

LEN MANNO
Reel I--Summary--Retyped
February 6, 1959

Those Present:
Richard B. Allen

[Recorded at Vieux Carre Music Shop.]

Leonard Wilbur Manno was born in Galveston, Texas, on Monday, July 5, 1915, "right after lunch." His father had a pawnshop at 2509 West Market [Street] in Galveston; just above it was a colored dance hall. They had dances every Saturday night and would bring in bands from all over the South, including Louis Armstrong and King Oliver. All of them would come in to the store to trade with his father. They would bring in their horns and hock them Monday morning, then take them back out Friday or Saturday. Sometimes they would come in during the week and ask if they could practice their horns a little. Manno's father had a good-sized room in the back where he and Len would listen to them practice. On Saturday afternoons they would ride on trucks and ballyhoo all through the colored district. Len, who must have been about six or seven years old at the time, was allowed to sit on top of the piano that was up in the front of the truck. This was the first music that he remembers hearing.

The next music Manno remembers was when Peck Kelly had Peck's Bad Boys: Jack Teagarden, Charlie Teagarden, Sammy Byrd, drummer, who was more or less local, well-known up and down the Gulf Coast in Galveston, Corpus Christi, and up and down the [Rio Grande] Valley.

Manno doesn't remember the men in King Oliver's band or Louis Armstrong's band. In those days even the name Louis Armstrong didn't mean too much to him. It was only in later years that he

realized to whom he had been listening; back in the early days, it was just another band there on Saturday night.

Manno's band, which he has back in Houston, is a famous French instrument, a [Gant ?]. He got it from Eugene Diehl [sp.?] who had bought it from Charlie Rittiner [sp.?] who had played in a theatre in various places, including New Orleans, and had moved to Houston for a while, then moved back to New Orleans-- Manno thinks Charlie died in New Orleans some ten, twelve, or fifteen years ago. Manno asked Charlie how some scars had gotten on the instrument, and Charlie explained to him that when he was playing jazz, in order to get a little zip to it, he would strike the bass with the bow. He was hitting on the bottom part of the bass, just below the F-holes, right in the front, on the belly. There are thousands of little marks there, where the flat tip of the bow had struck the bass. He wasn't playing a note, was just making a noise. The other musicians complained about him striking the bass with the bow and now playing bass, so they asked him if he could find a way to pick the bass and strike it with the bow at the same time. Charlie started picking the strings, and as he picked a string, he would strike the bass with the bow. In doing this, he found he was getting a slap and a snap on the string, too, so he put the bow down and just started pulling the strings. This got a much better effect. It was more in tempo and didn't seem to have too much effect on the bass note. He would slap free-hand-- that is, the hand was not set on any part of the instrument. "It

was strictly bringing the hand down and slapping the strings, and as you slap the strings you curl them under, and pick the string back up and pull it. You get a double action there. In other words, for each note that you play, you get a snap just before you play the note and a snap as you play the note." You hit it with the open hand, curl the fingers, and pull the string on the way out. The "curl" is just a slight amount of curvature in the fingers. Instead of pulling your hand straight out, you pull it back to you at an angle. If you pull straight out, your hand has a tendency to get under the string, and your hand won't come off the string. You have to pull it a way from you at an angle.

Manno has never heard of anyone using the knob which tightens the bow-string to pick with. Mr. Allen has just heard of someone who did this. This would be extremely awkward.

Antonio Bonuelles [sp.?] used to slap the bass with a rubber hose. He had quite an act, used to ride the bass as if it were a horse, whip it with a piece of garden hose about eighteen inches long. This was rather hard on the bass. He commercialized on the fact that he was from south of the border. He used to put on a big sombrero, put the bass across his knee like a guitar and slap it.

Charlie Rittiner played at a number of the different theatres in Houston as a pit man. In those days, if you played in the theatres, it was almost impossible to play anything else.

Manno has seen Leon Prima and Louis Prima, but does not know

them.

Bobby and Pat Decuir [sp.?] were well known through there; one played trombone, the other played trumpet. They both played real fine Dixie.

In the spring of 1937 Manno was hired as band manager for Don Irwin, who had a job at Baton Rouge at the Heidelberg. The man never did show up on the job. Manno was left with his library and a stack of bills about a foot high. The band was disintegrating. Wingy [Manone] came up and helped them put on a show so they could finish out the week. Last Manno heard of Don Irwin, he was tangled up with the law.

Louisiana boys in that band were Tommy Gonsoulin, trumpet, and Rome [sp.?] Landry. Gonsoulin, Landry, and Manone came from around Opelousas and Lafayette, Louisiana.

Almost all of Manno's work in the jazz field has been in Texas. He has travelled all over the country "concertizing," but not with jazz. The outstanding local musicians (in Galveston) included Fats Hawley. Fats played saxophone and clarinet, but he could pick up anything you threw at him and play it--he was a natural. He played in a style similar to Bix Beiderbecke's--he would take the tasty notes and simple rhythmical patterns and [play] them a little bit on the "dirty" side.

They also had a piano player named George Bouchon who played with Hawley. Mr. Allen mentions Lester Bouchon from New Orleans who plays tenor and clarinet, has been with Sharkey and the New

Orleans Rhythm Kings. There was another tenor man, Louis Thompson, who "played the dirtiest tenor you've ever heard, real fine. He had some of the most intricate rhythmical licks to go along with it; that really made him outstanding." These men [Bouchon and Thompson] were not businessmen, didn't know how to promote themselves, so they didn't go so far as they might have.

Peck Kelly is a sort of mystery man. He is very intelligent, has a high IQ, but he is an [EXTREME] introvert; nobody can get next to him, get any information out of him. He was one of the real pioneers in boogie-woogie. He has highly developed technique in his left hand and his right hand is even better. It may be stretching a point to call him the originator of boogie-woogie, but he probably had as much to do with the origin of it as anybody else. Something like that can't be attributed to any one man. Manno would guess Peck's age as about 55 now [in 1959.] His eyesight is failing now. Manno thinks he has glaucoma. Kelly can see light, and at certain times can see enough to read certain things. He still practices religiously every day, but is going almost entirely for "classical" music. He likes opera, symphony, ballet. He is particularly interested in contemporary works. Mr. Allen asks if Kelly explored extended harmonies, atonalism, various techniques from modern music when he was playing jazz. Manno says Kelly's playing was never influenced by anybody. Speaking from the viewpoint of a bass player, Manno says you could hardly find a bass note to match Kelly's chords; you would have to play

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the legitimate bass note to match and go with the normal routine of chords; it would sound right. But if you tried to follow Kelly's pattern, you would get lost. Kelly did what the "progressives" today do; he would take a chord and blow it up, leave out the fundamental part, keep the extended part. "If he was playing a C chord, heaven knows what notes he'd be playing because it would depend on how far he blew it up."

There is nobody around who plays like Kelly. Manno has listened to many musicians with tremendous reputations. They all have their niche in the history and progress of jazz. But the music has come a long way. While Manno thinks Peck Kelly was a very important pianist, there are some men today who probably play "more tasty things."

Manno didn't work with Peck regularly, but he was first substitute when the regular bass player took off.

Manno never heard of Len Harrell [sp.?], former pianist with Jimmy Joy, and a great Peck Kelly admirer. Harrell is now an executive with a date company.

The closest imitator of Kelly was a boy named Eddie Oliver. "There are a whole bunch of Eddie Olivers: there was an Eddie Oliver that was with the old Ben Bernie band and there was another Eddie Oliver over in Beaumont somewhere, but this one was from Houston--incidentally, he's in Chicago now. He played very much like Peck. He was influenced by Peck, but while he did play very

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much like him, there was only one Kelly. LIke all of these fellows, Peck was a character. He had his on nights and off nights, and he had more off nights than he had on nights. If he felt likē playing, he played, and nothing in creation would hold him back. But if he didn't want to play, money or anything else wouldn't make him play. It just depended on whether he wanted to."

Herman Vernon was originally a member of the Houston local [AF of M], a piano and fiddle man. He died in jail in New Orleans several weeks ago. They had known that Herman was a pretty heavy drinker, on marijuana, dope, everything. But he was a real talent, played fine jazz piano. and probably [would have ?] played the dirtiest hot fiddle of anyone Manno ever heard. [The violin does not lend itself ordinarily well to jazz,] but Herman sounded as if he were playing a horn. That's what made him so outstanding.

Manno remembers Doc Ross's band at the Rendezvous Club in Houston, out on South Main and Dryden [streets.] The club was closed up around 1936 or=1937. That was the last he heard of Doc. Mr. Allen asks about members of Doc's band. Felix [D'Agneau?] was guitar and banjo player; Richard Shannon played saxophone, clarinet, and xylophone: this was before the started using vibraphones; Howard Stratton played trombone. Mr. Allen says Howard Stratton plays around New Orleans, but he has never been able to find him because he's always been out on the road. Manno says Stratton is dead. Kit Reed [sp.?] played with Doc--Kit Reed is still playing, is a fine trumpet man, but a little dated.

He is of the vintage of Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, and Woody Herman, but hasn't kept up with the times as much as they have; is still playing the style of the middle nineteen-thirties.

Ray Potts was Doc's bass player. The last Manno heard of Ray, he was a bank teller in Memphis. Skipper [Treveathen ?] played piano with Doc. Skipper plays and sings the blues, has a fine style, individual, incorporates his own flavor into everything he does. Even if it's not blues, it still has the blues flavor. Doc himself was a drummer, but he hired a drummer to be on the stand whenever he wanted to get off. Manno believes Pat Quinn played drums for Doc at least some of the time, may not have been regular drummer.

Manno never heard of Sidney Arodin, clarinet player who wrote "Lazy River," who played around Texas some with Red Bolman, Charlie Cordilla, and a piano player from Texas, a good friend of Jack Teagarden's and a composer. Teagarden left this band and went to New York, had a hard time for a while, scuffling around New York. Cordilla told Mr. Allen about this. Cordilla is in New Orleans now, plays clarinet and saxophone.

Manno never heard of Troy Floyd, a colored band from San Antonio. Manno doesn't know of Don Albert's band, either, a band which Mr. Allen describes as being a big one, more or less on the style of Duke Ellington's [PRC notes that it was more like Fletcher Henderson's], and it had a lot of New Orleans players.

The only colored bands Manno knew were Cab Calloway's and Jimmy Lunceford's. Lunceford's bass player, Moses Allen, was Manno's

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student. The Lunceford band was originally a high school band; Lunceford was the band director. He organized them, and they were so good they became big time. They were all from the same school, originally. Later, he added others like Willie Smith and Chu Berry [PRC doesn't think Chu Berry was ever with Lunceford]. Moses Allen was one of the original members, from the same school with the others. Manno taught him after Moses became professional, around 1938 or 1939. Moses used to fly in to take a lesson; Jimmy Lunceford would finance it. Manno thought Jimmy Lunceford was a fine fellow.

Mr. Allen says he'd like a picture of Manno's bass and Manno seems to be agreeing as reel ends.

END OF REEL I

Esquire, 1945, mentioned Manno as being an outstanding bass player.

Mr. Allen returns to subject of bass Manno got from Charlie Rittiner. It is a half-size bass, made by Gann [sp.?), a violin maker of Mirecourt [sp.?), who states that the wood for this particular instrument came from the Vosges forest in France. The bass is scarred on the bottom part of the instrument, below the F-hole and to the side of the tail-piece, where Charlie Rittiner struck the bass with the bow as he picked.

Manno does not recall a colored piano player who worked around Galveston and Beaumont named Lazy Daddy [Henry Fillmore]. Mr. Allen says Edmond Hall told him about Lazy Daddy, who worked with Buddy Petit. Bunk Johnson also told about Lazy Daddy.

Manno remembers only two colored musicians in Galveston by name. One of them was Victor, a saxophone player who chauffeured for a wealthy family there. Victor left and got into the real big time. Manno does not know his last name--says it is like the story about "Cook Shop's Son" here in New Orleans, a legendary character; nobody knows him by any other name. [Mr. Allen is unsuccessful in attempt to find out where Manno heard of Cook Shop's Son, what he heard about him. Manno apparently just knows about name.]

Mr. Allen questions Manno about outstanding trumpet players he remembers. Manno says in Galveston, which with Houston, is the area he knows best, there was a trumpet player named Henry

Hayman [sp.?], now dead, who played real dirty style Dixie trumpet. He couldn't play anything pretty; everything he played "had that edge to it." They also had a boy named Art Geezie [sp.?] whose name really was Giesicke [sp.?], who played trumpet. He wasn't the trumpet player Henry Hayman was, but he is worth mentioning. "He left his mark down there on the Island [Galveston]. He played real fine." They also had a couple of fine trombone men down there, including George Hossenger [sp.?], who played Dixie trombone. He had a tendency to lean toward the pretty side, had a smooth, pretty tone, which is in direct contrast to what Manno likes for Dixie trombone--Manno likes to hear the trombone player sound "like a rusty gate opening." Hossenger had the ability to "team," to get with the other fellows rather than take off on a tangent. As Manno mentioned earlier, they had Fats Hawley and Louis Thompson. Marvin Molina [sp.?] was another one who played fine jazz. He had broken a finger; the finger was stiff. Molina had his clarinet specially built so he could operate it without closing the hole; he put a pyramid key with a pad on it. He played real fine jazz.

A fine Dixie-style drummer down there from way back was named Dominique Turminy [sp.?]. He didn't make history, but he was pretty good, real "tasty."

The king of them all in the Galveston bunch was a tuba player named Charlie Ott [sp.?]. Charlie is now running for mayor of Galveston. Played finest Dixie tuba Manno ever heard, better than Country Washburn and all that bunch you hear about that played so

fine. "Charlie would lose them the first eight bars. He played the dirtiest licks on the tuba that ever was." Country Washburn was a Texas boy, too.

Mr. Allen asks about piano players and banjo players. Manno goes back to George Bouchon [sp.??]. Jack Sharp was real popular down there, was one of the first Manno knew who became chord conscious, explored the possibilities of using harmonies other than straight major-minor augmented and occasionally a diminished and a seventh. Sharp got off on ninths and thirteenth~~s~~ths and all sorts of altered chords. He became stilted that way; it got to be a fetish with him; he was too busy experimenting to be an outstanding pianist. Manno thinks he may still be around, though he hasn't seen him for 15 to 20 years.

One of the first pianists Manno remembers around there was Albert Anderson, who played with the Seven Aces, Henry Hayman's outfit: Henry Hayman, the leader on trumpet; Albert Anderson on piano; Dominique Turminy on drums, Harry Rinari [sp?] on tuba-- Manno can't remember who played slarinet and trombone with this group [who would be seventh?].

In Houston, Manno recalls that Vic Encerillo [sp.?] was the toast of Houston for jazz

Kit had the ability to play trumpet with a pretty sound, but with a dirty feel with the rhythm that he uses. Played with the same ease and technique as Al Hirt, but does not play with the volume and command Al plays with. Kit's is an entirely different sound, soft and smooth; doesn't have that edge. Manno thinks Hirt is fabulous.

Later on, among the fellows who came in, was E. C. [Howard, sp.?], a tremendous first [trumpet] man, with tremendous tone and ability, plays good jazz. Another one who has been overlooked so far as his jazz playing is concerned is a draftsman, Neil Huart [sp.?]. Manno thinks Neil is the best Dixie trumpet player in Houston today, and has been for many years, but he is reserved and one does not hear much about him.

Mac McCorkerdale [sp.?] has the only real organized Dixie band in Houston right now. He plays real fine Dixie trumpet and sings.

Glenn Hughes, called Gosh Hughes, plays fine Dixie trombone. Another fine Dixie trombone player is Bill Cummins.

Manno says many people who claim to be playing tailgate trombone are actually playing the tuba part. "The real Dixie trombone. . . . plays as a team with the clarinet and trumpet, and lets [leaves] all the stuff that is so often called tailgate to the tuba." However, Manno doesn't claim to be an authority on this.

A new trombone player who has truned up in Houston, who plays mighty fine, is named Carnegie.

Dixie drummers are scarce in Houston; most of the drummers there have turned to fo r-beat. Even though many people claim Dixie was orifinally four-beat, Manno likes to think of it ~~ws~~ two-beat. Rome Landry is in Houston. Manno likes his playing. Landry is still using the same set of drums he played back in the Dixie [old] time, still using a cymbal with a spring on it. When he is playing Dixie he goes back and does everything as authentic as he can. He has a 16 or 18 inch Chinese crash cymbal with rivets in it, and also a small cymbal that he usually uses choked, but sometimes just goes ahead and hits it. This small one is probably ~~six~~, seven, or eight inches at the most. He's one of the better Dixie drummers.

Another boy Manno played with just a few weeks ago played fine Dixie. Manno thinks his name was Wade Kincaid.

Manno thinks what makes a drummer outstanding, in Dixie, "is his ability to play a rhythmical phrase to where you can tell where the phrase is. These drummers that try to be technical geniuses and see how many notes they can get in and not play a rhythmical pattern that you can tell where the phrase is, I don't consider those men Dixie drummers." Mr. Allen paraphrases this statement, "the drummer should have a sense of phrasing, meter, and all that, just like the trumpet player. . . . So he's playing a sort of counterpoint, in a way." Manno rephrases his allegation that "his rhythm should make musical sense, rather than to show what a technician he is. Where so many of the fellows that today

are playing so-called progressive, they completely get lost. In fact, you can sit over there and pat your foot and it might be fifteen bars, it might be nineteen bars and three-quarters, it never comes out even. All of a sudden he decides to hit a cymbal, and all the boys come in, but you can't pat it out. I think that a drummer above all people should stay in meter." This is all strictly Manno's own idea, not necessarily right.

Mr. Allen asks Manno if he knew any of the Casereses. Manno knew Emilio and Ernie. Emilio Casererer played fiddle; Ernie played saxophone and clarinet. Manno never worked with them. They were in San Antonio when he knew them. They played real fine. Emilio played mighty good jazz fiddle, but Herman Vernon was still "dirtier." Manno doesn't know what Herman Vernon was doing in New Orleans when he died; had completely lost track of him. Manno doubts that Vernon was ever recorded, regrets this.

KXYZ is a radio station in Houston, an ABC affiliate.

[Machine is turned off while Mr. Allen plays record, the KXYZ Novelty Band, playing "Bugle Call Rag" and "That's a Plenty."]
Manno says it is a wild guess, but it is possible that Peck Kelly is on the record. Manno promises to find out for sure and get complete personnel when he returns to Houston Monday.

Manno says KXYZ never did have a staff band. There were two bands that played up there: one was a band used to advertise used to advertise one of the music stores there; the other one was a hillbilly band. But there was a short time when Peck Kelly

played up there. A number of outfits wanted to get Kelly to record, and Manno believes Peck did make a record, which was taken off the market; there are only a few copies extant.

Russ Waite also thought it sounded like Peck Kelly.

"Right now Houston is going through a tremendous fever of progressive boys that completely turn their back on two-beat, and of course those that do use two-beat, like Shep Fields and Henry King . . . the hotel bands, it doesn't approach Dixie. I play with both of those bands, and they do have certain Dixie tunes that they feature several times a night, and they let the boys blow. They don't say 'Hold it down,' or 'Stick a mute in the horn' or something like that, they let them go."

But about the only men who played real Dixie were Benny Bell, Vic Encerillo, Kit Reed, Richard Shannon, Felix Stagno, Ray Potts, Dusty Hyams (a guitarist), Jack Riggs (another guitarist). There were others who floated in and out, but were not local musicians. Outstanding among these were Austin Little, saxophone, and Curley Austin, drums, and Miff Moyer [sp.?], clarinet.

Manno hasn't had time to think through all of the Houston musicians and such. He'll be able to tell more at another time.

END OF REEL II