

ROY CAREW

June 21, 1961

Reel I of 2--Digest--Retype

*Track 1*  
Also present: John Steiner, George Kaye.

✓ This interview was conducted by John Steiner and George Kaye at Roy Carew's home, 818 Quintana Street, Washington, D. C.

Carew's paternal grandfather, originally from ~~Somerset~~ *Somerset* shire England, emigrated to Nova Scotia, then to Ontario, Canada; several years before 1880, Carew's father settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Carew was born December 15, 1883. Carew went to New York City about 1900, where he lived and worked for a "season;" he then went back to Michigan, where he remained until 1904. In that year, he went to visit his maternal grandparents, who were living in Mississippi City [Mississippi] at the time; he was there until September of the same year, when he went to New Orleans. He went to work on Labor Day, 1904, for the New Orleans Acid and Fertilizer Company (a branch of the Union Oil Company), and worked at that company's plant in Gretna for two years. As he waited in the company offices in the Hibernia Bank building to be taken across the river to his new job, he heard music coming from Carondelet Street. Several bands were playing in the Negro Labor Day celebration parade; this was Carew's first exposure to New Orleans music, and he remarks that it was lively and good marching music. Carew says he knew nothing about the musicians in those bands, but as people now talk so much about Buddy Bolden being on the scene then, he chooses to think Bolden and his band were in the 1904

parade. He first heard "little blues tunes" in Gretna, where scraps of various blues tunes, mostly ribald, were sung by the white office boy, about 13 years old. Two of the scraps later went into the song, "Hesitation Blues," and a variant of another fragment later went into Jelly Roll Morton's "Buddy Bolden's Blues." The boy sang, "Thought I heard Miss Suzie shout, open up the window and let the breeze blow out." Carew says the boy had a lot of them, and that he must have gotten them from his older brothers, who "were a hot bunch around there." Across from the fertilizer plant was the Chickasaw Cooperage Company, whose bookkeeper, R. Emmet Kennedy, lived in a little house close by. Kennedy was also a musician, and a bachelor; he had a piano in his house, and it was his hobby to have Negroes who worked in the cooperage plant and who had some songs to come to his house and render the songs. Kennedy would then pick up their songs and play them on the piano; he arranged a couple of books of what he called "mellows." Carew says Kennedy arranged the first complete blues (perhaps not much of a real blues tune, but complete), which was called "Honey Baby." The words and music were later published by Kennedy in a book called "Mellows" (In Archive). Kennedy gave a concert in Algiers in 1906; he played instrumental music and accompanied his niece, who sang "Honey Baby," among others. Carew had heard the office boy sing fragments of the same tune in 1904-05, but he first heard the entire thing at the 1906 concert. He says it

ROY CAREW  
June 21, 1961  
Reel I of 2--Digest--Retype

3

was the first time he had heard a [whole] blues tune. He later wrote to Kennedy, then in New York, to ask him how old the tune was; Kennedy replied that he had arranged it several years prior to the 1906 concert. Carew speculates that it must have been arranged at least as early as 1903. The tune had "blue" notes in it, although it did not stay strictly in the 12-bar blues tradition. Kennedy arranged it with the help of his Negro man-servant.

In response to a question, Carew says he did not know Baby Seals, a vaudeville performer, but he knows about "Baby Seals Blues," the verse of which falls into the 12-bar blues pattern. Seals had published in New Orleans, in about 1910, a blues song called "You Got to Shake, Rattle and Roll or My Money Ain't Gwine," and the "Baby Seals Blues" [See W. C. Handy, A Treasury of the Blues, p. 180] was published in Missouri a little later; Carew says the former contains a verbal phrase or two which were indigenous to New Orleans, so Seals must have been influenced by New Orleans music.

Carew says Kennedy played a couple of piano pieces [at the 1906 concert] which contained blues strains, but he does not remember what they were.

When Carew was young, in Michigan, he was given lessons on the organ, but he didn't take to it. The family later got a piano, and Carew would fool around with it, picking out tunes that he liked, but he never took much to lessons. Carew, as well as three piano-

June 21, 1961

Reel I of 2--Digest--Retype

playing sisters, bought popular sheet music. There was a copy of "Mississippi Rag," the first rag ever published, around the house, as well as other ragtime pieces.

Carew's father, Robert Carew, who ran a shoe store in Grand Rapids, was also a violinist, playing popular dance music at his home. Carew's mother's maiden name was Carolyn Rosalie Johnson. The Carew family had music at their house, played by themselves, and looked on music as their entertainment. The Carews also danced at home, especially the quadrille, to the music of the father's violin; they even had a canvas cover for the parlor rug. The family were quite taken by "ragtime coon songs" and bought many of them to play. They had no mechanical music at home. There was a popular summer resort near Grand Rapids. Ramona, and good vaudeville acts appeared there; if the Carews heard a tune they liked, they would buy the music for it. Carew also bought music when he was in New York. Carew didn't hear any ragtime pianists in New York, although he went to several of the vaudeville houses there; he was "strong on vaudeville," and it was his intention to work up an acrobatic act and become a performer in vaudeville. He worked two winters [six months each time] in New York, 1901-02 and 1903-04, then went back to Michigan and eventually to Mississippi and New Orleans.

Carew then talks briefly about the various kinds of acts and presentations in vaudeville; he says that he himself became proficient as an acrobat, but that he never got into the business.

ROY CAREW  
June 21, 1961  
Reel I of 2--Digest--Retype

5

His practice partner, Harry Drew, went on to become a well-known acrobat, but died in California about 1921.

Carew says the travelling minstrel shows he saw in New Orleans, especially at the Crescent and Tulane theaters and as early as 1904 (He had seen minstrel shows in Michigan [and New York?] prior to that date.) always had good, hot music, and that trombones were especially popular. Steiner comments on the number of musicians that a minstrel show had, including the brass marching band and the pit orchestra. Carew says that the trade magazines of the period, particularly the "Clipper," were always full of advertisements wanting actors "who can double in brass." He says those actors would be part of the marching band, and then they would be part of the stage show in the theater, while the rest of the musicians comprised the pit orchestra.

Carew doesn't remember any street singers per se, but he recalls that there were vendors who had street songs to advertise their wares. He then tells a story about a blackberry vendor, who had a very strong voice. Steiner says that in the [19]20's Paramount [Recording Company] issued a recording of street cries, including a blackberry cry, and recently Harry Belafonte has recorded a song incorporating the blackberry cry into it. He goes on to say that it is said the song "Peanut Vendor" came from the cry of an actual vendor. He further says that in Chicago there have been street

singers around, and that there are still some around Halstead Street. Carew says he remembers that a truck would sometimes park at Canal and Rampart and that a Negro would sing with "a couple of pieces of music" from the truck, but he does not recall any wandering street singers.

Carew never met Clarence Williams and [A. J.] Piron of the New Orleans publishing house, but a messenger at the customs house in New Orleans, where Carew worked in 1916 and 1917 would sometimes bring Carew sheet music published by that firm. Carew agrees that the Piron and Williams were early in publishing "Negro" music, but that any music stores in New Orleans published music. He says Baby Seals' "You Got to Shake," etc., was published by Grunewald, and that he himself asked D. H. Holmes company to publish his "The Full Moon Rag," but Holmes was not publishing anything just then, so Carew was sent to John Puderer [sp?], who published it in 1909. It has never been recorded. Kaye says that another Carew tune, "Basin Street Stroller," was recorded by [Don] Fowler, in Portland, Oregon, but Carew says he thinks not. Kaye and Steiner and Carew agree that Fowler and his band did record a couple of Carew's later rags, but [probably] only for private use. Kaye says that Fowler is the person who organized the re-creation of the style of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and his band recorded some of those re-creations for ABC-Paramount.

ROY CAREW

June 21, 1961

Reel I of 2--Digest--Retype

7

Carew has never actually been in the music business except as a sideline; he has never played with a professional group of musicians. He "just fooled with the piano [and] got to playing fairly well; it was mostly for my own amusement. . . ."

End of Reel I

ROY CAREW

June 21, 1961

Reel II of 2--Digest--Retype

8

Also Present: John Steiner, George Kaye.

Steiner says that those present were talking about Carew's acquaintance with musicians before 1919 (during the time the tape was being changed), and Carew agreed that he knew more Negro musicians than whites in that time. In answer to Steiner's question, Carew says there was no Original Dixieland Jazz Band in New Orleans; Johnny Stein [drums], who was playing at the Haymarket on Customhouse [now Iberville] Street, was asked by an agent to get together a band to go to Chicago; Stein organized and led the band which was to become the ODJB, and the band went to Chicago.

Carew says he does not know that there were "cutting contests between old-time musicians in New Orleans. He says he does remember a ragtime piano contest held one evening at the Dauphine Theatre. The winner played "Entertainer's Rag" [by Jay Roberts], part of which is "Dixie" played by one hand at the same time as the other hand is playing something else ["Yankee Doodle"]; Carew thinks there were better players there, but they did not win. He says [Irwin] LeClere was there, and he could have won playing in a style other than ragtime; Kid Ross was also there, and he was a better ragtime player, but he didn't play anything "that struck them [the audience] as patriotic." The participants in the contest

ROY CAREW  
June 21, 1961  
Reel II of 2--Digest--Retype

9

sat in two groups, on either side of the stage; each player would perform in turn, and the winner was determined by the applause (Carew thinks). Carew says that one contest was the only one held here, that he can recall, and that it was held about 1914 or 1915.

In answer to Steiner's question, Carew says he has seen the vaudeville act of various composers seated at different pianos and playing their own hit songs, but he says that was well-organized, and as far as he knows nothing like that came out of New Orleans because New Orleans and its entertainers were on sort of a hit-and-miss basis--they would play at one place a while and then at another, moving at random. Carew also answers that there were a few girl singers around, but they would sing while standing beside the piano and would not move from table to table as some of the later and more famous blues shouters sometimes did.

Early in 1938, Carew saw an article in a Washington [D. C.] newspaper about Jelly Roll [Morton], in which Morton said, in part that Tony Jackson was the greatest "two-handed entertainer" there ever was, that nobody ever beat Tony. [Compare Jelly Roll Morton interviews on Riv] Carew decided to find out what had happened to Jackson, so he went to Morton's night club [in Washington], which was named at various times, Jungle Inn, Bluebird Cafe and Music Box, "none very successful." He had an interesting talk with

Morton about New Orleans and New Orleans music, and found out that Jackson had died in the early 1920's. <sup>(3.08)</sup> Morton asked for Carew's name and address and Carew went back to the place several times. Carew told Morton he thought Scott Joplin had written some of the best music ever, and he bemoaned the fact that nobody played it much anymore; Carew said that if someone would begin playing the music again, and perhaps publish modern versions of it, it might be a success. Morton asked Carew to bring some of the Joplin music to the club; when Carew handed him a stack of the music and repeated that someone should make a modern version of it, Morton remarked, "I agree with you;. . . as a matter of fact, I don't know anybody better qualified to do it than I am." Morton and Carew began their project of modernizing the Joplin numbers, but about the third time Carew went to Morton's club, Morton told him he had some songs that might be quicker hits than the Joplin numbers. Morton played four songs for Carew, which they later published. Over protest, Carew wrote words for "Why?," "If You Knew" and "Sweet Substitute," but he did not claim authorship for the last named. [See sheet music. Werac backwards is Carew.] Morton had written nearly all the words for the fourth song, "My Home Is In A Southern Town," so those four tunes were published. The Joplin project did not proceed. Carew suggested the name, Tempo Music, for the publishing name, and acted

as publisher. Morton went to New York and Clarence Williams agreed to act as agent for the songs. Carew designed the covers and the music was printed in New York. Carew says Williams never did anything with the songs. Steiner says that Carew has kept the songs in his catalog for quite a while, and Carew says they sell a little; upon questioning, he says 300 sales [per song] is about the maximum so far. Steiner remarks that the songs are so attractive that he is surprised that more sales haven't been made. He says he loaned one set of the songs to Earl Hines' trumpet player when Hines' group was in Chicago the past winter; the trumpet player was going to show them to Hines; the music has never been returned. Carew says they have never played it, either, as far as he known. Steiner says they will noodle around with it until they find out what they want to do with it. He says the Hines band got other tunes from him, including "Dallas Blues," which they recorded while in Chicago, and that he feels the band will keep "noodling" with the Morton songs until they become familiar with them and will then record them. (Steiner's copy of "Dallas Blues" was returned.) Steiner asks how many copies of each song Carew had printed originally; Carew says he made a mistake and had 1,000 of each song printed, [i.e., first four?] but that he got 500 each of the later titles, such as "Buddy Bolden's Blues" and "Mamie's Blues." Steiner says he would think everybody would have to have a copy of

"Mamie's Blues," but Carew says the problem is letting those people know the music is available. Steiner and Carew discuss ways of doing this.

Carew says his purpose in having Morton make [more modern] arrangements of Joplin's music was so the Joplin music would be played more; Carew says bands were playing so much music that was so inferior to the Joplin music that he thought if the music could be presented in good arrangements it would be played more. Then too, Morton was "on his uppers;" he had not recorded for several years, perhaps not since 1932. He had been in Washington since 1935; Carew went to him with the Joplin proposition in March, 1938. Morton's Library of Congress sessions, already proposed at that time, were not begun until the summer of 1938. In reply to Steiner's question, Carew says [Alan] Lomax did make notes at the Library of Congress sessions, containing material not included on the recordings. Steiner says Lomax may have used some of the extra note material in the book "Mr. Jelly Roll," but that he did not mention a period around 1915 when Morton was in and out of Chicago. Carew says Lomax did not mention another later period, when Morton had a band on the road. He says that was the band about which <sup>Kramer?</sup> ~~Cramer~~ [See the Second Line] is writing. Steiner says Lomax told him he had been to see Antonio Gonzalez, husband of the Gonzalez woman [Anita], to ask him to sell

or let him see some of Morton's date books, which covered the period mentioned, but that Gonsalez refused. Steiner says he thinks Cramer has made a mistake about the name of the band Morton took over, because he cannot find anything about a band with the name of Eldin or Eldridge such as Cramer mentions; Steiner says the band was, such as, the Alabamians, or some such name. Steiner says that Jasper Taylor had told him about jobbing with the band, but does not remember a theater date. Steiner himself heard that band in Milwaukee, but he didn't have any idea about who was in the band except Morton. Steiner says no musicians mention having played with that particular band [except Jasper Taylor], and says it may have been an "out of town band." Carew says Morton told a couple of stories about being on the road: One was that Morton would take the money from each job and put it in a "grip," after a while, he appointed one of the musicians to carry it, telling him not to let it out of his hands, but not telling him what was in it. After several jobs, the band arrived at a town where Morton wanted to bank the money, so he and the grip custodian went to a bank, where the custodian was quite astounded when Morton opened the grip and displayed all the money that had been carried around.

Carew says they published five tunes while Morton was alive, "We Are Elks" being the last, in addition to those mentioned previously.

*[Restriction in W.C. Handy band with IMA] W.C. Handy's band according to a letter to RC from W.C. Handy's son had his own band. Technical difficulty here also*

Then Lomax, who was having his book published, asked Carew for permission to include excerpts from the following in his book: "Mamie's Blues," "Winin' Boy [Blues]," "Buddy Bolden's Blues," "The Miserere" and "The Naked Dance." Carew gave permission and sent manuscript copies of the tunes to the publishers; "Mamie's Blues," however, was published in full. Carew thought he would get some sales of the tunes because of the exposure in the book, so he had the others [of those listed, except "Mamie's," which was already published] published. He later had J. Lawrence Cooke [make a piano arrangement of] "Big Fat Ham," which Carew then published. Steiner asks if there are copies of the songs in New Orleans, and Carew says he sent copies to [Dr. Edmond] Souchon at Steiner's suggestion; Carew got a letter from Souchon, thanking him and saying that he would certainly use them, "at least the words." Souchon and somebody [Merle Koch] recorded some of the songs, and did very well, says Carew.

Carew says he wished Morton had lived, that he would be a rich man now. Carew says Morton's estate is still "a going concern." Kaye asks who the lawyer for the estate is, and Carew says a nephew of the original executor, Hugh Macbeth, is now acting as administrator, and is in Los Angeles. Kaye says he got to know Carew through Macbeth, who answered Kaye's inquiry to Eva Mack about how to get copies of the Library of Congress records by telling him to get in

June 21, 1961

Reel II of 2--Digest--Retype

touch with Roy Carew; Carew had copyrights on the material, so Kaye got a set of acetates, even before [Rudi] Blesh got copies to issue on Circle [record]. Kaye says he thinks the acetates he has are much better than long plays he has heard later. Carew answers Steiner's question by saying that the equipment used for the Library of Congress session was not of the best quality, and that Morton's foot stomping, etc. are also distracting, mentioning the transition of "La Paloma" into blues as being particularly noisy. Kaye says the Circle LP's have Morton's voice lower [in pitch], as his acetates were also, than the Riverside LP's, in which the voice is higher and faster, as though the re-recording had been "gimmicked" and made at a different speed than the originals; Kaye says the different speed ruins the recording, as Morton's voice was lower. Steiner says perhaps the original acetates should be referred to for any further dubbing; then he says Carew should listen to the acetates (as perhaps they were recorded at a wrong speed) to determine which recordings have Morton's voice sounding as it really did in person. Carew says Morton's voice was a little bit more bass in quite a bit of those records [speaking of the originals] than it should have been. [Perhaps the Riversides are more accurate? PRC. Pitch of Library of Congress recordings is off. Compare key of sheet music and records. RBA.]. Carew, upon questioning, says Morton sings a couple of notes in the "tavern tunes"\*

\* [General label]

ROY CAREW  
June 21, 1961  
Reel II of 2--Digest--Retype

16

that sound a bit like Tony Jackson. He says that the voice of  
"Pigmeat" Markham [resembles Jackson's?].

End of Reel II