

MIKE DELAY
REEL III [only]
NOVEMBER 14, 1970

INTERVIEWER: John Bentley
ALSO PRESENT: Paul Affeldt,
Olivette De Lay
NOTES: Richard Allen
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

[Reel III, only, was donated to the Hogan Jazz Archive. Note restrictions between 20-22 minute point, approximately, on the tape.]

[Interview took place at 1332B South Avalon Boulevard, Los Angeles, California.]

(There is a bad hum on the tape as MD, and JB, discuss smoking, briefly, and exchange small talk.)

When did I start playing? As soon as I got the horn. October 6, 1925. A Conn. Brand new one. Man, I paid enough money up for it, too....

Well, I mean, you don't play, the first thing when you buy an instrument...Probably, I didn't know what I was doing music-wise, but I [got] that horn. I had a knack for it...

My first regular job I ever had in my life was with Olivette's cousin. He had an establishment. Edgar Saucier...

I was born September 29, 1909 [at] 1839 LaHarpe Street...Downtown...two blocks from North Claiborne towards...the lake. You ever been there?

That's where I was born. But, I was raised up in the Treme' [section:] fifth ward, fourth precinct. Treme'...just off the [French] Quarter.

My sister, and them, were born there. Both of my sisters.

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[MD and JB discuss street locations, and the location of "Back o' Town.".]

What we called "Back o' Town,"...Pauger, and around Frenchman. In that vicinity--St. Anthony, New Orleans. We called that "Back 'o Town," then.

Louis Barbarin lived in the same house as Paul used to live....That's where they were all raised, out of New Orleans...

I tell them I don't need no address, because I know that address. I used to rehearse with Paul years ago. That Louis is a drummer.

A kind of hard thing to say [is who was the best trumpet player.] You know the reason why? Because I was listening to cornets, and trumpets all my days. I just loved it.

My mother didn't want to buy me one. She wanted to buy me a violin. I didn't want a violin.

Until Louis Armstrong came along, I was crazy about my teacher, Manuel Perez. He was an outstanding musician.

He was not all that flamboyant. He never had a drink in his life. Never smoked a cigarette in his life. He was powerful. He was a wonderful trumpet player.

In those days, trumpet players of his type. They were really musicians. [They] could play either way, any way, one way, or the other.

You take a dude, get up a little juke band, whatever. That's

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what I call it. You put a cat....

Arnold Metoyer. He was wonderful. In fact, those guys were the tops. When you talking about players, I'm talking about top musicians. But, when you're talking about real players, my favorite was, like, Buddy Petit, Kid Punch [Miller]. You know Kid Punch? Boy, I used to love him when I was....

No. Wait. My number one was Lee Collins. Lee Collins. I thought nobody had a drive like that guy. We played a couple of times together....

He had a stiff leg. He walked bad, [pigeon toed]. He, and Joe Robichaux. They looked like they were mockingbirds, they walked so bad...Joe Robichaux was a catcher when he played ball. He was a good baseball player.

[Some favorite cornet players were] Kid Rena, Kid Shots [Madison]...Albert Snaer. He came to San Francisco. He came up to the Blue Grove when we were fooling around there, and I was carrying mail.

We used to play dances for my aunt. My aunt used to give dances....She was an old-timer when I was a kid, before I even started to play.

My Aunt Carrie'--that was her name. When she made up her mind to make a dance, she knew how much profit she was going to make.

She started with 400 couples over there....She probably knew

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how much profit she was going to make. How much the band cost, and the sandwiches. They'd serve ice cream, and punch.

We cats [would] come over there, and play for her. I remember...her paying so much money [for a] deposit to [Kid] Rena...

Conti and Roman. I used to go there for my aunt when I was a kid...to see Kid Rena. They'd get the date set up. He'd come, and play....

They held the dances at old Economy Hall, Co-operators Hall. We lived two blocks from the Economy Hall.

Do you know where the San Jacinto [Hall] is? That's really a Spanish name. It's (pronounces in Spanish). It was always pronounced wrong....We lived next to the San Jacinto.

Right next door...[was a] big brown house where the Germans had a grocery since 1858. His father had it. Then, he had it. Then, his son, Frank Jr., had it.

I remember when I used to go to the grocery store, get that wine. No kidding, with food, man...New Orleans people. They drink wine with their food...

I better not drink anything but Italian wine, without exception. Don't bring any claret. [The wine served the children was watered down, and had sugar in it.]

My dad never drank in his life. My father. My uncle was a sot.

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I didn't know [about Buddy Bolden]. I just learned about Buddy Bolden when I grew up as man, but I didn't know anything about Buddy Bolden.

As far back as I can go back was...I read books about Buddy Bolden, and all that. I didn't know. I only knew about older musicians, from what I read in books. I didn't know them here.

I heard about Freddy Keppard a lot, and King Oliver....None of these guys came up around [Louis] Armstrong, as far as I'm concerned.

Armstrong don't mean nothing to me because he's not going to give me a quarter....But, I could never keep none of those guys with Armstrong.

With all respect to the guys, not putting anybody down. But, man, after Armstrong...In the days when I come up, there weren't nobody [better], as far as I'm concerned.

I'm talking about jazz trumpet. You have these top musicians like George [Fagan?], all these guys...top ten, classical musicians. But, we're talking about jazz musicians, aren't we?

I could be mistaken. Maybe, I didn't hear enough of these guys, because I don't want to be putting anyone down.

Let me clarify this, one more time. Louis Armstrong was, to me, the first top trumpet player, exceptional trumpet player, I ever heard in my life. Me. Just put it that way. Because I don't know...But, Louis Armstrong, to my estimation, there was nothing

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like him....I'm 61....

I never had anyone, that I can recall, talk about Buddy Bolden. When I was coming up, in fact, I didn't know there was any such guy. I remember reading about Bolden as I got older.

Bunk Johnson? I met Bunk Johnson. I even met him when I was a youngster. He played [his] horn in New Iberia, Louisiana....

I used to love New Iberia. The girls. You talk about. Oh man, you never seen so many dolls in your life.

You know what a guy told me? I went to see a girl in a place called Edgard, Louisiana....He said, what the hell you coming over here for? I said, to see a girl. [He said,] they don't have girls in New Orleans? Those guys try to scare you to death, you know?

The only thing--today, they're so different. These kids today don't...They just take it. They don't want to listen to anybody nowadays. I don't mean all, but...a lot of them don't give any respect to their older people.

Why are you going to dislike a person because they're old? Actually, if they live long enough, they're going to get old. Unless, maybe, they want to commit suicide when they hit 30.

I'm just saying: if you live long enough, you're going to get old. Why get angry?

I can see anybody getting angry if somebody's trying to take advantage of them, regardless of what age they are. You know what

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I mean? But, if you go around...I mean, to each his own....

It's true, from childhood [New Orleans reacted to race differently than other places]. Now, you know, things happen. Things happen anywhere you go. We all know that. But, when I began to travel, that's when I found that out. When I begin travelling.

I travelled fairly young. Not to all [the states]. I never been to every state, and so forth....

But then, it comes to me when I come back home, I used to say: well, this is the best [place] for colored people. [Better] than other places. Because I had experiences in other places. You had bad days but you have bad days anywhere you go....

In the first place, when I'd leave New Orleans, here is what I mean. Whites went over here, and coloreds went over there. That's the way they used the signs.

The difference [was] that in New Orleans you were free. That's one thing. You were free. See what I mean? In New Orleans, they didn't try to tear the world up. It didn't work for anybody.

The white kids couldn't do it neither. They wouldn't let nobody tear up anything. We stayed up the way we want.

You know what could knock us out? A small town right in Louisiana. Then, you better get off the streets at such, and such, a time of the night. Not all of them, but some of them was terrible.

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When I went to Slidell, Louisiana, I swore I'd never put my foot in that place again. Right across the lake.

And I've been in some bad places. I've been in some terrible places in Louisiana, and some terrible places in Mississippi when I was a kid. In fact, I didn't know a real good place in Mississippi.

The nicest one that I could say, if I had to pick one, was...Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Biloxi, and all that. That was the best part of Mississippi.

The best one I would say in Mississippi, to my recognition, was Bay St. Louis. I went over there with the Sauciers, with Edgar Saucier's father.

Played bass over there. He hired me from New Orleans to go all the way over there to play bass. He was a trombone player.

That was the best place in Mississippi. No kidding. The people used to get along...

[The restricted portion of the interview occurs here and deals with individuals passing for white, especially within families where some passed, and some didn't. One term for passing was "jumping over the fence."

[MD then speaks a bit about Huey Long, whom he considered "straight" about the races. MD questions the arrest of the Long assassination suspect, and doesn't believe 'that man, Weiss, did it.' He thinks it was a frame.

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[JB and MD discuss Huey Long's assassination. They also discuss President John Kennedy's assassination, and Clay Shaw. They don't think Clay Shaw had anything to do with it.

[Restricted portion ends with a note that it can be lifted on November 14, 2020....]

My dad was a Frenchman. But, I mean, so what. The only thing I can say is he was a fine guy. I can assure you that because if he was a rotten [guy], or a lousy bastard, I would tell you that. He was one of the finest cats.

I know! I used to say that, and people used to look at me, and laugh.

My father missed opportunities because he married a negro wife. He was so wonderful. He was so wonderful. He couldn't get anything....He went through in life for us.

My dad could have had an awful lot. The opportunities my dad missed because of the deal, because of the colored thing. He didn't want to put his family down, or my daddy could have made a fortune.

My dad used to teach cats how to make tents, and awnings. You know what a sails-maker is? It's hard to explain the thing because everything, now, is venetian blinds. All this kind of loose stuff, and all this....

He used to work for the Fauria family. They had a place at 1220 Royal, if it's still there. My daddy worked for those

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people.

By sticking with his family, he couldn't make the kind of money they gave the Faurias. [The Faurias were Creoles of color. See sources on "Beansy" Fauria. RBA, 4 October 1972.]

They wanted him over there at [] and company. [My father] could have gone over there as manager for three times the amount of money, and he could have worked easier. Do you know what I mean?

But, he always thought of his family. Do you know what I mean? It was just one of those things.

[JB says the Fauria Company sign is still up which] might be because they are one of the oldest dealers in that business down in New Orleans.]

The next place my daddy worked was for old man Joe [Federer?], a little bitty guy--that big. The reason why he worked for this guy so long. He had two reasons for working.

My dad suffered with rheumatism every year. He couldn't do anything. But, the man brought his paycheck every week, just like he was working. That went on for years, and years.

Another person by the name of Vic [Millet?] took care of him with some kind of a bark from some tree. [He] started treating my daddy for nothing. And my daddy used to go to a specialist for this thing.

Before you know it, no more rheumatism. Now, I'm quoting

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[what] the doctor said here. Don't quote me for knowing what he had because, after all, I'm not a doctor. But, I'm saying he went to one specialist. He cost \$10 a visit, and \$10 was money in those days...

[JB says he met the nicest people of all in New Orleans.] I say the same thing. Not just because I was born, and raised there. In all my travels, the majority of them...

My sister's a sweetheart. But, the one thing. She never did take anything off anybody. Nobody push her around. You know why? Because we were taught not to be pushed around.

I started playing in 1925, when I was 16 years old. In other words, I bought my first horn, one week to date after my 16th birthday. My 16th birthday was the 29th of September.

No, I didn't hear Bunk's horn. Bunk didn't have a horn around that time, that I can recall.

I was told by Paul Barbarin that [Bunk] played "Confessin'" anywhere between [19]39-[19]41...No later than March of [19]41, because April of [19]41 I was in the service....

I never did forget that he played "Confessin'," because he thanked me for letting him play [my] horn. That was the first time I met him, and I thought he done wonderful.

He was old...seemed pretty old then....I never heard him any other time. That was the only time I heard him play, when he played my horn. He played 'Confessin.' The man didn't have much

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chops then, so you know how that is. It wasn't bad, but...you can't figure what you thought of the man's playing.

I heard them talking about [Bunk when I was a child in new Orleans.] I heard something about him teaching Louis, Louis Armstrong. That's what I heard, but I don't know how true it is...People, guys, different guys [said that]...I heard that rumor. I couldn't tell you where I got it from. I heard that.

[JB continues on this point, but MD emphasizes that it was just a rumor that Bunk taught Louis. MD mentions some guy from the (Colored Waif's) Home who taught Louis...]

I did know one thing about Louis. I know when I heard him - I don't recall the year - but, the first time I heard Louis was a street parade. This is no joke....I remember that people talked about Louis so much, you knew Louis. You knew who was Louis....The average kid in new Orleans liked music in those days.

[JB, or PA, again presses MD about Bunk and MD, again, says he didn't know much about him.] I don't really know [how good Bunk was] because I never heard him outside of...Did he have any records out?

I know about [Alton] Purnell and them working with him. I heard about that, but that was before I even started to fool around with Dixieland. I didn't start to fool around with Dixieland until...mostly through Joe Darensbourg and that

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bunch....I had never played any Dixieland....

Elmer, that's 'Coo Coo' [Talbert]. That's my buddy, man. You know something about Coo Coo? Coo Coo used to live in the next block from my house, right next to the McLeans...Ernest McLean.

His dad [Richard McLean] just died, [the guitar demonstrator?]. He was self-taught, a guitarist and a bass player. He turned out to be...his son is outstanding on the guitar.

Yeah, I know Coo Coo. His brother [Charles?] used to be a good ballplayer. Coo Coo. I thought he was a quite good [trumpet] player....I always thought he had lines wrong. You know why? Because his fingers were too short. Looked like they were too short, and he couldn't get his fingers in there. It looked like he blew so hard, [he used all his chops up?]. But, he was a hard worker. And he was a nice person.

To be honest, I didn't even know [white musicians]....You knew they were there. I had a little guy that I knew. I used to call him 'Sherbert.' His name was [Luke] Schiro.

He was still, like right around my age...I always wondered if his father was any relation to the mayor. I think the mayor was the one that had the [?], Claiborne Street, I think he's the one that had the [????]...Claiborne between Bienville and Conti, on the Lake side of the street.

But, the Schiro I'm talking about. I called him 'Sherbert.'

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I never did recall the boy's first name. He was a youngster like me. His daddy had an ice cream shop...for years.

Then, I heard of Leon Roppolo. I never met him in my life. We be friends with this grocer. It wasn't a block or two out of the way....Most of the Italian people were the ones that ran the grocery stores. In those days, they didn't have the supermarkets....

[I heard of Roppolo] probably [when I was] 13-14 years old. But, that's way back, man. It was 45 years ago, something like that. I heard of him, but I didn't know him.

Johnny Dedroit. I remember him working in the pit of the theater. I can't recall this boy's name, but that little cat used to wear his hair just like Rudolph Valentino....We knew the white musicians because they were working in the pit at the theater.

We didn't really know [the white musicians.] There was no association because, in the first place, the few guys that you might have known a little - they were friendly that you met [but] because the point of view is the law. The law said...

What happened with Burnell Santiago. You probably heard of him. He was just a little guy, man. A nice looking kid, man. [cf. Lester Santiago interview on family.] He was a genius. He'd get filled with stuff and he couldn't control himself. I never know him to [?] anybody.

These women would fall head over heels over him, and the men

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would just spell this word [racial epitaph]. They practically killed him.

They finally, I was told, that they finally threw him out of the place; like you see in the comedies, the movie pictures and the comedies, threw him out of the place through a window like in the movies....

[Crossing the color line,] I don't know if I'd know any people that didn't. [Laughs]...Oh man, that was damn near the style in New Orleans.

You had so many deals going on, man. Like, you're playing with this guy, and he wasn't with anybody. Nobody knew who he was.

You got a lot of dudes, you can't really tell what color they are nowadays. You probably met a lot of them. [Much of it was job related where you'd have a good job, or something, and want to keep it.]

Oh. All kinds of things went on in New Orleans....All these other guys that you're going to see; all the different colors, from white to black, and all the different colors you see.

I can't answer [what constituted a Creole]. You know why I can't? So many things changed when I grew up that I can't answer that.

When I was small, I thought they had white Creoles; and I thought they had light colored Creoles; and I thought they had

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black Creoles. So, I was mixed up right there, let's face it....

Here's what I mean. I was in some parts of society - some guy I was with - but I never could stand this man, honest to God. But, my dad said a person was a person. That's why I loved him. Because he did not mistreat anybody. You understand what I mean? He did not put the other guy down, the black man. He did not do it.

That's why I loved my daddy. And I noticed that. I noticed that damn good. Don't you think I didn't pay attention to that when I was a kid? That's the reason why I said that you had the white Creole, the black Creole, and the brown Creole.

Now dig this, man. I played at a hall - I don't recall the name - it looked like it was on Calliope Street. Some people say [and they discuss the various pronunciations of this and other streets]...I'm not saying they're right, but I'm just saying the way they say it. [They discuss, for example, Felicity Street].

But, like about what you say about the Creole. Man, I played dances that if you walked in that place, you would have thought it was white people - we were playing for white people - unless somebody told you different. I bet you, you would have bet your life on it. Like you say; well, who are these people, and you say what do you mean who are these people.

I played dances. You know the reason why they were like that? Because they wouldn't allow any other people in there. They

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were quite light.

I can't say who was the lowest [in status when I was a youngster]. We had lousy [status], and I can't tell who else was the louses down there, the nationality, but I know they were white. That's all I know. I mean they were supposed to be white. Let's put it that way.

When I stop to think, I wonder who the hell was imported to New Orleans...the bad characters. You know what I mean? Because, you know, you taken some of the gin off these....

But, you got a lot of Italian policemen down there too....Nine out of ten, if you was a guy that minded your business, it didn't matter what color you were. Nine out of ten, they didn't hardly ever bother you, or do you any harm, or anything.

I remember one time, I was walking down the street. One time, they got strict about loitering....When they came, we used to give them a nickname. He didn't want nobody to call him that. I don't get mad with people when they try to give a nickname. We used to call them 'Long John.' His name was John Cooper. He was the cop there, at the time...

That's another thing about [New Orleans], you see. The people down there, they help you. A lot of them would help you, a lot of people if they could do it....

I tell you one thing, though. For a Southern place, I would

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put it this way, you had more solid good white [people] in New Orleans than any Southern place that I could think of. That's what I would say.

Now, you had a lot of rotten ones. Anywhere you go, you get a few. But, the majority, I would say, I thought to myself. You had more good ones here in New Orleans. That's the reason why the people were able to do what they wanted to without nobody really [bothering them.] You did what you want. We stayed up all night, and stayed up all night. So what, I mean.

The reason why I'm bringing this up, you might say, is like a novelty...[when] it was compared to a small town. You couldn't do nothing in a small town. I went to a little small town where you got up to dance, and it was through at 11:00 [p.m.]. We go, play in the band...

[I'd say] I hope I never have to move from here. Now the biggest place in the world, the biggest place in Mississippi, is Jackson....Get off the sidewalk, God-damned right, I know what I'm talking about. I used to hear about that, but I witnessed that. Don't tell me, brother. You know a guy was afraid of Mississippi. It was something to be afraid of. This is still happening...

You know what I had a girl tell me? Bless her soul, I thought she was a nice kid. A white girl [who was underage and working at a Los Angeles club heard about a lynching of a Negro

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in Georgia and asked about lynchings in New Orleans.]

I said, well, so far, in my home town, it's never happened 'cause I asked my dad...that I know of, now don't quote me in saying that I know what I'm talking about.

My dad said there never was a Negro lynched in the city of New Orleans. But, the little towns, the surrounding towns, [they had some?]. I asked my father about all these things because I used to read so much stuff, and see so much stuff happening and all that kind of stuff.

[The Italians]...my daddy showed me the definite trees on all the streets. They don't have that anymore. They had the trees, the chinaberry trees...

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