

WILBUR DEPARIS
Reel I--Summary--Retyped
June 26, 1959

Present: Richard B. Allen

First part of interview giving vital statistics; etc. not recorded due to trouble with Wilbur DeParis's machine.

The tape was recorded in the basement of Jimmy Ryan's, N. Y. C. Sy Elliott looked like everything but a musician; he looked more like a stevedore. He could play. There were quite a few very fine men, this isn't beginning to name them all. Mr. Allen asks him if this is Roy Wolfsgale that went to Chicago that he was referring to. Wilbur can't remember their first names, they were the Wolfsgale brothers. He thinks that Roy was the name of one of them. Mr. Allen says that Paul Barbarin had mentioned it to him, and he wondered if it was the same fellows. Mr. Allen says those things all tie in together.

Wilbur knew Sidney Bechet; they worked together in Noble Sissle's band for about two years or more. They were in Paris together: Sidney, Tommy Ladnier, and Wilbur. Then when Sidney worked in Jimmy Ryan's, Wilbur worked one stretch with him. They also worked on record dates and "around" [spot jobs?],

Mr. Allen asks Wilbur how Sidney made out with a band like Noble Sissle's, if he could read the parts. Wilbur says he didn't have to because he only played solo jazz parts. He didn't do any section work with Sissle at all. In fact, Tommy Ladnier and Sidney Bechet were there for that express purpose of just playing the swing choruses. Tommy Ladnier could read, but how much Wilbur doesn't remember.

Wilbur's experiences in music came early in carnival bands, brass bands, medicine shows, and high school bands. Orchestras were secondary to Wilbur.

Wilbur started on the alto horn, then went to bass, and then to baritone. Then for a while, during the time he was in New Orleans, he was playing a little C melody saxophone. He was playing the saxophone when he met Louis [Armstrong], but that was just a side line because he was on trombone then.

Wilbur has had teachers from time to time, but actually he was never in one place long enough to derive a whole lot, but he got the pointers and the information that he wanted. Most of his has come from experience; he has had lots of that.

Wilbur's first job was with his father on a carnival, what they called a "gilly" show. A "gilly" show is the name for a small carnival that doesn't have cars of its own, just loads up in a couple of box cars and goes on to the next town. His next job was the same thing. He stayed with his father practically till he finished high school. Sometimes he left and did other things, but he was playing with his father most of the time. After he left his father he went with himself. He organized his own band and later on he went back and got his brother Sidney [DeParis] and took him to Philadelphia, where he had a big band. Wilbur has had bands of his own off and on all his life. He had a band at eighteen with Billy Mack's Merrymakers.

His best jobs in terms of money were during the carnival days. As far as the prestige places: France at the first class restaurants and in London at the Palladium.

He has played for "Tab shows" i.e. tabloids, a musical comedy, a small version.

Wilbur played with Duke Ellington. It was "a band that was strickly from paper and you play the paper." He took the place of "Tricky Sam" [Joe Nanton] even though he didn't play Tricky's solos, he played his parts.

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Wilbur seldom uses a mute in his own personal playing, but in a lot of things he had to do in Duke's band he did use mutes. Then he used mostly straight and cup mutes. He has used a plunger but not with Duke. Wilbur and Sidney both have used plungers. Sidney still does.

END OF REEL I