

Also present: William Russell, Manuel Manetta.

Sidney L. Desvigne, Sr., was born September 11, 1893, in New Orleans, on St. Louis Street, a little way out of the French Quarter, near the old St. Louis Cemetery; [No. 1 or 2?]; SD lived most of his life in the downtown area. He remembers that when he was 12 or 13 years old he began following Manuel Perez and Joe Oliver, to hear their cornet playing, which he liked; he would stand by the bandstand to hear them. When he was about 14, he asked Manuel Perez to teach him cornet; George Fihle, trombonist then working with Perez, asked him to learn trombone, but SD declined, saying he preferred cornet. Perez gave him two lessons a week. SD's parents were not musical; he had brothers and sisters, none of whom played an instrument. (he was the only musician in the family). SD was Catholic. SD used to see lots of parades. He lacked confidence in his ability to play when Perez first took him to play 3rd cornet in a funeral band; he had never marched and played before, and says he found himself well in advance of the entire band, so that he would have to drop back into line. When he became pretty good on cornet, he organized a little band; besides himself on cornet, there were the Bechet brothers--Joe, guitar, Leonard, trombone and Sidney, clarinet. The band practiced at the Bechet house, and played so loudly that the police would come to quiet them; SD and the Bechets lived in the 900 block of Marais street then. (Leonard became a dentist; WR says he died [maybe] 6 years ago [1952].) Emile Bigard, violin, was later added to the band. The first job they played was for Leonard Bechet's mother [sic], at a house party she held; SD says

she made over \$ 100, and that she paid the band \$ 4 each, and \$ 1 extra for SD. The band was named The Silver Bell Band. Arnold DePass, drummer, got SD to begin playing with him in the tenderloin district; they worked in a barroom for some people named [Gaspé, Gaspar?]. Many barrooms did not have dancing. SD says Manuel Perez and Joe Oliver and [A.J.] Piron would be working on one corner [inside] or another [near each other], and Manuel Manetta was working at Tom Anderson's [saloon], which also had a dance hall; there were other dance halls, says MM, naming George Fewclothes' [Foucault], Hunt's and Nagel's; WR mentions Rice's, the Tuxedo and the Entertainers' Cabaret. SD says the time of his playing in the district was 1912-1914; SD played at many of the district places, organizing his own little band for that purpose. Later on, his band played for dances outside the district, and in Louisiana and Mississippi, etc. Later still, he worked on the steamer Sidney. Questioned by WR, SD says he heard Freddy Keppard, and that he knew the styles of all the "king" trumpet players--Keppard, Perez and Oliver. Again questioned by WR, he says he heard Bunk Johnson later, who was playing with the Superior Band. SD studied with Perez for 6 or 7 years; his studies were mostly from a method book; when SD was to play a parade, Perez would give him his part, and he would take it home to study; SD played with Perez in Perez' Onward [Brass] Band. SD later played first trumpet with the Excelsior [Brass] Band; the other trumpets were Andrew Kimball and Joe Oliver; the leader was George Moret [also a cornetist]. Then SD helped make up a band with Papa Celestin, the [Original] Tuxedo [Brass] Band, and played with

SIDNEY DESVIGNE
Reel I [of 2] --Digest--Retype
August 18, 1958

3

that one a long time. At one time, Jimmie Noone played clarinet with the Excelsior. SD played cornet until he began playing on the riverboats, when he got a trumpet. He began on the Sidney, with Arnold Metoyer, a very good trumpet player. SD played around [New Orleans] for years, until he got a letter from the Streckfus people, asking him to join one of their bands out of St. Louis; he joined a band led by Eddie Allen [trumpet], in 1925 or 1926. The band played the first winter in New Orleans, then went back up for the summer. Then Allen was replaced by the pianist, Fate Marable, with whom SD worked a number of years. SD finally agrees that he played with Marable after Louis Armstrong and Baby Dodds had worked with Marable (1919 Or 1920). Released by Streckfus, SD came back to New Orleans and organized a band which took a job on the Cincinnati-based [and owned] Island Queen which operated in New Orleans in competition to the Streckfus boat for a short time [about 6 weeks, according to Louis Cottrell, q.v.]. Pops Foster played [bass] in the band, which was 10 pieces (SD used 10-piece bands from then on, until he enlarged to 12). SD worked on the Island Queen for 2 seasons [mostly in and around Cincinnati]; then he returned to New Orleans, where he and his band replaced Marable's band on the Capital, where SD remained for a number of years--about 3 or 4 seasons. SD was replaced by the A. J. Piron band. After leaving the boats, SD's band played a lot of fraternity and sorority dances around Tulane University, and played occasional dances at San Jacinto Hall, among other places. Some of the trumpet players who played with SD (and perhaps got started with him?) were

SIDNEY DESVIGNE
Reel I [of 2]--Digest--Retype
August 18, 1958

4

Alvin Alcorn and Joe Phillips (Phillips still plays parades). SD answers WR, saying that he may have hired Kid Howard for a job now and then, but Howard was never a regular member of SD's band. Louis Nelson and Eddie Pierson were two of the trombonists who worked with SD's big band; (SD says he used to get men from out-of-town to play in his band); MM says his nephew, Irving Douroux and "Pink", ^[Eugene Alberts] from Algiers, were also trombonists with the band at one time. SD says a trombonist who worked with him is now here [Los Angeles]. In his 12-piece band, there were three trumpets, two trombones, 4 reeds (two of the saxes, Louis Cottrell and [Theodore] Purnell, doubled on clarinet, as did Gene Porter [now in Los Angeles]), drums (SD had both Barbarins, Paul and Louis, working for him at various times), piano (in later years, William Houston played piano; in earlier years, Manuel Manetta played piano, as well as sax, sometimes, and worked with SD and Ricard [Alexis] in brass bands), guitar (which was used in bands before the banjo replaced it; the first person SD heard play a banjo was Johnny St. Cyr, at a place called The Bucket of Blood, on Gravier, where they were working. Joe Oliver also played there a lot. The place was a dance hall, operating on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, and had a seven-piece band) and bass ([Henry] Kimball, Pops Foster, Johnny Lindsay and [Narvin] Kimball (Henry's son) were bass players who worked with SD). Some of the guitarists were Emanuel Sayles and René Hall (who now has a music house in Hollywood), and a banjo player was Willie Foster. [This makes thirteen men].

The old-time cornet players SD heard were Perez, Oliver, Bunk, Andrew Kimball, Arnold Metoyer, Sonny [Papa] Celestin, some barber, a man named Legeau [sp?]. MM adds George McCulham. He never heard Buddy Bolden. He knew of Edward Clem, but didn't know him personally. He remembers Joe Johnson. SD recalls that Joe Oliver had a very good, loud tone; he used his ^{hand} ~~head~~ and his derby for mutes, preferring open horn. MM adds Keppard played more of a "rag-time" style than Oliver. Perez had a nice tone, and used mutes more than the others. Bunk had a nice style; he used no mutes. He had a nice tone, didn't play loud, was softer than the others. Joe Oliver had a higher range than the others. MM says Andrew Kimball was also a high-note man. SD used C. G. Conn instruments. He says when he changed to trumpet, the trumpet "was so far away" he had to change back to cornet, but he finally got used to the trumpet. Eugene Ware, who came to New Orleans with a burlesque show, played trumpet with SD; Ware later joined [John] Robichaux. William Houston wrote most of the arrangements for the SD big bands; a fellow in Chicago, never met by SD, also wrote for the band. SD used stock arrangements only in the early days. He says that sometimes the band would fix an arrangement at rehearsal, working it out on the stand as they went along. The big band played a lot of the old favorite jazz numbers, like "Panama" (and also played what came out at the time); the music publishers would send SD music every month. Houston wrote his arrangements from the piano sheet music. SD says Earl Bostic worked with him a number of years, and also wrote some arrangements.

Also present: William Russell, Manuel Manetta.

SD played trombone for a short time; he couldn't get a trombone player for his band, so he took a few lessons, hired a trumpet player (in one instance, Louis Armstrong; Joe Lindsay played drums, MM was also on the job); when trumpet players became difficult to get, SD went back to trumpet.

MM, following SD's lead, tells of the time he worked on the [Streckfus] boat [about 1920] out of St. Louis. (He was working with Oke [Gaspard] at the Sans Souci Hall then. MM says it was Bigard and Desvigne's band.) He (MM) was hired, but he made the condition that he would bring SD to play one of the trumpets in the band. MM went to St. Louis, where he discovered there were hard feelings in the band because he had insisted on getting SD in; Bob Shoffner, the organizer of the band, was dismissed, as he was the trumpet player being replaced. He was replaced by Ed Allen as leader and trumpet player. MM replaced a woman pianist, who was filling in until he could get there. MM took a trip with the band to Davenport, Iowa; then the boat went down to Memphis [Tennessee], where SD was to join. He had to exchange his new silver instrument for a gold-plated one, as all the other horns in the band were golden. George ["Pop"] Foster and Johnny St. Cyr [bj] were roommates. Johnny St. Cyr's boy, who is 39 now [1958] was born then. MM tells that he used to get his pay envelope separate from the other band members. He says he would play piano while Captain Verne [Streckfus] played violin and his [later] wife, Louise [then working in the boat's office] sang. He says Walter Thomas, also sax player

and Floyd Casey, drummer, were stool pigeons for [Ed Allen?]; Eugene Sedric [sp?], soprano sax [and other saxes? CF photo in Playback or Jazzfinder] was in the band; WR says Sedric's father was a famous ragtime pianist in St. Louis.

SD tells of the time at the Blue [Ribbon, Rhythm?] Club when the people who had hired him objected to his playing trombone, as they had thought he would be playing trumpet; SD says the trumpet player he had hired could probably play better than he, SD, could but the employers wanted him to play. MM says SD had Arnold Metoyer and Louis Armstrong on that job. SD borrowed Metoyer's horn, and Metoyer pretended to be looking for some music. SD says Metoyer was a fine trumpet player, one who played out West, too, around Juarez and Tiajuana, Mexico; he played like the Mexicans.

MM says, and SD agrees, that SD made a trip [on the boat], then came back to New Orleans and organized his own band.

SD says his band played some "head" arrangements of blues, but read [practically] everything else, although they did not actually read when once the parts were memorized. He says his band played in Bogalusa, La.; once and had begun the job by playing some of their big arrangements; nobody danced, so at the suggestion of one of the bandsmen, they played the blues; everybody danced. SD tells a similar story, about Slim Jones' hillbilly band, in Muscatine, Iowa.

SD had mentioned George Fihle as a trombonist he liked; he says he didn't know many trombonists, but names Vic Gaspard and Buddy Johnson. He didn't know Benny Raphael nor Baptiste Delisle, both suggested by MM. SD says Louis

Nelson was a very good trombonist; WR says he still is. SD knew Honore Dutrey; he knew Roy Palmer, with whom he "started out" [began playing music at the same time], and says Palmer gave him lessons on the trombone; Palmer sold SD a trombone for \$ 1. 50. Palmer was a "pretty good" and "very good" trombonist. SD says Zue Robertson was good; Zue wanted to take SD with him to play with the circus (or wild-west show) called the 101 Ranch, but SD's mother wouldn't let him go, as he was too young. BeBé Ridgley, BeBé Matthews and Bill Matthews are mentioned in confusion. [Both BR & Bill Matthews played drums and trombone]. SD says he worked some with Kid Ory, but was never a regular member of Ory's band. SD remembers the Superior Band, Manuel Perez's [Imperial or Onward?] band, and Freddy Keppard's Olympia band; he says he thinks [Alphonse] Picou played clarinet with that band, and that A. J. Piron was violinist at one time; Willie Santiago played guitar. SD has taught some, but didn't like it. Desvigne has traveled [with his bands?] throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. SD thinks his big band was the first of its kind in New Orleans; he is sure that it was the first band [of its kind] to have uniforms. SD shows pictures of his band, Sidney's Southern Syncopators, made in 1934, 1935, etc. The pianist shown is [Burroughs] Lovingood (from St. Louis); a man, [Eugene?] Porter [sax], is now in San Diego; George Fleming lives in Berkeley [California]; Théodore Purnell [saxist of New Orleans] is shown; Judge Riley, drummer, is in Chicago; Moran, trombone, joined the band in Mississippi; Eugene Ware, trumpet, was stranded with a show, in New Orleans, when SD hired him [he is now in Chicago]; [Al?] Guichard (one of

two saxophone-playing brothers) is now in St. Louis. SD played on the steamers Sidney (the first one), the Capital, the St. Paul, the J. S. --practically all of Streckfus' boats. MM says the Washington, which WR mentions, was a Streckfus boat; SD says he heard of it, but didn't ever play on it. SD liked working on the Island Queen, out of Cincinnati [not a Streckfus boat], best; SD worked one season on it; and was coming to New Orleans on it; high water prevented them from going under a bridge for two weeks, so the boom [boom?] was taken down to allow the boat to go under; SD says they got their salaries that two weeks, although they didn't work.

SD has retired from music, is happy with his business and with California, where he came in 1949, opening his business in 1950. When he first came to California in 1949, he opened a little cafe on Avalon, near Vernon [Boulevard]. SD didn't know about Dink Johnson's place, at 4200 Avalon. There is talk about Bill Johnson, bass player, and about Dink, who came out with Freddy Keppard and the Creole Band. SD ends by saying "the best years of my life were playing music, but I didn't ^{ke} make any money." He made one record, "Pianoilage" [& "Frankie and Johnny"], with Fate Marable [on Okeh].

End of Reel II