

WARREN "BABY" DODDS
1 [only], Track 1
May 31, 1958

Also present: William Russell

Joe Oliver's band was good to work with; everybody always knew what was going on. Baby Dodds, who quit working for the Streckfus [Steamship Company] people in 1920, joined the Oliver band in San Francisco in 1921, where they were playing at a jitney dance hall on Market Street. Besides BD on drums and Oliver on cornet, there were Honore Dutrey, trombone; Johnny Dodds (BD's brother), clarinet; Eddie Garland, string bass; Lil [Hardin, (later Mrs. Louis Armstrong)] piano; Dave Jones, sax (no melophone with Oliver--melophone with Fate Marable). There was no comparison between the Oliver and the Marable bands; the Marable band had more men, and more harmony; any band with more men had better music. BD thinks the people on the boat [Streckfus] gave a better reception to the Marable music [than other people to the Oliver music], because they danced to everything. BD tells about the time the boat played Hannibal, Missouri; nobody danced until the band was almost ready to stop playing; about 1/2 hour before quitting time, the people started dancing and wouldn't stop; the boat had to make an extra trip. Before they danced, the people just stood around listening. BD figures that the people just weren't used to dancing to Negroes' music. The band had a little of the same kind of trouble in St. Joseph, Missouri, too. There was no trouble in Keokuk, Iowa. When Oliver was at the Royal Garden, Chicago, the people really danced; BD says that all he had to do to keep the people dancing was to use two pieces of sandpaper, scraped together, and the people would dance for 15 minutes or more.

May 31, 1958

Joe Oliver was taller than Bill Johnson; he was about 5'9" tall, and weighed 230 pounds; he was easy to get along with, unless he was crossed by someone, when he became vocally "mean". Oliver was a great trencherman. When BD first knew Oliver, Oliver drank a lot of liquor, but not in later years. BD says Oliver was a great guy; he regrets one thing: He quit Oliver's band in 1924, when the band broke up; in 1934, Oliver came to see him in Chicago, at the place where he was playing (Michigan and 51st), and asked him to join his band, saying that BD's presence in a band of youngsters would help their morale. The Oliver band was on tour, going from town to town in an old bus. BD didn't want to take a chance, and he also felt a responsibility to his brother, Johnny, who was working at the same place, so he did not join Oliver. Oliver did not last much longer. Oliver was not unusually loud, although he was very powerful, but he "muted himself down" by using a small metal [straight] mute, ^{made} by Conn, and sometimes he would use a rubber plunger in addition. He seldom used a derby. Oliver was a neat dresser. BD says he used trumpet, rather than cornet, for about the last 10 or 15 years. [Compare photographs]. The Oliver band had no uniforms; in the winter, at the Royal Garden [and elsewhere?], they dressed in tuxedos, the leader the same as the sidemen. Oliver was not loud-spoken; he liked to kid and joke; he didn't say much unless he had something to say for the band. He thinks Joe Oliver was a very fine man. ED thinks Oliver had his family with him in Chicago; he says, in fact, that he thinks

WARREN "BABY" DODDS
1 [only], Track 1
May 31, 1958

3

Oliver's daughter got married in Chicago. Oliver would start the band on a tune either by playing some "pick-up" notes or by stomping off; he would sometimes tell the name of the tune, or he would call out the [band's] number of the tune. The band played many requests. Oliver would pick out the tunes to be played as they went along; they very seldom repeated a number. Sometimes the band would immediately repeat a well-received number as an encore, (as still done by some bands in New Orleans) but usually the repertoire for the evening was followed. The length of a number depended on its reception and on the way Oliver felt about it. The bands improvised blues very often; the blues tempos were slow, sometimes speeded up a little to make a different sound. BD says a blues should be played slow, that a person can get more into a blues if it is played slow. BD says they [the Oliver band] played blues at most [any] tempos, even playing blues waltzed. The band played waltzes at the Royal Garden, as the Garden was "practically" a dance hall; they would play sets, including Dixieland numbers, waltzes, fox trots, etc. "Oh, How I Miss You Tonight" is mentioned, BD saying they didn't play it for dancing, although it was "out" [published, known, etc.]; WR says he heard it became sort of a theme [for Oliver?], almost. The band lined up at the Royal Garden in a straight line, with the bass as one end and the drums at the other; BD says that a band with the drums in the middle will not be balanced. BD says that at the Stuyvesant Casino [in New York, 1945, with Bunk Johnson] the band was never

WARREN "BABY" DODDS
1 [only], Track 1
May 31, 1958

4

balanced, because it was set up in two lines, under two ceilings of different heights. The Oliver band played in a straight line at the Dreamland and the Pekin [theater, in Chicago]. BD, after telling WR that the bandstand at the Royal Garden was about four feet high, says that music is more even when it comes down on people's heads, because it hits the ceiling and comes down on them; he says the balcony bandstands in some of the New Orleans halls are good because they are up high. The music will sound too far away when the bandstand is too high or too low, but music from a too-low stand will sound better than from a too-high one. BD says a band will sound better if the best place in the room is picked out to set up the band. Asked about Joe Oliver's hobbies, BD says Oliver was a baseball fiend; as a matter of fact, all the band were, except Baby, who liked baseball, but didn't idolize any particular player, because he figured it took nine players to make a team, not just one star--same as with a band. BD says he has played in bands from two pieces to twenty-five pieces, and that each player had his own part to perform, and that the addition or subtraction of any one man would not break or make a band, although the addition of a good soloist certainly wouldn't hurt the band. Joe Oliver was also an enthusiastic pool player in New Orleans, but didn't play so much in Chicago, as there were not many pool rooms. BD didn't go in much for sports; he and his brother, Johnny, used to play pitch and catch when they were boys; BD says, however, that he was a "great hand" for flying kites and

WARREN "BABY" DODDS
1 [only], Track 1
May 31, 1958

5

shooting marbles. BD says that the George W. Thomas tune, "New Orleans Hop Scop [~~Check spelling~~] Blues", was descriptive of a game played by New Orleans children. He says Thomas was a friend of his, a friend who was one of the first to hire him to play music; BD played drums with the pianist [Thomas] in a house in the District, a house of the class of Lulu White's. BD says he had to learn many beats to play with the piano player, and that is why he is so versatile.

End of Track 1

DODDS, WARREN "BABY"

I [only] Track 2 --Digest--Retyped

May 31, 1958

Also present: William Russell

BD says Honore Dutrey was a comical fellow; he always had a "tale" to tell, and always liked to see people laughing. He and BD stayed [roomed] together at one time. BD says Dutrey once kidded a man named Goldberg so much that the man got a gun and fired a shot [into the air] in the drug store his father owned. Dutrey, about 5'8", weighed about 180-90 pounds. BD was the only small man in the band; Johnny Dodds weighed 210, Joe Oliver weighed 250 [Compare Reel I]--Lil Hardin was smaller than BD, but she was a girl; she got pretty big before she left the band--Bill Johnson weighed about 190-200 pounds, Louis Armstrong weighed about 205-10. It was a pretty healthy band.

The [Oliver] band had all special arrangements, but only after the first recordings were made; before that, every man had contributed his ideas to the music, and that was when it was "our band"; when the records became hits, it became "King Oliver's band," and that was the way [i.e., the reason] it broke up.

WR mentions the book ["The Baby Dodds Story"] by Larry [Gara]. After the [first] Oliver band broke up, Johnny Dodds led his own band; BD says Johnny was a very stern fellow. BD says he himself went to several rehearsals for recording sessions, then would not be at the session because he had gotten drunk, and Johnny wouldn't allow that. Johnny never did drink; he was strictly business with the music. He was not always quiet, as WR knew him; BD says he joked a lot, had a sense of humor; in fact, he would carry a joke to the extreme, carrying it until it became annoying.

DODDS, WARREN "BABY"
I [only] Track 2--Digest--Retyped
May 31, 1958

7

Johnny was patient; BD was not. BD says he and Johnny didn't get along too well, not because either of them did anything to the other, but that they just "couldn't see eye to eye." However, BD wouldn't leave Johnny to go with Joe Oliver, or with anybody. Johnny had a quick temper [he was patient, too?--see above] and held a grudge. Johnny was also a prize fight fan; when watching a fight, he would throw sympathetic punches with the fighter[s], and would actually hit people around him, but without malice. BD says Johnny worked more with small bands because there was more work, and because he knew he could get as much music out of 3 or 4 pieces as out of 5 or 6; the [Louis Armstrong's] Hot 7 made as much music as a 12-piece band, and the [Louis Armstrong's] Hot 5 made as much music as a 10-piece band. Johnny's clarinet was an old un-improved Albert, the type he always used, although Barney Bigard, who had used that type and who had compared clarinets with Johnny, later changed to a newer model [i.e. Improved Albert. See photos]. Johnny had both B^b and A pitched clarinets. He used a hard reed; BD says they must have been hard, because nobody else could blow his horn, except Sidney Bechet, who also used hard reeds--they could blow each other's instruments. They would sometimes even burn a reed to make it stiffer. Johnny was easy to get along with, although he would make things tough when he was feeling mean, and also would appear to be tough when he felt like joking about a hard or disliked piece of music. Johnny used the double embouchure; his teeth were not worn from touching the mouthpiece, as are George Lewis', who uses the single embourche.

DODDS, WARREN "BABY"
I [only] Track 2--Digest--Retyped
May 31, 1958

~~8~~ 8.

Johnny and George Lewis, both with false teeth, asked BD practically the same question about their playing on the same number, "High Society"; each asked if he were playing differently [from before false teeth]; BD assured each that he sounded the same; BD recorded the tune with Johnny in 1940, for Decca [Unissued?], and with George Lewis in 1945 [with Bunk Johnson for Victor].

Although BD was last in contact with him in 1914, he says George W. Thomas, with whom he worked in some of the houses in the District, was not strictly a blues pianist, that he played all [types of] music; he was an adequate pianist, could read, could sing, was an "house" entertainer. BD doesn't remember how he sounded--too long ago. Richard M. Jones, a person similar to Jelly Roll Morton, was a fair pianist, but he talked more piano than he could play; his wife could play more piano than he could.

BD likes piano rolls. He says Kay Thompson likes them, too, and the kind of music on them, and would have liked to have played that kind of music, but couldn't. Asking if BD ever played drums with piano rolls, WR says there was a player piano in a theater in his home town when he was younger, and a colored drummer, Doss Taylor, now dead, would play drums with the piano for movies. BD says he never did play with the rolls; he just liked the piano music.

BD discusses his present ability.

Jimmie Noone was a quiet person, didn't talk much; he hired only good drummers; he allowed the drummers (and the others) freedom to do anything that would make the band sound better;

DODDS, WARREN "BABY"
I [only] Track 2--Digest--Retyped
May 31, 1958

9

BD liked to work with him. Noone asked BD to go to California with him in 1940, but BD stayed in Chicago; BD is glad he didn't go, because Noone died in California in 1944, and BD says he couldn't have taken that death so soon after Johnny's in 1940.

Johnny's favorite clarinetist was his teacher, Charlie McCurdy, although [almost] everyone else (including BD) liked George Baquet at the time; BD says he thinks McCurdy had a bigger tone than Baquet--BD says McCurdy played so heavy he sounded like a bass clarinet; Baquet, who (BD thinks) learned from "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson], sounded like Nelson; Nelson played a C clarinet for a long time. Among trumpet players, Johnny liked Louis Armstrong, and considered Joe Oliver the "daddy" of them all. Johnny did not praise unless he thought praise was earned; he was like Jelly Roll, insisting that everything be done right, in the best way. Johnny missed so few notes that it wasn't worth mentioning. Oliver might miss once in a while, but he could cover so that it wasn't noticed; he was so powerful he could blow a new horn out of tune [yeah, yeah, yeah!--hooey. PRC]. Oliver bought his instruments at Tom Brown's, on Lake Street; he used a Holton first, then a York. All Johnny's instruments were French-made; he used Selmer a long time. He purchased new clarinets. Johnny sometimes kept a horn so long that it would be full of rubber bands, etc., and would hardly play; Sidney Bechet was the same way. Bechet is now back in Paris [France].

BD says every man in the Oliver band was great.

End of Track 2