

unedited first draft

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
July 18, 1958

INTERVIEWER: William Russell
ALSO PRESENT: Ralph Collins
NOTES: Richard B. Allen
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

[A note on the tape box indicates that this 'clarinet lesson,' for Ralph Collins was purchased for \$20 by Bill Russell, who retained the rights to it.

[RC begins by asking EH if he ever used a plastic reed.]

Yeah, I did. I tell you the reason I used a plastic reed was because I had to use it. During the [World] War [III], you couldn't get no reeds. You could buy a reed, but you had to buy so many of them to get a good one; and those that you would get, a regular reed, it was made so long that it would dry out. The minute it get kind of soaked, they would all curve....

I had a lot of trouble with them, so rather than have all that trouble, I just went to a plastic reed. Well, that's all right.

[After the war], I went back to the regular reed. Of course, now they've got a machine that they make them. Now, you don't have to buy as many.

Now, I'm using a La Voz [reed]. I think they key actually came from France, but the reed is made in California. A La Voz.

They don't go in numbers. They go in different strength: soft, medium, medium-hard, and hard. So, in case; like you get used to one kind - if it's medium or a hard reed - if you go into

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

2

the store, you just ask for somebody to get for you a box of hard or medium-hard.

You get the whole box and usually, sometime, you get eight. I remember, one time, I got about nine out of a box that was actually good.

And you didn't have to...if you used a certain strand all you got to use; if you break one, you just get another, and put it on there. It's practically, just about, right. I mean, like if you break one, and you need one in a hurry....I'm using a medium-hard.

I'll tell you what was good about [the plastic reed.] You didn't have to worry about...like a cane reed, when you start to playing, and you had to wet it; especially if you hadn't played for a couple of nights, you know, it's dry. You got to wait until it get wet for you. That particular reed, that plastic reed, you didn't have to worry. The minute you blow, it was alright.

[I changed back] because it affected the tone of the clarinet. It didn't cut through. You understand what I'm talking about? Like, when you do a recording, you had to put [it] right in the mike. It was something about the reed didn't give you the quality. It got the quality; but I mean, it's something, it was a dead sound.

I got a Selmer [clarinet.] I got a Buffet a guy sent me....He happened to have saw me playing on one of these

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

3

television shows, and he's a musicians used to play with the symphony band from Chicago, the symphony band.

He noticed me as using the Albert system of clarinet, and he's retired; so he had a Buffet and I've been looking for a Buffet all my life. And he asked me if I could use it. [It's in good condition.] The guy is working on it now, getting it in condition [for] when I get back.

I don't know how many keys they got because...[Apparently looking at RC's clarinet...] Yeah, that's an Albert system...The Selmer that I just bought in France is made just like that. It's got four rings.

I bought another clarinet from a fellow in Boston. They got six rings. That's the first six-ring Albert clarinet I ever saw....I like the [extra] ring. I don't know why they make four or five rings, but - I don't know - it don't make no difference to me...

[I don't have a favorite make of a mouthpiece.] I'll tell you what happened, since I've been playing clarinet. I've only used three mouthpieces in my whole life. You get a lot of guys that claim - especially saxophone [players], a reed instrument - so, the company put out all kind of mouthpiece[s], you know, and it looked like they have trouble finding them, a good mouthpiece to work with.

What they do. Everything that come out, they buy. So, they

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

4

don't get used to one before they're buying another one. And your mouthpiece is 50 percent of your playing. If you got a good reed and a good mouthpiece, you don't have to worry about that...squeak....

I'm using a Meyers' [mouthpiece.] It just happened so, the last one I had, my clarinet fell off the chair, fell right on the mouthpiece and just nicked it.

So, it happens that I went down to the place that do the work for my clarinets, you know, and I asked them; I said, do you got any mouthpieces? They said, yeah, I got one. It's a Meyers. Try that.

So, I was in a hurry. I took it and I tried it. I didn't pay for it. He gave me to try it, then if you like it, you can pay me for it. So, I tried it, and I've been using it ever since...It's a medium [lay.] It's nothing, actually extra. It was just a regular stock model.

I never fooled with my [mouthpiece, grind it down,] because if you [dilute?], you can throw it out....I knew a guy that used to play with a tenor mouthpiece, playing tenor saxophone, but not the clarinet.

[I bite my teeth on the mouthpiece] on the top. I put the reed right on my lip, here....My first mouthpiece I had was, must have been made out of...must have been wood, because my teeth kept cutting into it, you know; [should be grooved?], until a

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

5

piece fell out and I had to buy another.

[WR mentions how Professor (Manuel) Manetta is trying to teach RC how to use the double embouchure, which WR thinks Barney Bigard used. BB told WR that in Chicago, over three years ago, just before he died.]

I imagine that the double embouchure may be alright, but I don't know. It looked like to me now; that if I stop playing for four days, five, and six; it affects me when I pick up my clarinet again because you got a corn in here [probably on the lower lip?], you see. It gets soft, just like I got a corn on my thumb.

If I don't play for another week, this would be gone. Then, when I start to playing again, it gets sore until...just like the muscle in your lip, too.

I couldn't play a whole chorus - now, with a band - to save my life, on my clarinet because my lip couldn't take it. [Laughs.] I got to wake up in it, you know....I think it do make a difference in the tone.

[Playing like I did wore my teeth down.] These are my own [teeth], but what I did was...my own they were wearing down, so I had them fix them in [19]56 - the first quarter of [19]56 - when we made that picture 'High Society.'

So, I had them filed down, and they put a cap on them, and made them the same size they were before. But [] and they're

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

6

wearing down again. Just those two [teeth,] and you can tell they're wearing down....

I just heard about that [double embouchure] not so very long ago....

[WR thinks classical musicians in France use the double embouchure; but WR personally only knew of Barney Bigard. Manuel Manetta said he played it that way, and his teacher, Sam Dutrey (Sr.), who used to play on the riverboat...1918, or so. His brother was with King Oliver. Sam Dutrey advised everybody to use it.]

Well, I guess you would have double trouble, then. If you stopped playing for about a couple of weeks, and you go back, both lips get sore then.

[WR agrees with that. RC says, when he first started playing...if I practice for, we'll say, a couple of hours, I'll make it bleed.] That's right. It gets sore.

I wasn't thinking about practicing [when I played with a band every night]. The onlyiest time I did that was when I was interested in...a lot of time, when I'm playing with a small combination, just a clarinet, you know, and a rhythm section.

I'll learn something then, and say, well I got to play the melody, this and that. I find out that the hardest thing about the clarinet is playing the melody. The hardest thing [is] to play a straight melody for a clarinet player....You got to play

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

7

it just right, sure.

You know, you hear about those things; [practicing] to get a nice tone, you're supposed to practice holding that tone, and all that kind of thing. You start that g[lame?], you get tired of that, you know what I mean? You want to go, and do something else....

When you're learning, you've got to practice because it's mostly [for] your fingers to exercise. You got to develop your fingers, just like anything else. You got to practice.

I remember now, I used to play in a band; say, like a dance band. You only just play for dancing. So, when you get with a small combination, they play something really fast, you know; and you got to work into that too, to get used to playing really fast.

A lot of times...Like you get a lot of piano players like to [play] fast tunes. You take a guy like Mel Powell, Teddy Wilson; anything that you like to play, you can't play too fast for them.

If you're playing a clarinet, if you're not used to it, it will take you time to work into it. [That's my trouble right now, RC says.] Well, it usually comes to you.

[It took some time for my fingers to go fast.] They're going fast now. You take a tune like 'Tiger Rag.' They can't play too fast, faster than you can play. I play 'High Society.' The faster they play, the better I like it. Oh yeah. You bet I like it.

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

8

And if you play []; if I'm playing slow, it look like it's a strain. I'm playing it fast. Of course, there's so many notes, that if you miss some, you can't tell it because [laughing] it's so fast.

[WR observes how somebody said if you take a match, and go along real slow, you see the light flickering...and it looks like one streak....Playing so fast, one note in there...same thing here.]

I never did use no kind of salve or ointment, nothing [for hurt lips]. I think it wouldn't do any good. You know, it's a matter of time. Usually, if your lip is sore, just give it a chance, [don't practice as much, and] it'll get better. To me, frankly, Louis Armstrong is the first guy I seen to ever use salve. I ain't ever seen nobody else use that.

[WR notes that EH says he's mostly self-taught, I guess; but your father, and all your brothers, and all, played; so, it was really like having a lot of teachers around, everybody you heard.

[But, did you ever have any formal lessons...or pick up a book and read?]

I bought some exercise books, you know. I used to look in them, and get different chords.

[I first started using arrangements in a band] when I left, and went to Florida with Alonzo Ross's band. They had an arranger in the band. We used to have rehearsals, get everything down.

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

10

exercise books, and get them.

So, he practiced them so much, that he memorized them. So, now, everything he play, you can tell where he got some of that from, that come from the exercise book. It's clean. He got a nice tone, and everything.

So, what he did - he's making so much stuff, he forget about the real feeling of the instrument. You understand what I'm talking about? He's just going for the notes....[Too much from that exercise book] will spoil you.

Of course, a musician will appreciate that. When you hear a guy play like that; the first thing you say, well I know you require a lot of study to do what he's doing. But, so far as just the feeling of an instrument...You lose that feeling.

When I play, I try to put a feeling into it. Not so much, I'm trying to make you feel what I'm playing. Making a whole lot of notes, that's alright, but put [in] a feeling.

You're just like a singer. You can get a singer, she don't have to have a good voice. But, if she can put it over just enough to make you feel it out there, you know, [while listening to her], that's what counts....

Usually, I don't pat my foot, not especially if I've got a good rhythm section. If I got a good rhythm section. If I've got a bad rhythm section, usually I do [pat].

But, a lot of times, if you read music too, you got to count

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

11

too. You know, you got to beat your foot. Some guy pat four to a bar, some pat two, some pat one.

I tell [young players], you get used to it, then you don't have to count. But, usually, you always...you're following the bar. A lot of times, you got a lot of tunes that you playing, and you got a lot of layout; and you got to count, count those bars out.

[Jelly Roll used to pat his foot a lot, WR says. People like Bunk (Johnson) did, I know. Other people, like Baby Dodds. Of course, on a drummer...] foot going all the time.

[WR continues, Baby said you shouldn't tap your foot, you shouldn't have to do that.] No, you shouldn't, not if you've got good rhythm.

You can feel it. If you've got a good rhythm section, you don't have to worry about the rhythm behind you. You don't have to fool with that because, usually, when those men are not hitting back there together, you can feel it, and then you've got to keep your own tempo.

I never thought about [tonguing.] No. I never worry about tonguing....

[EH asks RC for a reed. He has a Rico #2 reed. WR remembers when EH was playing with Kid Thomas, and all they had was a soft reed.]

And that piano was really out of tune. [It still sounded

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

12

wonderful to all of us in the band, WR says. We still got a kick out of it.

[RC comments on the ligature which EH puts on the way RC was told, rather than, as some people do, on the other side.] The reason I put my in [is] because; usually, when you get ready to put that cap on there, and if you're not using it, you're [].

[Benny Goodman has his on that way, WR notes.] [It doesn't make much difference.] [EH plays scales.] Now this mouthpiece is really close. That's a close lay. The reed is soft, too....[EH plays more scales.] Yeah, this reed is really soft.

[I use my throat to make a rough tone....] I'm not humming the tune, just trying make the growl come out....Just one of those [growls]. [EH demonstrates growls and plays scales].

There's a lot of times, if you [use your throat to make sounds] too much, it gets so you can't help it. That rough tone [is] only good on certain things. You wouldn't play a nice tune, and try to use that. But, on a blues, or something like that...or sometimes, you get to playing something, and you're so anxious that you do it...and if you just keep doing it you get so you can't help it. Gets to be a habit.

This is a nice [clarinet.] [RC says that he got from Emile Barnes. It's not his regular one, but he had this one as sort of a spare. He said that he didn't think he was going to play any more, and did I know anybody that wanted to buy it.

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

13

[So I said, well, I'd like to buy it. (Laughter.) I can play just a few little exercises, that's all. I can play a little bit of tunes, but I can't fake anything.]

[WR says RC's made up a couple of little tunes. Like one day, RC was practicing, and came across the first two or three notes of 'The World Is Waiting For The Sunrise,' and he's able to go ahead and play the rest of it.]

You'll make it alright, I guess, if he can get his fingers to work. [Manuel Manetta is teaching me right now, RC adds, to concentrate on...like when your fingers are working up here, and you have to go all the way down. I have trouble getting from up here to down there.]

From B-flat to B-natural. This is just a matter...of your practicing.....Like, I tell you what. You're making a B-flat, and a B-natural [EH demonstrates]. Now, hold this [right hand] down. It's a lot of short-cuts to a lot of them.

Now, see this clarinet? If you want to make C-sharp, instead of fingering in C-sharp like that - if you're gonna hold that note - this is a C-sharp you'd hold.

But now, if you gonna make a fast passage, you hit this key. [EH demonstrates.] See, this is much easier than to do it this way. That's what you call your short-cut. [Use your left little finger on that.]

Now, if you're gonna make a D-flat, you can [fake] B-flat

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

14

like that. Alright. That's in a fast passage.

But, if you're gonna hold it, and you're playing with other instruments, you make it this way. That's the best way. That's the real way to hit it....

Or either...you can use this key here. You can make B-flat this way. You can make it this way. Or you can make it [part the first and third finger, WR says.]

[WR says we were talking about artificial fingering, and that's what Ralph was wondering about....]

Now, when you get to your artificial fingering - that's you're playing your low register, and you're playing a middle register. Then, when you get to the next register, everything's mostly artificial, especially on the Albert system.

On the Boehm system, after you get over your...B-natural, then you start your artificial fingering. But, on an Albert system, I got so that I could go as high as D, open with my [octave] piece open, and then I start my artificial fingering....

[EH demonstrates various fingerings and notes...] And all the notes you just keep working up. Some guys can go up to the high, way high, see all this is artificial fingering. [Squeezing the reed more.]

It's a certain way you can...they tell you in the book how to finger C up there, or D, or F, or E-flat.

And that's the most important part about the clarinet is

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 1
Summary
July 18, 1958

15

your artificial fingering. You get a lot of guys that can do all that artificial fingering, but get on the ballroom, and it seems they can't play nothing....

Everything's in a good condition; you got a good reed, and a good mouthpiece, and these notes come out just as nice....

[EH demonstrates another passage...] [My right hand's on there] most of the time. I'm just changing the note, but I don't move this....But, I got to catch everything right. If I miss one of those - if my fingers don't cover this - then you get a squeak. [EH continues to demonstrate].

[WR asks about playing registers]. If you want to build it up, you say, well I'll start easy, and work it up. So, you start in a low register because you get too many guys that can't play notes.

END OF TRACK 1

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EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
July 18, 1958

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[Conversation continues with EH saying,] if you've got two chorus to play, never play everything you know in that first one. You know, you work up, and then you keep adding on. That last one; well, that last one you really cook.

You take any guy playing any instrument, ask a guy to play three choruses on any instrument. He got to repeat something if he going into the fourth.

My job [on clarinet] is I try to fill in. I try to keep from running in to the trombone player.

I tell you, there where you get your style. If you get guys that got ideas when they're jamming like that - you know what I mean - like, if you're trombone is not running too much, a lot of times, you see one guy who fit better in a Dixieland band than other guys.

[Winnie Hall enters the room, and is introduced.]

I try to keep from running into the trombone part. That's the reason why, Bill, you get a lot of guys like to...people would ask you, do you think you could fit into a Dixieland band? Would this guy fit into a Dixieland band?

A lot of times those guys won't fit into a Dixieland band because what the trumpet player's doing is he's trying to play the same thing the clarinet's playing. Everybody's running.

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

2

But, when you get a good trumpet player, he still can go his way, but play the melody...every now and then he hit - you know what I mean - you know where you are.

But, when you get a guy that forgets about the melody, and tries to play what the clarinet is playing, then you don't get anything, see.

[RC asks when the trumpet is playing, and sticking more-or-less straight to the melody, do you try to make your little runs more in the harmony part?] Yeah.

You try to make it harmony part, and if you're used to playing like every night, you just keep playing. You'll catch that right note, you know, maybe you'll mix some up, you may make a bad note.....

It takes a little while...[to get] what the next guy is going to do. You get used to a different style.

Now, you take [Louis] Armstrong, if he's playing a solo, if he's staying with the band, he's practically playing the same one every night. It's not hard to follow a guy like that. If you play with him for a while - you know what I mean - you follow the notes, and practically every time you play that same tune, it's the same, you'll find the notes.

[You don't want to play the same harmony part,] the trombone is playing. Usually, when you play a note, you're playing the same syncopation. A lot of time you get the trombone player, he's

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

3

making a whole lot of stuff, and it don't work in a Dixieland band. [Tailgate trombone fits in the Dixieland band.]

You take a guy like George Brunis. I'll tell you another guy's a good trombone player, filling in [] is Cutty Cutshall. He got a good idea of music.

A lot of times you start in playing the tune, the harmony is easy; and if a guy know anything about his instrument...

A lot of time, the trombone player, he grab his note, and the clarinet player []. All the trumpet player's got to do is just play the melody, and you got your harmony going.

Syncopation is the main thing about reading music. I mean, like you know how to divide your notes, divide your passages.

The way they're writing today, they're writing your eighth note, the sixteenth note. You know how they're dividing. Sometimes, your notes are tied over to another. You know how they divide them up....

Well, you get guys that play in the studio, do that every day, it comes just like anything. They look at a sheet, and a lot of them can tell whether they can read it or not.

You have to get used to that but when you get away from it, then you got to get back, work into it....You get some guys that can transpose four or five notes apart, four and five tones apart.

...[You think of chord changes while playing.] Usually if

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

4

you're gonna play a tune, and you're gonna play a hot chorus, you got to know the changes.

[You know it] by instinct. If you're used to the tune, you know what makes up...A lot of times, you may make something you think is going one place and it's going; that's the reason I say about reading music. A lot of time if you don't know the tune...Of course, if you know the tune....

[WR wonders if EH is ever conscious of playing the B-flat chord and think, now I've got to change, and go to E-flat.] Yeah.

Sometimes, you go to a B-minor. You may go to...just changing the chord. [I studied the chords.] That's why I bought that exercise book for. [I don't remember what that book was.] I got a couple. I still have them. They call them exercise books....

Another thing what's good about it. You study those chords, and you notice the principle notes in the chord. If anybody says - if somebody says - well listen, what chord is that on the piano; and you say, well, that's such-and-such a chord on the piano. If you know the chords, you know the notes...you know what note consists of that chord, you got it.

[RC notes that, that takes quite a bit of study. I know it does on my part.] Well, it takes time, but those things will come to you.

[WR asks about advising jazz players to study different

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

5

instruments.] Well, it's good if you do know something about piano. You know what I mean? Because a lot of times, you won't have to ask a guy what chord it is. You go to the piano, and you figure it out yourself. If you know it.

I used to play guitar, but it was just from...I didn't know how to read, but I just go for me [and hear the harmony.] I don't know anything about a piano. I know where 'A' is because I can tune it up, and I play a little blues. That's only one key [laughs].

I clean my clarinet every night. Every time I get through playing, I dry it out. I swab it every night. I have a piece of chamois 'cause that does the job on the moisture. Sometimes [I run oil through it.] You can't put too much in it because it'll affect the pads.

A wooden [clarinet] is the best. That way, you get a good instrument, and a cheap instrument might be made by the same company, but it's cheaper than the next one. Some of them made out of hard rubber. But when you get solid wood...[it] is better, and the older the clarinet is, the better the tone is.

I played [a metal clarinet]. I turned it back to the company. I didn't like it. It was a [Vega?] too. They make them in Boston.

Now, you see this clarinet you got there? That's part rubber. I have the one that I have - I have a German made

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

6

clarinet, and it's solid wood. I got a Selmer, that's wood. That's the reason why you crack 'em. Now, that clarinet will never crack. But my Selmer clarinet cracked because it's wood.

The onlyiest thing - like when I take my clarinet out at night, when I'm getting read to put in the keys - I pull it apart. I run that piece of chamois through it. I pull the barrels off...and wipe them on the inside, and I wipe and clean my reeds off.

I don't take the reed off. I just stick it, and run it through there, and dry that mouthpiece off. I leave the reed [on the mouthpiece.]

When I clean my instrument...you don't have to take this part off. That fits in the case. But when you pull it off here, a lot of time the water get in around here. See, I wipe that off.

And when you take this...I don't have to take this joint off every night; but when I take this mouthpiece off, I take my chamois, and run it through here, but I don't touch the reed. I leave the reed right on the instrument, and I clean that reed about every other day.

I'll take it off, because sometime you take them off, and it's playing good; when you put it back on it don't look like, it don't feel the same way. [Laughter]. Sure. So, when it's on there good, and it's no trouble, just leave it on.

[RC says that's a good idea, I have a lot of trouble with

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

7

that.] Yeah. When you put it back on, a lot of times it's a good reed; and when you take it off too much, and try to put it back on, you mess it up....

A good reed will last me...I remember. I think I use a reed, practically, the whole month. [Even playing almost every night.]

Sometimes, they're good and then they get real damp; real water soaked, all the way. Then, they get too soft. You see. Then, you got to change it.

Sometimes you got a good reed, and it's a little too soft. If you can cut it down, sometime, you get good result. But, after, once you burn them, they don't last too long....

I think I got a burnt one on my clarinet, right now. The last job I played, up there with Armstrong, I had to burn it because it was a little too soft.

Well, I tell you what. I got a cap for...it's German made. I bought the clarinet, just for the ligature.

Let's see the cap on yours. No, this is too round. See how that...reed is cut. See. If you put it on there, you find out that it's...too round.

But, this cap is just right. I just take it, and put that reed on there, just about how much I want; and take a match, and light it, and I just burn it all the way around. Just a little tip end....

But, this particular cap that I got is a German made cap,

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

8

made just right 'cause it's sheared just like the reed. When I burn it - and if you burn it right - then it's alright.

Of course, they got another thing, too, that you can buy - the cutter reed. Sure, you can buy...they call it a reed cutter, but I never did fool with this 'cause it's heavy, too, and you got to carry it in the case.

After you burn it, it'll last you for a while, but it's not as good as...like the original. [A burned reed] is rough.

I'll tell you what. You asked me about a plastic reed. Now, that plastic reed; you can use a plastic reed for about a month, but eventually it start to chipping off, right at the end, by the vibration....Then, you have to change it.

The minute it get the least little nick in a plastic reed, you feel it. A cane reed is the same way. Sometime, I be playing, and all at once, the reed don't feel the same; and when you look at it, it's just a little nick on it, and it's no good....

I remember Johnny Dodds. I heard about Jimmie Noone, but I never did have a chance to meet Jimmie Noone. [WR met him, and, of course, didn't pay much attention to him.] Well, he was playing a double embouchure they call it. [Barney Bigard was the only clarinetist, WR knew.]

I think Benny Goodman is playing a double embouchure. I think so. I can tell [by] the way he put that clarinet in his mouth. [WR remembers when Louis (Armstrong) was playing a

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

9

concert, a long time ago, and all Benny talked about was his new embouchure...his new tone....]

Well, you get a lot of guys - just like I say about that artificial fingering. You get up there in that upper register...you know, and going away [squeaking.]

I don't go up to these high notes on this, unless I just have to. I like to be down in the register, the low register. It's more feeling down there in my estimation.

The highest I can go with mine...I can't get that higher 'C.' I can make B-flat is the highest I go.

There's a fingering for that high 'C,' and I know what the fingering is. But every time I try it, you got to squeeze so much, and if you try to do that too much, you make your lips sore. So, that's the reason I never fool with it.

[On the job I get as high as] B-flat. I did it more when I was with Louis Armstrong because he always tried to get up there, too.

[I find it easier to play with a trumpet that doesn't try to go] too high. Oh, yeah. I can go higher than him because he got to do a lot of squeezing; all I got to do is finger, and just a little squeezing.

A lot of times we play something. We play the encore. Then, he try to hit the note that I hit, see. Then, I go the next one higher than him [laughter], and that would just go all through

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

10

the night. [More laughter.]

Well, to be frank about it, I think that every clarinet you buy [has] one of the notes out somewhere. I don't care how much you pay for it. It's a certain note that look like it sound out-of-tune. Either the B-flat...it's usually always the B-flat. Up there, in this register, up here...on the middle-line B-flat.

Usually there[']s] where a clarinet, if it's a cheap clarinet, you can tell that, that note is out....

I tell you what, now. If you're playing a fast passage, a lot of time you don't notice it. But, if you got to hold at B-flat, you see, then you got to notice it. That particular note.

All the rest of them may be alright, or sometimes, you get the A-flat is out. Sometime, it look like - after you hit a key - it look like the 'C' is out, but usually it's the B-flat, right in here.

[RC used to think it was me that was wrong on that, but I think it's the clarinet.] Yeah a lot of time that B-flat is not up....

Mostly when I get those half-things [notes], it come from the lip because you can blow a note sharp, or you can blow a note flat. You can always blow sharp.

What you got to do is make that same note, and squeeze the reed, and you can make it sharp.

Sometime, [you slide your finger off,] but it's mostly a lip

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

11

thing. [EH demonstrates.] I'm moving my finger, but it's mostly a lip thing. [EH demonstrates.] That's mostly a lip.

But, your finger, to make sure that...if it don't come out right, you got the note finger anyway.

[You use the end of your finger.] My fingers are blunt, and I'll tell you a story about that. I don't know why they're blunt like that.

A psychiatrist, when he saw me, he went to meet me. I didn't know him. I met him through, you may know Nat Hentoff. [WR does.]

Well, Nat Hentoff was a disc jockey in Boston. So, he says a guy used to be in the army, and he's a psychiatrist. He's asked to see you. He'd like to meet you.

So, I was in Boston and he took me up to this guy's house. I didn't know who he was. So, he say, he was...this would be a psychiatrist.

He ask me a question. He say, I saw the picture of your fingers. He say, by being this blunt, fingers; he said that I thought you'd have been dead by now. I say, why? I asked him why. He said, on account of your fingers. I said, well, I'm sorry to say, I feel very, very good. [Laughs.]

Yeah, I don't know what...what study that he do to figure that, you know what I mean....So, I don't know how that happen, that my fingers be blunt. I don't think that the instrument had anything to do with it.

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

12

[WR notes that when I played violin, my finger flattened out some. My nails are dirty...worn down. The bone's the same, but the flesh, and that nail, are shorter; and this is twisted, too, from getting...See. My fingers are bigger than they are from getting my fingers closer together to get them in the high position. (They) are twisted.]

And if you notice my finger here, this finger here is kind of twisted like this. On account of this...by doing that so much, I imagine it might have had....But, so far as my finger being blunt, I don't think that had anything to do with it. But, this finger here would always do one of those things. [EH apparently continues to illustrate point with his hand....]

[This is why] I have trouble fooling with a Boehm system clarinet. Because the key - this key here - is way up, and your finger sits down in between the keys. So, I did have a lot of trouble with the Boehm clarinet.

That's the reason why I always did rather [have] the Albert. That's not the reason why I changed. But, I just like an Albert from playing with a small [deck?]. To my estimation, the tone is bigger, especially in the low registers.

[RC always like the Albert system better. WR notes all his clarinetist friends play with the Albert system, so it looks like it must be better].

I'll tell you another story. I went to old man Selmer when I

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

13

bought that instrument.

A lot of people come up, and ask me, why do you play an Albert system?

I say, well, when I started to playing, they wasn't making no Boehm system.

They say, well, how long have they been making Boehm system. I say, well, I remember the first Boehm, around 30 years ago. So, when they'd ask me how long has the Boehm been made, I'd say, oh about 30 years ago.

So, it happened when I go to this factory, I'm buying a Selmer clarinet. So, this guy - what's his name - old man Selmer, but his son's got the factory.

I said, tell me something. I'm going to ask you a question. I say, how long have Boehm clarinets been made? Because they don't make the Albert system anymore.

He said, oh about...by the way, I have the first one that was made. He goes in the showroom, and pulls out the first Boehm clarinet that was made. His father made it. His father played it...and it was made in 1853, over a hundred years ago....

Yeah. That was in Paris. He said, now he got so much order for clarinet that he can't make them all. [Orders] from every country in the world. He said he just got some [orders] from South America. All the South American countries. He said his factory is working, day and night, to make clarinets.

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

14

And it happened so, when I walked in there, that was the only Albert system clarinet he had. He said, I think I have one upstairs.

He went and found one. And he was very nice too, 'cause I told him, I never played a Selmer before. So, he said, I'll give you a break on this one. He give me a double case, and everything. Yeah, he made a present of this one, a box of reeds, He give me a cover for the case, and everything, just for me to use the Selmer.

And I told him, I said, now, any chance of this thing cracking? He said we don't guarantee [wood?]. If you pay \$1,000, we'll [replace it,] if it cracks or not. They usually crack from 10-12 days.

The 13th day, I pull it out of the case, I think it was the last day we was in France, in the theater. I put it up that night. It was all right.

The next day, when I went to the theater, opened my case, the clarinet was cracked. On the 13th day, it cracked.

It was on a Saturday night. We're leaving Sunday, and I can't go back to the factory. The factory's closed. It was lucky enough, I had another clarinet.

So, I brought that clarinet all the way to the United States. When I got to California, the guy wouldn't touch it. So, a fellow on Eighth Avenue in New York City; I sent it to him, and

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

15

he patched it up. And then, every other week, I had to change pads on it.

I went down to South America, and there was a guy, a saxophone player there, and he repaired instruments. And he said, I can fix that clarinet, and it won't leak.

So, he came to the hotel - it took about two hours - and made two pads for that. I haven't had trouble with that clarinet since....

[WR and RC thank EH for taking the time.] It's alright. It was a pleasure, honest, because I appreciate that very much that broadcast y'all worked up on that WWL[-radio.]

I got the tape of that whole show, but I haven't played it yet. Just the way it was sent to me, I still have it.

[This was a New Orleans Jazz Club Program. See Harry Souchon tape collection at Hogan Jazz Archive. DSW 7 March 1991.]

Sure, it was a pleasure to do it.

[RC asks about Kid Thomas Valentine's style on trumpet]. I studied with Thomas. Of course, Thomas is still playing the same way.

If you get a trumpet player trying to play like a clarinet, playing all his notes, then you clash with each other. [Thomas] plays very few notes, and very simple, so you understand what he's playing. A lot of trumpet players be playing something you don't understand what they're playing, you see.

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

16

The clarinet is just mostly to fill in, unless you're playing the solo, you're playing the melody. But, usually that trumpet is there. Then, that trumpet play the melody, and you just move around it, fill in. [I played with Kid Thomas, and he still plays the same style.]

[WR thanks EH again, and says, he knows other people will hear this, and some day we'll get this in print. We'll fix it up, and just print certain parts.

[EH gave good advice to students, and people that want to learn. Many people have heard you on records, but they don't know exactly how you play, and your ideas about music.

[As I say, WR continues, some day...none of us are going to live forever. It will be lost if we don't preserve it...At least, as a part of preserving the history of the old bands, to know just what that music is, and what the musicians actually think about their music. Really, it's a wonderful privilege to hear your ideas.]

I'd like to tell you a story. I only had [one student] that I taught...one kid. I know his father, and this kid, he was seven years old at that time. That was in New York, on Long Island.

So, this kid wanted a clarinet for Christmas. [His father] give him a clarinet, and the question that he asked me...from a kid seven years old, and so his father said, what do you think?

Well, the question that this kid asked me...doctor, he gonna

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

17

learn this instrument 'cause he asked me [if the instrument would last for more than a few years, or a few months?] The question he asked me....

[His father] said he don't want to pay a whole lot of money for a clarinet. I said, if you're gonna buy, you just ought to buy a good one. No use to buy one that's out-of-tune. Then he gets, it makes his ear bad, you know. So, if you're going to buy one, buy a good one because the older it gets...the better they are, you see.

So, he bought his kid a clarinet, and this kid could hum tunes; and the thing about it, the first tune he played was 'Old Man River.' He played the verse of 'Old Man River,' which some professional clarinet [players] have to sit down, and practice, before they play. And anything he hear, he can play.

So, I started to giving him a lesson, and he got so that he - you know how kids are - after he was interested in the clarinet, he got so he wanted to do something else...and I said don't force him. Let him come back to it. Usually, they'll come back to it.

He came back to it, and you should hear him now. He's playing for his school, and everything. He gonna be a clarinet player. Oh, yeah. Good tone and everything.

So, the question that this kid asked me. I told him, I told his old man; I said, can I have him for a while? Let me give him

EDMOND HALL
REEL I, TRACK 2
Summary
July 18, 1958

18

a few lessons, you know. [He was just starting,] and this kid is doing alright.

[RC mentions that there will be a lot more clarinetists, in future years, like myself, that have heard your records, and are very interested to know these things.] Thank you.

So, do you want to hear that thing I made in South America? Do you want me to play it for you?

[WR asks EH if there is anything you'd like to say yourself, that you can think of, that somebody should know; any advice, or anything of that kind, any statement that you can make about the clarinet....]

One thing I would advise anybody taking up the clarinet is learn how to read music. 'Cause you're limited if you don't. It's always best to know how to read music, so you can sit down and play with anybody. Of course, my inspiration right here is sitting by me. [Laughs. EH is referring to his wife.]

[WR puts on a record for the last minute, or so, of the tape and the tape ends...]

END OF TRACK 2