

EMILE BARNES

Reel I [of 2]--Digest--Retype
December 20, 1960

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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Colliñs.

There is discussion of clarinets and mouthpieces; EB says that he first started playing using a wooden mouthpiece, which he found better than any other kind of mouthpiece; it was stolen, with his clarinet, and he finally became accustomed to hard-rubber mouthpieces, which he formerly sandpapered to fit his requirements. RC mentions that Raymond Burke also makes adjustments on his own mouthpieces. WB says that Professor [Manuel] Manetta had a Buffet clarinet which he got from George Baquet; WR asks EB if he can tell anything about Baquet. EB says that Baquet had fire in his playing, that he had a loud tone, played a lot of variations. EB says Sidney Bechet played somewhat like early Baquet [cf. their records]. EB tells how Bechet could take his clarinet apart, joint by joint from the bottom, and still play it. EB says that Bechet used to "cut hay", [perhaps this means that he would search for someone to beat playing the clarinet], that he would go around to places where there were good clarinetists--like Baquet, [Alphonse] Picou and [Lorenzo] Tio, [Jr.]--[the inference is that Bechet could play better.] EB and Bechet were buddies, and they would go to dances, taking their clarinets in their back pockets, anywhere there was one. EB was about 17 years old at the time, Bechet a little younger; both wore short pants; EB says Bechet was about 63 [when he died in 1959].

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In competition, EB would try first, and if the man was not defeated, Bechet would take him. EB answers RC, telling him that he used a 13-key Albert system Buffet clarinet at that time, and that he thinks Bechet also had a 13-key clarinet; EB says 15-key clarinets were very rare at that time, that they didn't come into general use until later. He says the clarinet has had keys added to it through the years; he says the Boehm system clarinet is much easier than the Albert because of the additional keys, but that he does not use a Boehm because if one key is out of line, the whole thing is wrong. RC says one seems to get a better tone from an Albert, and EB agrees. He says, too, that one gets a better tone from a wooden clarinet than from composition or metal instruments. EB agrees with RC that the tone of an Albert carries better in the street than Boehm. RC says he has heard that George Baquet had a very loud sound when playing in the streets; EB confirms this, saying a person could hear Baquet's E^b clarinet for blocks. EB answers WR, saying that Baquet was a pretty fine man. EB then says that Picou, Baquet, Tio, Bechet, himself and Sidney Vigne used to meet uptown musicians in The Alley [a bar room], where the St. Bernard [at Claiborne] Supermarket is now, where they would play and party. If anyone of them had any money, the others could be sure of continuing their pleasure. EB says that "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson] Delisle would not go home until

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7 AM, at which time he would get food at the market to take home to prepare; he would stay home until time to go out again. RC says that Manetta had told him that Delisle was particular about his food. WR asks if Delisle had ever been married; EB says he thinks he was once married to a woman named Corrine, the same name as the song "Corrine, Corrina". [Bunk?] [Johnson] liked to play this number. In answer to a question, EB says musicians other than clarinetist did come to The Alley; he says the trombonists, Zue Robertson, George Fihle [WR's suggestion] and Harrison Brazley would come sometimes, the drummers Jean Vigne, Walter Brundy and Edward Gaspard, the pianist Wilhelmina Bart--EB says she was primarily a classical pianist, but she played in bands well, and bands would fight to get her, George -----and [Louis P.] ----- . (EB doesn't remember Frank Ahaynia by that name, says Fred Washington was more uptown, doesn't remember Black Pete, that Coochie Martin was not the one he was thinking about, nor was Steve Lewis.) RC asks about Zue Robertson; EB says that the men around here considered him a good trombonist. WR says Bunk [Johnson] considered him the best he had ever played with. EB says he thinks Zue left New Orleans with Joe Oliver [No. RBA. Cf. Jazzmen], and WR says Zue played with Oliver in Chicago; EB says [Kid] Ory took over [as the best?] after that. WR asks about the Baquets, Achille and George, and if any of the

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other Baquets, such as the father, played music. Achille was younger than George. EB says he doesn't remember if any of the others played. He says he thinks the Baquets studied with [Paul] Chaligny, as did most of the musicians, including himself. EB also studied with Picou. EB says George Baquet helped many musicians [in study], including Sidney Bechet. EB says that he and Bechet used to go [take lessons] from Chaligny, Picou and Tio because they would sit in for them [those last two or all three] in the district, and EB and Bechet would be told to come by the [respective] homes the next day to take a lesson; sometimes they would go, sometimes not. They were not interested in [written music]. EB says they could already play, but they couldn't "prove what we were doing." In answer to WR's question, EB says Picou was considered one of the best 40 years ago, but it would be hard to pick the best among Picou, George Baquet, Tio and Charlie McCurdy. EB misunderstands a question, and says [Barney] Bigard was nothing until he left New Orleans. Then he understands, and says that Big Eye Louis was not in the class of the four just mentioned, that he was a "swing" clarinet player; he played as well as those four, but in his own way. EB says he himself, and Bechet, were that way. EB says the musicians around town used to be afraid of him because he could play so well. He says he could play that well now, if he practiced a couple of weeks, and had his teeth. EB's favorite cla-

rinet player was Big Eye Louis, and after him, Tio. EB says the reason he uses a stiff reed is because Tio used to "stiff" his reeds, cut them off some. There is discussion of strengths of reeds, cane and plastic. EB says he thinks he will practice some; he says Punch [Miller] has got in touch with him about forming a "short" band (not having the usual 6 or 7 pieces), and EB would like to get up a band. He says he doesn't know how Punch plays [now], but WR and RC say he is pretty good, and healthy, since his operation. RC says Punch has been playing a bit with Eddie Morris, trombone. RC asks about The Alley; EB explains that it was the meeting place for downtown musicians, and that its popularity was before World War I. He says Joe Oliver told him goodbye, that he would be there when EB got back [from being in the Army]. EB was born in [18]92; he began going in the district when he was about 17 years old. EB answers RC, saying he remembers hearing Buddy Bolden, Manuel Perez, [Ernest] "Ninny" Coycault, Jimmy Brown, the Imperial and Superior bands, and others of that era, but that was during the time he was just trying to play, when he knew only one song, "You Got Good Booty, So They Say." WR says EB played a bit of it at Tulane when Herbie [Friedwald was recording EB with] Kid Thomas; EB played it between numbers. EB says that at that time the music was all Scott Joplin music [ragtime], that it was hard, the parts were written out. He mentions "Chicken Reel" and "Go Along, Mule", and says that Charlie [Love] should have that music.

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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins.

EB mentions songs of the era being discussed [around 1910-1917], saying some of them were "Go Along, Mule", "Corrine, Corrina" (EB says Bunk Johnson used to kid "Big Eye" Louis [Delisle] about that song [Delisle's wife was named Corrine]), "Italy" (a waltz) and "Chicken Reel". He says Delisle was noted for his playing of "Chicken Reel", that he could make sounds like a rooster and a hen. Delisle also made sound effects on "Go Along, Mule". Delisle was playing his "C" clarinet. EB says that other clarinetists could play around a little with the music, provided they had the written music in front of them, but the good thing about Delisle was that he could play all around the music and then still come back in [to the melody] where he wanted to. EB says Delisle played at the lake, with the Imperial [Orchestra], in which Jimmy Palao, violin, also played; EB answers RC, saying that Palao was a wonderful violinist.

WR says he has seen pictures of bands in which sometimes the violinist would be wearing the leader's cap, and in others the cornetist would be wearing it; he asks EB which was really the leader, and if a clarinetist could be leader, too. EB says the violinist was the leader, because he played the lead [melody]; if there was no violin, the clarinet was supposed to play the lead. EB says that the use of cornet as the lead instrument came later, except in a brass

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band, where the cornet lead is natural, that the cornet (or trumpet) played just "trumpet parts" in the earlier days. When there was a violin, the clarinet played "variations", above and below the cornet part. EB is asked (by RC) what two clarinets in a band would do, as the questioner has seen a picture of the [Buddy] Bolden band, which shows Frank Lewis and Willie Warner both holding clarinets. EB says use of two clarinets was not usual. EB says when there are two clarinets, one is supposed to play tenor sax, the sax playing variations and the clarinet leading. EB says he doesn't like the sound of a sax. He then says that he plays clarinet three ways; he plays lead, or if the trumpet is not playing, he plays lead and variations, or if the trumpet is playing [lead], he plays variations "underneath him" [lower in pitch]. EB answers RC's question by saying that most of the old-time clarinetists did not play as he does, that they played just one way, playing variations, all the time. EB says that Sidney [Bechet] and Louis Delisle played the same way he did, and they are the only ones he knows who did. EB says Charlie McCurdy played only variations, and wanted all other clarinetists to play that way, too. EB says he takes enough rest while playing to be strong later, but he plays most of the time, giving the trumpet player a chance to rest. EB answers WR's question about having a leader and a manager in a small band; EB says there should be not only a manager, but an assistant manager

as well, both playing in the band. EB says Kid Thomas [Valentine] is the manager of his [own] band. EB says it doesn't make any difference whether the leader is also manager or not, that the leader or any of the other men can be manager, just so the manager is sensible. EB continues about assistant managers, saying that if the manager can't go to see about a job, there will be the assistant manager to look into the situation. EB says he is against leader prices (considering the leader as the manager, not as the one who plays the lead), that no man in the band should get twice as much money as any other man, that 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 dollars more, for the trouble [of getting the job, etc.] is all right, but not twice as much. EB said he quit playing with Abby Williams because of disagreement over leader price. EB explains about resting between playing numbers and taking intermissions; he says the way the music is played in the Vieux Carré [on Bourbon Street] (with very brief periods between numbers and a limited repertoire) is foolish, that one doesn't get enough rest, and that is not the way it used to be or is supposed to be. EB played with Bill Matthews [at the Paddock Lounge on Bourbon Street] for one week only, then told Matthews he would have to get someone else. EB says Andrew [Morgan?] was there [a long?] time, but he couldn't play clarinet, and that is what was wanted. WR asks if it makes any difference who is leader of the band; EB says no, but the manager

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should be a business man, the strong man. WR asks who should pick the tunes to play; EB says it makes for better feeling if each man gets to pick one. WR asks who should kick off the tempo for the band; EB says the leader [meaning the one who is playing the lead]. RC asks how the signal is given to end a tune; EB says the leader stomps one time, hard, to let the others know, and the signal is made just before the last chorus. EB says the right way to call the attention of the band, before playing a tune, is to stomp one time. WR asks if musicians stood up much in the old days, if they stood up at all, or if they stood up when they took solos. EB says there were solos only when written, and that a man could do as he liked, stay seated or stand up. EB brings attention to something [a hump between his shoulders], saying that he got it from having to look up [from the pit] at the show when he played at the Palace [Theater], and agrees with RC that he got sort of a crick in the neck from that. RC says that Kid Thomas, when playing a waltz, will finish the waltz and then play it in 4/4 time; RC asks if that is an old custom. EB says it is just something done if somebody feels like doing it, [not custom]. EB says all waltzes are not easy to play in 4/4, although some are. WR says that at dances Bunk [Johnson] used to immediately repeat a song, as an encore, if applause called for it; EB says that is an old custom, that a band might sometimes even play a tune three

times if the crowd demanded it. He says the encore should be played immediately, not after a wait. WR asks how long the dances at places like Economy Hall and Cooperators Hall would last; EB says they would start at 8 [PM] and last until 4 [AM]. RC asks if the band had to take its own food and drink to the dances; EB says no, that there would be a table for the band, and all victuals, etc., were furnished. A half hour was allowed to eat. EB says that the old days were better; now the dances start at 10 and sometimes 11 o'clock and are over at 1 or 2 o'clock, so the people go somewhere else. He says he decided to quit playing because he was with young people who didn't know what he played, and he didn't know what they played, that they played any kind of notes [^{implying} ~~infering~~ wrong notes] and it was all right to do that. RC says there are a lot of saxes in the bands, and EB agrees; he said in the old days a musician might get a sax, and after a while he would get tired of it and throw it away, but now everybody is buying saxes and just blowing. He says its the same with guitars, that if a person can play on one string he considers himself a guitar player. EB says the way for a band to be on top nowadays is to get somebody who can holler--not sing, holler--and that will bring success. WR asks EB how much musicians were paid for eight-hour jobs during the years from 1910 (about when EB began playing) to 1920, or around the time of World War I; EB says that the very first, they would get from

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\$ 1.50 to \$ 3.00, but after the war they began getting \$ 4.00 or \$ 5.00. He says it's altogether different now, that they are getting too much money for music.

End of Reel II

