

JOE JAMES

Reel I [of 2] --Digest--Retyped

November 25, 1961

Joe James began playing piano when he was about eighteen years of age; he played by ear at first, but then studied with Manuel Manetta. His first instrument was banjo, followed by guitar; he studied those with Professor [Dave] Perkins, who lived, JJ thinks, on Sixth Street [in New Orleans; cf. city directories.]. Perkins gave him lessons which were one or so hours in length for ^{fifty} 50 cents each; JJ learned to play chords on the banjo by watching Perkins' fingers; JJ later began "picking" [i.e., playing melodies?]. JJ always used a pick when playing banjo; he says playing the instrument without a pick is hard on the fingernails. He switched to piano when he decided he didn't want to carry an instrument or forget it any more, as he drank ~~alot~~. When he first began playing piano, he worked in dance halls in Walkertown [a section of Marrero -- RBA]. He is now ^{sixty} 60 years of age [in 1961], so BL figures he began playing piano too late to work in Storyville; JJ says he didn't know the men who played there. [Probably JJ never heard of Storyville, as it is usually called "the redlight district" or simply "the district" -- RBA].

JJ says more tunes were played in the old days, e.g., "Panama Rag", "High Society", "Doll Dance".

JJ first worked with Teddy [i.e., Elton Theodore?], as a duo; he later joined the Kid Thomas band, with whom he has been working ^{Twenty-five or twenty-six} for ~~25 or 26~~ years [check]. He played as far away from New Orleans as Texas, when he was younger; he no longer makes any tours. He plays at Preservation Hall two or three times a month.

JJ says no young musicians are learning to play Dixieland; he says it is hard to learn the style, as it is played in many

Betty Lee (Hanson)

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different keys; rock-and-roll is easy, because a person might play in the some key all night long, and that the music all sounds the same. JJ says his son plays rock-and-roll, but will begin playing Dixieland when he learns a little bit more of it. JJ says a musician has to work hard to really know how to play the ^{style} ~~strly~~ music he himself has played; he says a musician must play not to entertain himself, but to make the people listening like the music. He says that during his drinking days, when he was playing he was as happy as "the people on the floor" [i.e., the dancers]. He has become tired while playing music, but he is never tired now when playing.

End of JOE JAMES segment, Reel I

time off. GL got the first job through his father, separated from his mother; his father lived in Mandeville [across the lake from New Orleans]; GL joined the band there, with other young boys. His best recollection of that job was the money and the girls.

He didn't begin playing in marching groups until the beginning of World War I. Then he joined brass bands, such as the Pacific, the Tulane, the Eureka, the Original Tuxedo. He quit playing parades because of his legs. The parades might be anywhere in the New Orleans area.

All of GL's living five children are grown and have children of their own; GL has ten grandchildren. None of his children play music. He says the tradition of New Orleans music is being carried on in Europe. Bands playing true jazz in London outnumber the same kind of bands in America over ten to one. He tells of sitting in with a band in Stockholm, Sweden; none of the members were over fourteen years old, but they had followed [i.e. learned in the style of] some of the musicians from New Orleans. GL plays mostly concerts in Europe. Asked about the reception his music gets, he tells of being met at London's ^{Euston} ~~Euston~~ [sp?] Station by over 1,000 people, with brass bands in attendance. He says the people in London have all the types of jazz band, including brass bands, as there are in New Orleans.

End of GEORGE LEWIS segment, Reel I

Joseph Butler became interested in playing string bass when he held the instruments of older bassists at various functions. [He names various leaders (not bassists) Chris Kelly, Louis Armstrong, and Jack "Pie Eater" [Williams?]. He says his ability is "a gift from God." He began taking lessons from Pinchback [Tureaud], but Pinchback would put his hand [i.e., his fingering hand?] in positions JB didn't like, so JB quit taking the lessons. JB soon began playing in a band with a group of Xavier [University] students; he doesn't know how he got in it, but the others liked his playing. A few years after his few lessons, JB joined the Xavier band, led by Clyde Kerr; the band broadcasted over radio station WWL, and toured as far west as California.

JB's first [jazz?] band was the [Kid?] Thomas band, in the Jung Hotel. JB had bought a bass for \$1.50, from a bartender; he earned the money by doing odd jobs. JB went to the [Mississippi] Gulf Coast with Thomas; all but one of the strings^s broke, so he played two jobs with just one string.

JB says, "A bass is the/a foundation of a band."

JB says he has had some outside [i.e., jobs not associated with music] jobs, when music business was bad.

JB has been as far as Texas to play for \$1.25; he says he has often "taken a ham" [i.e., been poorly paid, or not at all].

JB tells of keeping time on a drum while [Henry] "Biffly" "Sonny" "Red" Allen [Jr.] played trumpet with [phonographic records?]. Allen's father would watch, and try to sneak up on them to punish them, as he didn't like the style of practicing. RA played in parades but was almost inaudible.

Kid Thomas, who is ^{sixty-five} ~~65~~ years old, began learning to play the trumpet when he was about ^{fifteen} ~~15~~ years old; he was soon playing at a dance hall, although he was able to play only ^{two three} ~~2~~ or ~~3~~ numbers; he played the numbers at varying tempos. KT, Edmond and Robert Hall [and others] organized a little band which played around their hometown of Reserve [Louisiana]; although their repertoire was very small, they worked three or four nights per week for one man. The band got a man [the druggist?, cf. other KT interviews] to buy them instruments; a druggist persuaded the band to call themselves Nile's Band, for a medicine he bottled for sale.

Edmond and Robert Hall left the band; KT's cousin, Lionel Thomas, left the band. Clarence Hall, who joined the band for a while on banjo, left the band. KT was last to leave. He then played with a band from Vacherie [Louisiana], which is across the river from Reserve. (KT's father [Pete Valentine] was in a brass band in Reserve.)

Then KT came to New Orleans, where he joined a band in Algiers replacing a trumpet player who had died from bad whisky. The band prospered, playing many kinds of jobs in many places.

KT's father approved of his taking up trumpet; KT's grandfather, however, didn't approve because of his religious beliefs, so KT practiced somewhere other than at home.

KT has never changed his style of playing.

William Russell says that as far as he is concerned, the word "jazz" was first applied to the music now called jazz in Chicago; he says the old musicians around New Orleans referred to the music as ragtime, or often just dance music, as it was the music played in the dance halls. As far as he has been able to discover, the type of music which is called jazz started in New Orleans, says WR.

WR says that probably at least half the jazz musicians, even the best ones, could read music; during the early days of jazz, from the 1890's on, more musicians could read than can today.

WR says there are theories that New Orleans music came from parade music, from blues, from work songs, etc.; he says a lot of it is European, although there is argument about the African influence on the music. He says there was definitely an African strain in it, certain elements which he has never encountered in European music. He says the African rhythms are not necessarily stronger than some of the European ones--e.g., Spanish. The harmonies in New Orleans music didn't seem to be as important as the melodies and the rhythms; the harmonies were simplified rather than elaborated, as is the tendency in European music. WR says the melody is always kept going in New Orleans music. WR says Kid Ory or Bud Scott of Mutt Carey told him that Buddy Bolden got all his music from the Baptist Church; Bolden would take two sisters, Nora and Dora Bass, one of whom he later married to church, and would come out swinging. WR says church music has changed very little, even compared to jazz; he says it has always had a good beat and melody.

WR says jazz may have influenced marches more than vice versa, although some marches, such as "High Society") have been used as dance pieces. WR says old-time New Orleans musicians will play marches at slower ^et_Ampos than other bands, such as high school band or bands not from the city; the t_Ampos will be more in keeping with a more leisurely way of living, and with the hotter climate.

WR says probably there will soon be no difference between music played by white bands and music played by ^{negro}~~new~~ro bands, as the place of origin for all will be New York, and probably Hollywood. He says that perhaps there is a little difference between the "pure jazz" played today by whites and that played by Negroes, but that they all probably played pretty much in the same style years ago. WR mentions the difficulty in knowing what to call different aspects of jazz; he says there are many names for the same thing, and many things for the same name. He mentions Al Rose's ambition to have on^e_A single definition adopted for [what he calls jazz--PRC]. WR says the beginnings of jazz with colored and white may have been pretty close together; he says colored organizations and white organizations both buried with music in the early days.

WR says bands which left New Orleans and stayed together for several months or more didn't lose the New Orleans style; if they broke up, or took in musicians from other places, their styles would change somewhat, depending on the other musicians. WR says Dr. [Edmond] Souchon claims [Joe "King"] Oliver's band was different in Chicago from New Orleans.

WR briefly explains the purposes of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz at Tulane.

WR says jazz existed before Storyville, and that bands were not used much in Storyville, even after 1910, when some bands were being used in dance halls.

Jazz bands were used for all occasions in the early days; they were hardly ever just listened to; there is less use of jazz bands today because of many reasons, e.g., radio, juke boxes, etc.

WR believes jazz originated in New Orleans because of the great number of early jazzmen who came from there; he says it appears ^{to} that no other city or section of the United States had anywhere near as many good and/or great musicians as New Orleans.

End of William Russell Segment, Reel II

Sandra Jaffe, in answering Betty Lee, says she and her husband, Allan Jaffe, didn't come to New Orleans with the idea of reviving New Orleans jazz; they did come with the hope of hearing a lot of it. The first New Orleans jazz they heard in New Orleans was about one month [May, 1961?] after they had arrived from Philadelphia [Pa.]; the Eureka Brass Band played at the Cabildo for The Friends of the Cabildo.

Allan Jaffe says Larry Borenstein had been having musicians play in his art gallery, for public donation, for at least 10 years prior to this time; William Russell had known a lot of the musicians who play at the place [Preservation Hall], and Grayson [Ken] Mills, a Californian, ^a had done a lot of the initial work of getting the place started. The Musicians were among those who had already played at the place before it was formally opened; the rest of the musicians came around after the opening. Jim Robinson, Kid Howard and George Lewis are mentioned; asked how he can get George Lewis to play at the place, AJ says Lewis is happy to play, as long as he can play with compatible musicians. Asked about the number of musicians now working, SJ says they used to rotate a band once a week, but now there are over 20 bands and over 160 musicians working; she says the musicians worked interchangeably at first, but they don't now, except as temporary replacements. SJ says the musicians organize themselves into bands, that the leaders are hired and told to bring a certain number of musicians; the Jaffes may have heard the musicians before or not. The styles range from the subdued, perhaps more sophisticated music of the Peter Bocage band to the rougher, perhaps more direct music of the Kid Thomas band.

The Jaffes have not found it necessary to tell a leader or a musician that they will no longer require his services. Discussion of customers' behavior....The place has been run according to union regulations; the president of the union [Local 496], Louis Cottrell[Jr.], is a fine musician himself, and frequently works at the place. So far, the place has been able to break even with kitty contributions; SJ says that if they can, they will continue in the same way, but if necessary, they will charge a definite admission price. BL states that both SJ and AJ work days. AJ says they must forget about their private lives. AJ says he doesn't feel like a crusader, that it is a privilege to be associated with the musicians. Asked about the crowds, SJ says they are growing, that there are repeats from local residents, that people from out-of-town are hearing by word-of-mouth and coming to listen. He hopes to have some people from France next year.

End of Reel II