

Unedited first draft

GEORGE "JUG" JERNBERG
REEL I [only]
August 23, 1963

INTERVIEWER: John Steiner
NOTES: Richard B. Allen
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

"Little" Lester Allen, that comedian who was with "White Scandals." He was there. All kinds of big people in show business--they were all at that party that night. I can't remember all of them.

They were all there. Joe Frisco went nuts about our band. He didn't even dance. All he did all night long, from the time we started to play...He just sat on a chair, right in front of the bandstand. And went out of his noodle about this band.

A lot of the others did, too. Sophie Tucker. All of them. They were really paying attention to that band.

[Joe Frisco always stuttered.] That was never put on. That was perfectly natural and normal.

[JS says that if jazz enthusiasts were looking for a patron saint, it would be Joe Frisco.] That's right, yeah. You're not missing the mark much there. I'll tell you that.

[JS says he was certainly an early man to appreciate what a jazz band could do for an act.] Yeah. [Because for his dance, he needed a great band, and when you had a great band...]

Well, I'll tell you. He heard this [Tom] Brown's Band from Dixieland in New Orleans, and he come back to Chicago to Smiley Corbett's cafe - the Last Cafe - raving about this Brown's Band from Dixieland.

GEORGE "JUG" JERNBERG
REEL I [only]
Summary
August 23, 1963

2

He kept on raving, and kept on raving, until Smiley Corbett finally gave up, and had the band come up. Corbett was still of the old school, pretty much. He thought they ought to be playing dinner music at night, you know. (Laughter.) Boy, what a joke that is.

The full band didn't play the dinner music. [Tom] "Red" Brown switched from trombone to guitar...There was a string bass. Gus Mueller playing clarinet.

I went down to hear them play. I heard so much about a jazz band. I had never heard a jazz band in my life, and didn't know what jazz sounded like. This was the summer of 1915, about July, around there.

I went down there one night to have dinner before going out to the Sheraton Inn at Broadway and Devon [Sts.], where I worked at night.

Here were these three guys. I thought: well, gee whiz, this is not so hot. Where's the rest of the band?

They started to play for dinner music--this guitar, string bass, and clarinet. [They played] black-and-white rags, strictly Dixieland style. (Laughs.)

[A little softer, though, JS suggests.] Oh no. No. No. Boy, was that comical. I never did get to hear that whole band, either. Because that was the only time of the night that I could get down there.

GEORGE "JUG" JERNBERG
REEL I [only]
Summary
August 23, 1963

3

[JS says they weren't in Chicago very long. They left, and went to New York for a week, or two.] Brown's band? Well, I tell you. They eventually split up.

Waddy Wadsworth, who was in that College Inn band...It was Waddy that landed that job at the College Inn in 1915, February.

They had never had dancing at the College Inn before. Strictly an orchestra, straight legit orchestra...

In-between his skating shows, they just sat, and played a concert - semi-concert - number, once in a while. In the College Inn. They had an ice skating rink there for the performers.

So, Walter Blofus had the [legitimate] orchestra down there for the skating show, and everything. When he heard they were going to put in a dance band, he went to the union, and kept them from coming in. He kept them from...so they couldn't join the union. He fixed them up.

The Sherman House said: o.k., you can get out, and they'll come in anyhow. Walter was about to lose the job down there, and they were going to cut out the ice skating show.

Then, Walter, after trying like all get-out to keep them from joining the union, went over there, and fought with his fingernails almost, to get them into the union.

They got into the union, went down there, and started to play for the dancing. They alternated between the skating shows, and dancing. Waddy Wadsworth landed the job. The saxophone player

GEORGE "JUG" JERNBERG
REEL I [only]
Summary
August 23, 1963

4

who landed the job at the Winter Garden that I told you about.

Bert Kelly was a pretty smart guy. He said to the boys, as they were getting near the end of the week. He says: gee, here are the four of us. We're here. We got the job. We ought to have somebody who can talk to the boss.

Bert says, I'll talk to him. He's the one that brought it up, and he also said I'll talk to them, if that's alright. They said, o.k.

He not only talked to the boss, but when it was time for them to get paid, they got paychecks signed by Bert Kelly.
(Laughs.)

[The boss would pay Bert, and he'd split it up.] It was Bert Kelly's job. He finagled it, and it was his job.

Wadsworth was the guy who had really booked the job, landed the job, and hired Kelly as the banjo player. So, from then on, Kelly...I guess it was irking Wadsworth pretty much.

Wadsworth finally was out of there. That's when Kelly got Gus Mueller to come in, and play clarinet, and tenor saxophone. That's what broke up the band.

Ray Lopez went with another band over at the Windcliff Inn. I told you about that, too, I think. It was in the basement of the Windsor-Clifton Hotel. That's where Carson, Perry, and Scott, and Company's Men Store is now.

Benny Fields, Benny Davis, and Jack Salisbury were a singing

GEORGE "JUG" JERNBERG
REEL I [only]
Summary
August 23, 1963

5

trio in the Windcliff Inn. Ray Lopez was in the band that played for dancing down there.

Ray Lopez's father was the clarinet player. He could play the New Orleans style clarinet fairly well, you know, nothing to brag about. Ray Lopez, yeah.

Charlie Thorp played piano there for the singers. Earl - what the heck was his name - Earl Shagoo [?], or some such name as that, played piano with the dance band. Then, later on, when Benny Fields married Blossom Seely, Ray Lopez went with that act, and played in the pit...

[JS notes that others back up GJ's assertion that Ray Lopez was the best of the early Dixieland trumpet players. For example, Frankie Quartell backs him up. He swears by Lopez.] Yeah, I liked Lopez.

[JS thinks that Roy Maxon was from New Orleans, and that he worked with Lopez.] He might have. I'm pretty sure that he worked in New Orleans before he ever came to Chicago.

But, Maxon could shoot the bull something awful, also. So, to be very truthful with you, I never cared much for him.

I liked [Larry] Shields playing [clarinet]. [Leon] Rappolo with the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. He was alright too. Of course, Johnny Dodds with Joe Oliver. Oh Jeezus, he was great. I though he was wonderful.

[I heard] Jimmie Noone. He was very good. I was trying to

GEORGE "JUG" JERNBERG
REEL I [only]
Summary
August 23, 1963

6

think of his name, just last night I think.

He had a style of clarinet playing that was very, very nice. Very, very, soft, and subdued; but, very nice clarinet playing.

He used to work at the old Apex Club on 35th Street. Yes, he was a very nice clarinet player.

I'll say this. We'll get back to Johnny Dodds again. That guy was strictly a New Orleans jazz clarinet player. But, brother, his instrument always sounded like a clarinet. Always sounded like a clarinet. A good, fine, clarinet tone, too.

Those [Frankie] Teschmachers - and all the rest of those guys - you can have them. I'll take Johnny Dodds every time.

And this clarinet player that's with Al Hirt. Oh, he's very...[that little fellow, JS notes]. Oh that little shrimp. Very good man on a clarinet. Oh brother, he can get plenty of stuff out of a clarinet. He really gets it out.

There are five very exceptional men in that outfit. But, when they're all playing, [it's] like five individuals playing, not like a group sound, like one organized group. It sounds like five individuals, each playing individually.

They're all great performers. But, when they're all playing at the same time, they should fit in together, and they don't. Each one is an outstanding performer, really performing, but performing by himself with no...Just going on, you know.

[Louis Armstrong, and King Oliver performed mainly by

GEORGE "JUG" JERNBERG
REEL I [only]
Summary
August 23, 1963

7

themselves.] Those bands in those days sounded pretty rough. There should have been just a little bit of refinement about the sound. They were totally lacking in way of an organized sound, and just a little touch of refinement, or a little touch of know-how in regard to training as a group.

That's what Al Hirt's band [also] needs. They need to learn how to play as a group, and not as individuals. But, as individuals--brother, there's about five of them that are great.

Of course, that takes in Al Hirt. Al Hirt, and that cornet player, and that drummer he's got. He's tremendous. He's some drummer, that guy. Wonderful.

[Vic Burton] supported the band. There were other good drummers. Herb Quigley, for instance.

[JS says the preceeding are excerpts of an interview with George "Jug" Jernberg, a trumpet player around Chicago for the [19]20's, and into the [19]30's. The interviewer was John Steiner.]

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