

ISAIAH MORGAN
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
December 1, 1958

Also present: William Russell
Richard B. Allen

Isaiah Morgan says that when Russell "Big Chief" Moore was here once with a show, at the Lyric Theater, he hired Moore; their first job was in Vacherie, Louisiana; Moore took off his shoes, to rest his feet, and told the other bandmen they were going to hear some trombone playing now; IM said he really could play. There is a discussion about the whereabouts of Moore's birthplace; WR asks if it were Oklahoma, but RBA says Moore is a Pima Indian, from New Mexico or Arizona. Moore later worked two tours with Papa Celestin's band, and then he went to Florida; Punch Miller saw him there a few weeks ago; John Porter told IM that Moore was in town to play a job [probably with a Lester Lanin unit for a debut party at the New Orleans Country Club]. [At this writing, October 9, 1964, Moore is playing with the Louis Armstrong combo, probably in Japan.] [Shortly] after his report, Porter died. IM mentions Jim [Robinson] and the Young Tuxedo Brass Band.

IM was born April 7, 1897, in Bertrandville, Louisiana, which is twenty-eight miles down the Mississippi River [from New Orleans] and on the East Bank; *8.7.64 The father and mother were great church members and preachers.* all the Morgan family originated in that town. ^A None of the Morgans except the boys played music. IM's brother who died a few years ago [Robert?] was sixty-six when he died, and Sam was sixty-six when he died [probably not so--Sam was born probably around 1895], and IM doesn't really know when Sam was born. Sam died on Carnival Day, 1936; he died at the family's residence on St. Louis at Burgundy [Streets], of "overnight pneumonia." He had had a stroke, made a recovery, was again playing; he sat ^{out} on the front steps ^{of him} late at night, became ill and died. ^{5+mins} ^A There were six Morgan brothers living when IM was coming up; four other Morgan boys had died before he was born. The youngest

ISAIAH MORGAN
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
December 1, 1958

2

brother was forty-two [when he died?]; next was Albert [still playing], then Andrew [still playing], then Isaiah [the same], then Robert and oldest, Sam. Robert and the youngest brother did not play music. ^{The youngest Sam liked to write} IM wanted to learn music because he liked to listen to records by Wayne (or Wynn) King; he taught himself how to play, using his brother Sam's instrument when he could take it. IM's first job was with Jim Little [Sidney Brown], playing a Carnival dance in Buras, Louisiana; Brown was playing violin then (other Jims [probably Robinson] were on the job, too); IM couldn't play[much]. On his next job he was leader; he faked his way through that one. Then he organized his band, the Young Morgan Band, with headquarters on Dumaine between Liberty [now Tremé] and St. Calude, at Jim Robinson's house; the band became popular, getting a lot of work, and becoming "stronger" than the Sam Morgan band (IM's band was also known as Young Sam Morgan's Band). During this period, IM took lessons from Professor Delmas [spelling?], of Baton Rouge, who would come to New Orleans to teach [among others?] IM and Jim Robinson; IM says he learned well, taking twelve lessons from him; Jim Robinson didn't do as well. IM learned to read and write music, and transcribed ^{the choruses} many [piano] lead sheets to trumpet leads; he had a good ear and could play anything he heard other bands, including those on records, play. He played straight, so that people could understand the tune. The only tune IM remembers of the four he could play [on his first job] is "Margie" [Check publication date? OJJB record?]; one of the others was either "Dolomite" or "Dynamite"; he had already been in the Army [during World War I--RBA], returned; he figures his age at the time as around twenty or twenty-two years. IM began on cornet, a C. G. Conn; next was a King trumpet; then another King trumpet and some other trumpet; he wore out all the trumpets, was not satisfied with them anyway, and returned to

I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
December 1, 1958

Conn [probably trumpet], which he has at home; he also has an Olds trumpet, which he will replace, if he does, with a Martin trumpet. He bemoans the fact that gold [plated] instruments are no longer made, that all one can get are gold lacquered. Sam also began on a Conn cornet, later playing a Conn trumpet; his last session [after his illness? recording session? RBA] was made on a Conn trumpet. Cornet is louder, but trumpet projects better. [Doc Evans, usually a cornetist, says trumpet is easier to blow than cornet; he plays trumpet only when he is quite tired--PRC.]

Sam Morgan didn't make any records until he began playing with [and later leading] IM's band. Sam's first band had Joe Watson, clarinet, "Ti Boy" [Eddie Gilmore], bass; Butler "Guye" Rapp, guitar; Alfred Williams, drums, and Yank Johnson, trombone--Sam Morgan on trumpet. When Sam was ill, Willie Pajaud was taken in as trumpet player; the band went to Mobile [Alabama] for an engagement, but didn't do very well and broke up; at IM's suggestion, Sam joined IM's band as an added trumpet player. Others in IM's band [Young Morgan Band] were Earl Fouche, [alto] saxophone, Andrew Morgan, clarinet and [tenor] saxophone, Jim Robinson, trombone, [Sidney "Little] Jim" [Brown], bass, Johnny Dave, banjo, Roy Evans, (now dead), drums. The band would pick up a pianist from Mobile when they traveled. The band went to Chicago on an [L. & N. RR] excursion, played for [a party for] Kid Ory, played around Chicago for about three days, and played in Gary, Indiana. IM says that from then on he let the band be known as Sam Morgan's band. The band began going to Mobile every Monday night, at Brooklyn Park, drawing around 3300 people each date. A band from Pensacola [Florida], with Al Morgan and Edmond Hall, was very popular in Mobile at the time,

ISAIAH MORGAN
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
December 1, 1958

4

but after the Morgan band began playing there, the Pensacola band's popularity declined abruptly. IM thinks Lee Collins might have been the trumpet player with the Pensacola band, but he is sure Mack Thomas was not the trumpet player. IM recalls that Mack Thomas was the trumpet player working with the Pensacola band. ^{IM thinks SM joined IM's band about 1932-33 [cf. discographies and other interviews]} The Morgan band played spirituals and hymns on parades ^{Esp. in Mobile} and at Maypoles, but didn't play them at dances; the band recorded "Sing On", "Over In the Gloryland" and one other ["Down By The Riverside."] Other bands did not play spirituals or hymns in dancehalls, either, until Louis Armstrong's record of "The Saints" ^{when I E.S.} came out, and didn't play that tune until people requested it; IM would tell people his band just didn't play the tune. IM doesn't remember the melodies of the other tunes on the recording session-- "Bogalusa Strut", "Everybody's Talkin' Bout Sammy", etc.

When Roy Evans died, he was replaced by Alfred Williams, who had played in Sam's first band. The first drummer in the Young Morgan Band was Nolan "Shine" Williams, who was replaced by Evans. Sometimes the band had Lionel [Terragana (spelling?)] as drummer when they made some of the out-of-town trips, but when Alfred Williams came back from Texas, he became the regular drummer. [Apparently there was no regular drummer with the band after Evans died, until Williams returned from Texas]. [Compare Alfred Williams, Reel ?] The band began to break up about that time, Earl Fouché left, and the break-up was complete.

IM says there was no piano used on the recordings [probably confused about the question, perhaps thought RBA meant as a regular pianist]; IM says they used to use a girl named May, who played at the place which is now the New Orleans Athletic Club, because someone would bring music to them on the stand, no rehearsal; May was a good reader. The place is on N. Rampart, between Iberville and Bienville.

Roy Evans was the drummer on the recordings.
** Edmund Hall entered and left at this point.*

ISALIAH MORGAN
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
December 1, 1958

5

The band members were paid fifteen dollars a side for the recordings [fifteen dollars per man, which would be pretty high, or fifteen dollars for the entire band?]; the composer credited with some of the tunes received whatever royalties there were. The band didn't record anymore [after the second session]; they had a chance to record further, but would have had to go to Johnson [City], Tennessee to do it. IM says the band he wants to record is the one he has now, over the lake [Mississippi Gulf Coast]; they can play anything; they are young, except for the saxophone player, who can play all styles and can play like Earl Fouche; he is Warren Bennett, from Bay St. Louis [Mississippi]. He has played around New Orleans with [Noon Johnson? RBA].

End of Reel I

ISAIAH MORGAN

II [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
December 1, 1958

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Richard B. Allen

Interview conducted at 600 Chartres, New Orleans

6

The guitar player in IM's band worked at the Navy [probably Veterans] Hospital in Biloxi [Mississippi]; the bass player is in Bay St. Louis. IM telephones the various members when they have a job. The band is the only one IM would want to record with; they can play old style and new style music.

IM moved to New Orleans the day after the hurricane of 1915; he had stayed with a sister who worked at St. Charles and Louisiana, sometime before the storm, but had returned to the country (at Belair ^{Plantation} [spelling?], John Diamond's place) in time for the storm. Sam Morgan had already moved to New Orleans at that time. There were not many bands in the country; Sam once had a band there. A trombone player ^[Frank Dixon See below, p. 7, para. 2] [from New Orleans] used to come to teach a brass band, and musicians of the area from Belair to St. Sophie ^{Plantation} [spelling?] were receiving instruction once a week; the teacher came on the Louisiana Southern train. IM agrees that the teacher was [operated] like Jim Humphrey, the grandfather of Willie and Percy Humphrey. It was not Dave Perkins, who used to work at Werlein's, according to IM. The brass band did not play many parades. ^{neighborhood} IM says Willie Parker, from the same area of the country and later in [leader of] the Terminal Brass Band and in the Eureka Brass Band in New Orleans, was not in the brass band in the country; Parker had already gone to New Orleans, was not in the brass band in the country; Parker had already gone to New Orleans. Sunny Henry was not in the band, either, as he lived on the other [west] side of the river. Other musicians from IM's original home area were John Williams, trombone, now dead, "Beans" trumpet, also dead. [Compare below] IM knew about clarinetist Phil "Pill" Coycault, of Violet, Louisiana, but did not know he had a brother, trumpeter [Ernest] ^{NENE} "Nini" Coycault; IM says they didn't get down to Bertrandville. The

ISAIAH MORGAN
II [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
December 1, 1958

Also present: William Russell
Richard B. Allen
Interview conducted at 600 Chartres, New Orleans

7

brass band played marches and some jazz, but not as well as the later bands around New Orleans. IM says there was a good brass band across the river from St. Sophie; also, Sam Morgan had his band and a cousin, "Beans", also a trumpet player, had a band; "Beans" [now?] works at the Veterans Hospital.

Frankie Duson was the trombone player who was teaching in the country; RBA says he had always thought of Duson as being an "ear" man; IM doesn't know that Duson could read or was teaching reading, but he was teaching.

IM doesn't know that Sam Morgan was reading in the country, but he could read when he was in New Orleans; IM says that when the Sam Morgan band was playing at the Astoria Garden, Sam would bring hard numbers, such as "Miss Trombone" and "Sally Trombone", on the job, wait until the place was full and then given them to the band, saying "Who fall down, stay down." IM says Sam did it because the band would not rehearse. Oddly enough, Jim Robinson, who does not read [or, at best, can only "spell" a little], had no trouble with the trombone specialties, as he had played them with Chris Kelly; he

had very little trouble with any of the numbers, as he is a good ear man and can usually play a harmony to a lead at first hearing. IM says that [Kid] Howard always furnished a good lead for Jim to play with [in other bands]. Alvin [Alcorn] is mentioned. George Lewis is mentioned, IM saying that he tried to get Lewis to play with him a couple of times, but couldn't get in touch with him; Lewis's first wife, Jeannette, who is dead, was a cousin of IM. IM says that Cleo, bassist, played with him in 1941; he wanted to give Cleo a steady job [probably every night] over the lake (one which lasted five years and five months), but Cleo stayed with Sidney

Desvigne's big band. Unable to make a living playing only one or two nights

* P [Fred Howard has replaced Alvin Alcorn as AA couldn't travel with (George Lewis's) band] KH had been fired.

a week, Cleo joined the merchant marine and sailed on a ship which was sunk immediately [in the Gulf of Mexico?], and Cleo with it.

George Gussman played for a long time with the Sam Morgan after Johnny Dave. (Restriction)
m r f f IM tells of playing on the steamer Capital [Streckfus Lines], alternating with the Fate Marable band; the people were so enthusiastic about the Morgan band that Marable would turn off the amplifying system when the Morgans would play; the Streckfus people wondered why the Morgan band was not playing [or being heard]; IM discovered Marable's trick, and the amplifier left on, and the day was won. *Johnny Dave was playing well* Marable had a ten-piece band, with Dewey Jackson [cornet] in it.

The thing that made the Sam Morgan band so popular was its swing; IM says Sam was a stickler for tempo, that he wouldn't allow any variation in tempo. Some kind of advertising card the band had read "Sam Morgan's Band with the Swing." The band played almost any kind of music; IM says that the Frenchmen [i.e., Creoles of color] downtown, say at Economy Hall, demanded that a schottische be played at least once a dance; there would be prizes for the best schottische dance; IM says the good ones danced so gracefully that they could put a glass of water [one to a head] on their heads, dance and not spill a drop. *(20 min)* At midnight, the band would play a blues, and they would expect a fight [to break out among the dancers], *one want blues playing, which is in jump style and makes people feel good or "freakish"* IM doesn't know why the blues almost always precipitated a fight; people would begin screaming when the band played a "slow drag" blues, *the men would be affected the women more. TP* and begin fighting. IM says the only singers with the band then were people from the audience; the bandsmen were not concerned with singing. [Compare SM's records].

(page of below)
 IM played in only two parades when he lived in New Orleans; he worked a Labor Day parade with Sam Morgan and Chris Kelly, but vowed never to play again after they "let" him do all the work until a certain point (this was

during the period when the [Pythian?] Temple Roof Garden was in existence).

The other was a funeral ^(sic cf. above) in Algiers, with the drummer, Edgar Moseley (brother of "Bat" Moseley), "one of Howard's boys." [IM considered a funeral to be

a parade?]
Chris Kelly didn't go over along the Mississippi Gulf Coast during IM's time there; the ones who went over the most were "Fostair" and his brother, "Dude" [Lewis]. Sam Morgan "kept the Coast hot", before IM went there.

IM was first taken to Mississippi to play a job in Pascagoula with the band of John Handy's father, who played bass; Tom Albert, then living on Burgundy and [near] St. Peter [took him over?]. When that particular band could not take one job, IM was asked to get a band together, which he did, calling it the Young Sam Morgan Band; after that first job, they were launched as a band.

When IM first moved to New Orleans, in 1915, the trumpet players he most liked to hear were Joe Oliver and Manuel Perez; they were loud and could play, and where most brass bands used three trumpet players for a parade, those two could do all the playing in their brass band. Freddy Keppard was here, and IM heard him a couple of times, but he left town. (At WR's questioning, IM says,) Bunk Johnson left soon after IM arrived; IM says he didn't know Bunk, but when Bunk came back to New Orleans, with George Lewis in the band [c. 1942], Bunk knew IM. Oliver, Perez and Louis Armstrong were the three trumpet players IM knew most about and liked to hear the most. Oliver had a "tough" [i.e., good] dance band; Kid Ory was playing a lot, including picnics at which the Morgan [band also played?]. Ory had a good band; so did Jack Carey. IM tells of playing on advertising trucks, and about tying trucks [and wagons] together for "bucking" contests. IM "grabbed old Punch [Miller] one day, played some of Louis's [Armstrong] numbers ^{the}".

