

June 22, 1960

Also present: Richard B. Allen, William
Russell, Ralph Collins

[Interview recorded at 1722 New Orleans Street, New Orleans, La.]

Louis Isidore Barbarin is a son of Isidore John Barbarin. LB began by playing on chairs with forks. LB Got his first set of drums from his brother, Paul [Barbarin], who went to Chicago around 1916 to play with Manuel Perez at the Royal Garden. LB's first job was at a house party, playing drums with a pianist. He began sitting in with bands such as those of Sam Morgan and Kid Rena, and soon he was being hired by Morgan, Rena, Jack Carey, Kid Punch [Miller], and A. J. Piron. [Some of these?] bands were not organized [i.e.] did not have steady personnel [? RBA] LB played at Tom Anderson's place, in the red-light district [sic] on Rampart near Canal, in 1923. In the same year he joined a newly-organized band, the Imperial Serenaders, who went to work at the Victory Inn, on Jefferson Highway. Albert Snaer, leader of the band, also had a day job, which he decided to keep, rather than play at night, so Sidney Desvigne came from St. Louis, where he had been playing on the steamer Capital, to play trumpet in the band; the name of the band was then changed to [Sidney's?] Southern Syncopators. The band then played on the Capital, and on the Island Queen, [an excursion boat] of Cincinnati; LB began playing with Papa Celestin's band in 1937. During the 1940's he was once again with Desvigne's band. In 1947 LB went to New York [City] with Danny Barker, speculating on a job; LB joined a USO show, touring Japan, Manila and Okinawa; he returned to the U. S. in June, 1948, and joined Desvigne's band, remaining with him until 1950. Then he joined Celestin's band again,

playing at the Paddock [Lounge, Bourbon Street, New Orleans]; not liking the job, he quit and went into the El Morocco, with George Lewis, where he remained six months. When the job folded, LB went to the Famous Door, where he worked about three months; when that job folded, he rejoined Celestin, "and here I am."

LB was born October 24, 1902, at Columbus and St. Claude [Streets] in N. O. LB believes his brother Paul is about 62 years of age, [about five years older than LB--Cf. Paul Barbarin interview]. Another brother, William Barbarin, played trumpet with various bands for a while, but has given it up; still another brother, Lucien Barbarin, now dead, played drums with Billie and DeDe [Pierce]; he never took any lessons; he was two years younger than LB. Paul Barbarin was playing around N. O. long ^[before] LB took up drums; Paul helped LB to learn. LB studied with Cottrell for six or seven months, until Cottrell died. LB began studying drums when he was about 18 years old. Cottrell recorded with Piron in New York in [19]24, says RBA. Discussion of his lessons follows:

LB talks about the music he heard when quite young; he remembers hearing Louis Armstrong, still a resident of the Waif's Home, playing with the band from that place; when Armstrong was released, he joined the [Onward?] Brass Band, in which LB's father played. Some brass bands active at the time were the Onward, the Olympia and the Imperial. [See copy of LA's letter to LB. RBA]

LB's father practiced a lot at home; LB still has his melophone. The father's first instrument was cornet; he changed to alto [horn] and then to melophone. LB also played with the Onward Brass Band; some others in the band then: his fatehr; Manuel Perez; Ernest Trepagnier; Trepagnier played bass drum, LB played snare drum. LB scats in ET's bass drum style--discussion of drums and drumming in brass bands follows:

Some outstanding drummers playing when LB was young: Henry Martin, Red Dugas [sp?] (from the corner of Bienville or Iberville and Liberty, in the red light district), and "Black Benny" [Williams]. They played with various brass bands. Martin played snare drum in parades; Williams played bass drum; Dugas played snare drum; Martin and Dugas also played orchestra drums.

LB thinks his father didn't play with small dance groups, although he did play in brass bands playing for picnics and other such functions at which people danced. "King" Oliver is mentioned. Members of the Onward Brass Band: Isidore Barbarin; Manuel Perez [cornet and leader]; Ernest Trepagnier, bass drum; Eddie Cherrie, E flat clarinet; Adolph [LSP] Alexander [Jr.], alto sax; Alfred Williams, snare drum; Maurice Durand and Andrew Kimball (LB thinks), trumpets; ^YBuddy Johnson and his brother, Yank Johnson, trombones. There may have been less than three trumpets. LB thinks Eddie Jackson played tuba with the Onward. Adolph [LSP] Alexander, Sr. played baritone and euphonium in the Onward. RBA says Bill Matthews told him Alexander, Sr., was an arranger, also, who wrote for Celestin; LB agrees that he wrote music.

Another fine drummer was "Bebé" ^{[Nathan?] Matthews}, brother of Bill Matthews; Bebé, who once played with Manuel Perez, died a long time ago; ^[Remus or Ramos Matthews?] "[Brown] Happy" Matthews, another brother, died recently.

Talk of correct way to hold [snare] drum sticks; LB demonstrates, WR describes. RBA describes. LB used to teach at [Educational] Gateways. LB demonstrates and discusses various rolls, other drumming rudiments.

Participants inspect and describe Isidore Barbarin's melophone.
WR saw Isidore Barbarin play a couple of parades; he also made some
records with Bunk Johnson's Brass Band [for WR.]

End of Reel I

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[Many technical troubles during reel.] LB mentions men who played with Kid Rena, including clarinetist Zeb [Leneries] and [trombonist] Morris French; LB talked to French about three weeks ago in Reserve [Louisiana], and says French lives there or in LaPlace [Louisiana]. RBA mentions his nephew, Albert [French], and Punch [Miller]. LB sometimes substituted in Rena's band for Rena's brother, Joe Ren~~e~~ [sic], and French was in the band at the time; beside Rena [trumpet], French, Zeb and Joe Ren~~e~~, "Ti-boy," a banjo player, was in the band. LB says there were several "Ti-Boys", including [Dominique] Remy, who played trumpet in the Eureka Brass Band, and a bass played [Eddie Gilmore?]. The banjo player was brown-skinned, of medium height, and had big eyes.

Other clarinet players were Georgie Boyd, who played with
→ Punch's band, and Joe Watson, who played with Sam Morgan's [early] band.

When Zutty [Singleton] worked at the Elite, Mutt Carey played trumpet in the band; LB saw Carey use half an egg shell as a mute, in the manner of a plunger. Other [brass] players used Coca-Cola bottles, glasses and coconut instead of [manufactured] mutes. LB worked with Carey at the Elite after Zutty left. Zutty was considered a fine drummer; LB says he played all the shows at the Lyric Theater with [John] Robichaux's band. LB says Zutty is now a drummer at [Jimmy Ryan's?] in New York now. He [Louis Cottrell, Sr.?] was the only drummer LB saw around N. O. who had a collapsible drum.

The late "Little Willie" was the piano player on the first job LB ever played [see Reel I]. Another pianist, now in California, was "Little Red" [Cayou?], who also played house parties. Both pianists played by ear. Those days were better [for musicians] because there were more nightclubs and house parties and the red light

district was open.

Albert Snaer, trumpet player, was the leader of the Imperial Serenaders [see Reel I]; he [later] played with Claude Hopkins in N. Y. RBA thinks Snaer now lives in Connecticut, but LB thinks he has moved to California to live with his daughter and son, and that he plays in a Dixieland band there. Snaer at one time played on the steamer Capital. Snaer "was one of these wa-wa trumpet players." The Imperial Serenaders had bucking contests with Kid Rena's band on the street. [Some?] members of the Imperial Serenaders: Raymond Brown, trombone; LB, drums; Snaer, trumpet; George Augustine (now in California, he is the son of a former president of local [496 of the Musicians Union?], banjo; Wilhemina Bart, piano; Joe Rouzan (also in California now), sax [and clarinet]; August [Lanoix?], bass. LB's brother Lucien [Barbarin--see Reel I] also played with August.

LB also played with the Camellia Band; some members: Johnny Prudent ^{Prudence or Preudence?} [sp?] [who was also the leader?] and George Stewart, the latter a clarinetist who died in the [19]20's or 1930's. Stewart was a fine clarinetist, although LB doubts that he read music much. Prudent played bass. Albert "Fernandez" Walters, trumpet player now with LB [Albert French band?], says he played with the Camellia Band at one time. LB is reminded that "Wooden Joe" Nicholas played trumpet with the Camellia at one time; LB says Nicholas was the trumpet player in the band when he worked with them. Nicholas could read music, used mutes, could play softly, and could also play clarinet, although LB does remember hearing him on this instrument; he was an uncle of [clarinetist] Albert Nicholas. Joe Nicholas was a good parade trumpet player, too.

LB mentions Joe Petit; WR recorded him once. LB mentions Buddy Petit, Kid R^Ena and Rena's brother, Joe [René--sic]. LB played a few jobs with Buddy Petit, but not as a regular member of the band. LB's favorite trumpet players in N. O. were Buddy Petit and Kid Rena; he says Sharkey [Bonan~~no~~o] can tell about them, that Sharkey followed the bands, and heard them on street corners; Sharkey's playing embodies much of Rena's style; Sharkey is "the closest Dixieland man you have around [here]." Rena played in the high register of his instrument; Sharkey doesn't play so high. Buddy Petit played in the low register.

LB made one recording in the earlier days, with Albert Snaer and the Imperial Serenaders, same personnel listed earlier; the recording, for Columbia, was of the tune called ["Zosie"?], for Snaer's wife; it was never released. It was recorded about 1925 or 1926. LB describes the recording equipment; his saying horns were used instead of microphones places the recording in the pre-electrical recording period. *[Columbia's 1926 New Orleans recordings were electric.]*
[Machine off?]

LB describes the drum set he bought after the set given him by his brother, Paul [Barbarin--see Reel I]. He describes the set given him by Paul Barbarin. LB has had five sets of drums during his career; he now has a 22 inch bass drum, but thinks the tone of a larger bass drum is better. RBA mentions that Ed Blackwell has a very small bass drum. LB says a lot of modern drummers use modified tom-toms for bass drums.

LB learned drumming rudiments from [Louis] Cotrell ^t[Sr.].
Talk of drum practice pads, snare drum sticks.

Left-handed drummers LB has known are Alfred Williams and (reminded by WR) Clifford "Snags" Jones, who died in Chicago; LB says Jones, a fine drummer, played with Papa Celestin just before he left New Orleans. He was a fine show drummer.

LB didn't know Baby Dodds or the Hall brothers, Minor and Tubby. LB knows Zutty Singleton personally; Zutty gave LB his own job at the Elite; LB also played with John Robichaux, [replacing Singleton?] after Robichaux's band left the Lyric Theater engagement; when LB was in the band, they played on the steamer Susquehanna, which traveled on the lake between New Orleans and Madisonville. The Elite night club was on Iberville between Rampart and Burgundy; the Oasis night club was next door to the Elite. LB thinks the Budweiser, a [taxi] dance hall was later in the location of the Elite. The red light district was open when LB worked at the Elite; he would sometimes work in Tom Anderson's, substituting for his brother Paul; some others in the band were Willie Santiago, [g?] [as-cl?] Albert Nicholas, and Albany [Barney] Bigard [ts-cl?] (the latter now with Louis Armstrong). LB agrees with WR that Arnold Metoyer and Louis Russell were also in the band. The dancer at the place was Willie Jackson, who ^{was} accompanied on the piano by Udell [Wilson].
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End of Reel II