

SING MILLER  
Reel I  
January 17, 1971

*Also present: Mona MacMurray,  
Kid Shiek Colar*

[Mona MacMurray:] Today is January 17. We are at 1433 Dauphine,  
home of Mona MacMurray. We have Sing Miller and Kid Shiek<sup>[Colar]</sup> here.  
We've just been making some tapes of some of Sing's records, and  
now we'd like to talk a little bit about Sing's life history.

When were you born Sing?

[Sing Miller:] June 17, 1913,

[Mona:] Where?

[Sing:] 1243 [Blind ?] Or-else I was born in [ ] in  
the middle of the block. (laughter)

[Mona:] You still see it?

[Sing:] [See it every other week ?]

[Mona:] Where did you go to school first?

[Sing:] I went to [Ludwig ?] school. (coughs)

[Mona:] Where was that?

[Sing:] Washington and Dryades.

[Mona:] Was that where you started first grade there?

[Sing:] I started first grade at ~~this~~ Mary Steele. My school  
teacher still living.

[Mona:] Who is it--was that a--

[Sing:] Mary Steele

[Mona:] Special school or what?

[Sing:] A special school. [A house school-- ?]

[Mona:] Oh

[Sing:] [A house school. Wasn't no regular gentleman. A house  
school ?]

[Mona:] And how long did you go to school? To what grade?

[Sing:] I went as far as tenth grade.

[Mona:] Tenth grade. And then what did you do?

[Sing:] I started playing music. I took lessons from Professor [C. Foster] Victor. My mother used to give me fifteen cents and I'd buy apples on a stick, give him a dime. (laughter)

[Mona:] How old were you when you first started playing the piano?

[Sing:] It was around 1929.

[Mona:] You were about fourteen?

[Sing:] Something like that.

[Mona:] Where did you get your first piano?

[Sing:] Mother bought a piano for about ten dollars. (laugh)

[Mona:] Yeah? Where did she get a piano for ten dollars?

[Sing:] During them times people was throwing <sup>them</sup> away--

[Mona:] *He, they would.*

[Sing:] I used to be a two-finger piano player.

[Mona:] You just started banging?

[Sing:] Yeah. Banging by myself. Always could play the blues.

[Mona:] You just started picking it up?

[Sing:] Picked it <sup>myself</sup> myself.

[Mona:] Then how did you meet this Victor where you started taking lessons?

[Miller:] When I went to Lafon school.

[MacMurray:] You met him?

[Miller:] Yeah. He was a school teacher. He played everything.

[Macmurray:] What, he taught piano or he just played--

[Miller:] He taught piano, saxophone, trumpets.

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[MacMurray:] Well, how did you come to decide you were going to take lessons from him?

[Miller:] Everybody else was doing something, I wanted to do something, too.

[MacMurray:] (laugh) And where were you working when you started to work--what was your first job?

[Miller:] My first job was a dishwasher, washing dishes.

[MacMurray:] And where was that?

[Miller:] Dollar and a half a week.

[MacMurray:] Wow! (laugh)

[Miller:] At Manale's restaurant.

[MacMurray:] Oh, Manale's, here?

[Miller:] Manale's

[MacMurray:] Manale's is still operating.

[Miller:] Manale's still--All the Manale's dead [ ?] but Pascal.

[MacMurray:] And when was that, do you remember?

[Miller:] Oh, 19--'bout 1932, something like that.

[MacMurray:] Fine, and how long did you work there?

[Miller:] I worked there till prohibition was over. And when prohibition was over, I delivered the first bottle of beer.

[MacMurray:] You did?

[Miller:] Dixie beer

[MacMurray:] The first bottle--You--

[Miller:] I delivered the first bottle of beer in the city.

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[MacMurray:] How did that come about? What was your--

[Miller:] That's how the first person delivered it.

[MacMurray:] You mean you got--had a job driving delivery--

[Miller:] Riding a bicycle.

[MacMurray:] Oh, you rode a bicycle.

[Miller:] Couldn't get on a bicycle. Had to get on the curbs to go on a bicycle. Legs too short.

[MacMurray:] Ah. (laugh) Where did you manage to [run ?]--what you delivered beer, just beer, or--

[Miller:] Beer and oysters. Oysters on a tray.

[MacMurray:] Oh. Well what company were you working for then?

[Miller:] It was the restaurant.

[MacMurray:] You still say Manale's, too? Oh, you were promoted from dishwasher to deliveryboy.

[Miller:] Right.

[MacMurray:] And then you delivered beer.

[Miller:] ~~One~~ dollar and a half, three meals a day

[MacMurray:] Dollar and a half and--

[Miller:] All I could eat, all I could [steal ?] (laughter)

[MacMurray:] Ah, and how long altogether did you work for Manale's?

[Miller:] 'Bout four years.

[MacMurray:] And then where did you work?

[Miller:] I worked at [Meissler's ?] drugstore.

[MacMurray:] What did you do there?

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[Miller:] Delivery boy.

[MacMurray:] Delivery boy. And how long did you work there?

[Miller:] I worked at <sup>[from 1/18/54]</sup> [Meissler's ?] twelve years.

[MacMurray:] Twelve years. Wow!

[Miller:] Twelve years. I seen all his children raised up.

~~[MacMurray:] Ah ha~~

[Miller:] [ ?] Four  
dollars a week.

[MacMurray:] (laugh)

Then you could live high.

[Miller:] Four dollars. And you get the ice-cream free. Everyday.

[MacMurray:] Everyday you get all the ice-cream you want.

[Miller:] (laugh) All I could eat.

[MacMurray:] When did you get married, Sing?

[Miller:] I been married in '34.

[MacMurray:] And what were you working at for a living when you got  
married?

[Miller:] At the drugstore.

[MacMurray:] You're still working at the drugstore--You got  
married on the four dollars a week?

[Miller:] Only four dollars a week. I was paying sixty cents a  
week and I couldn't pay that.

[MacMurray:] Sixty cents a week.

[Miller:] The landlord come on Saturdays for the rent. I give him  
fifty cents, ~~and~~ say I owe you a dime. (laughter)

[MacMurray:] Fifty cents a week. Where were you living then?

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[Miller:] I was living on <sup>Water</sup> Washington street.

[MacMurray:] And the rent was sixty cents a week.

[Miller:] Constantinople and <sup>Water</sup> Washington. Yeah.

[MacMurray:] Yeah?

[Miller:] 4033 Water street.

[MacMurray:] And what kind of a place did you have?

[Miller:] I had one room. Cook, eat and everything else in that one room. (laughter) Had my clothes in the egg box. (laughter) Train passed by, would stop, ?] would unload it in my yard. That's how I kept my family warm.

[MacMurray:] Oh. You mean they just dropped coal in the yard.

[Miller:] No the [car ?] the [car ?] box passed by. I get up ? ] throw coal in my yard. (laughter)

[MacMurray:] And how long did you live there at that sixty cents place you paid fifty cents for?

[Miller:] Stayed there till my first child was born.

[MacMurray:] And when was that?

[Miller:] He was born in the last part of March--March 8, 1934.

[MacMurray:] And then where did you move to?

[Miller:] Moved to another house, two dollars a week.

[MacMurray:] Oh, that was high rent.

[Miller:] That was room and kitchen--two dollars a week. Landlord put me out--made too much noise.

[MacMurray:] (laugh) What, playing the piano? He didn't like to hear you practice?

[Miller:] No. Neighbors complained about me.

[MacMurray:] What for practicing or just playing?

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[Miller:] Practicing.

[MacMurray:] In the meantime while all this was going on, where you just playing music on the side?

[Miller:] Yeah.

[MacMurray:] Where did you play?

[Miller:] My first job was at OK bar on LaSalle and Seventh. Made sixty cents.

[MacMurray:] Who did you play with?

[Miller:] I played with the Hickman brothers, [John Brouge, Julius Simpson ?], Buddy Charles, and around 1941 I met [Kid] Shiek [Colar] at the Cotton Club.

[MacMurray:] And this first job was it a dance or--

[Miller:] No, it was speakeasy.

[MacMurray:] <sup>at all,</sup> And you just sat there and played?

[Miller:] Sat and played.

[MacMurray:] What did you make there, just tips or did you get paid?

[Miller:] No tips. Wasn't no tips. Sixty cents was what you made. Hot dog man was ~~waiting~~ <sup>waiting</sup> on the outside waiting for you to buy hot dog. Out there.

[MacMurray:] (laugh) How much did he charge you for a hot dog?

[Miller:] Fifteen cents for hot dog.

[MacMurray:] Why, it took a whole quarter of your night's pay.

[Miller:] Right. And you needed two hot dogs to get full so I go on my thirty cents. (laughter)

[MacMurray:] Then where did you play after that?

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[Miller:] After that I went out there by Mama Lou ['s] with Clayton. Out by the Bakefront.. Kid Clayton.

[MacMurray:] And what year was that, do you remember?

[Miller:] That was during--I was in Milneburg you know--that was around '37, '38.

[MacMurray:] And when did you meet Sheik?

[Miller:] In '41.

[MacMurray:] What you met him on a job?

[Miller:] No I played with Sheik in '41. Cotton Club.

[MacMurray:] What did you play there?

[Miller:] [What Sheik made albums in New Orleans in public, playing saxophone music ?]

[MacMurray:] And who else was playing?

[Colar:]

[MacMurray:] You had so many different ones. And how much did you get paid there?

[Colar:] I forget.

[Miller:] Sometimes you wouldn't get nothing. (laughter) Man say you "see for yourself."

[MacMurray:] Oh, in other words, you were supposed to try to get what tips you could get?

[Colar:] No, if he ain't made nothing--

[Miller:] --You couldn't get nothing.

[MacMurray:] Oh, it depends on what he made. Oh, I see--"you see for yourself"--there's nobody here?

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[Miller:] Yeah.

[MacMurray:] Well, how long did you play together at the Cotton club?

[Colar:] A little while. [ ?]

[Miller:] After I left Sheik , I went down there by the Big Apple. Started playing with George Guesnor.

[MacMurray:] And how long did you play there?

[Miller:] I was down there about two or three months. That was a [ ?]

[MacMurray:] And who else played in that band? You don't remember?

[Miller:] I know Julius Simpson played drum. I know it. Tony [Fongerat ?] played trumpet. Then I started with Earl Foster.

[MacMurray:] When was that?

[Miller:] I started with him at the Carnival Club on on Dryades Street. His wife used to come in and bring us red beans and rice at night.

[MacMurray:] To feed the band?

[Miller:] And she'd play the drums while he ate. (laughter)

[MacMurray:] Oh, she'd bring his dinner?

[Miller:] Yeah. You had to bring your dinner on the job. You had to bring two shirts.

[MacMurray:] Bring two shirts?

[Miller:] You sweat, yeah.

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[MacMurray:] Oh. (laugh) And she'd--was she a good drummer?

[Miller:] Yeah, she played nice drums. She played real nice drums. She played time. Well, during that time Joe (Ben) was playing trumpet there. He was a nice trumpet player. [RESTRICT: Joe [Ben ?] was using dope and every time he'd go on a job, he's falling off with dope [ ?] I never seen Joe in all my life. Never, and Joe was a good man.]

[MacMurray:] And when did he die?

[Miller:] He's living.

[MacMurray:] He's still living? What's he do?

[Colar:]

[Miller:] He come down by Presevation Hall sometimes.

[Colar:] Yeah. [Out on the week. This week. He was passing out hand ?]

[Miller:] He was working at First and Daneel--for drinks.

[MacMurray:] Well, he doesn't play music anymore?

[Miller:] No.

[Colar:]

[MacMurray:] Yeah, that's right. I remember. We were walking through the hall and he just walked by and handed me this paper. Well then, Sing, what are you doing now for a living. I mean--(laugh)--you do--alot of carpentry--

(1:57) [Miller:] I'm a cement fixer