

unedited first draft

GERALD JOSEPH  
REEL I [only]  
June 10, 1969

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

My name is Gerald Thaddeus Joseph. My mother told me she named me after a priest, some relative that she knowed.

His son went over to the seminary, and became a priest. So, she gave me this name--Gerald. I never questioned her about that [middle] name, Thaddeus.

[Today's date] is June 10, 1969. [I come from a musical family.] As you know, my father [Waldron "Frog" Joseph]...he's been around the business as long as [he was alive]. In his life, he raised seven of us, just playing music.

I also had my grandfather--my daddy's daddy. He's playing bass and drums. I wasn't born at the time. I didn't get a chance to see him, but they were telling me he was pretty good.

[His name] was kind of confused. I knew his children's last name. I really didn't know him. He's dead now about 32, 35 years. That was about 10 years before I even got here.

I was born right here in New Orleans, Louisiana. My birthday was February 15, 1947.

[RBA says the reason for making this tape is GJ's entering the military service.] Yeah. I've been inducted in the [U.S.] Armed Forces. I leave June 12.

I started taking music lessons when I was 11 years old. I started out on the valve trombone. I played valve trombone for

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about four years. The reason why my daddy put me on the valve trombone [was] because he figured my arm wasn't long enough for the slide to go way out there.

When I got about the age of 15, 16 years old, I switched over to the slide trombone. I still was taking music lessons every Saturday for an hour [at] Crescent City Music Hall. I went down there to have a lesson, started taking music lessons at school, and played in the school band.

I remember I played my first solo when I was attending McDonough 41. The band director, Mr. Dennis, [asked] me would I like to play a solo, and I did at the school exercise. It turned out pretty good, but I started shaking for the first time.

Then, it just went on. After I left McDonough 41, I went to St. Augustine High School. I had to...audition to get into that band, because it's really not easy. It's a lot of work, and a lot of marching, too.

This is where I really got hold of more ideas for the horn. You never could lag, had to keep up with your horn because the guy right next to you is always trying to get your seat.

It was...like a challenge. In order to perform, you had to do your best. The whole [time] I was there, I was sitting in the number two seat. For four years, the number two seat.

Me and this other guy. He was playing trombone. He was pretty good...Some little things he got me on, but some little

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things I got him on.

As it went by, and I got to the age of 17, I joined the musicians union. I played my first professional job with Topper's Orchestra - Milton Batiste - and a few months later I joined Harold Dejan's [Olympia Brass] Band.

I've been playing with Harold ever since, traveling around a few places over in the country. Doing pretty good. Getting new ideas on my horn, about how to go about it. It's just something I really like. This music is something that is appealing to me.

I performed for some big delegates. We got big politicians. Just recently, I played somewhat of a rally for Mr. Hale Boggs at the Seafarer's Hotel. This was under the direction of Mr. Paul Burke.

I joined the post office band, what they call the Zip Coders. We had a little rally for Mr. Hale Boggs, and also played a dedication for Mr. Edward Hebert [at] Michoud Station. That's a new post office - or sub-post office - down around New Orleans East, back there.

I met the guy, shook his hand, and talked to him for a while. Just to say, keep up the good work.

Playing this music ever since. It's the only thing that I like.

This is when I really started [on the valve trombone.] I took music lessons underneath the direction of Mr. Wardell

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Quezergue. He taught me the valve trombone as, sort of, simple.

When I switched over to the slide trombone, he was still my music teacher. Every Saturday, like an hour. Every now and then, I'd go over there, and practice on the valve trombone. It's really not in any kind of shape to go on the job with. It needed a little repair, and a little fixing up.

My daddy helped. I remember the first Carnival parade I played in. It was with Anderson Minor.

He told me there was nothing to worry about. He showed me a few pointers. How to learn a melody, and get around with it. Play around the melody, and get to use certain ideas. That was a another good start. It just led to more ideas that came to my own self.

I was strictly a reader when I first start off. Strictly reading music. This is how I got into the St. Augustine Band. Strictly reading. You have to know how to read. Right now, I still read a little music.

These dance bands I play with, you've got to know how to read to perform yourself. I always feel personally, I never wanted to be a one-sided musician. I wanted to be the type of musician that can do just about anything. Not just be one phase.

I want to learn how to play everything. Different type of music, too. That's what I would call a real musician. Maybe, I won't make it as far as in one field, but I would say I could

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perform all sorts of fields.

I [studied harmony] on my own. I used to read a few books on harmony, try writing little tunes, and everything. As far as construction of different scales, and everything--this I know.

But, to tackle something really hard...I could tell you it would be hard on me because I really haven't got the real depth of it as far as writing it down on paper. But, I could perform it as far as my horn is concerned. There's no doubt about it.

I would say [I studied] about six years [with Quezergue]. [That was all during] the Crescent City Music School, down around Aubry and Rocheblave [Sts.].

After I went to St. Augustine under the direction of Mr. Edwin Hampton, I just continued my music lessons on the side. Every day - five days a week - we would rehearse for one hour in the morning; a half an hour; half of the lunch period; and two hours after school.

This kept my lips up, and kept my eye good as far as reading was concerned. It helped me out a lot, too. I was three years at St. Augustine.

I've been with Harold Dejan since 1963. I performed with the Eureka Brass Band once. I performed with Andrew Morgan, and the [Young] Tuxedo [Brass Band], a couple of times.

Most of my jobs were with the Olympia Brass Band, but I had performed with these guys before. I performed with the Onward

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Brass Band twice.

I do a lot of charity jobs. Just recently over here, got a certificate from the President's Youth Opportunity Association. We performed with the Olympia Brass Band. I played for the March of Dimes Fund. The United Fund. The opening of the Audubon Park Pool.

There's a lot of charities I done, because I wanted to do them. I wasn't asking for money, or anything, just as far as health organizations are concerned.

[I really don't play any instruments other than the valve and slide trombone.] I have been picking away at an old bass my father had from my grandfather. But, I wouldn't say I know enough to say I really played it. I was starting getting my ideas together when I received this induction letter.

In the Toppers, you have Milton Batiste, the trumpet player. You have Edmond Foucher. On the drums, you have Joe Butler. Edmond Foucher's the trumpet player. [Wadleigh?] Johnson's, the bass player. Charlie Gaspard, our alto player. George Johnson, alto player. David Grillier, I believe that's his last name, tenor saxophone player. Julius Schexnayder on the baritone sax.

It's more of a progressive side of modern jazz, the type of music the guys play. What I'm trying to do is not just be...one thing, just rock and roll.

A lot of guys coming up now, they just play...this is all

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they know, just play rock and roll. They get with anything else, they're lost.

Occasionally [I play rock and roll] because from time to time it gets a little harder, and I need the money. So, I play rock and roll jobs.

I performed with the Second Liners underneath the leadership of Milton Batiste.

I played with Donald Minor. I really don't know the name of his band, but he would get some guys together, and perform. Whenever a job would come up, he would call us up, and let us know. [He had] about 10 pieces--two trumpet, two sax, a trombone, and rhythm section.

These types of jobs [don't use] reading. It's strictly...chord changes, and so forth, and so on. Listening to tunes, hanging on. It's fairly easy. Once you've been through it once before, you know...how to go about it.

The Second Liners [don't read]. They do the same thing. They just pick up tunes. A guy tells us what key it's in. Know the melody, and just play around it. This is why rock and roll is so easy.

[There are] six of us [in the Second Liners]. You have Milton Batiste, Joe Butler, Wadleigh Johnson; The guy that plays the guitar - I just know him by the name of Joe, I don't know his last name - and myself. Little rock and roll jobs. They're

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somewhat comical.

I performed with June Gardner before. James Black. These big jazz concerts where you have to read music for this. Guys will call you about a week, two weeks before the concert. They just put this music in front, and you've got to read it.

I play modern jazz solos. I like the style of Jay Jay Johnson, and Kai Winding. I have a lot of albums I own by them. I sit down, and listen. Get a lot of ideas from those guys.

I sit down, and listen [to the old] tunes. Like my daddy said: you know the melody, and you have the tune right there. In other words, when you learn the melody, you got to learn the changes along with it.

[A partner] might be playing a tune. You get an idea. You think it sounds nice. You start hitting a little riff together.

You just bend over to the guy next to you, and he...catches on to you. He knows what you want to do, and it just comes out real nice. It is an idea that hits you at this particular time.

[Among famous trombonists] I admire my father first. Wendell Eugene. I like Tommy Dorsey's style, too. I liked to hear him play, and have a couple of albums on him. I like Clement Tervalon as far as brass bands are concerned. I got a lot of ideas from this guy, too, just by listening to him.

This is what happens. I get a lot of experience playing with these other guys, these older guys that have been in the business

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longer than what I have. I sit back, look, and listen.

Then, when it's time for me to perform, I put their ideas...in other words, compromise with their ideas, and my ideas. Put it together, and try to come up with something.

I never did try to play like nobody else because I always did feel that if you have your own style, you got to sell it to the public.

I never did feel where I could get somebody else's style, and try to perform, because every artist out there has a different style, and is appealing to the public.

This is the way I always did feel. If I get my style, and bring my style out to the public the way I think it should be, and if they like it. Well, I'll feel more satisfied than trying to be like somebody else.

There would be a lot of jam sessions...with the Olympia Brass Band. We probably meet other bands, and get together. Guys [would] be trying to show the next guy what he could do with his horn, and I'm trying to do the same thing.

You'd be surprised. When you get in a position like that, you do things that are kind of unexpected.

You don't think you could do. But, you done it, and you can realize this. You can say this was something I didn't know I could do, but I could do it now. That's something that can come up to you, and surprise like.

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[RBA asks about the Zip Coders. They don't play paying jobs.]

Mr. Paul Burke, the postmaster, he likes jazz music. He found out there was a lot of talent in the post office, and he said he'd like to get a band together.

We got this band together underneath the direction of Warren B[onary?]. We rehearse just about every other Sunday. We would play at dedications. Play for Flag Day. Dedication of a new post office down there in Gretna, out there at Michoud.

This was something that was done on our own time. We wasn't granted no kind of leave, or anything. This was like dedicating our service to the post office.

There were a lot of good guys in the Zip Coders. First, on trombone, they have - beside myself - Homer Eugene. Leonard Morris, on trumpet. Warren Bonary, on trumpet. Gilbert Young, on trumpet. Warren Bell, on drums. Walter Epps, on guitar.

This guy, Warren Bell, who used to play with Clyde Kerr, not the alto player [Warren Bell]. The piano player...I can't think of his name. They used to have Narvin Kimball playing bass. That's about all beside the piano player. I know him. I just can't recall his name.

With the Zip Coders: on Flag Day, we played a parade at City Hall. On that particular day, Kimball didn't perform. [We don't have a tuba player.] But, on that particular day, too, Jerry

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Green came along, and played with us. He dedicated his service to the post office.

[The farthest from home I played] was at Boston. I think it was Boston, or Detroit, one of the two...I stayed in Boston a week. I went up there with the Zip Coders at a letter carriers' convention up there a week.

We performed up there for the convention. They had a lot of big people there. Mr. Humphrey was there. Mr. Nixon. That was [Vice-President] Hubert H. Humphrey...

As a matter of fact, Mr. Hubert H. Humphrey was staying in the same hotel we were staying in, the Somerset up there. I didn't get a chance to shake his hand, or anything. But, he did like the way we performed, playing this New Orleans jazz music.

All the other bands [that] came from all over the United States was performing marches, and were performing New Orleans jazz tunes. We got somewhat of a nice applause, even though we didn't win first place.

I believe the best job I ever played was the first time I went to Washington D.C., and played for the Smithsonian Institution. A lot of people [were there]. We played for the National Press Club, I believe, is what they called it. The best job I ever played.

[The people of New Orleans] enjoy themselves. That's a funny thing about this city. People just love this music, all types of

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music, as a matter of fact. I'm just glad I'm a part of it, performing, and present my ideas as far as show business is concerned.

It's sort of different [in other cities], as far as my eye sight is concerned. It's really different. It don't seem like they're having as much fun as they have here for it to be somewhere else.

If we were going to play this New Orleans jazz music, somewhere out of town in...Recently, we just returned from Houston. We were marching around the block like we do here in the city, and it was so strange to people. They just stood up there, and looked. It was something new to them.

They finally got around to [marching with the band], but it looked strange to most of the people. There was no doubt about it.

They came around. After we marched around the block a couple of times, they got the kick of it a little bit. They was clapping their hands, and marching behind us.

We read music with the Toppers. People get out on the floor, and they start dancing all night. [They dance] about the same [here as in other towns.]

They get all excited [with rock and roll], but it's just about the same. Everybody's playing the same...rock and roll tunes. Everybody's doing the latest steps, so forth, and so on.

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You have to keep up with the times, and keep up with the different sorts of tunes. My mind is sort of like...I know so many tunes.

[RBA says they should stop with one reel, and thanks GJ.]

END OF REEL

