

GEORGE "SHEIK" COLAR  
Reel I [only]--Digest--Retype  
July ~~28~~, 1958  
20

1

Also present: William Russell, Walter Eysseleinck.

GC began playing around 1923; he "followed" Chris Kelly, Wooden Joe [Nicholas] and Kid Rena, playing 2nd trumpet with them sometimes, and followed [Lions?] band, [with?] [Elmer] "Coo Coo" [Talbert], and also Buddy Petit's band. About 18 years old at the time, he lived around Marigny and Rampart [Streets]; there was a railroad depot there, from which excursions to Pointe a la Hache departed, and he would ride the trains to hear some of the bands mentioned. GC first began playing by substituting a kazoo for the mouthpiece of his trumpet; he was scheduled to take some lessons from Chris Kelly, but got more musical information from Wooden Joe, as Kelly's lessons were more liquidly social. GC got his name "Sheik" from the clothes he affected when he was about 17 years old [he says he wore "Clark Gable" suits, but Gable was not a star then--perhaps they were Rudolph Valentino suits]. Chris Kelly had the most influence on GC's style; GC liked the blues, and Kelly was the blues specialist in cornet playing; Kelly used a toilet flusher [plunger] over a small mute for many of his solos; he could make crying sounds (wa-wa) with the mutes; sometimes he used only a derby for muting. Women would sometimes become so excited by his playing that they would throw their pocketbooks at him. Others such as Rena, Petit, etc. were great then, too, but when it was announced that Kelly was to play, "that was it." Louis Dumaine was a good musician--not barrelhouse--, who had a good band at the Royal

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2

Garden, Gravier between Dryades and Rampart, when GC was a youngster. Kelly played at places such as the Sawdust Inn, near the cattle yards on St. Bernard, in the street (and the mud) at dances on Flood Street, and at Willie White's, who held dances in his yard right next to GC's home, Marigny, between St. Claude and Rampart. GC would warm up his instrument at home, go over and sit with Kelly, who would [frequently?] leave him to play [most] of the job. GC had some specialties, "Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie" being one, and another being "Careless Love," which he copied from Kelly as well as he could. GC got a job "christening" a new hall, which was in charge of Rockford Lewis; GC couldn't play many tunes, so he got Kelly to play with the band, in which were included Eddie Summers, Leo Montrel, Phillip Gilbert and Irene Watson, singer, niece of the clarinetist Joe Watson. Kelly could make any band sound good. GC reiterates that he learned more about his instrument from Wooden Joe than from Kelly, because Wooden Joe would spend an entire afternoon teaching him about the horn, not about anything else; Wooden Joe knew GC's family, for several generations, but GC got to know him when he got into music. Georgie Boyd was GC's favorite clarinetist; he played with Punch [Miller] and [later] with Rena. [Lewis with Rena, Boyd also at times--unclear sequence]. George Lewis' playing of other contemporary clarinetists most resembles Boyd's. Harrison Brazley, who

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3

worked a long time with Rena, was GC's favorite trombonist; his tone and his technique were good, and he never got excited. Rena didn't play jitney dances [until the Brown Derby?], limiting his work to regular dances, advertising, parades etc. One of his specialties was "Maryland, My Maryland." GC says he wasn't the best trumpet player, but he played the "cleanest" of any of them; other trumpet players could chase him off the street in a contest, but his playing was cleaner and sweeter than any other; Rena was not a low-down player; he played blues, but his blues had class. GC stresses that each trumpet player had his own crowd, because tastes differed, as they do now. Buddy Petit was at his best during the time GC was "coming up"; Petit's style was to play all in the staff, not trying for high notes, and playing sweet music. GC worked several jobs with him shortly before Petit's death; Petit played 2nd trumpet, still sweetly. When he died, he was living over the Try-My Hall, directly across the street from the Caldonia Club, St. Phillip at St. Claude. GC played BP's funeral.

GC doesn't recall ever having heard, in person, [Freddy] Keppard, [Joe] Oliver and Frankie Duson; he has heard Keppard and Oliver, in later years, on records. He says he may have heard them, but he doesn't recall, although he heard Manuel Perez and he knew Yank [Johnson], old-time trombonist, very well.

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4

The brass bands of earlier days were larger than the ones of today, having about 15 pieces, compared to 10 now; there were hardly ever any saxes; baritone horn and alto horn were used, and E<sup>b</sup> clarinet. The bands were made up strictly of reading musicians; good bands, among others, were the Tuxedo, Imperial, Onward, Excelsior and Pacific. The routine for funerals was the same as today; going for the body, the bands played hymns; with body to burial, dirges; afterwards, tunes like [Oh] "Didn't He Ramble." GC played with his brass band job during Carnival time, with a pick-up band led by Willie Parker; it was during the Depression; Kid Howard was in the band, and so was [Alcide "Big"] Landry, who had quit the Eureka Brass Band. GC joined the Eureka in 1946 [No. In early 50's. RBA], replacing Eddie Richardson. GC worked with some of Rena's pick-up brass bands when GC was coming up.

GC worked about six months with George Lewis, before Herb Morand or Elmer "Coo Coo" Talbert worked with Lewis; the job was at Benefit and St. Roch [Mannie's Tavern]; GC had his own band, so Morand would fill in for him; Morand joined Lewis band, later to be replaced by Talbert. Talbert worked some jobs with Sheik's brass band [Eureka] while working with Lewis, then at the El Morocco.

The three trumpets in the Eureka play together at the beginning and end of the number, unless they are reading, in which case they

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July 28<sup>7</sup> 1958

5

play all the time; they try to keep one trumpet [except during sax chorusses] playing, so that there is a lead going all the time, for the benefit of the band; GC says this is the routine for "head" numbers. The band doesn't rehearse <sup>Every time</sup> except for special numbers and/or occasions; often the band will play new numbers, on the street, without rehearsal, for the musicians are capable. GC's family never played any music; he was the first. He has fooled around with drums and piano a little.

End of Reel I

GEORGE "KID SHEIK" COLAR  
REEL I (Summary), Retyped  
January 20, 1959  
Present: William Russell, Richard B. Allen

George Colar is called "Kid Sheik" because he used to wear "Sheik" clothes, i.e., a suit with arrows on it, arrows on the back and side of the coat, and pockets. This was the time Clark Gable suits came out, and they called him "the Sheik." [He must mean Rudolph Valentino.] They had what they called uptown pockets on the pants; patch pockets, open on the top.

Colar was born September 15, 1908, at Marigny and Johnson streets.

His brother fooled around with Sheik's horn some, after he was grown, but he never did play any jobs. He could fill up the horn, but couldn't blow a piece. No one in the family was particularly musical. Colar got started in music by going around to yard parties when he was quite young. He used to follow Wooden Joe Nicholas and Chris Kelly and Sam Morgan. He wanted to play trumpet, got an old bent-up brass cornet and fooled around with it. He doesn't remember from whom he got it, but he was around 10 or 11 years old. He couldn't blow it. Put a kazoo in instead of the mouthpiece. It didn't have the cornet sound but he thought he was "raising sand." He'd get with piano and drums.

He went around Wooden Joe, and Wooden Joe showed him how to fill the horn, how to blow.

Colar used to follow "Coo Coo" [Elmer Tal<sup>bert</sup>~~bert~~] around. He was playing at what they used to call the Pecan Yard, a yard at Pauger and Marais streets, the night a guitar player called "Hamp" got killed. "Hamp" never played with a band, but he and "Black" Walter [Nelson] used to go around playing for fish fries, play in the street, serenading; first and second. He gave Walter his start. In those days, fellows used to wander around serenading,

2  
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Reel I (Summary), retyped  
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you'd hear them at two or three o'clock in the morning, playing the blues on a guitar. People would throw coins into that hole [in the guitar?]. They didn't use picks, just their fingers. Jim Lucas used to play guitar that way. He also played banjo, played in bands with Rena and most others. He was good. Jim Lucas is dead.

RBA says you can hardly find a good blues picker on the guitar around now. Colar believes Walter is about the only one who picks in that style now. Freddie Gould [sp.?] [~~a lottery vendor~~]<sup>7</sup> who lives down in the Ninth Ward used to be great. He's crippled now, doesn't play any more. Freddie could play "High Society" on the guitar, could pick the solo just like the clarinet. Never played with a band. But he could play blues and everything.

RBA says that Dude Lewis used to play just blues. He and Fostair Lewis were two brothers; Fostair played trombone and Dude trumpet. At that time most bands played nothing but blues. The only bands that played anything besides blues were like Manuel Perez's, A. J. Piron's, bands like that. But the other bands, like Sam Morgan, Chris Kelly, Buddy Petit, Kid Rena, Punch Miller, they had to play the blues.

Colar went to New Roads, Louisiana, with Dude about 30 years ago, first time he played with him. They had two trumpets. It was an excursion, over the river on the S. P. [Southern Pacific?] [Is he talking about railroad ferry?], "take that route through Algiers. He had heard Dude before, at lawn parties, up around Bolivar and Perdido Street, near where Georgie Boyd lived, as did Dude and others. Dude and his brother had a little combination. Sometimes [Clarence] "Little Dad" [Vincent] may have played with them. [Correct. See C.V., Reel ?] Casimir's brother who died

may have played drum with them some. [See John Casimir, Reel ?]

Dude tried out at the La Veéda, but couldn't make it, because he couldn't read. He was powerful. RBA used to hear him with Joe Avery [and Wilbert Tillman]'s band. Fostair has been dead. [Dude] did a good job but was not outstanding.

When Colar was ten years old he was second lining behind such brass bands as Excelsior, [Original] Tuxedo, Imperial, Onward. That was when they used to have hearses with horses, with draperies on them.

Colar has always lived downtown, always on the north side. His father belonged to the Magnolia, a men's society, and Sheik belonged to the juvenile division. [Is Sheik still a member?] They met at Independence Hall, on Elmire [now Gallier], between St. Claude and Marais. The parade would leave from the hall, parade all around the Seventh Ward. Once a year, when they had their anniversary, they'd parade to a church. Also they buried with music. Most of the members were from around Louisa Cemetery, where they buried. If a member lived way up, they'd have a meeting place and then circle around. The clubs would have Sunday afternoon parades; the societies would just have music at members' funerals. The Charities and the Liberties always had music at funerals. Sometimes there would be four or five bands at one funeral. When Colar's uncle, whose name was also George Colar, died, he had four bands. Belonged to four societies.

Just lately they have started this "burying by committee" business. That means that when the member dies, the family wants the money instead of the music. A committee is appointed to represent the organization at the funeral; [somebody with a car ?]. Some of the societies voted on whether if they didn't take the music they

couldn't get the money, but it must not have passed. If it had passed, the bands would be playing more. When the Grand Marshall Alexander died they should have had two bands, but the Olympians said the daughter wanted the money. The same thing happened at a funeral about two [Sundays ?] before the interview.

Colar estimates that sometimes during a month now the band plays three or four funerals, but they haven't played one for about a month. Most of the parades are in the summer. Most of the organizations parade once a year unless there is a cornerstone laying. The band may work three or four parades during a year. Not many clubs are parading now outside of the Jolly Boys [Bunch], The Tulane, the Young Men Olympians [suggested by WR], and the Merry-Go-Round. Nothing, <sup>17.00</sup> downtown parades.

When Colar was young, they had more funerals and fewer parades. <sup>Compare with 1959</sup> [This seems wrong. Check please, RBA.] The Square Deals always used to come out once a year.

The clubs are purely for pleasure; the society is a benevolent association for sickness and death. Some societies pay \$250, some \$300 for death, like insurance. The societies sometimes have a banquet once a year for the members. They will meet, have refreshments, then parade. Over in Algiers they have the parade once a year and the banquet once a year on different nights.

The Union pays a death benefit now. It is better than the societies. You pay \$20 a year; you get \$1000 for death. [Now raised, (1961) RBA] Before that sometimes a musician would die, couldn't get buried. The Union will furnish a band [out of the check--meaning part of? or other than? the check?]. Some members don't want bands; Catholics and such. It's a form of group insurance, out of California. The International [office of the Union] has nothing to do with it.

Wooden Joe gave Colar his start, filling the horn, playing numbers, taught him the scale, taught him to read. Colar used to go by his house at Painters and Miro, sometimes twice a week. Didn't go too far with him; Sheik was bumming around different musicians, mostly with Chris Kelly, got started going by Chris's all the time for lessons. "We'd fool around, talk, and start to drinking, and that was the lesson."

Chris's son tells a story about Chris starting on a home-made horn or pipe or something out in the country [story suggested by WR]. Chris never told Kid Sheik about this. WR says "a funnel."

Chris had his own style. Fingering was just like any other trumpet player, though. They used half-valving in those days, and they growled plenty in those days, something you don't hear much now. You growl with your tongue and lip, the ~~KEYS~~ keys half-way down (demonstrates)--"like an animal or something."

Chris Kelly was great. He used mutes a lot. Used an aluminum mute shaped like a salt shaker, small at one end, could fit all the way up in the cornet. (Later says it was brass, when WR says Conn mutes are brass. WR suggests shaped like a light bulb, the kind King Oliver had.) It fit way up in the cornet, so he could use the flusher [i.e., plunger] over it. Couldn't do it with a trumpet, because the mute comes out farther than the bell. He could make it sound like a baby crying, he could get down so soft. Could play just as well without a mute.

The bands played louder in those days, but they could get down soft, too. Sometimes when they were playing banquets, Chris, Sam Morgan, all those fellows, loud as you had heard them play, you get in a banquet, where they're playing a blues, where they have a stop, just the trumpet would have it, it would be so quiet you could

hear a pin drop.

Chris had his own band. Most every musician in town had played with him; settled fellows; he had his pick. Yank [Johnson], trombonist, played with him a long time. He played all kinds of jobs. Up at the Bulls' all the time they had two bands, Chris's and Sam Morgan's. They played all the night clubs, white and colored. Bar rooms, too.

When Sheik would go for lessons, Chris would usually play a number and Sheik would try to follow it. Colar always liked Chris's style, practiced it. He doesn't sound at all like Chris on the record he made, because they weren't playing that kind of number, but he can still play like Chris with the mute and all on "Careless Love," and "Maryland, My Maryland," some of the [outdated ?] numbers. Can't remember others, but when he has his horn they come to him.

Colar also followed Kid Rena when he was young, and George McCullum. Took a few lessons from George--twice a week for about six months. They would drink, too, but they would get the lesson in first.

George had a nice style, nice tone. Didn't imitate anyone. Not a barrel-house musician. Good reader, first class musician. Didn't blast much. Not ratty at all. Wonderful musician.

The first brass band Colar played in was a pick-up band of Kid Rena's. It was a 10-piece band, for a funeral. Another fellow in that band was [Emile ?] "Shot Neck" [Hopkins or Hawkins ?]. He's a deacon in the church now, doesn't play any more. He played trumpet. Works on the river now. He imitated

Chris plenty, with the mute and all.

They never had small seven- or eight-piece brass bands. Rena's outfit wasn't a standard band, but even the kids coming up had good bands. There was the Original Tuxedo, Manuel Perez, The Olympia, the Onward.

Kid Rena played funeral marches and hymns in the street, no 6/8 marches. He never used music. Coming back from the cemetery he played blues and songs, just like now. Other bands would use Rena now and then, but he wasn't a regular man with them, in a brass band. There was a big difference in style between Chris and Rena. Rena was a sweet, clear, clean trumpet player. Rena played higher, stayed up there, would make runs. Chris had a sweet tone, a different style. Buddy was a nice sweet second trumpet player, had nice tone. None of the trumpet players played in Chris's style, except that some of them imitated him. Chris started [Kid] Howard off, and Howard ~~played~~ played in his style. Anybody that had anything to do with Chris, would have something of his style in his playing--maybe a run would be in Chris's style.

END OF REEL I