"), but BP, Kid Rena, and Chris Kelly were also very good; CK was the most beautiful trumpet player DA ever heard. (Cootie Williams's plunger work with Duke [Ellington] was influenced by CK.)

RBA asks if anybody on record sounds like BP. DA says that Punch Miller, when young, copied BP's style. He says that Billy Douglas, in technical ways, is brilliant and gives an idea of what BP and PM's music was like; but his "tonation" is not great. Billy Douglas is on DA's band records. [See ^{P. 3} ~~below~~ on "tonation."] He calls what they do a 'variation style.'

DA contrasts their music with Louis [Armstrong]'s. LA played "mostly from what he felt within himself," and he did not usually do so much [fast] fingering.

DA likes the old style of these men because he wants to enjoy music when he listens to it. He says they brought music out of their souls and communicated ("looking at you and you looking at them") happiness. Some people call him "old timey" because of this. But DA doesn't see much happiness in the music today.

Don Albert
 Reel II
 May 27, 1972

One reason for this, he thinks, is that the young musicians haven't been exposed to the good big bands, which started to break up in 1940. He says the breakup happened because the depression was almost coming back at that time. DA's group also disbanded then.

Big bands of today are out in left field, according to DA. They're trying to do things the way young musicians are doing them.

"Tonation is that that you get out of a horn," DA says, explaining that if a man playing a horn has a light sound, it's called a "peashooter" sound. But if he makes a big sound, like LA, it's as "big around as a bowl...it has a space that is covered, and a peashooter doesn't cover too much space."

DA played with Lips Page in Dallas in 1926 with Bennie Moten's Blue Devils. [Cf. *compare other sources*] [Count] Basie was at the piano. Oran [Walter] Page played bass. People thought Lips and [Walter] were brothers. ["Lips" was Oran Page's nickname] After the job, ["Lips"] Page and DA would play together with Count Basie on piano. LP sounded even better in person than he does on records.

DA took Claude "Benno" Kennedy's place in Troy Floyd's band.

Don Albert
Reel II
May 27., 1972

4

DA thinks ^{CBK}~~CR~~ was powerful and beautiful, and that CBK and LP copied each other. DA never copied LP. LP didn't play much blues during this time. LP and ^{CBK}~~CK~~ were exciting. Texas has a different kind of blues and CBK was part of this clan, but he didn't "lay on" the blues. The man who brought some blues to Texas was an Orleanian named Lee Collins, another great technician according to DA. LC and Guy Kelly [also a great technician?, ^{no relation to Chris,} had some dreams. "A man has to dream to play what those guys played." DA was the blues player [of the trumpeters?] with TF.

The blues wasn't in the bands, it was in the individuals [ie; who played alone.] George W. Thomas from Houston (where his family still lives) played boogie woogie, also called "Santa Fe." Boogie woogie is played on the piano. RBA mentions guitarists such as Blind Lemon [Jefferson], and gospel singers such as Blind Willie Johnson [both] Texas [singers and guitarists. RBA and DA agree that Texas blues sounds different from what you get in New Orleans or on the Mississippi Delta. DA says Bennie Moten didn't confine himself to blues; but, RBA adds, ^{era} he played rags and popular songs. He was in the ~~ear~~ of the first big bands.

The first good band to migrate to Texas was Alphonso Trent's. It was tremendous! After him came Troy Floyd and his Orchestra

Don Albert
Reel II
May 27, 1972

of Gold; they were not blues bands but dance bands. RBA says Trent's band was good but Floyd's band played a solid blues. DA suggests that the difference is that the musicians in TF's band were all self-taught. Sometimes a self-taught musician has a better feeling than a trained musician. The latter is called an automatic player. Trent had several educated musicians; to these musicians who had been to school, the music was just another "sideline" they took up when it brought them success.

RBA says that many musicians from the East who try to play blues play a lot of wasted notes. DA agrees, saying that "blues is just a soulful song that has a simple meaning, and when you go to adding this and that then you deviate from the blues and it becomes something else."

DA says that Billy Douglas and Buddy Petit and Punch Miller made each note count, even though they played many notes. They put them in the right places and added something to what they were playing. RBA adds that they could think fast and had a terrific ear.

No band in Texas sounded like [A.J.] Piron's. They had a different way of playing music. Not many musicians in Texas were familiar with what was going on in New Orleans

music, except for one or two [from New Orleans or of Texas.

There were numerous Orleanians in Texas. RBA, Sept. 18, 1974.]

So they didn't pattern their music after New Orleans or Louisiana music. DA says that Texas music was built from a different type of feeling.

[standard, printed] ^{2ESB}

✓ RBA asks about stock arrangements as played by Texas bands.

DA says stocks were all they used in Texas. The individual musician himself affected the sound produced rather than a geographical style.

Asked whether there were Society bands in Texas, DA comments that a "society band" was just a name and that the band didn't have to be that. AJP's band was called 'Society' because he played for the New Orleans elite. RBA says he played soft sweet music. DA says Trent's band played soft because many ✓ of TF's numbers were built around his [DA's] "sweet, straight trumpet."

Kansas City Bands were great because KC was a stopping place --like ⁺St. Louis and Chicago -- for musicians migrating from New Orleans to the Eastern states.

✓ RBA says the early Bennie Moten [band] records sound as though they had been listening to King Oliver and Jelly-Roll Morton. Reuben Roddy, who used to play with Walter Page's Blue Devils, told RBA about this influence. RR moved to N.O. during WW II.

Don Albert
Reel II
May 27, 1972

7

RBA says he doesn't know to whom the Texas bands had been listening, and DA points out that records weren't a big thing. There were not many Louisiana ^{ians} ~~bands~~ moving to Texas.

The current cities of Texas before the 1920's, according to RBA, were mostly small towns and there wasn't much teaching going on. Several of the men in Trent's band were Arkansans and Trent himself was from Ft. Smith. The only Texan DA can remember in it was Lee Hilliard, who is dead now. Others in the original Trent band were: Chester Clark, trumpet; Red Sparks, tuba; [James] Jeter, alto; A.G. Godley, drummer; Leo "Snub" Moseley (from Arkansas), slide saxophone [and trombone.]

Texas musicians were mostly untrained. "Lazy Daddy" [Henry Filmore] of Galveston was limited in reading music, but he was "tremendous" on the piano. "Noo-noon" was a showman; he danced with his bass. DA and RBA speculate about whether Noo-noon was from Louisiana because of his name. Neither can recall his real name.

When DA went to Dallas in 1926, the first place he went was where Polite "Frenchy" Christian was playing, an upstairs joint on Swiss and Ellum [ie., Elm St.] DA says "Frenchy" was one of those loud, rough trumpet players. For advertisement, he would stick his horn out the window and play. He wasn't

Don Albert
 Reel ii
 May 27. 1972

a great trumpet player, but --DA repeats-- he was loud.

Speaking of Kansas City again, DA says that the George Lee band was great. "Kansas City musicians: different sound, different group."

✓ RBA asks about Lamar^m_A Wright and Joe Keyes. DA says they sometimes sat in with his group in Little Rock; Count Basie's band was in the area at the time. [They played with Basie at that time?] There is an unresolved discussion of where LW and JK are from. RBA and DA agree that LW was a good blues man and played with great feeling. LW was very young when he recorded with Bennie Moten; DA says the whole band was young.

Troy Floyd's band was made up of settled men. DA thinks he was the youngest, eighteen years or less. Charlie Dixon, who played the tuba and trombone, "acted as my father," DA says. He gave DA "good, wonderful advice," and DA has never forgotten him.

RBA suggests that in San Antonio people have an outlook that is similar to the one associated with New Orleans. RBA asks if DA's daughter was raised in the New Orleans tradition. DA says she was raised in the Louisiana tradition because his wife is a firm believer in the things her mother taught her. [DA, it should be noted, seems to insist matter-of-factly on the distinction between the New Orleans and Louisiana tradition.] They tried to raise both son and daughter this

way. But today, even in Louisiana, the tendency is for parents to let their children "take care of themselves," and not to worry about them. If a kid wants to stay out all night, he does. If he wants to dispute his teachers, which he should not do, the parents go along with it.

DA was on a [radio? television? school?] program with ex-baseball player Don Newcombe one time [DA apparently gives talks in the community] and his message to the people was to help the teachers. He said that when they didn't do that, they were "putting a block in the wheel." He told them that since their children were with the teachers eight hours a day, it wasn't fair for the parents to take the children's side all the time without hearing the teacher's story.

RBA asks what kind of advice Charlie Dixon gave him. CD told him to study his horn and keep out of devilment. DA and CD practiced together to pass the time and to get something accomplished. CD played the tuba or trombone; he could play lead on the tuba and anything on the trombone because that was his first instrument.

RBA likes CD because he (ie, his playing) was simple. DA agrees: CD believed in the simple life. That's how he lived. RBA comments that his feelings are always there for you to hear. DA says this goes back to a point he tried to make earlier communication between player and listener. Moreover, RBA adds, people make fun of men who play that way

now, but it's clear CD had the basics down and besides, everything doesn't have to be tricky. DA says that such critics don't really know why or what they're criticizing^z.

RBA mentions that Paul Crawford, who studied at the [School of Music], Eastman Conservatory, finds it a challenge to play a solo on one note [ie, pitch] ; simple play requires skill. DA says yes, that it is easier to play a lot of notes than a whole note. Also, if you are playing a whole note, you can exert "tonation" [ie, timbre].

RBA says that some musicians can't play a solo on two chords; they wind up playing just [chord] changes, not ideas. RBA notes that he is injecting his own opinion too much. DA brushes this aside and agrees with the first point.

DA mentions "Moonlight on the Ganges" which changes two chords each bar [ie, measure] and says that's too many changes. The only way to deal with a number like this is forget the chords (or you would play too many notes) and just play it "as straight and pretty as you can."

DA says that Al Hirt can get more notes out of one chord than any man he's ever heard; however, "tonation" gets put in the background.

RBA notes that the reel is about to run off, and DA comments that these things run out kind of fast.

END OF REEL

DON ALBERT
Reel III 2
May 27, 1974

Also present: Richard B. Allen
Notes: RBA
Digest: Ralph Adamo
Check: Richard B. Allen

RBA asks if DA recalls how Louis [Armstrong] could hold a note on "Mahogany Hall Stomp." RBA adds that there was a good rhythm section and he names the men who were in it: Paul Barbarin, Eddie Condon, Pops Foster, Lonnie Johnson, and Luis Russell. DA agrees with both points, and adds that LA was holding a great big "balloon tone."

RBA asks DA what changes he's noticed in the rhythm section -- the way of playing and the actual instruments -- from the time he was growing up. DA says that it's changed quite a bit; even the drummers have changed. This is partly due to the drummers in different areas copying different types of music. But DA adds that around New Orleans, the average drummer tries to play in the style of the old -time drummers, and DA thinks this is great.

DA names Louis Barbarin (adding that Paul [Barbarin, his brother] is gone) as the "finest percussionist you have [with] Freddie Kohlman--" [Interrupting-] RBA notes that they sound like professionals to him. DA contrasts LB with FK, who plays "a tremendous drum" but in a different style. DA says that FK copied his style from DA's drummer, Albert "Fats" Martin. They played identically. Fats died years ago.

RBA asks if DA would call Fats a typical 1930's drummer or if he played in the nineteen-twenties' style. DA says that he played in the 1920's style, even in his cymbal work. RBA asks if he was a 2/4 or a 4/4 drummer, or both. DA answers

that he was just a great drummer all around.

DA says they played some of the biggest shows with some of the greatest actors in them. For example, they played for Pete, Peaches and Duke who were "the greatest tappers off of Broadway," and for Pete Nugent as a single. DA says it required really technical drumming because "these guys used their feet to talk." [See Jazz Dance] PN would even stop rehearsals to explain to Fats Martin what he wanted FM to do with sticks and snare [drum] to make it coincide with his feet. FM, DA repeats, was an all-around drummer, and Freddie Kohlman was the same kind of drummer as Fats.

RBA asks what a show would consist of, for example, one set. The floor show would be performed by the chorus girls and individual acts would open, do a center number and close with the cast. RBA wants to know what a 'center number' is. DA explains that, for instance, there might be six acts: Billie Holiday singing; Pete, Peaches & Duke dancing; and possibly a comic. ^{After these acts performed,} The chorus line would come back and do another routine [ie, the center number.] Then the stars would come back. And for the last number, the stars would be joined by the chorus girls.

DA says that of course they don't do ^{shows} ~~numbers~~ like that anymore. It's "old show business." Now the shows are mostly individual acts. A guy will come out and sing a song, then leave the stage. Also, you rarely see chorus girls unless you

go to [Las] Vegas, where that kind of show is still being produced.

Leonard Reed is one of the greatest Negro producers of that type show. DA thinks he's still trying to keep his shows alive.

P RBA asks DA if a musician can actually improvise while a chorus girl is dancing -- won't it confuse her? DA says a musician can't really improvise because a dancer wants to hear the basic part of her music. "...they want to hear that, and they don't want you dancing all around them."

RBA suggests that what the dancer wants is straight melody. DA says yes. As for special arrangements, DA says the music is not [written for] three saxophones playing the same thing in harmony. It's the same with the brass: one guy wouldn't be out there alone unless the performer were doing something that "requires a fellow to get out there and exert himself."

Would the performers have their own arrangements? DA says they would sometimes, but most of the work was done on the basis of head arrangements. They'd tell you what they wanted and you'd go from there.

DA mentions Dusty Fletcher, a great comic, who never had his own music. He would listen ^{and} pick the music he wanted; then he would alter it to suit his act.

Billy Eckstine had no arrangements when he sang with DA in Buffalo, New York. He used DA's arrangements.

Sometimes a singer will want to change the key of an arrangement.

RBA asks if any of them brought "their own pianist or drummer or anything." DA says they didn't in those days because "the money wasn't big enough." RBA notes that some star singers do so now. DA comments that this is the case because there is enough money to pay them.

RBA says that he's seen very few floor-shows, tent-shows, or circuses that had bands he can remember because that seems to be a thing of the past. He asks DA to describe such scenes. DA agrees that it is lost. RBA amends that: movies are an exception, and DA agrees. This is necessary because movies must reproduce things authentically. [!!!RBA, Nov. 5, 1974.]

RBA asks if DA has ever seen a movie he liked about show business. Yes, a number of great movies, DA says. He mentions "The San Francisco Story." RBA asks if that was the one with Alice Faye. DA doesn't remember the stars. But on the original point, DA says that he used to go to a lot of movies and get ideas from them.

RBA mentions some performers he's seen in movies: Buck & Bubbles, and Pigmeat Markham. DA says all those guys were up in the Eastern part of the [United] States when he was playing. When the bands would play a show with such performers, they would have to play what the performers wanted. DA says they were the attraction; the band wasn't.

DA mentions Butterbeans and Susie, whose music was simple. RBA thinks "~~There~~'ll Be Some Changes Made" was

20

written especially for them. He adds that they must have had their stuff for years; they had some great numbers. DA says they used the same routines year after year with few changes. That couldn't go on today because the public is fickle. "They want everything to change, change, change."

Back then, the bookings were "far and few between." Performers would play in one place for a while and then move on to the next town with the same routine.

RBA asks if DA knew any comedy writers then. DA says he never did, and RBA suggests that there weren't any. DA agrees. That's a new thing altogether.

DA mentions Flip Wilson. He has writers. "Dusty Fletcher wouldn't have known what a writer was" -- nor would Pigmeat Markham. RBA mentions Grant and Wilson. DA mentions Bert Williams, "the original comic." He didn't have any writers but used his own material. RBA says that BM was a man of great learning and knowledge -- a fact that isn't widely known.

RBA says that those comedians had a lot of sense. They didn't have anyone behind them; they had brains themselves. DA says they didn't put theirs on paper -- "it was up here."

RBA and DA agree that they were naturals. "They were crazy, man," DA says.

DA points to Dusty Fletcher's "Open the Door, Richard." He was doing that years before it was put on records. He did it in Buffalo, New York, with DA. When DA heard the record,

it tickled him that after thirty-five years they got around to putting it down on record.

RBA asks how many of the comedians came out as singles. Most, says DA. RBA wonders if they didn't need a straight man. Some of them did. Dusty Fletcher would pick out someone from the band if he needed a straight man. DF tried to use DA for this, but DA couldn't be a straight man because he would laugh at everything DA did. DF told DA to shut up, that this [ie, routine] wasn't for him but for the public. DA says he was such a natural-born comedian that "if you just looked at him he'd make you laugh."

RBA asks if DA was ever on Broadway. DA answers "yes and no." He was booked into the French Casino [on Broadway?] and also into Small's Paradise [after Small's Paradise moved from Harlem?]. But he got tied up with a "Jew booker" who in a way ruined his career "forever." (DA says he's using the word "forever" too loosely, but the booker did ruin a big-band career for him.)

The man was a crook. He would book DA's band in five or six places for the same night and get a deposit from each one. DA, of course, could only play one date. So when he was booked in the French Casino and Small's Paradise on Broadway, he was playing in another town.

The same thing happened with the Apollo Theater. DA's name had been advertised for months there -- "The Great Don Albert's Music From The South." They even had all the rest

Don Albert
Reel III
May 27, 1972

of the personnel lined up to be on the show. But DA was playing that night in Youngstown, Ohio or somewhere.

RBA asks whether DA played in the Palace. DA says there was some confusion. There was an old pit-leader at the Palace who was named Don Albert. People would confuse the two DA's. (RBA asks if they are now talking about the Palace on Broadway and DA says they are.) People would stop DA and tell him they had heard him the night before even though he had never played there.

RBA commiserates [about the damage done by the bad booking agent.] DA says it was a big disappointment. The booker's name was Al Travis. DA hasn't seen him since this happened in the early thirties.

DA went to see Joe Glaser to get help. JG offered to take him under contract. But JG didn't understand that his band was a cooperative band. The cooperative band could live on twenty-five to one-hundred dollars a night. But JG said they were too great for that kind of money. He wanted to hold them out for four-hundred to six-hundred dollars [a night?], which was a lot of money in those days. DA [decided he] would have to go back South and get a few [low-paying] jobs, and then try to go back [to New York] again.

DA says John Hammond, of Columbia records, came over to Newark, New Jersey to see DA; in those days he really wanted to get DA's band on ^a record. But the crooked broker, Al Travis,

caused that to fall through. [DA must mean that the cause was his ruined reputation. RBA, Nov. 5, 1974]

RBA asks DA about the old days in Texas when he was with Troy Floyd or even before: he wants to know if DA ever heard of George Morrison's band. DA says he knew him. GM's band was out of Denver, [Colorado.] DA says they could be compared to society bands, such as [A.J.] Piron's. GM played violin.

RBA asks what kind of band T. Holder had. It was a good blues band. TH played trumpet, and there were only two trumpets in the band. RBA asks who the other trumpet player would have been. DA is not sure. He thinks it may have been "Lips" [Page].

TH came to Dallas when DA was with TF's band. TH was on his way out to California or somewhere.

DA says Andy Kirk's band grew out of TH's band. [Harry] "Big Jim" Lawson, an Indian from Oklahoma, was with TH and AK's bands. [Cf. John Clinton, Who's Who] RBA says he thinks HL made "The Big Jim Blues" [with Kirk], which RBA isn't sure he's ever heard. DA notes that, in those days, recording was very "spasmodic." DA says that Big Jim was powerful, but maybe "too powerful over T." TH was a beautiful trumpet player and played beautiful blues. (RBA interrupts: Big Jim could cut into TH's [song?]. DA agrees, but TH was the boss.) HL could "outblow" TH.

RBA asks if there were a lot of Indians [playing music?].

DA responds, "Part Indians," from Oklahoma. In Oklahoma there was the same kind of ^{inter}mingling of blood you find in Louisiana. But it was on the Indian side.

RBA says you read about the Mexicans in San Antonio. This is an example of the mixed heritage. DA agrees. He says none of the musicians of Mexican blood [in that area] ever came into prominence. RBA mentions Ernie Caceres as Mexican [by descent]; and DA adds EC's brother, Emilio. RBA mentions Henry [Cuesta], who is a "Tex-Mex."

RBA also mentions reading about Negro fiddlers playing fandangos "and stuff like that," way back, for the Mexicans.

RBA asks DA if he likes chili. DA says he likes it and makes it himself. RBA asks if DA makes chili here [in New Orleans.] DA says he has made it a couple of times, once at the Woods' [ie, a family where DA stayed.] DA fixes a lot of Mexican dishes. DA explains that he had to learn to cook Mexican dishes because ~~when~~^{the} the chef didn't show up at his nightclub, he did the cooking.

RBA asks if DA cooks Chinese food. DA does, but not a great variety.

DA also like^s to fish and to cook fish. He has his own place at Aransas Pass [Texas], where he goes to fish on weekends. DA says he would have gone there this weekend if not for the interview.

^{Cap} RBA asks if there is creole cooking in Texas. "Not that you can tell."

[Leading by RBA] DA comments that each state has its own way of living. Traveling on the road for ten years with his big band, DA says, he got in the habit of eating different foods in different places. Your body gets used to this as you go from state to state. DA discusses regional cuisines.

RBA brings up T. Holder again. DA says that TH did have a singer in his band. He thinks the singer was Pha [pronounced Fay] Terrell. PT stayed with the band when Andy Kirk took over.

RBA says he guesses the [Kirk band] saw some dark clouds. [See John Chilton, Who's Who,.. for Kirk's biography and "The Dark Clouds of Joy."] DA agrees, but of course some had silver linings. DA says he was fortunate enough to get to play at a lot of places because he was bright in color [so that he could pass for white -- see previous interviews.] The people who hired him did not know that he was a "race man" [ie, leader of his race.]

DA says that [ie, his pioneering?] was the basic part of getting Negroes into these other [ie, white?] places. Then, when DA's band played someplace, they left a good name.

RBA comments that the second time [for anything] is always easier. Once something is done twice, people assume it has always been that way.

DA says that the younger guys don't know about the hardships of the older days. They don't know, for instance, that often Negro bands wouldn't be able to find a place to stay, so they had to sleep in the bus on a highway. Usually, they

would find out where the railroad track was because the Negroes would always be on the other side of them.

Hotels would not accept them.. DA names North and South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, and "even" [Kansas?] as places where the hotels would not accept DA's band.

DA mentions the idea of "dark clouds" again, times when the band didn't have food or money, and didn't know where those things were coming from. But DA says the Lord has always blessed him in that he's been able to find a friend. And also, there were some situations where the Negro was treated so badly that he'd rather be dead, DA says.

It was quite an ordeal to come from 1926 to 1972. DA says you don't like to discuss these things "because you'd like to let that be part of the past," but you do have to let people know about these things that happened. It's part of the training of the kids to let them know that "there wasn't always a paved road -- it had a lot of bumps in it." RBA comments that if they [ie, the children] hit a little bump now, they're scared to death. DA and RBA agree on this point.

DA talks about "the first beginning of our talks, how we got along together." Musicians in those days would strike up friendships with one another, (DA mentions Lips Page here) and they would share what they had. "Not in the way that I want you to pay me back -- it was a friendly gesture." [RBA's comment unintelligible.] DA says that if you said you needed it you got it.

From his youth, RBA remembers "When the Real Thing Comes Along" by AK, and he asks DA if TH's band sounded like this recording. DA says the band changed as the drummers and a few of the reed men changed.

RBA asks who the drummer was with AK before Ben Thigpen, and suggests, "Crackerjack." DA says there was a fellow who is very seldom mentioned, Joe Lewis. He became an alcoholic. DA can't remember the drummer that came after Lewis.

There weren't too many musicians in those days. [A.C.] Godley was about the best drummer. There was also a fellow out of Waco, Texas, named Jimmy Westbrook, who was a left-handed drummer. DA thinks he was with T. Holder.

RBA asks when "the business of high-pitched singing" by men came along; he is referring to a specific sound. DA thinks the high, soprano notes (RBA mentions Pha Terrell) was copied from [Bill] Kenny of the original Ink Spots.

RBA asks about DA's band singers. DA mentions Merle Turner, who copied Orlando Roberson. DA says that OR was just a singer who now and then would hit a high note.

DA had a singer from New Orleans, Buddy Collins, who died as a young man. He died in St Louis. RBA says he doesn't know much about BC. DA notes that this is because he died too young. BC was born off Claiborne [Avenue] and Iberville [Street]. He was no kin to Lee Collins. DA says BC was a "real dark fellow" whereas LC was "a sort

Indian fellow."

RBA wonders if DA hired musicians on the basis of shade of color or section of town. DA says all he cared about was whether they could play the book; he says again that he had a tremendous book, with five arrangers. [CF. RBA's Don Albert ..., Storyville No. 31. That is, five main arrangers?]

DA regrets that he got mad and burned up the book. But, he says, even if he had kept it, he's not sure he could find fourteen men today who could play those arrangements. He explains that there aren't many musicians today who are trying to study, learn and read music. "It's the quick buck today." RBA says yes to that, and DA goes on to say there's no set pattern as to how you make it -- you just go ahead and "make this dollar now."

RBA asks if DA doesn't think the young guys coming out of Denton [North Texas State University at Denton] could [play DA's book.] DA recalls that RBA has recommended them as a good group and says he would like to hear them.

DA mentions that Al Clark [of Heritage Hall] has some "gimmick" down there [H.H.] tonight, and that young musicians will be playing straight Dixieland. [ie, The Last Straws, with: Bris Jones, cl. Moose Zanco, co. Nick Gagliardi, tb. [and leader]. Bob Casey, piano. and Ken Allen, d. RBA, June 2, 1972] DA says he's going down to listen at ten o'clock, and RBA hopes that he can get there also.


RBA asks how AK took over TH's band. DA thinks that

there was friction building up in TH's group. He says he's not going to commit himself to details. TH wanted to go to California and nobody else wanted to go.

RBA and DA discuss the difficulty of getting the straight story on why something happens. DA says that you don't get to find out unless you're on the inside, and RBA comments that even then you might get twelve different stories.

DA mentions that he left Troy Floyd's band for personal reasons. TF tried to replace DA but couldn't. Consequently, a couple of other fellows dropped out. DA says that finally TF dropped out.

RBA asks what happened to TF. DA says he died in San Diego ten or twelve years ago. He had become too stout to work. But TF never was an all-around musician. He could read. As for tonation [timbre], he had what is called a "nanny tone." (DA demonstrates it by voice.) But he was a great confidence man, a gambler.

RBA asks what DA means by 'confidence man.' DA says he could sell you something that you didn't need. RBA asks, "Would he drop the pigeon?" DA says he would not play this confidence game, but he could talk you into buying whatever he wanted to sell. RBA asks if that would be in music or just anything. DA says this included music. TF opened the way for Negro bands to get a lot of good jobs in Texas. After he quit music, he went to San Diego [and started a life, "fooling with the women."] RBA heard that he ran a poolhall. TF never was great musically. This is why DA was sometimes reading five parts... 

[END OF REEL]

DON ALBERT
Reel IV
May 27, 1972

Also Present: RBA

Don Albert says there were not too many finished musicians back then so when Troy [Floyd] would get jobs in nightclubs that required music to be played for performers, like a dance team, DA would have the violin part, clarinet part, trumpet part and the piano part sometimes, to transpose from one part to another to keep the lead going.

For instance, their piano player Scott Bagby couldn't read, but, after he heard [it] he could play it. He was a great clarinet and tenor sax player.

After the band broke up [T.] Holder went to California. RBA thinks that he kept a band going with Jesse Stone for a while, but D.A. is not sure. [Cf John Chilton, Who's Who of Jazz, Bloomsbury]

Don Albert said there was only one Negro theatrical circuit, the T O B A [Theatrical Owners Booking Association]. Punch Miller was working one of those. He stopped in San Antonio.

Troy [Floyd] had a great singer that worked TOBA by the name of Earl Sanders [sp?], a baritone. He didn't stay in the business. Minimum wages in those days were nothing and this guy was an aristocrat and real dark [sic].

Another singer in Dallas was Nookie Johnson from New Orleans. RBA remembers that Willie Jackson and Nookie Johnson were partners. DA says that they lost Nookie Johnson to the bottle, and that he had family troubles.

DA didn't recall anyone on dope, but 'weed' [marijuana] was used. A lot of people thought Schexnayder [sp?], ts, as, was on dope, but he actually had diabetes and asthma. He was as great as Johnny Hodges to DA. He was from the same place as Bunk Johnson; New Iberia.

RBA asks about the competition Troy Floyd had back then, other than [Alfonso] Trent band. DA says there was no competition. "Only competition he had was when I came back."

There were other bands, white bands like Herman Waldman, now retired in Dallas, with Rex Preis, of San Antonio now dead; Jimmy Joy, San Antonio. DA used to sit in with J J at the Gunter Hotel. DA was not shy. DA also sat in with J J at the St. Anthony Hotel. Harry James was with Jimmy Joy and played there. Blue Steele [was in Texas ?]. DA didn't know of Doc Ross [Cf. Jack Teagarden source]. He knew Wingy Manone. Don Albert said he talked to Joe Mares who said Wingy Manone was coming to New Orleans.

RBA asks about KXYZ Band with Herman Vernon out of Houston. [Cf discographies].

Milton Larkin, Houston, copied D A's band. Had Eddie Vinson, blues singer, but back then ^{he} played sax in the section with Arnett Cobb.

DA got a bass player from that band, [Lawrence] Cato. Exceptional good bass player but didn't get along too well with people. Dead now. DA's was the first band to use string bass [in that era in Texas?] Question DA about this]. Jimmie Johnson, from New Orleans, and Harold Holmes, from Mobile now in Canada, were both on string bass at once with D A. Then Cato [came into band.] DA also had a tuba. Harold Holmes arranged music. H H also extremely good bassist.

D A's first arranger was alto man Philander Tiller of Arkansas.

RBA asks if his band changed in style. DA says it changed altogether. When he started it was with 9 pieces. That's the reason of the name Don Albert and his Ten Pals [sic]. DA picked up Hiram Harding, trumpet, in Dallas [making ten sidemen?] DA played mostly stock [arrangements] plus a few New Orleans numbers. As time went on and he brought new personnel into the band and arrangements became the thing, he just started playing a different kind of music, but tried to [stay in the vein of the solid beat?]

RBA comments that Bennie Moten's band changed in five years [from 1927 to 1932] I was thinking, RBA, June 9, 1972] Instruments, times and personnel have changed.

DA tells why he stopped using banjo. Banjo was too loud; you could hear the banjo above all others. Arrangements in those days distributed the tone to the reeds and brass in such a way as to sound like one note. On balance of sections and banjo, banjos didn't fit as well as six string guitar.

In 1929 [Ferdinand] Dejan was playing banjo with him. It was a sound they wanted in those days.

Some of the New Orleans numbers were "Clarinet Marmalade", "Milneburg Joys", "Sister Kate", and other old standards.

After they played in Texas a while they stopped playing these numbers. In early '30's they played stock numbers [?] of 32 measures length. They were beautiful [mostly numbers they could listen and dance to ??] Played introduction, choruses; rarely played verses unless a singer might want to sing the verse. In that case they'd play the introduction, chorus and possibly go back to the verse.

Typical set at a dance - start medium, slow and then something [up in ?] tempo. Rarely used 6/8, 3/8 or 2/8 unless called for. Mexican time signatures in music different. DA never heard

of 2/8 time until he saw Mexican music. Troy [Floyd] was stumped. DA would ask the people to sing the ones he was unfamiliar with, mostly to get the tempo.

(Kaps)
DA talks about his treatment by Mexican and White people. The Mexicans treat him well. Every white man you meet is not bad. There's a certain element and certain area that do treat negroes badly but DA doesn't believe they know why they do, other than it has been a way of life for them.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, D A was invited into the locker room at the Southern Hills Country Club for a drink during intermission. DA felt it was their way of saying "See, I don't mind your drinking out of my bottle", or another way of saying those other fellows out there can't, but you can. DA considered this a greater insult and so just said, "Thanks, I don't drink."

They have had dealings with the Ku Klux Klan. Even situations where they had to be brought to the bandstand by policemen. On the other hand there have been places where whites accepted them and took them into their homes back in the 1930's.

In Texas he played the Kings' Ranch [The King Ranch]. Richard King never had a prejudiced bone in his body - just opened the doors to them.

In Thomasville, Ga., he and the whole band were arrested

DON ALBERT
Reel IV
May 27, 1972

6

for the simple reason that he wouldn't say "Yes, Sir". The fellow hit him, arrested the whole band, and snapped a gun in his face after emptying the shells out. DA says he wouldn't be here today if there had been a shell left in.

He played country clubs in Atlanta, mentions Graham Jackson of Atlanta Piedmont Country Club.

Another time played in Louisville, Ky., for one of the Derbies and Don Ameche, Bette Davis and Wallace Beery were on stage with them and they ate and drank together. Got along beautifully, this was back in the '30's.

Played fraternities in the South. Opened the [Greggory?] Gym at the University of Texas in Austin.

DA tells of a place in Oklahoma City owned by Mr. Bertrend [or Buttram?] that loved waltzes so DA had to play waltzes every other set, but they very seldom played waltzes otherwise unless at a formal dance of a dance which was not strictly public.

They played polkas like "Roll Out the Barrel" for the German people in New Braunfels, Texas. A german man in [eastern part of? East Bernard?] Texas was a real friend who was white. DA could always wire him for money. This man only expected DA to play for him. [c. 1950 Alvin Alcorn told me DA could always get money by wire. RBA, June 12, 1972]

DA said he "sat in" with Piron and Perez before he left New Orleans. These bands played schottisches in the creole section.

He tells of incident when he was just learning to play. He accepted a job to play at the Italian Hall. He started to play and saw this fellow looking at him. The man called him and said "Here's \$3.00. Go home and learn more."

DA played at the Bienville Roof during the formation of his group. He was with Bebe Ridgley [Tuxedo Orchestra] with Arthur Derbigny, Sidney Hansell, Herb Hall and Louis Cottrell and Danny Barker [recommended?] DA to the "fellows". DA didn't plan to stay in town. They got together and wrote "True, You Don't Love Me" there.

They left and went to San Antonio. Played hotels - Gunter, Plaza and Adolphus in Dallas. The hotels in those days were where the dance halls were, so you automatically played hotels.

DA talks about liquor laws of Texas. Booze was wide open in the early days, but a law was passed in 1942 or 44 [Cf local option and national prohibition laws]. Prior to then there were saloons. RBA remembers having to bring liquor in paper sacks when he was in the Navy at Corpus Christi in 1945[and 1946].

DON ALBERT
Reel IV
May 27, 1972

8

DA says "It was the craziest law, they found that out-^{it} it was another law just like the Prohibition laws, and it didn't serve their purpose.'

DA says Texas is a melting pot. In West Texas you find cowboys; Central Texas, the Mexicans; East Texas you have what they call the "die hards",⁹ who won't accept anything.

East Texas is where the oil is - up around Kilgore which used to be predominantly Negro lands, but the land was taken away from them. South Texas is the cotton belt. RBA says that Texas is like a lot of different states with a lot of different people and that he had wondered what difference it had made in what they liked in music.

DA says if you have something they want to listen to they're going to appreciate it, and ask for their requests. For instance, with the Mexicans they might ask for "Maria Elena" or "Begin the Beguine" whereas the Germans like "Roll Out the Barrel". The young ones don't care what you play. People were more interested in melodies, not band style. "San Antonio Rose" was a well-liked^{hill} hill billy number.

RBA asks if DA knew the Light Crust Doughboys, Knocky [Parker], Bill Boyd and Milton Brown. DA didn't, but he does know Bob Wills well. ^{He} Says there was about 15 or 20 Western halls in San Antonio. Also knew Red River Dave and Marty ~~Cobb~~ ^{Cobb} [sp?]. RBA says there were some good jazz players in the hill billy field. DA agrees and

DON ALBERT
Reel IV
May 27, 1972

9

lc
says they go where the money is. Shelly Lee ^{Allen}~~Allen~~, v, switched
from ~~Jazz~~ to ~~Hillbilly~~ according to RBA.

DA mentions Emilio Carceres ~~Carceres~~ as being the greatest.

End of Reel IV

