

ERNIE CAGNOLATTI
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April 5, 1961

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Interview conducted at EC's home, 3651 Buchanan, 1, New Orleans.

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins, Harold Dejan.

Ernie Joseph Cagnolatti was born April 2, 1911, in Madisonville, Louisiana; his parents did not play music, but were musically-inclined; his older brother, Klebert Cagnolatti, drummer, who died in 1941, played with Bunk Johnson during World War I, at shipyards in Madisonville; EC was inspired to play trumpet by hearing Bunk, the first trumpet player he had ever heard. EC began playing drums at age 5, on his brother's extra set; when the brother was away playing, EC would play on the extra set at the Sons of Labor Hall in Madisonville, where movies were shown; when the movies were over, EC accompanied the pianist, Leona Behan [sp?], who played only when the movies were not being shown; movies were accompanied by pianola. EC moved to New Orleans with Klebert in 1919. Klebert's wife has a picture of the band Bunk was in; personnel: Joe Fritz, leader and bass; Earl Fritz, trombone; Isidore Fritz, clarinetist; [and teacher of George Lewis]; Leon Pyrone [sp?], guitar; Klebert Cagnolatti, drums; Bunk Johnson, trumpet. The band would come back to Madisonville for each ship launching by Jahncke company, and would rehearse afterward, and play jobs nearby. EC knew Andy Anderson, cousin of Earl Foster, both of whom lived in Mandeville at the time; Anderson also heard Bunk then.

[Behan]?

Leona Behan
color photo
from Madisonville

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EC did not know Tommy Ladnier. EC says Professor [Charles] Deverges, like Pinchback [Touro], would come from New Orleans to the various schools across the lake, and would teach music, mostly to students without financial means; some of his students were Joe Clark, violin; Hysle [sp?], trombone; Paul Santone [sp?], guitar. EC knew Dan Moody, trombone and bass, recently deceased; EC didn't play with him until the year of Roosevelt's death [1945]; Moody had a band composed of men from various towns in the Mandeville area, where Moody had a regular job at Duval's Pavillion, where the steamer Susquehanna came in [Duval's burned about 1953]. [George] "Sheik" [Colar] played with Moody around the countryside.

EC picked up drum playing on his own. His brother, Klebert, was 18 years older than he; Klebert was wearing short pants when he played with Bunk Johnson. Klebert joined a band with Albert Glenny when he came to New Orleans, in 1919; other personnel: Albert Duconge, trumpet; "Nootsy", clarinet; Ambrose [Powers], trombone; un-named banjo. EC would sometimes be taken on the jobs, and his brother would let him sit in; EC also played some jobs on his own, some with George Lewis, some with Billie and DeDe [Pierce] [early for Billie?]; the year was about 1924-25. EC began playing trumpet in 1927, studying about 2 years with Arnold Metoyer, who had taught Albert Snaer until about 5 years previous; EC wanted to study with Manuel Perez,

but he had quit teaching. EC studied solfeggio and ear training for 16 weeks before Metoyer would let him play the horn at all, and then would not let him play with anyone else for about 2 years. EC first had a French [Pancheron?] method for trumpet, and later got an Arban method. After EC's 14th lesson, Metoyer told him when he played a perfect lesson, he would not charge him for it; EC says he never paid for a lesson after that. He was not allowed to play a job for nearly two years. A discussion of counting time follows. Metoyer didn't stress a non-pressure system of playing to EC, although Metoyer was famous for that; Metoyer wanted EC to develop the lip muscles. Metoyer, when playing jitney dances [and other long, strenuous jobs], would play in a regular manner, until he got tired, and then he would use a non-pressure system for relief. Most trumpet players moisten their lips for playing. EC explains that use of more bottom lip than top, in forming the embouchure, is generally better, because of greater support. EC and HD say they know trumpet players who have false teeth; HD says Gilbert Young, a good trumpet player, would play with the mouthpiece all over his lip [in various positions], before he got false teeth, and that he played well no matter where he put the mouthpiece. He can play without his false teeth. Young played a lot of jitney places, with Earl Foster, among others; they played at The Alamo, before Alvin Alcorn was there.

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Talk about breathing follows. EC says Metoyer, even playing a jitney dance, would always stand while playing; HD says Metoyer could play with his mouth full of food. Mention is made of a tobacco-chewing trombonist. WR says Bunk Johnson liked to stand while playing solos, sometimes. Metoyer played at the lake with Dave Perkins; Metoyer stood then, and also stood while teaching the seated EC.

EC tells of bands and individuals he played with; [Albert] Burbank; Kid Rena; Wooden Joe Nicholas; Billie and DeDe Pierce [all the three foregoing two-trumpet jobs], Paul Dominguez, violinist, with whom EC studied trumpet after studying with Metoyer; in a quartet consisting of EC, Steve Lewis, Johnny St. Cyr and Simon Marrero; Willie Santiago. EC was on Decatur Street during that time [The Depression], after he quit working with HD [EC and HD worked at the Popeye Club a long time]. EC also worked with George Lewis, about 4 years; Richard McLean; Chester Zardis [leader and bass]; Howard Mandoff [sp?], [Alexis] Rouchon [sp?]; saxophone, [works as porter at Whitney Bank, belongs to Jehovah's Witnesses]; and EC and Homer Eugene, guitar. EC mentions a drummer, "Ti Ti", who played with Chris Kelly at the Night Hawk, when HD [and EC?] were at the Gypsy Tea Room. "Ti Ti" was a slow drummer. There is talk about pictures of Buddy Petit; there is probably only one known

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to exist [Esquire, 1944] [date?]. There are no known pictures of Chris Kelly; EC says there are none of Omer [Bernard], highly regarded as a trumpet player by Albert Glenny and EC. EC says George Lewis may know of pictures of Kelly, because Lewis filled in for [Phil] "Pill" [Coycault] in Kelly's band. EC says Zeb [Lenoir (sp?)] was Kid Rena's clarinetist; Zeb was from Poydras, Louisiana; Richard McLean knew him well, having played with him. EC agrees that Buddy Petit was a good trumpet player in the staff [middle register]; EC says he was noted for his use of diminished [seventh] chords.

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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins, Harold Dejan.

Chris Kelly played more blues than anybody. If Buddy Petit or Kéd Rena [who had the opportunity, but refused] had gone to Chicago before Louis Armstrong, the public probably wouldn't have heard of Armstrong so much. EC and HD say Rena was great; EC played with him some. Rena was more modernistic than any of the other trumpet players. Rena was great in all registers and in all keys; he was a fair reader; his band played Dixieland, head arrangements, until sometime during their stay at the Gypsy Tea Room, when William Houston began writing a few arrangements; the band would revert to all non-written arrangements as the evening wore on. Don Redman, playing opposite Rena at the Tea Room with a 16-piece band, was amazed that a 7-piece band, Rena's, could get such a sound; Redman wanted to hire Rena. HD says EC, Mike Delay [with Joe Darensbourg at the time of the interview] and Bob Anthony all got a lot of ideas from Rena. MD also played piano and bass. EC says he quit playing drums because of the difficulty of carrying them; there were not many cars or cabs, and a drummer had to get a special permit for each trip he made, with drums, on a street car. HD says EC, HD and EC's younger brother, Wilbur Cagnolatti, who was also a drummer, used to play Saturday night fish fries on Caffin Avenue, about 2 blocks from where Fats Domino's [present?]

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house is; HD Says Wilbur, who now lives in Chicago, was a pretty good drummer. HD tells how fish fries started--because of the Catholic ban on eating meat on Friday--and how the fries eventually became also Saturday night functions; there would be a red lantern hanging in front of the home where the fry was being held, and anyone was welcome. EC says 9 out of 10 times the fries could get musicians to play for their food and drinks, and that musicians coming home from another job might decide to stop at the fry to eat a bit and play some music. HD and EC say the permits for the fries cost too much [\$ 25.00 per night] more than in the older days [\$.50 to \$1.00 for a week-end], and that a permit to sell beer costs extra. EC says there used to be many lawn parties; he remembers hearing Louis Armstrong at a lawn party; place was owned by "Whistling Gossoon", a monte dealer, and there would be parties quite often; the location was St. Philip Street, near where the Cooperators Hall was. HD says people would rent their yards to others for parties; if a yard was bad, a tarpaulin would be rented from a transfer company, and placed over the yard. EC says he was lucky to see things like that [fish fries, lawn parties etc.], and says that 1919, the year he came to New Orleans, was the last year horses were used to pull fire engines in the city. Asked about differences in funerals, EC says the old ones were slower, because,

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for one thing, horses were used to pull the funeral vehicles; if the person being buried was under twenty years of age, white decorations, including a white coffin, were used; over twenty, black was used. There were many more societies for burials then, there not being so many insurance companies, and all the members would turn out for a funeral or have to pay a \$ 1.00 fine, so there were many more in attendance; the men all wore blue suits and derbies. There were no policemen at funerals or parades, except at the Bulls' annual parade, held at night, coming from the clubhouse at 8th and Toledano [Danneel] and finishing around Dumaine and Claiborne, employing flambeaux and 7 or 8 bands--very big occasion. The Lions and the San Jacintos also had only one parade each year. Various clubs are mentioned: Square Deal [very old], Jolly Bunch [young], etc. EC explains the difference between societies and pleasure clubs, saying societies are benevolent [burials, financial help, etc.]; EC explains that there are not many members of societies now because so many people get so much from insurance companies now; the insurance companies, however, do not have banquets, parades and other social functions. EC and HD say some of the survivors of society members now take the money formerly used to get the band, instead of hiring a band to play for a funeral.

The most-organized brass band EC ever played in, as a regular

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member, was Allen's Brass Band, led by "Red," Allen's father [Henry Allen, Sr.]. EC has played a lot of funerals with the Eureka Brass Band, in which D'jalma [Ganier], "'Ti' Boy" Remy and Percy Humphrey [sometimes] played trumpet; [Alcide] "Big" Landry was the leader, and was the last man playing funerals to play an E^b cornet, such as Manuel Perez had played. Landry, who died about 1949, also played in a band with "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson] [clarinet], Ernest Rogers, drums, at Luthjen's, where Landry also used the E^b cornet. [I remember trumpet circa 1947. RBA. See Jazzways.] HD says Landry was soloist in the Holy Ghost Brass Band, and used the E^b there too. Landry was a good reader. Cornish and Rogers had been members of the Eureka at one time, also. EC didn't get to play with the original Excelsior Brass Band; (in fact he wasn't playing trumpet at that time); George Moret, who died in the early Twenties, was leader; Willie Pajaud was in the band. Manuel Perez' Onward Brass Band, with [Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.], Eddie Jackson [tuba] and Bill Matthews' brother, Bébé Matthews, in it, was THE band; the other bands would move when the Onward came through. EC says that the Onward, the Excelsior and the other good bands had, besides the [now] usual instrumentation [three trumpets, two trombones, tuba, two drummers, clarinet and sax [or two saxes]] a melophone, an up-right alto, a baritone horn and an E^b clarinet. The bands were

well-rehearsed (two or three times a week); the members brought only some funeral marches and other special marches on street jobs, being able to play the well-known hymns ["Bye and Bye", "Gloryland", etc.] and such tunes as "Panama" from memory, as they had been rehearsed also. The band members stepped out, to begin a parade or funeral, on their right feet, and everyone remained in step. EC says there was a tower [band stand] at Orleans and Claiborne, where big bands, hired by the city, would sometimes play on Sunday; white bands would play St. Mary's Playground, on Magazine, and many small and large bands played at the lake. A discussion of curfew and short pants follows; a boy wore short pants [knickers] until he was 18 or more, and got long pants only when he became a man [about 20 years old]; the police would discipline any males in short pants who were found on the streets after 9 PM.

EC says the big bands, like the Excelsior, would play tunes coming back from funerals like the bands of today do--[Oh] "Didn't He Ramble", etc.--and that there were men who played hot, just like today. When Kid Rena would be in one band, and Red Allen would be in another, "the street would be hot." The bands were rehearsed, and everyone knew when his time to play a solo would come [but his solo would be up to him as to style, etc.]. HD says one of Willie Pajaud's biggest fusses with the Eureka Band was that he couldn't get them to rehearse often.

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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins, Harold Dejan.

EC's father, who ran a poolroom called El Rico, had a good Phonograph and bought many records--Jenny Lind, and all the Okeh records, including those by [Louis] Armstrong, Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith and Butterbeans and Susie. EC's family was musically inclined; [besides EC and two brothers mentioned previously] three sisters were good singers. EC was Catholic at one time, but he is Baptist now.

There were no brass bands across the lake; on holidays, sometimes a band from New Orleans would be hired, but it was difficult to get one. The bands across the lake, like the Fritz band, were Dixieland bands, called string bands then. Musicians from bands on boats like the Susquehanna, Camellia, Hanover, Victor and Madisonville, which made fairly regular trips across the lake, would come to Madisonville and Mandeville. WR says there appears to be a railroad coming to the wharf in a picture showing the Susquehanna; EC says that there were two shipyards over the lake, Jahncke and [Bowers?], and that Bowers had a track for hand cars running to the edge of its wharf. The lake boats docked at West End, near where the Southern Yacht Club is now. EC says the [street] cars to West End on Sunday morning might have eight or nine trailers (no motors) attached to the one car with the motor; the company which ran them would find out how many people were going to West End for the boats, and then would put on the necessary number of trailers; the people would get there about 6 AM, and be on

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the lake by 9. The boats, which made one trip on Sunday, would arrive in Mandeville about 11 AM; the boats would go to Madisonville that night, tie up, and leave Monday, and sometimes Tuesday, for New Orleans. Later, the trip schedules were changed, so that there were more trips, some returning the same day as they departed. HD played on the Madisonville, and later on the Susquehanna, but not on the Camellia; Wooden Joe [Nicholas] played on the latter, and so did Raymond Burke, the white clarinetist.

...In speaking of Manuel Perez' band, HD says after Lorenzo Tio [Jr.] left the group, Eddie Cherrie remained on tenor sax, while Adolphe Alexander [Jr.] was added on alto sax; sometimes Cherrie would play E^b clarinet.

There is talk of white horses; HD says they were used in the undertaking business; he had relatives in that field, and was once studying the trade. White horses were used for persons 20 years old and under, while black horses were for over 20 years old. Also talk of fire horses, horses in Rex parade, etc. Talk of Camellia boat, which sank at dock in the Tchefuncta River, of old age.

EC joined Herbert Leary's big band, "Society Syncopators," in 1935, and was with him until 1941; EC then returned to playing Dixieland. The Leary band had 12-14 pieces; there were many big bands at the time, during the Depression; Sidney Desvignes' band was on the Capitol; [A.J.] Piron's was on the J.S.; there were Clark's Brown

Buddies, [Clarence] Desdune's band, the Rhapsodians (with Emanuel Sayles and his brother), the Sunny South band (with Eddie Pierson and [Richard?] McLean), Big Foot Bill [Phillips]'s band, the Crescent City High Hatters. Ec says more musicians worked during the Depressions than at any other time, because of low prices--\$ 1 for a night's work. HD says he had the best job on Decatur Street, for \$ 1.50 per night. EC says men would go to Baton Rouge on Christmas Eve and play for \$ 3.--, and would be fighting for the job. HD says he would go with Kid Howard to Mobile on Mondays, make \$ 6 to \$ 8, and be rich! With repeal, in 1933, many small clubs hired 3-4 piece bands for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, and everyone was working; it was hard to get musicians then. HD renamed the Rio Rita club, on Airline [actually Jefferson] Highway, the Cotton Club, which it is to this day; HD first had Joe Phillips on trumpet, and Burnell Santiago [on piano]; Mike Delay later came in on trumpet, and Lawrence Deroux played piano; when Deroux would take off, Delay played piano and EC would be hired to play trumpet. Most of the big band musicians were in the WPA band; EC says only 2 or 3 members of any one family could be in the same kind of WPA project, so he couldn't get in the band, because his brother was in it and claimed that he supported EC. The band was huge at first; Edward Johnson, brother-in-law of Lester Santiago, was the 52nd alto sax player in the band; the snare drummers, when

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lined up, would stretch from one corner of Jackson Square fence to the next. Then the people who couldn't read were cut out, and the band was much reduced in number. The band played for many occasions, and for many public places (buildings, etc., like for the jail and for hospitals). HD says he was asked to join the WPA band, but he was playing with Arnold DePass at the ^YCrustal Palace, and didn't want to join. There is talk of Jack "Papa" Laine and his "potato" men in bands--men who couldn't play, but were put in the band to collect the money, but with potatoes stuffed in their horns to keep them from blowing. HD says he hired a man to carry an upright bass [tuba] in a Jefferson City Buzzards parade [about 1942-43], but he just didn't blow--no potato. EC doesn't know much about Laine, but he knows Sharkey [Bonano], [Abby] Brunies, a drummer who died, Tony Almerico, [Joey?] Loypcano and Jeff [Riddick]. EC filled in for Willie Pajaud at the Budweiser (jitney dance), with Sport [Young?] in the band; also subbed for Mike Delay, but didn't like to play jitneys. EC says sometimes men would sit in for musicians at jitneys (he mentions drummers), and the regular might not come back for hours. The numbers were played one after the other; EC explains the routine. The Last Roundup (at the old Virginia Kitchen, [800 block Bienville St.]), would be going until about 9 AM; it was the latest place open to hear music in the city; Jimmy Davis [pianist or bassist?] had the

band, with twins playing trombone and trumpet. HD played there with Kid Harris, with "Little Dad" [Clarence Vincent] on banjo. EC worked across the street at the Caliente, with Chester Zardis and Howard Mandoff [sp?] in the band; there was a floor show which traveled from place to place, collecting only what was thrown them. Annie Laurie, now a star, was once unable to sing; EC tells about how bad she was; she sang at Gasper's with HD's accompanying her, and the band couldn't follow her, her sense of time and key being so bad. About 9 months later she was with Paul Gayton, and becoming a star, and really singing. EC tells of Earl Palmer, helped into the union by HD, who became one of the best modern drummers, and now plays in the movie studios in Hollywood, and also writes arrangements. Palmer worked about 3 years with Dave Bartholomey.

EC played several jobs with "Shots" Madison, including parades; he was good and played mostly 2nd trumpet, by ear. EC says people hearing Louis Armstrong and King Oliver were baffled because there was no music to be seen, but playing a harmony was quite common in New Orleans, and is done to this day in parades and funerals. EC says the New Orleans musicians have been doing that so long that no music is needed.

