

FRANK CHRISTIAN

I [of 3] Digest-Retyped

September 6, 1965 Also present: William Russell, Al Rose

Frank Joseph Christian lives at 3030 North Claiborne [Avenue, New Orleans, where this interview was conducted]; he was born [in New Orleans?] September 3, 1887. His parents didn't play any musical instruments, but FC has always liked music. He can play [or has played] violin, guitar, bass^(?)clarinet, sousaphone and trumpet; he played ^{flute 186} trumpet when leading his own band. He also played bass drum once in a while. FC thinks his first instrument was clarinet, which he learned by himself; he played clarinet with Anton Lada's band, and made recordings with that band, probably for OKeh. Lada organized the Louisiana Five after having the band in which FC played. FC [later?] recorded. [Cf. discographies.]

FC grew up in the neighborhood where he now lives. FC thinks he was the first of the Christian brothers to take up music, although his brother Charlie~~x~~ [Christian, a trombonist, not the guitarist] was the oldest, being about two years older than FC; Emile [Christian] is about eight years younger than FC. There were two daughters in the family, but they didn't ever play music. [Emile ?] and FC had a band. Charlie Christian played around town before FC took him into his own band. FC was about thirty years old when he first led a band of his own. FC has been playing trumpet for a long time. He had his own band for ten years or fifteen years. He took up clarinet when he was about eighteen, perhaps a bit younger. He was self-taught on trumpet, also. The first bands he remembers having heard were colored bands playing for funerals. Other bands he remembers having heard were those of [George "Happy"] Schilling and [Johnny] Fischer, but they were chronologically later than FC's own band. FC says he helped Eddie Edwards, at one time a violinist, learn to play the trombone; Edwards came to FC's house every day to play the trombone in duet with FC's trumpet. FC says Edwards talked about organizing a band; FC agrees with AR that he himself was supposed to have been a member of the Original Dixieland [Jazz] Band; FC says Johnny Stein met him one night, showed him a telegram from Bert Kelly, who wanted him to bring a band to Chicago;

FRANK CHRISTIAN
I [of 3]-Digest-Retyped
September 6, 1965

2

Stein wanted FC in the band, but FC didn't want to go, as he was doing all right in New Orleans; he suggested that Stein get Nick [LaRocca], but "Nick wasn't much" Stein didn't want him. Stein got Edwards to join the band as trombonist. FC thinks Emile Christian went with the [nucleus?] of the ODJB as cornet player; he thinks it was with [Billy] Lambert [, drums]; Edwards was the trombonist with the group. [Cf. other accounts. Confusion here?? RBA.] Johnny Fischer went [North] with FC.

FC played with [Jack] "Papa" Laine; he and Laine organized a band; he says he played with Laine when Laine first started playing. [Cf. other accounts. RBA]. The personnel of Laine's bands changed often; he even took people who had never played into his bands. FC thinks Laine's headquarters [home?] were around Mandeville and Chartres. [streets]; FC says Laine lived there when he worked as a blacksmith for Dennis Sheen [drayage company]; FC thinks Laine worked for Dennis Sheen before 1910. Although FC couldn't play very well at the time, Laine had him play his clarinet in his band; if he needed a player on any other instrument, he would have FC play it. FC talks about a music store at the corner of Chartres near St. Louis; musical instruments could be rented there; it was run by a woman. FC agrees with AR that Dave Perkins also rented instruments; FC played picnics at the lake with Perkins; Perkins played trombone on the jobs; FC thinks that he himself played string bass.

Some of the bands around in the early part of FC's career were so bad that he didn't like to play with them; Laine had some of that nature; FC says Laine didn't care how bad they were. He made a lot of musicians. Laine used ten men in brass bands for playing parades, such as Carnival [i.e., Mardi Gras] parades; those bands used two cornets. FC says Laine's favorite cornet player was a young man named Lawrence Veca, who was younger than FC; Veca didn't like FC to play in the band with him, as Veca wanted no competition, preferring to be the star by himself.

FC played with the band led by [Bill] Gallaty[,Sr.] very seldom; he had Gallaty play with his band sometime. Gallaty also played in Laine's band sometimes when FC

FRANK CHRISTIAN
I [of 3]-Digest-Retyped
September 6, 1965

3

worked with Laine.

The number and variety of instruments used for dance jobs depended on the situation; sometimes a group might be only five pieces (e.g., clarinet, cornet, trombone, bass and drums), but seven-piece groups were also common. Guitars were used in bands quite a bit; a violin might be used in a seven-piece band, although there weren't many violin players. Sometimes a brass band would play for dancing. FC says string bass, guitar, and trap drums seemed to be preferred [for dancing].

FC played a lot of old songs [with his band?], but he kept up with the popular pieces of the day, because he played for a dancing school. He played at the Lusitania Hall [Dauphine and Elysian Fields?] for a long time, and at the Standby, located at Decatur and Frenchmen. [Leon Hirst?] played cornet there [not when FC played there?]. The Standby had a saloon downstairs and a dance hall upstairs.

FC got most of the late tunes from the girls who requested them; he would have them bring the sheet music; being able to read a little bit, he could produce a satisfactory rendition shortly.

FC says he played the tune now called "Tiger Rag" twenty years before it was recorded [by the ODJB]; he thinks it was then called "Number Two." FC says he played all the numbers "those fellows" [i.e., ODJB] recorded before they even started playing music. FC recalls "Lizard On The Rail" [i.e., "Hiawatha"] [he scats the first theme]. FC says Eddie Edwards was just learning trombone when he himself was playing all the tunes they [ODJB] took to Chicago; Larry Shields was still in short pants; LaRocca wasn't playing trumpet then. When FC sometimes used Shields in his band, FC had to go to his house to get him, and then bring him back home after the job; he also did the same thing when he used Tony Parenti on clarinet. Parenti's father wouldn't let Parenti go with just anyone, but he trusted FC. FC says Harry Shields wasn't playing clarinet then, that he was too young; another brother, Eddie Shields, sometimes played piano with FC.

FRANK CHRISTIAN
I [of 3]-Digest-Retyped
September 6, 1965

FC tells of a sickness and the recovery of Eddie Shields.

FC first left New Orleans about 1914 or 1915, perhaps earlier; he went to Chicago, alone; he worked for the Sewerage and Water Board in the latter part of 1918 and in 1919; he quit that job, left town again, and resumed the job when he returned to New Orleans. He was in Chicago during World War I.

WR mentions "Livery Stable Blues." FC says "Memphis Blues" and many others were tunes which had existed under different names, usually numerals [i.e., Number One, Number Two, etc.], prior to their presentation under their current names. FC doesn't know who wrote the tunes; he tells of hearing bands play at a dance hall at St. Claude and St. Peter [Globe Hall?]; some of the bands which played there were the Eureka (perhaps a brass band), [Sam] Morgan's, Freddy Keppard's; FC heard a band play a tune one afternoon, as they were playing from the balcony of the place; FC learned it from the one hearing, and the following Sunday, his band, playing at Quarrella's on the lake, just opposite the band from which he had learned the tune, played it, astounding the other band.

FC had regular members in his band; Ed "Kid Tots" Blaise was the regular drummer; he is shown in a photograph FC has; all the men shown in the photograph, with the exception of Harry [Alcide?] "Yellow" Nunez [clarinet]. Other regulars were Charlie Christian [trombone] and Willie Guitar [bass].

End of Reel I

FRANK CHRISTIAN
II [of 3]-Digest-Retyped
September 6, 1965

Also present: William Russell, Al Rose

5

Bill Gallaty, Sr., played mostly old Dixieland numbers in his band; his son, Bill Gallaty, Jr., learned to play trumpet, but he didn't play in his father's band, as he could read music; he played in a big band.

FC's band was called Christian's Ragtime Band. He had very few personnel changes throughout the life of that band. Sometimes his brother Charlie [Christian], a trombonist, would play with other bands, such as the Margiottas. Charlie Christian began playing music later than FC; Charlie first played guitar; FC helped him learn trombone. FC also helped his other brother, Emile [Christian], with music; Emile was a good hot cornet player before he took up trombone. EC was hotter than FC. FC says Tony Giardina learned how to play clarinet well when he played with FC; Giardina replaced Gus Mueller. FC sometimes played with Tom Brown.

Billy Braun was a piano player, but he played melophone when he was in Norman Brownlee's band; Brownlee played piano; FC played trumpet in Brownlee's band. Emmett Hardy was playing [cornet] at the time, but FC doesn't name any bands Hardy played with (AR says Hardy played with Brownlee.)

FC doesn't hear much New Orleans jazz now; he used to listen to the bands of Tony Almerico and Sharkey [Bonano], but there isn't anything to hear now. FC says he sold Sharkey his first trumpet. [See Sharkey Bonano interview]. Sharkey's sister was married to Johnny Quarrella, who operated a camp at Milneburg, where FC played every Sunday; Sharkey, who was always there, would sometimes be allowed to sit in; after a while he got his own band.

FC wrote a couple of tunes; he says the band would get together and play just anything ^(at all) they'd think of, and the rest of the men would harmonize. He didn't write any tunes that other bands used. Emile has a couple of tunes, says AR; WR says one is "Satanic Blues," which was recorded [by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Bud Freeman and others].

FRANK CHRISTIAN
II [of 3]-Digest-Retyped
September 6, 1965

FC worked some with Fortmeyer [sp?] over the river.

FC has a sixth-grade education; there were no school bands when he attended school.

Dance tempos were not as fast in the old days as now. There were singers with bands in the old days; [State] Senator Ted Hickey followed FC's band almost every place they played; he sang with the band. One song Hickey sang a lot was "Sweet Adeline." ^[You're the Flower of My Heart Sweet Adeline ©1903] Ernest Giardina, who played violin with FC for a long time, also sang "Sweet Adeline;" he was a pretty good singer; another song Giardina sang was "Somebody Stole My Gall" [©1918]

FC played many waltzes in his band; he also played schottisches, mazurkas, fox trots, and lancers; he describes the form of the lancers; he agrees with AR that the lancers were like square dances.

Not all of FC's bandsmen read music; it was not necessary to be able to read to play in FC's band. He would get some musicians occasionally, when he had a brass band job; one musician he hired was Hinson [sp?], a baritone [horn] player, ^[See Budoyacano sat. p. 33?] a good musician who worked with minstrels. FC mentions a shoemaker who played baritone horn with Siegfried Christiansen's band.

FC frequented the [Irish] Channel; he doesn't remember the Brunies brothers, mentioned by WR; Terrigan was a friend of FC, as was Red Gallagher. There was also the Morning Star club at Calliope and Tchoupitoulas [streets]; FC played lawn parties around that area; he says the people were tough; the drums and drummer were thrown over the fence sometimes; he tells of playing for a particular group who liked his band so much they wouldn't have a party if they couldn't get his band.

Asked about Tin Roof Cafe, FC doesn't remember the location; it is mentioned that "Tin Roof Blues" was named for the place. FC says there were so many dance halls; he names the Portuguese Hall, Lusitania Hall [correctly, Lusitania Portuguese Hall] and Standby Hall; the latter was on the downtown-river corner of Frenchmen and Decatur [streets], or rather, next to that particular corner.

FRANK CHRISTIAN
II [of 3]-Digest-Retyped
September 6, 1965

7

FC doesn't recall that there was a band called Christian Brothers Band; he says it probably referred to his band, with his two brothers also in it; Charlie Christian played trombone in FC's band; Emile Christian played cornet; FC played bass fiddle. FC managed the band.

Other halls were Perseverance Hall, on St. Claude and Ursulines he thinks; Perfect Union Hall was on Rampart; Pink's Hall was at Congress and St. Claude. There used to be dances at the Industrial Canal, where the Army place [Port of Embarkation] is now.

Dancing in New Orleans was about the same style as in other towns. FC talks about patrons who made requests; he says his band would play anything.

A usual night's playing would net a musician about one dollar and fifty cents in the old days; FC always split any extra he got for leading the band with the rest of the members. FC says musicians (e.g., Chink Martin) will say that he never cheated his musicians.

FC quit playing years ago, probably around 1935, sometime before World War II; he thinks he played his last job with Durfee's band. FC worked for the Sewerage and Water Board for a long time.

FC started on cornet but [soon?] changed to trumpet.

FC used a beer can for a mute. FC used the mute when he played for Gilda Grey, in New York; she was a shimmy dancer and singer. FC worked with Jimmy Durante in New York; FC also played in vaudeville houses; personnel of the Durante band: Frank L'Hotag [sp?], trombone; L'Hotag's brother had a big band; FC doesn't think L'Hotag ever came to New Orleans. Achille Baquet played clarinet with the band at one time, but FC can't recall the name of another clarinetist with the band. FC worked a few times with Baquet in New Orleans, also; FC used either [Gus] Mueller or Leon [Grio?] on clarinet [in his band in New Orleans.].

End of Reel II

FRANK CHRISTIAN

III [of 3]-Digest-Retyped

September 6, 1965

Also present: William Russell, Al Rose

8

George Verges [brother of Joe and Louis Verges?] played clarinet with [FC's band?]. Leon [Grio?][also played clarinet?], and so did Red Holland. Grio played some with [Bill] Gallaty [,Sr.], and with FC, but wouldn't play with just anybody; he was particular about with whom he played; he was an older man, and a good clarinetist. FC agrees with AR that he himself probably was with [Jack] "Papa" Laine when he played with [Achille] Baquet.

FC played with Jimmy Durante, who was a pretty good pianist. FC says Durante had a song for everyone who came in the place where they worked, including the waiters, and he would play to greet them. The place was the Alamo, in New York City, perhaps on 158th Street; FC also worked at Coney Island with Durante.

FC recorded "Jadea" for Okeh Company, in New York, with a band that was "part of a jazz band" [i.e., the band was a jazz band in part?], but he doesn't remember the name of the band [the ^{Original} New Orleans Jazz Band]; he also recorded for Columbia. He doesn't think he ever recorded for Victor, but he thinks he did record for Gennett [with the Original New Orleans Jazz Band and Jimmy Durante's Jazz Band.]

FC recalls playing with a band which might have been part of the band led by the brother of [Frank] L'Hotag [see reel I]; FC was featured soloist on several numbers. AR mentions Paul Ash, a band leader. FC says he himself played with practically every show in New York City, and in practically every theater there. AR says FC played with Mae West. FC says he would just play featured solos with the pit bands with whom he played in New York. He says Mae West was good.

FC lived on 108th Street near Lexington Avenue in New York; he never got homesick. He lived there about five years. He was playing at the Alamo when the [Original] Dixieland [Jazz Band] played at Reisenweber's; he says the ODJB offered him two hundred dollars and transportation back to New Orleans to leave New York, but he told them he didn't want to go home, that they could play their music and he would play his. He says the

ODJB was a good band, but they broke up because "there was a lot of jealousy in that band." FC says that he used to use pianist Henry Ragas on some jobs in New Orleans, that Ragas was then so young that FC had to pick him up at home and take him back there after the job. FC says Nick LaRocca's cornet playing was adequate.

FC played a more or less straight lead, in the same style as that of Johnny DeDroit. He played almost all the time, carrying the lead. FC says the clarinet played variations, while the trombone played a second part; FC would often harmonize with the trombone. Parts were rehearsed but "faked". FC's band observed differences in dynamics; FC says the bands of today don't follow that practice, but play at one volume, loud. FC talks about how long the bands of old played before taking an intermission; he talks about how little music bands of today play before taking an intermission. FC mentions [Ted] Hickey, who sometimes sang with FC's band [for pleasure--see Reel I], and tells how they would perform some of the popular songs.

Talk of two-beat and four-beat. FC usually played string bass with a bow; when he played pizzicato, he also slapped the bass on the afterbeats. FC mentions bassist Willie Guitar.

FC didn't ever have a banjo in his band.

FC and his brothers never played valve trombone; they all played slide trombone; Charlie [Christian] began on slide trombone. FC played valve trombone for a while [sic]. Bill Gallaty played valve trombone; he "never got the hang" of the slide trombone.

FC played many Carnival parades; he played bass drum sometimes. Sometimes he played with Braun's Band. FC agrees with AR that Braun was Billy Braun's father. FC also played with Pete Pellegrini; "Pete Pellegrini had a band from the union, you see." FC wasn't in the union at the time; he was a union member when he was in New York. FC doesn't approve of the union as it was in his time; he agrees that it is better today.

FC often played on advertising wagons, using seven pieces. He says he also played for all the prize fights, at various places.

FRANK CHRISTIAN
III [of 3]-Digest-Retyped
September 6, 1965

10

FC played with Bob "One-legged Robbie" Agilera, who played accordion, trombone and piano; FC liked his accordion playing in his band. FC recalls trumpet player Henry Knecht. Clem Camp, clarinetist, played "a good while" in FC's band; Camp replaced [Tony] Giardina in FC's band; Camp was in FC's band when they worked every Saturday night at the Plum Plant, now an [American] Legion Hall, at Music and Claiborne.

FC talks about his band, about rehearsals and parties they had, etc. He talks about the loyalty of the men in his band; he says Chink Martin would rather play with him, even if he got less money than for playing with some other band; Martin played music for a living, too.

End Of Reel III

