

JOE MARES
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April 8, 1960

Also present: William Russell

Interview was conducted at the Southland [Records] Recording Studio [also Mares Brothers Furs], 520 St. Louis Street, New Orleans. WR remembers jam sessions which used to be held in the place; Joe Mares says that probably all the famous jazz men from out-of-town, as well as from New Orleans, have played and [perhaps] played in the studio at one time or another. JM points out photographs, on the wall, to WR: the New Orleans Rhythm Kings (JM's brother Paul Mares, was leader; JM thinks it was the greatest white band to play); Paul Mares; George Brunis; Leon Roppolo; then, a picture of Sharkey [Bonano]; Monk Hazel; [Irving] Fazola; Pete Fountain; Armand Hug; Raymond Burke; Santo Pecora. WR asks about a picture taken at Italian Hall in 1925; JM says the occasion was a benefit for "Battling" Barerre [spelling?]; in the band were Pecora, trombone; Roppolo, clarinet; Leo Adde, drums; Charlie Cordilla, tenor saxophone; Freddie Neumann, piano; ("Red" Long sometimes worked with the NORK, too).... The band was really good at that dance; most of the people listened instead of dancing; the band played almost anything the crowd wanted, including, of course, the old jazz standards. Continuing the photo tour--George Girard; Wingy Manone; Paul Barbarin; Louis Armstrong; Chink Martin; Abbie Brunies (drummer, nephew of trumpet player Abbie Brunies). Another picture of the NORK shows Jack Pettis, saxophone; Elmer Schoebel, piano; Roppolo; Paul Mares; Georg Brunis; Mel Stitzel, piano, also played a little with the band; this was the original, small group. Another photo shows Armstrong and his Hot Five; the [Bob Crosby] Bobcats, with Fazola, Eddie Miller, Ray Bauduc and Nappy Lamare, etc.

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JM thought New Orleans musicians and music deserved to be heard, so he founded Southland Records in 1953-54; he wanted to record the music of men like Raymond Burke, Harry Shields, Armand Hug, etc., men who didn't want to leave New Orleans for various reasons. To date, JM has released seventeen [LP] albums; reviews have been good. Alvin Alcorn got a job with Kid Ory, after Ory heard him on Southland. Pete Fountain got a break [with Lawrence Welk]. Al Hirt was first recorded on Southland [except for Horace Heidt's label]. Jack Delaney first recorded for Southland. Southland also has Johnny Wiggs, Sharkey, Pecora^a--"all the top boys around New Orleans." JM's only regret is that he didn't get to record Paul Mares, who died August 18, 1949.

JM was born around the neighborhood of Broad and Esplanade in 1908; Paul Mares was born in 1900, probably in March. JM's father played good trumpet, concert music, and performed at [places such as the] Tokyo Gardens at West End. Another brother of JM, Vic, two years younger than JM, was a good tenor saxophone player; he took lessons from [Charlie] Scaglione, a good tenor player [and clarinetist] in New Orleans in the Twenties. JM says Scaglione never played violin, that Roppolo was the one who started on violin [later switching to clarinet]. JM's family is of French (and Irish) ancestry, his father having been born about twenty-five miles from Paris, France. JM's sister played good piano, having been taught all the chords by Paul Mares; she is a year younger than JM. Vic quit playing saxophone. JM took up clarinet, studying with Roppolo, but he couldn't learn Roppolo's style because Roppolo couldn't tell him how he would make various licks, etc.;

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as he told "Herbs", [check spelling] his name for JM, he made them when he got to them, never playing the same thing twice. JM says Raymond Burke is the same way. Around 1925-26, JM went to Spring Hill College [Mobile, Alabama?]; before that, however, he took a trip to Chicago, where he heard King Oliver and other greats, including Johnny and Baby Dodds, Lee ^FDollins, the Austin High gang, Bix [Beiderbecke]--but at that time he did not appreciate the fact that he was hearing great jazz musicians. JM was not able to become good on the clarinet, so on the advice of Paul Mares, he quit; he didn't lose his interest in jazz, however. He never played professionally, but did sit in at the Halfway House with Abbie Brunies and Charlie Cordilla, and in Biloxi with Julian Laine, Abbie and Merritt Brunies; he played Albert system clarinet, and still has the clarinet Roppolo used when he made "She's Cryin' For Me Blues" and "Golden Leaf Strut"; the clarinet was JM's and Roppolo borrowed it and, he thinks, Harry Shields's mouthpiece.

Paul Mares's first instrument was trumpet; he could play piano some [later], but trumpet was his instrument; he learned by ear, and could not read except a little, near the end of his life. He was in the Marines during World War I; when he got out, in 1918, he went "up the line" [to Chicago]. The bands he played with around New Orleans were made up of the same people later in the New Orleans Rhythm Kings--Georg Brunies, Roppolo, etc. Paul is credited with forming the NORK; he was living in Chicago, at the home of Tommy Harrison, a policeman, whose sister was to become Paul's wife; Harrison, a friend of Mike Fritzel and Jacob, owners of the Friar's Inn and [later?] the Chez Paris, ^Gbig Chicago nightclub, told them New Orleans music was ^Abecoming a big attraction (the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and others,

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including Tom Brown, had been to Chicago already), and asked Fritzel to have Paul organize a band. Thus authorized, Paul sent for Brunis, whose train fare was paid by Paul's and JM's father; Brunis also borrowed JM's brother René's overcoat and carried his trombone in newspapers. At the same time, Roppolo, Emmett Hardy, and Santo Pecora were somewhere in Indiana, working for Bea Palmer, and not doing too well; Paul got Roppolo from that band. He then got Arnold "Deacon" Loyocano on bass, Elmer Schoebel on piano, and Frank Snyder on drums--this was the first NORK. Schoebel was later replaced on piano by Mel Stitzel, Steve Brown replaced Loyocano, Ben Pollack replaced Snyder, and Lew Black was added on banjo. JM tells about Jelly Roll Morton and the NORK; at the time, the NORK was about the most popular jazz band, while Morton was floating around; JRM was plugging tunes for Melrose Brothers [publishers] then. The Melroses advised JRM to see Paul Mares about his tunes, which he did; Paul liked "Mr. Jelly Lord" and "London Blues". The NORK was rehearsing for a recording date for Gennett, and JRM came to the rehearsal; there he wrote the introduction and verse of "Milenberg Joys", not the whole thing as some people credit him. JM says Paul, Roppolo, and Brunis were playing that tune years before, in New Orleans, as they were playing "Tin Roof Blues", sometimes credited to Richard M. Jones, who used a somewhat similar motif in his "Jazzin' Babies Blues." JRM played on the recording session with the NORK, probably the first session on which a mixed band was used.

Paul went to McDonogh Number Nine school and Aloysius [high school] in New Orleans; he had no music lessons at all. He played the lead, and could swing a band. WR says he heard him in the Thirties, in Chicago, at Paul's P and M barbeque joint, at a Monday night jam session. JM says all the top jazz musicians around Chicago would attend the sessions, and that Paul would send for his favorite drummer, Baby Dodds, and for Lee Collins.

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WR interviewed Paul in 1938, for the book, Jazzmen. Paul wasn't playing regularly then; his last regular job was at Harry's New York Bar in Chicago, in 1934. About a year before his death, Paul was authorized by the owner of Chicago's Blue Note [^{sup?}Franz Holzfiend] to organize a band out of New Orleans; he got Santo Pecora, trombone; Fazola, clarinet; Lester Bouchon, tenor sax; Paul, trumpet; George Wettling, drums; Jess Stacy [piano]; Pat Patterson [bass]. However, when he got back to Chicago, he didn't feel well, so the deal didn't materialize, and Paul finally died August 18, 1949.

Paul didn't play in any school bands; JM doesn't think there were many then. Paul's first instrument belonged to his father.

JM says he made the last recording of Papa Celestin, and the last of Tom Brown. JM didn't know Brown very well in the early years, but got to be a good friend in the last ten years of Brown's life. JM organized the first band Johnny St. Cyr ever fronted, as leader, for recording on Southland; JM got up a band for Tom Brown to front, as leader, for recording on Southland; Brown died three weeks after that session.

JM and WR talk about Mares Brothers's Furs, etc. Rene Mares works with JM; Vic Mares works at the Post Office. The business comes from JM's grandfather, and from his uncle, P. V. LaCoste, and from JM's father. Paul was in the business [before he began playing music?] and when the NORK broke up, in 1923-24 (Roppolo being ill and Brunis joining Ted Lewis), he came back to work in it. In 1925, Paul formed another NORK, the group which played at Italian Hall that year [see first part of reel]. Paul also later, 1930, opened the Chicago Barbeque, at Magnolia and Washington [~~S~~streets],

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operating that for a few years; JM remembers Louis Armstrong coming there to eat. JM tells of Paul Whiteman's orchestra coming to New Orleans, and of Beiderbecke, Frank Trumbauer and others, plus Monk Hazel, Armand Hug, etc., coming to the Mares's home in Metairie Ridge for a party and jam session. In 1932, Paul returned to Chicago; in 1934, he opened at Harry's New York Bar there, with the band which recorded for OKeh. Omer Simeon didn't work with Paul at Harry's; he played on the recording date, replacing Fazola, who couldn't be there; the date was arranged by Hoagy Carmichael. The regular front line was Santo Pecora, Paul, Boyce Brown (alto saxophone) [and Fazola?]; the others were Jess Stacy [piano], Pat Patterson [bass]....

End of Reel I

On the OKeh session [with Paul Mares, in 1934] was Jess Stacy, piano; JM says Paul recommended Stacy to Benny Goodman, Stacy's beginning with Goodman. JM says Goodman, then sixteen years old, played for Paul's wedding; Paul married Marie, a sister of Tom Harrison, a captain of police in Chicago. JM says the OKeh band was the only one working at the time that was free to play what it pleased, and than many musicians consider that jazz was brought back by that band; many musicians came to hear it.

JM describes the contents of the Southland studio, which is in the back part of the fur company. The Sharkey [Bonano] album, Southland LP 205 and the Monk Hazel album, Southland LP 217, were actually recorded in the Southland studio. LP 207 was recorded at the Woodmen of the World Hall [Urquhart and Franklin]. Eight or ten LP's have been recorded at [radio and television station] WDSU; later LP's have been recorded at Dan's Pier 600, 501 Bourbon Street [now Al Hirt's]. LP 200 (with Johnny Wiggs, Harry Shields, Tom Brown, et al) was recorded at the Legion Hall on Canal Boulevard, across from Lenfant's; the Basin Street Six wss playing at the Legion Hall at the time. JM says that session [#200] put him in business; he tried to sell it to several of the smaller record companies, but not being successful, decided he would have to issue it himself; the record got good reviews, and Southland was a going business. JM recorded George Girard and Jack Delaney; he recorded George Lewis at WDSU, which he says is one of the first times Lewis was ever recorded in a studio. JM also recorded some at radio stations WTPS and WSMB, moving to the various places to suit the sound of the individual bands. (Aside, answering WR, JM says Jack Delaney's father, who drives a cab for a few hours a day just to get out of the house, used to play alto saxophone; the elder Delaney is a retired fireman).

JM says ~~Papa~~ Celestin was kind and generous, well-liked; he was usually available to play for any benefits. Celestin turned down a lucrative session for Columbia to record for JM; it was the last thing he ever recorded. JM says "Down By The Riverside", the last tune cut, moved Celestin to tears. Celestin, who died in 1954, is still remembered, and still sells. JM says that in the years when many bands were leaving New Orleans [for greener pastures], Celestin remained, and became known, from generation to generation, as the man to get to play music for weddings, parties, etc.

The Tom Brown session was recorded at WDSU. All rehearsals are held at the Southland studio. Tom Brown was well-pleased with his session; he had presented JM with a list of rules about publicity, etc., but tore them up after he had talked with JM about them. JM says Brown had had experience with other recording companies, and that some recordings he thought should not be released had been released anyway, and he objected because he thought they would reflect on his ability. JM says Brown had a collapsed lung, and that he had to cut out Brown's last solo because he just couldn't make it.

JM talks about musicians he has brought back to public notice; Joe Capraro who was in the early Thirties "the only one [who] had a band around here" and Charlie Cordilla are two, and JM tells about recording them. JM tells of getting Emile Christian a band to front for a recording session; Christian played bass on most of the recording, but played trombone, with Bob Havens, on "I Lost My Heart in Dixieland" (originally recorded by the ODJB, of which Christian was a member at one time) and JM's tune, "Mardi Gras Parade."

JM grew up with deceased drummer, Abbie Brunies (nephew of Merritt, Abbie and Henry Brunies, and of Georg Brunis, et al); JM got him with Sharkey's band in 1952, and Abbie played with that group until he died [1954].

JM tells of how he started Lizzie Miles back on the comeback trail, having her on his disc jockey show, on a concert, getting her a job at Steve Valenti's Paddock Lounge, record dates, etc.

JM tells of taking Pete Fountain (who was not doing much at the time) to the West Coast in 1956, where his break with Lawrence Welk occurred.

JM made his first music-promoting trip to the West Coast in 1954; at the request of Frank Bull, JM got together a band consisting of Jack Delaney, Raymond Burke, Johnny St. Cyr and George Girard; they competed with eight bands and won.

JM names others he has recorded.

JM says that Si Girard [spelling?], who played alto saxophone, could have told WR a lot about the NORK members, but he died two years ago.

Paul Mares used mutes; his idol was King Oliver; he tried to copy Oliver.

JM says none of the musicians on the Gennett sessions remember details of the sessions, even to remembering who played on some of them. JM talks about some of the Gennett tunes and composers; he says "Farewell Blues" was composed on the bandstand at the Friars's Inn (where the Austin High gang would often come to listen; Beiderbecke was there every night, almost being thrown out for his persistence).

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The band played from 7 [PM] to 7 [AM] there. Roppolo found the tune when he was looking for a harmony to something Paul Mares was playing; it was first called "The Railroad Blues", because of the train effect in the bridge. Georg Brunis told WR it was made from the tune, "Weary Blues". JM says the band made up a lot of tunes, but that Elmer Schoebel, being the only one who could read, would write the tunes down and then claim them as his own. JM says he knows for a fact that Paul Mares wrote "I Never Knew What A Gal Could Do" (known also as "Zero" ^b [credited to Santo Pecora]), on which Schoebel has copyright.

The Victor [NORK] session, in 1925, was held in New Orleans. Santo Pecora, trombone on the session, and Roppolo, to play clarinet, had an argument; Roppolo left; Charlie Cordilla, to play tenor saxophone, had to play clarinet. Red Long played piano, and Leo Adde played drums.

The OKeh session was rehearsed at the Mares's home on Broad and Esplanade. JM says "Golden Leaf Strut", which is "Milenberg Joys" [without the introduction and verse], played in the key of C, was named for the cigarets that used to be made of marijuana and wrapped in yellow paper. They also recorded "She's Cryin' For Me Blues" and "I Never Knew What A Gal Could Do" and one other.

End of Reel II