

FRANK MURRAY

I [only]

May 12, 1960

Also present: Richard B. Allen, Paul R. Crawford  
[Interview recorded at Frank Murray's home, 1323  
South Rampart Street, New Orleans, Louisiana]

FM plays the guitar and sings "Who's Sorry Now?", "See See Rider", and "I Surrender, Dear".

FM was born October 9, 1896, at 1225 Euphrosine Street, between Magnolia and Robertson [streets in New Orleans]. FM's father played guitar; his maternal uncles played music in the country, specifically in Maurepas, Livingston Parish, Louisiana. FM's father, Spencer Murray, had his own band, which worked at Tom Anderson's, then located in the 200 block of North Rampart, where the [New Orleans] Athletic Club now stands. <sup>see the historical sec. May 9, 21]</sup> Spencer Murray was also a bricklayer who worked for the City [of New Orleans]. FM's uncle, John [or Jean] Batiste, played violin; FM's grandfather's brother, Charlie Batiste, and the grandfather himself, were guitar players. They played mostly reels and "calling figures" [i. e., like square dancing--quadrilles, etc.?]. FM says jazz became more popular after "Kid" Ory's band came in [to New Orleans from LaPlace, Louisiana]; the Silver Leaf Band was before Ory's band. Ory's band played with more swing.

FM's first band work was with the band led by "Fireman George," who was a volunteer fireman. [Christopher] "Happy" Goldston played drums in the band; FM played the flute, i. e., tin fife, [not the transverse flute?]. They played many marches. When FM went to the [Waifs] Home he discovered that Joe Rene, who played flute, clarinet and drums was the brother of [Kid] Rena [sic], could play "Chicken Reel" on the flute better than FM, so he quit and took up banjo, and later, guitar.

FM says guitarists in this area did not use picks of any kind until Nick Lucas began making appearances here at theaters; he introduced the use of the pick to this area. Mandolins, violins, flutes and accordions were in demand.

The Silver Leaf Band played jazz; the only members FM can recall

are Joe Nickerson, guitar, and Albert Batiste, violin. [Cf. Hypolite Charles reel ?]

Some members of Ory's first band, who came to New Orleans with Ory, were: [Lewis] "Chif" [Matthews], cornet; his brother, "Stonewall" [Matthews], guitar; Manuel Manetta [a native of Algiers], violin.

When Joe Oliver quit Ory's band, "on the corner of Perdido and Franklin," FM took Ory with him to get Louis Armstrong, then working at Spano's [sp?] honky-tonk on Franklin Street, to join the band as cornet player. "Now, I was with him [Armstrong] clean up until--not playing with him, because I didn't get a chance to play with him again until Paul Whiteman sent me for him in 1925. I was in Chicago. Paul Whiteman sent me. He [Armstrong] made one appearance, his first singing then; that was his first singing, when he went to New York, after Paul Whiteman left the Rainbow Garden, that was his first one." FM didn't see Armstrong anymore after his own return to New Orleans.

FM says he and his wife [and Armstrong?] were practically raised together. His wife did more traveling, with various [minstrel] shows; her name was Mattie Spencer, but she was known as "Sweet"; her name is now Mattie Murray. Locally, she sang with Joe Oliver at Pete Lala's; then she sang with Freddy Keppard at the Rosebud Theater, "that was about the first colored theater here, with entertainment, colored entertainers working down there." The Rosebud was on Dryades between Jackson and Philip. She worked on the same bill with Ethel Waters. She quit show business around 1932.

FM began to study music in 1909; he was learning the printing trade at the same time; both lines of study were sponsored by the Louisiana Freedmen's Association. FM had played his flute, without tutoring, a year or so before the formal studying began. FM played his flute with Fireman George's band; George didn't play anything, but he would get together a group of youngsters and have his parade May 12.

When a man named Dave was released from Waifs' Home, Dave started a band.

Professor Dowell was the teacher FM studied with at the Louisiana Freedmen's Association; he could teach all instruments, but his specialty was strings. There are not many string instrument teachers now.

FM has played jobs with many musicians, including George Lewis, [Kid] Howard, Buddy Petit, Bill Matthews, and [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin; FM hasn't worked with any of them in recent years, because he doesn't belong to the union.

Members of Buddy Petit's band when FM worked with him: FM, George Washington [trombone], Petit [cornet]; FM thinks "[Slow] Drag" [Pavageau] was the bassist. FM was with Petit around 1918. With help FM says [Abbey] "Chinee" [Foster] was the drummer in Petit's band, and Zeb [Leneries] was the clarinetist. FM was replaced by Buddy Manaday [ap?] from Covington, Louisiana. FM agrees with RBA that Edmond Hall, clarinet, was in Petit's band after FM.

FM says many bands, including Manuel Perez's Onward Brass Band, would make up string [i. e., dance] bands out of their brass bands.

FM's first band job, even before the one with Buddy Petit, was with clarinetist "Blind Freddie" [Small]; others in the band were [Raymond? RBA.] Brown, a slide trombonist, and Tick Chambers [cornet?]. [Joe? RBA] Gabriel was the bass player. The band worked across from old Straight University, near the present-day Pan American [Life Insurance Building, 2400 Canal?], at an open-air pavilion. Willie Jackson worked there as an entertainer. "Sweetie" Matthews was a female entertainer there. "Nooky" Johnson (the same man as "Noonie") worked with Willie Jackson in a presentation of songs, etc., Shows consisted of three or four entertainers plus a band. RBA says he has a couple of fine recordings by New Orleans Willie Jackson, with Steve Lewis on piano.

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FM says Lewis also played piano with Freddy Keppard, before he played piano with [A. J.] Piron.

FM says bands of the period were very often not organized, that when a man got a job he would hire people to play it at random, as he happened to see them.

FM says he doesn't understand how the present-day musicians play written jazz; he says in his time the musicians would just follow the melody in the best way they could.

End of Reel I