

August 3, 1964

Also present: Richard B. Allen, Barry Martyn,
George "Kid Sheik" Colar, Harold Dejan

(Interview recorded at home of Lionel Ferbos)

Lionel Ferbos was born July 17, 1911 [in New Orleans?]. His family was not musical. He was inspired to take up trumpet after hearing a women's band at a local theater. His first studied with [Paul] Chaligny, [Harold Dejan says Chaligny was one of the best teachers in New Orleans, that he charge 25¢ per lesson, and wrote his own music theory book for his pleasure in instructing students in New Orleans.] LF began his study on cornet, switching to trumpet two or three years later; he began taking lessons about 36 years ago [about 1928], when he was 16 or 17 years old. After studying with Chaligny about two years, LF studied with Albert Snaer, with Manuel Perez, and with Salvadore Castigliola. LF learned the rudiments of music, including theory and how to read music. The first band LF played with were the Starlight Serenaders; some of the personnel: Wilton Smith, sax; Clarence "Pappy" Ratliff, drums; Pete DePass, trumpet; [LF, trumpet]. (Barry Martyn mentions [drummer] Arnold DePass.) The band was five or six pieces. They played for house parties and were paid. They played choruses from written music. LF was with that band a year or two. LF next played with the Moonlight Serenaders, led by Sidney Cates [banjo?]. HD says the first Moonlight Serenaders comprised Hanry Cazenave [], Leo Dejan [trumpet], Cates, HD [alto sax], and ["Bazoo" ?]. ?

When they disbanded, Cates took over the name and reorganized the band; personnel: "Ti Boy" Briscoe, saxophone; "Bill" [] ? (who used to work at Krauss [Department Store], bass; Emile Maurice (now with [John] Brunious's band), drums; [Rico?], piano (Ashton Murray is mentioned; [perhaps he played piano with the band later]) Will White, trumpet; [LF, trumpet]; [Nace?--possibly Nate, for Nathan?] Fountain, trombone; Lee Rouzan, tenor sax; possibly Oscar

did play a few "head" arrangements. HD says LF would get the music for tunes requested if he didn't already have it; HD says LF could play a lot of "heads," but he would bring a lot of music on the job so he could put each number in front of him [as a reminder?]. LF says the Moonlight Serenaders "pinch hit" for the bands led by [A. J.] Piron and by Sidney Desvigne, playing the jobs they couldn't accommodate.

Trumpet players LF liked to hear: [Elmer] "Coo Coo" Talbert, Louis Dumaine, Maurice Durand (HD says Durand used to play in a cabaret called The Alley, adjacent to the St. Bernard Market [corner St. Bernard and North Claiborne], and Arnold Metoyer too [i.e., LF liked his playing, or he played in The Alley?] (Lf liked to hear him when he played at the Lyric Theater). LF says Manuel Perez was the first to use the "wa-wa" [or Harmon?] mute, that Henry Busse began using it later.

GC asks about LF's favorite street bands and the players in them. HD mentions Chris Kelly. LF says he couldn't [[] Kid Rena was such a small man to be such a good trumpet player. HD says Rena was called "Little Turk." HD says Don Redman, in New Orleans with his big band from New York, heard Rena's six-piece band, with HD, at the Gypsy Tea Room; Redman was amazed that Rena could play all night and never get tired. LF, then a small boy, heard Buddy Petit play in several parades. LF says Rena improvised quite a bit, but he had a clean way of playing; LF would have liked to have played like Rena, but can't say that he did because too many years have passed since he heard Rena, and his own style has changed quite a bit during his career. HD says LF's style is more like the styles of Manuel Perez and Arnold Metoyer, "you know, them great trumpet players." GC says, "It's more the music ability [i. e., being able to read, etc.]. HD says LF is in the class of HD's brother, Leo Dejan, and Perez, Metoyer,

Maurice Durand and Willie Pajaud. LF says another good trumpet player who worked with [Walter] Pichon when LF and HD were in Pichon's band was (named supplied by HD) [Allen?] Gardette; he was a good friend of Louis Dumaine. HD says Joe Bentley, recently out of the hospital, plays like Gardette, although Gardette was more powerful.

HD explains that Alex Bigard was steered to the job for Haydel at the Melody Inn by [Harold Peterson], of Peterson's Music Store. Bigard got LF, HD and George Guesnon and took the job. Haydel originally operated the place to sell sandwiches and drinks; when he added the band, he discontinued selling sandwiches after about two weeks, as business was good from the outset. The band played from 9 PM until 2 AM; at first they played on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights; then they added Wednesday, which was dropped shortly afterward. Guesnon remained with the band about one year; the rest of the band continued to play there for another two years, using "Daddy" [Frank Moliere] and [Earl] Wiggins at various times. The band played pop tunes, Dixieland, rumbas, tangos, etc., a request program. If the band didn't have a certain requested tune, LF would write out the music for that number so that they would have it the next week. Other musicians came to hear the band. RBA says he quit going there because he couldn't get near enough to hear the band because of the crowd.

Mr. Haydel became ill and sold the Melody Inn to one of his waiters, Tiny by name, who kept the place a while before he sold to someone else. HD says the someone else gave the music job there to John "Pick^ey" Brunious, who asked HD "about taking the job." HD says, "That's when we had went to the Happy Landing."

Guesnon, who played amplified guitar with the band, was replaced by [pianist] Frank "Daddy" Moliere, then at the Paddock Lounge,

who was replaced by Earl Wiggins, who was soon replaced by John "Smitty" Smith, who remained quite a while with the band.

The band was first called Bigard and Dejan's Band; it was later decided by Bigard to call it the Mighty Four. HD says the number called "victory Bounce" or [Bill Synigal's] "Second Line" was a feature of the Mighty Four which they would play for at least 30 minutes; HD "used to walk [on?] the bar and all around the tables and everything and while the band was still playing."

LF says the music he, HD, Bigard and Guesnon recorded [recently, for BM,] was the same, i. e., had the same sound and feeling, as the music the same group played when they were working at the Melody Inn, except that Guesnon played banjo on the recordings. HD says that while recording he "got a Melody Inn feeling."

Bigard was business manager of the band; LF and HD called the tunes and kicked off the tempos.

The band took fairly long breaks except when the place was very crowded; on their long breaks they would eat the food they had brought and cooked in the kitchen of the Melody Inn.

LF went back to play at the Happy Landing when he left the Melody Inn. HD, who also joined the band at the Happy Landing, returned to the Melody Inn with another band he got together, with John Brunious playing [trumpet]. At the Happy Landing, before joining the first Melody Inn band, LF worked with Israel Gorman [clarinet], Albert Jiles [drums], Eddie Dawson, bass, Herman Antoine [guitar]. When LF left the Melody Inn and returned to the Happy Landing, HD was in that band; when HD went back to the Melody Inn, Andrew Morgan [tenor sax?] replaced him. [Confusing on sequence of jobs. RBA]

LF's only recordings other than with HD for BM were done surreptitiously, [some at the Happy Landing?], some at Porter's

clothing store (HD says one tune done there was "Woman In Love," sung by John Smith); the recordings were done without the knowledge or consent of the musicians.

Prior to playing with the Mighty Four, LF worked quite a bit with Walter Pichon. He also played with John Handy's Louisiana Shakers; members at the time: Ricard [Alexis] second trumpet; LF, first trumpet; Morris French, trombone; Handy, the late Eddie Bottley, alto saxophones; George Clark, tenor sax; old man [Henry] Kimball, (Father of Narvin Kimball) bass; Roy Evans, drums (Evans had previously replaced Nolan "Shine" Williams in Sam Morgan's band); Benny (not Benny Turner), piano. Benny lived in Girttown [section around Broadway? See files], was tall and dark; LF says Benny worked with them also at the Entertainers [Cabaret]. HD says Kiefer [sp?] played at the Entertainers before LF did. Willie O'Connell, a guitar and banjo player who taught René Hall, was the leader when LF worked at the Entertainers. HD says O'Connell now lives in Biloxi [Mississippi]. In the band were: O'Connell, Benny on piano, Evans on drums, Son Johnson on alto sax, and LF, trumpet. HD says, "The great Son Johnson." LF says that when he played at the Club Forest and the Suburban Club [i. e., Garden?], men from big bands, including that of Abe Lyman, would write to other musicians to tell them to hear Son Johnson. GC comments on Johnson's clarinet playing. HD says Johnson played clarinet and piano, and was "one of the greatest alto players that ever put an alto into his mouth." GC says Johnson never smiled, but he was a nice fellow.

LF worked many places with HD, including the Popeye on Decatur [Street], and Moreau's at the lake.

LF worked with Johnson at the Entertainers sometime after he was with Handy; LF worked with Pichon playing a lengthy tour of

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Saenger theaters; tiring of that, he returned to New Orleans, where he immediately went to work at the Entertainers.

LF has taught a number of students in New Orleans. One of his students was [Carl] Blouin, who plays sax with the Royal Dukes of Rhythm; Blouin is Manuel [Crusto?]'s son-in-law.

End of Reel I

August 3, 1964 Also present: Richard B. Allen,
George "Kid Sheik" Colar

The last name of Lionel Charles Ferbos, Sr., is pronounced many different ways, but he prefers "Fairboss."

LF talks about the all-female orchestra he heard on the stage of the Orpheum Theater; the orchestra he heard on the stage was not from New Orleans, but traveled a theatrical circuit. LF says the trumpet players played with such ease that he decided he wanted to play trumpet.

LF says it was Phil Spitalny's All Girl Orchestra DM

LF says that to his knowledge Manuel Perez was the first [trumpet player] to use a "wa-wa" mute; after Perez went to Chicago, a lot of musicians began using the mute. Perez could "get off," [i. e., improvise]; He was a good street man, and could be heard above all the instruments in the street. He could play ratty or straight. LF was told that he worked in a theater band in Chicago. GC says he followed Perez and his Onward Brass Band when they played street jobs; Yank [Johnson, trombone] was also in the band.

LF has worked in quite a few parades with various brass bands, but he never liked the walking; he has played with Harold [Dejan], who has had several brass bands; he played in the Eureka Brass Band, with GC and [Willie] Pajaud; he played with the Eureka for Pajaud's funeral; he has played with Andrew Morgan and with Andrew Jefferson. His brass band activity has been probably in the last fifteen years.

LF began playing music before the [depths of the?] Depression; he worked in the W.P.A. Band all during the Depression. At that time there were very few casual jobs. He played at the Popeye with Harold Dejan before joining the W.P.A. Band. He says he was "newly married" when he played at the lake and also when he played at the Entertainers; he got married in 1934; he was playing with Walter Pichon when he got married. He was playing with [John]

Handy's Louisiana Shakers when the sale of beer was legalized [the Twenty-first Amendment, which repealed the Eighteenth Amendment, went into effect December 6, 1933--PRC]; they were working at a restaurant and beer place on Gravier between Carondelet and Baronne at the time. LF was playing in the W.P.A. Band at Jackson Barracks at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack [December 7, 1941]. GS adds that he was working at the Crescent Bag Company then. He went in the Army in 1942. LF played with the W.P.A. Band at the various military installations and functions, and for the USO. There were few jobs during World War II.

LF believes the trumpet should always carry the melody, or at least, have some of the melody involved, so that people will know what is being played. LF says that unless a band has a job which calls for playing only Dixieland, the band will be called on to play a variety of types of music, including rock-and-roll and Latin. He says he himself can imitate a variety of trumpet styles, but his own style is eclectic, as he has heard many trumpet players, including Bunny Berigan and Harry James, and his style has been influenced to some extent by all of them. LF says he has never tried to play like any other trumpet player, as some trumpet players do; he says players may copy Louis Armstrong, or Kid Rena, for example. GC says he will use something he hears if he likes it.

LF had some good jobs when working with Walter Pichon; he names some of the hotels and the better restaurants. He worked at all types of places with other bands. When he was with Handy, sometimes they wouldn't make any money; if they did make any, it was very little. Tips weren't large. GC says he worked at the Cadillac sometimes for \$3.00 a night, which was the equivalent of \$6.00 or \$7.00 today.

LF is sure he began playing at Haydel's Melody Inn after World War II; RBA visited New Orleans in 1945, while in the service, but probably didn't hear LF until 1950 or 19~~4~~⁵1; RBA moved to New Orleans in September, 1949. RBA first heard LF at Haydel's.

LF never worked with Fats Domino; GC says Domino worked with him, and with a lot of other bands; Domino's brother-in-law, Harrison Verrett (with whom LF has worked), took Domino around to play with the various bands.

Use of the band at the Melody Inn on Wednesday nights was discontinued after two or three weeks because there was no business; LF says Friday and Saturday nights at places like that are good, but even Sunday isn't good, because people have to go to work the next day. RBA says he has heard bands at the Harmony Inn on Wednesday nights; LF says he worked there years ago with Herbert Smith, a fine saxophone player who now operates a place at Johnson and Lapeyrouse; GC says Smith used to be a bartender for Mulé's, and that now he has his own place. LF says Smith worked for a long time at the Last Roundup during the Twenties; the place was on Bienville near Dauphine. Smith, who played alto saxophone, hasn't played in years.

The band at Haydel's originally consisted of Alex Bigard [drums and manager], Harold Dejan [alto sax], George Guesnon [amplified guitar], and LF [trumpet]; Guesnon was replaced by [Frank] "Daddy" [Moliere, piano], who was subsequently replaced by Earl Wiggins [piano], who was replaced by John Smith [piano]. The band played at the place two or three years.

When LF played with Walter Pichon, other trumpets in the band were [Allen] Gardette and Raymond "Clifford" Brown (son of Raymond Brown, trombone), GC says the father Brown was the father-in-law

of [Fred] "Achie" [Minor]. The trombonist in Pichon's band was from out-of-state, perhaps from Alabama. Saxophones were played by Theodore Purnell, George Clark, and for a time, [Eddie?] Bottley; Judge Riley played drums; Pichon was on piano; Chester Zardis played bass; "Achie" played guitar.

RBA mentions trombonist Nat Story, of St. Louis; LF met him when Story was playing for Fate Marable on the steamer Capital; he also met the King brothers, both trumpet players, who were also working with Marable then. LF is reminded that he himself took lessons from [trumpet player] Albert Snaer, who also worked on a boat with Fate Marable at one time.

GC asks about Joe Robichaux's band, when Baby Briscoe played with him; LF says Guichard played in that band then, too; GC says "his" brother said "one of them" [Al Guichard?] died recently.

LF worked off and on with "Big Foot Bill" [Phillips], who had a big band one time, but usually had five or six pieces. "Big Foot Bill" had most of the band once probably called the High Hatters, in which Raymond [Brown?] had played; some of the members of both those bands; Maurice Justin [spelling?], sax; Hypolite Francis, tenor sax. Francis was a good band man, although he wasn't much of a riff man [i. e., hot player?]. LF was with "Big Foot Bill's" band in the [19]30's.

LF worked with Joe Benoit; in the band: Benoit; drums; Father Al [Lewis]; Albert Warner's son, "Piccolo," sax; Albert Warner [trombone]; Herman Antoine [guitar?]. GC says "Piccolo" is now in California. The Benoit band was a Dixieland band. Benoit died about two months ago.

LF worked on the [steamer] Madisonville; in the band: Reuben McClendon, banjo; Sadie [Goodson], piano; Reuben [Hughes Jules?],

saxophone; Robert Davis, drums. Robert Davis was a brother of [pianist] Jimmy "King" Davis; Robert died. Robert worked for years at jitney dance halls, such as Vida and the Fern. The band on the Madisonville played to break the monotony of the trip, about an hour in length, LF thinks; the boat departed from West End and traveled to Mandville and Madisonville. GC worked on the Madisonville once; he says the boat remained across the lake for the weekend; LF can't remember whether the boat remained across the lake overnight or not.

LF says the band at neighborhood dance hall played three or four numbers and then took a five or eight minute break so that the proprietors could sell food and drinks; if the music was continuous the dancers would dance rather than buy the merchandise. RBA mentions that there were long breaks a set of only two numbers. GC mentions that Harrison Brazley, Pete Bocage, and Charlie Love played at Luthjen's at one time. LF says he played at Luthjen's when it was at the lake [but he sounds a bit uncertain that it was there? It may have been another place run by the same family or their relatives. RBA.]

LF worked occasionally with Emma [Barrett] years ago; he worked one job with her about two years ago. LF says he worked occasionally with many bands, with anyone who would hire him. LF played with [Oscar "papa"] Celestin when [Henri] "Kildee" [Holloway] and Herman Franklin [both trumpet players?] were in the band; Celestin wasn't playing trumpet then, but confined his duties to directing the band. LF worked from time to time with [A. J.] Piron and with Sidney Desvigne.

LF wrote big band arrangements for them when he was working with the Moonlight Serenaders. "Kildee" was a good arranger and a good

trumpet player. LF and GC agree that Herman Franklin was a fine man. RBA says Franklin told him he recorded with Jimmy Gunn and that one of his own tunes, "To My Levee Home," was used at the session. LF says Franklin was on the road for years; when he returned to New Orleans, he worked with Celestin and settled down into business until he died.

Other good arrangers: the man who wrote for the Sunny South band; Walter Pichon; Clyde Kerr [Sr.]; Manuel Crusto; John Brunious; Louis Dumaine. Dumaine wrote a lot arrangements of Dixieland music. GC says he has a Dumaine arrangement. LF says Dumaine also wrote down [i. e., arranged?] Scott Joplin music. LF played some Joplin music.

End of Reel II