

HARRY FAIRCONNETUE Also present: Richard B. Allen,
I [of 3]--Digest--Retyped Harold Dejan, Joe Jackson
November 11, 1962

(Interview recorded at 423 Webster Street, Bay St. Louis,
Mississippi)

Harry Fairconnetue was born July 28, 1907, at 434 Sycamore Street, Bay St. Louis. His family all sang around the house. His first instrument was drums; he was inspired to take up drums by the playing of John Benoit, a local drummer who worked with August ^ASucier. HF's drumming was confined to playing for his own amusement. He later learned to play ukulele. He was hired by the Gogettum [spelling?] Band, a local band led by Paul Maurice, and including Oscar Collins, on the condition that he play banjo; he accepted the condition, remaining with them until he joined the [Clarence] Desdune band, in 1928. HF had no teacher until sometime after [or during the time?] he played with Desdune. He says they played at Tranchina's for a while; Harold Dejan says they also worked at the Beverly "Country Club" every Sunday. HF learned banjo by tuning it like a ukulele; RBA says Danny Barker did the same thing. HF was shown one piece on the piano, "My Country 'Tis of Thee", by his cousin James Fairconnetue. The first tune he learned on ukulele was "Who's Sorry Now?"; his first tune on trumpet was "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate; he took up trumpet about

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1938, beginning to play on an instrument he had bought for his daughter, then about eight years old, to play in the proposed school band, which never materialized.

The first band [Goettum?] HF played in had the following personnel: Oscar Collins, trombone; Paul Maurice, leader and clarinet; Johnny Toncray, trumpet; Eddie Thomas, drums; Anderson "Gigger" Edwards, bass; [HF, banjo.] HF later played with the band led by August Saucier, trombone. The early band played all fake numbers [i.e., used no written arrangements], and was a Dixieland band. They usually played a set composed of a slow drag, a fox trot and a waltz, with a schottische being played occasionally. They played mostly in dance hall, e.g., the Promo Benevolent Association hall; they played about once a week, usually Monday, which was the big day in that locality. They played in the area around Bay St. Louis. HF played with Edgar Saucier, saxophone, in the band of Saucier's father, August Saucier; HF says ~~that~~ at one time the Saucier band was a family band, with August's daughter, Gertrude Saucier, playing piano, and "Little Bea" [spelling?] on drums. The family band broke up because the children couldn't stay up late.

HD tells of playing in Bay St. Louis with Desdune's band; they would play an advertisement on trucks for the engagement to follow that night; a druggist would always pass out cigars

to the band, so when George McCullum [trumpet], who composed tunes as he played, made up one, he called it "The Cigar Stomp", in honor of the druggist; the year was [probably] the latter part of 1928, just before the band went on tour. It is explained that McCullum would begin playing one tune, but would forget what he was playing, so he would just continue, ad lib; the result would be another tune, which sounded good, according to HD. HF played with the Saucier band after he had worked with Paul Maurice; he joined the Maurice band in about 1925. Personnel of the Saucier band: Edgar Saucier, saxophone; August Saucier, trombone; William Franklin, trumpet; HF, banjo; Norbert Maurice, drums; HF's uncle, Thomas Fairconnetue, clarinet; Gertrude Saucier, piano; Anderson "Gigger" Edwards, bass. HF's brother-in-law, Eddie "Chook" Palloade, was playing banjo with August Saucier when HF left Maurice's band to join Saucier. HF joined Desdune, probably on the recommendation of [Henry?] Kimball, after leaving Saucier; HD was in the Desdune band when HF joined; it was known as Piron Number Two. Others in the band then: Earl Foucher, alto saxophone; Felix Goff, clarinet and tenor saxophone; Nolan "Shine" Williams, drums; Raymond Brown, trombone; old man [Henry] Kimball, bass; Lucien Johnson, clarinet and alto saxophone; HD, clarinet and alto saxophone, and sometimes tenor saxophone. HD played tenor after Goff left

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the band; Oliver Alcorn later replaced Foucher. George McCullum was the one trumpet player in the band; Raymond Brown, the trombonist, was the father-in-law of [Fred] "H.E." [Minor]. Warren Bennett played piano, and would sometimes play saxophone or clarinet; Bennett, in Biloxi, grew up in Bay St. Louis. HF and HD agree that Bennett was good; HD says Bennett played the most like Bernell Santiago of anyone HD knows; he was very fast, and just as fast on clarinet and saxophone as on piano. Henry Kimball was the father of Narvin [Henry] Kimball [bass and banjo], who is not Junior. Desdune played violin and plectrum banjo; he was a good violinist. The band used stock orchestrations; they played all the Ted Lewis arrangements; they played the old standard [jazz tunes] by "head." HF thinks most of the stocks were written by Frank Skinner [see Robichaux Sheet Music Collection]; HD says Archie Bleyer wrote a lot of them, too, as he and Skinner were the top arrangers then. HF was with Desdune about two years, until the band broke up in the early part of 1930, according to HD. HF joined the band when it first began playing at the Pythian Temple Roof Garden [New Orleans]. Desdune was from Omaha, Nebraska; HD says he thinks Desdune came to New Orleans to teach or study at Xavier University. The band went on a six-month tour, through Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska, where they remained a while,

booking out of Omaha. HD talks about a huge watermelon which was given to the band at a fair they played. The band went back to New Orleans from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, HF's cousin had been killed and he wanted to go home, so all the band went with him; he was band manager at the time. HF explains the operation of the Desdune band: Desdune was the booking agent; HF managed the band, paying the men, etc., and sending Desdune his part of the take; Desdune played with the band when business in area was good. The son-in-law of the mayor of DeRidder, Louisiana, Hooper, booked the band in Arkansas, where business was good for a while. HD tells of playing a dance in DeRidder, with permission from Mayor Hooper, and of the great reception of their music. Most of the Desdune jobs were for white people; the colored people were glad to get a chance to hear the band, which was seldom.

End of Reel I

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HF plays the first piece he ever learned on ukulele; he plays a Martin ukulele, uses a felt pick; the tune is "Who's Sorry Now?", which he also sings.

There were some personnel changes in the Desdune band during the time HF and HD were in it; Warren Bennett and Edgar Saucier joined the band after JF and HD; George McCullum, who left when his wife had a baby, was replaced by Alvin Alcorn (HD thinks Alcorn joined in Wayne, Nebraska); [?] "Tittytat" Steele, who lived on Melpomene [New Orleans], trumpet, came into the band at one time (he was playing bop in the Twenties, says HD and was called "Tittytat" because of the rhythm patterns of some of his figures; HF says he played a circus type style, and played [i.e., held?] his trumpet upside down; he left a circus band to join the Desdune band); there was also a tenor [saxophone] player who had played with Alphonse Trent's band. (RBA says that [Henry] "Red" Allen was playing flatted fifths in 1929, that he has recordings of such, e.g., "Higginbotham Blues", on which Allen ends on a flatted fifth.) HF says Edgar Saucier was playing present-day rock-and-roll style in Desdune's band. ^{CKIA} Kifer [spelling?], trumpet player, was great, and in the Desdune band at one time; Kifer played at The Entertainers a long time; Louis Prima and others listened to him there every night; his style was similar to

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to those of Louis Armstrong, Red Allen and Guy Kelly; HF says that sometimes it appeared that Kifer was sucking [instead of blowing] on the trumpet. Davy Jones [saxophone] played with Desdune a short time, while Desdune was teaching.

When he left Desdune, HF returned to his home [Bay St. Louis], where he played with Edgar "Buddy [Bo?]" Benoit for a while; then he formed his own band; personnel of the latter included Joe Jackson; HF's brother-in-law, Eddie "Chook" Palloade, guitar; Eddie Thomas, drums; Harold Dejan. HD stayed in Bay St. Louis during his vacations, and would also play with HF when called from New Orleans. HD says [August] Saucier sometimes sent for Kid Clayton to come from New Orleans to play. HF's jobs around his home were on week-ends; with Desdune, he played every night. HD says Desdune's band competed with the [A. J.] Piron band, although the Desdune band was the Piron Number Two band at one time.

HF currently works as chauffeur-houseman for a couple; he worked at other jobs when he came off the road with Desdune's band. None of Desdune's men had other jobs when they played with him, as there was too much work and travel involved; HD and HF talk about some of the trips and jobs. HD left the Desdune band about a month before it broke up. "Big Head" Eddie Johnson is mentioned; he worked some with

the Desdune band, but only as a substitute. HD says the band Johnson played with the longest was Arnold DePass's original Olympia Band; HD and Johnson both played alto saxophone in that group, which included [Elmer] "Coo Coo" [Talbert], "Big Ike" [Robinson, on trombone?] and Benny Benoit, banjo.

HD, at RBA's request, tells of a non-drinking incident in Poplarville, Mississippi. Raymond Brown and George McCullum are mentioned. [Nolan] "Shine" [Williams] is mentioned. The drinks "chock" and "swig" are mentioned. HD mentions August [Saucier]; HD talks about one job he played with Saucier; Saucier's bass had no back and only one string then, and Saucier took off his shoes "soon as he got in this fabulous place."

Joseph L. Jackson, Jr., is better known as "Joe B." He was born November 25, 1913, in Pass Christian, Mississippi, at 238 Third Street. He began playing piano, his first instrument, between 1925 and 1927. His family were musically inclined; his father played guitar and bass fiddle; his mother played piano. The father, Joseph L. Jackson, Sr., played with August Saucier; the band frequently played in Pass Christian, and after the dance, they would come to the Jackson home and play until Train Number Two [probably L&N, and northbound--PRC] came along, about five-thirty in the morning;

then they would go back [to Bay St. Louis?] home. In later years, August Saucier's son, Edgar Saucier, began playing saxophone with the band, and Warren [Bennett?] began playing clarinet and piano with the band; Warren was JJ's inspiration to play. JJ watched Warren play the piano at JJ's home; JJ's ~~sister~~ ^{sister} grasped the idea of playing piano before JJ did. JJ also watched the pianists with bands from out-of-town, such as those of Sam Morgan and [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin, and learned from them. Then some youngsters in Pass Christian organized their own band; Sylvester Thompson (now in California) played trumpet; [Octave?] Murray [spelling?] (whose father played bass) played bass; JJ played piano; Benny Thomas played drums. They began playing every weekend in Gulfport.

End of Reel II

After the band [with Sylvester Thompson] broke up, some time passed before Joe Jackson joined the Watson Band, of Pass Christian; personnel of that band at one time: Harry Watson, trumpet; Eddie Watson, guitar; "Gator" Watson, whose first name may be Henry, banjo; Charlie Watson, drums (all the Watsons were brothers); [~~Selma?~~^{Salby}] Thomas, bass; JJ's sister, [~~Anita? Amelia?~~^{Anita}] Jackson, piano. JJ replaced his sister in the band; he worked with them several years. Harry and Eddie Watson later switched to alto saxophone. After the Watson Band broke up, JJ joined the band led by Paul Maurice; personnel: Harry Fairconnetue, banjo; Paul Maurice, leader and clarinet; [Amadie?] Delahoussaye (now in California), saxophone; Kingston Alexis (brother of Ricard Alexis), trumpet; Eddie Thomas, drums; JJ, piano. The year was in the late Twenties or the early Thirties. JJ remained with that band until October, 1936, when he went to work for the L&N Railroad; he is still employed by that line. JJ didn't play much for the next several years; during that time, he worked with August Saucier and with Sumner Labat. JJ began playing with Edgar "Buddy Bo" Benoit in [1948?]; August Saucier played in that band. AS played bass. JJ tells a long story of going to and coming from a job during a flood. John Cooks was the drummer at the time. It was JJ's last job with Benoit. Harry Fairconnetue organized a

band after that; personnel: JF, trumpet; JJ, piano; HF's brother-in-law, [Eddie] "Chook" [Pallode], guitar; Eddie Thomas, drums; Harold Dejan, saxophone. The band worked together for many years. Dejan, who couldn't make a few of the jobs, sometimes sent Adolphe "Tats" Alexander [Jr.] as his replacement; Clarence Hall also substituted for Dejan once. Then Dejan began working a steady job at the Melody Inn [in New Orleans], so he had [John] Handy, who lived there [Pass Christian?], on the weekends, take his place; some time afterwards, Handy had Jesse Charles replace him. HF eventually managed the business on the Bay St. Louis side of the Bay St. Louis, while JJ did the same on the Pass Christian side of the bay. JJ tells of having difficulty getting men for a New Year's Eve job; he helped John Farris (father of "Little John" Farris, trumpet, who is now in California, recording) get a quartet together for a job Farris was committed to; Farris's band had left him to form their own group, and left him without musicians. HF, JJ, Brady Smith, drums, and Leo Montrell, HD's cousin, saxophone, played the job. Then JJ and HF reorganized their band; Eddie Thomas was getting old, so they replaced him with Brady Smith; Eddie Pallode had decided not to play with them, so they got Charlie Lejoie on guitar; John Handy played alto saxophone, JJ played piano, and HF played trumpet. Jesse Charles was added on tenor saxophone later. JJ says the band

has done well, even until the present.

JJ thinks [Amadie?] Delahoussaye, saxophone, is a native of Bay St. Louis; Delahoussaye is now in California.

(A tape is copied of "Perdido", played by JJ, piano, John Handy, alto saxophone, HF, trumpet and Brady Smith, drums).

Handy was playing in New Orleans when HD was in the Fairconnetue-Jackson Band.

JJ now plays a more modern style of jazz. Talk of JJ's piano styles, from his beginning until the present. JJ picked up ideas for his playing by listening; he has been many places in the country, and made a trip to Montreal, Canada; he tells of meeting a trumpet player, "Hot Lips" [Page?], there.

End of Reel III