

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel I [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1959

1

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins.

Richard A. McLean (who once had a son named Richard, long dead, is the father of guitarist Ernest McLean [q.v.]) was born January 25, 1898, somewhere above Napoleon Avenue in New Orleans. (RM says his mother told him he was born on Water Street, near Jena; RM says Water Street would have been one block nearer the river than Tchoupitoulas Street [i.e., Leake Avenue]; WR mentions that the river has probably moved since that time [there being more land between Tchoupitoulas and the river now]. His mother had a nice voice, sang in the choir at St. Peter's Church [Methodist), corner of Cadiz and Coliseum. RM also had an uncle, a good amateur "songster," who sang in his church in Chicago. RM's interest in playing music came from being in a group of boys who, with the exception of RM, played some instrument (one played guitar, violin and mandolin); when an outsider asked RM why he didn't play, he replied that he hadn't thought about it. RM talked to a barber-drummer friend, "Nini" Bryand (long since gone to Chicago), who dissuaded him from taking up mandolin by telling him mandolins weren't used in bands, but guitars were, and he could make some money playing; RM, about 16 years old at the time, sent away for a guitar. Guitar teachers being scarce, RM learned what he could from others who played guitar, but not enough to hold his interest; he packed it away in his house and

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel I [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1959

2

and didn't look at it for about two years, during which time he was in Chicago. Upon his return to New Orleans, he got a job at a lumber yard; the men working there were sent home early one day, because of inclement weather, and RM, looking for something to do, noticed the box containing his guitar. When he opened it, he discovered instructions for tuning the guitar and a tuning fork [i.e., pitch pipe]; he tuned the instrument. Later, a friend who sought to buy the guitar tested it, and to RM's surprise, told him it was in tune; the prospective buyer didn't have enough moeny to pay cash, so RM decided not to sell it. He began experimenting, playing chords to some friend's piano playing, until he began to catch on to changes in chords. After his marriage (during the early days of his marraäge he didn't play the guitar) he would play at home in the evening; a tall, dark man who played bass heard him and stopped by his house one day, wanting him to play a job that night; the bassist thought he had heard a relative of RM's wife, Octave Beaulieu, who played guitar (had been with Sam Morgan's brother, Isaiah "Ike" Morgan) and had lived there quite some time before; in short, RM was hired for the job, his first with a band. RM was amazed at the amount of money he was paid for that job (\$ 7 at the job, \$ 1 deposit before). RM

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel I [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1959

3

worked several jobs given him by various members of the band at that first job. RM began working with trumpet player Vic Despenza; John Casimir told him Despenza was going to fire him and get a banjo player to replace him (which he did). Because he wasn't getting work as a guitarist, his wife encouraged him to get a banjo; Amos White [trumpet] wanted him to play with his band, so he showed how to tune the banjo like the first four strings of the guitar. RM worked with White; others in the band: Lee Collins [trumpet]; Sidney Carrere [sax]; "Freddy BooBoo," trombone; Joe Lindsay, drums; unknown bass player. The band played a lot of country towns. (Wr mentions Lee Collins and the [Jones-Collins] Astoria Band; RM says that was a different and earlier group entirely.) RM then joined the Olympia Band of drummer Arnold Depass (an uncle of his wife), remaining with that band about four months. RM sat in at a jam session at a cabaret called the Elite (on Iberville between Burgundy and Rampart), where Sam Morgan was holding a benefit; although RM was not known by such as Morgan and Joe Rene (brother of Kid Rena [sic] and, at the time, a drummer), he was encouraged by others, including banjo player "Son" Thomas, to play. Some time later, Arnold Depass told him Kid Rena was looking for him; Rena found him, hired him for one job; (others in the band that

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel I [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1959

4

night: [Albert] Glenny, bass; Morris French, trombone); hired him after that job as a regular member of the band. RM played with Rena from that time (about 1923) on [until when?].

Arnold Depass took the name, "Olympia," from Freddy Keppard's band of the same name. Ricard Alexis was not in the Depass band [at least, not when RM was in it]; when RM was in the band, [Louis] "Shots" [Madison] played trumpet for a while; Henry Julian played saxophone [and clarinet?]. This band did not work as often as Rena's.

End of Reel I

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel II [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1959

5

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins.

Dave Depass played clarinet; his other [?] half-brothers were Octave Beaulieu and Rudolph Beaulieu.

When RM left Kid Rena's band, he played with Sam Morgan. When RM first joined Rena's band, the clarinet player was Zeb [Leneries] (RM says "[Black] Happy" [Goldston] knows Zeb's real name); others in the band: drummer Joe Rene [sic], brother of Kid Rena; Morris French, trombone; [Albert] Glenney, bass, who had just replaced Simon Marrero. Bob French played tuba in the band at a later date; Albert Morgan played bass later (but for only a short time), as did Bob Lyons. "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson] was playing clarinet in the Rena band when they won a cup at Loyola, playing against the band of "Kid Punch" [Miller];, about 1925 (Big Eye was in the band about one year); the bands alternated at a dance, and the cup was awarded (RM thinks a committee made the decision) after the dance was over. [Cf Punch Miller interviews.] Continuing about Sam Morgan, RM says he substituted for someone in the Morgan band, but was with the band for one year. After Morgan, RM played night club; he played at the Hummingbird [a cabaret], substituting for George Guesnon, who had been accidentally shot in the leg. RM then went to a new Hummingbird, operated by the old Hummingbird people; others in the group: Henry Julian, saxophone; Octave Crosby, drums; Joe

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel II [of 2]--Digest-- Retype
May 27, 1959

6

Robichaux, piano. RM doesn't remember the first trumpet player they had; James Cobett replaced Julian on sax, and Albert Ducong  came in on trumpet. RM then went to the Music Box, (a taxi dance hall, where Stein's Clothing Store is now, Canal and Carondelet), playing with brass bass player Eddie Jackson's band; others in the band: Octave Crosby (who left the Hummingbird before RM), piano; Oscar ["Chicken"] Henry, trombone; George McCullum, trumpet; Henry Julian, saxophone; Ernest "Menesse" Trpagnier, drums. At one time, Arnold Metoyer played trumpet; Joe Strohter played drums; Lester Santiago replaced Crosby on piano. RM then went with George McCullum (who had rejoined the Jackson band at the Music Box), who organized a band and took a job at the Alamo dance hall. When he left the Alamo, RM jobbed around with various bands. He later joined the band he considers the best he ever played with, the Sunny South Band; some other members: Eddie Pierson, [trombone]; Sidney Montague [drums]; Elliott Taylor, clarinet [and alto sax?]; Emile Fritz (not related to Isidore Fritz), tenor sax; Booker [Washington?], sousaphone and bass violin; Albert McNeil, trumpet and leader; Leo Dejan (brother of Harold Dejan), trumpet; George ["Son"] Johnson, [alto] sax. RM left the Sunny South Band during the depression [band broke up?]; very little music work. He joined the W.P.A., first as a laborer,

RICHARD McLean
Reel II [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1954

7

then as a banjo player when the W.P.A. Band was formed; the musicians made about \$ 19 per week, more than the laborers. When he left the W.P.A., about the time World War II began, he went to work in the cleaning and pressing establishment of his sister-in-law's husband, [trumpet player Elmer] "Coo Coo" Talbert, on Rampart Street; he turned down music jobs, even one steady job, as he was doing all right with Talbert. He later went with Sidney Desvigne's band, playing guitar, and remaining with him for two years. At this time he acquired a bass violin; when he had had it about 18 months, he was hired to play bass with Kid Howard, and although RM claimed not to be able to play bass, he did very well. The year was about 1944. After being with Howard for quite some time, he went with the big band of Don Raymond, learning more about the bass from reading the music Raymond used. RM tells of learning to read; when he was playing banjo, he decided his ear was not quick enough to catch some changes of some tunes with some bands which used music; he took one lesson from John Marrero (then with ["Papa"] Celestin), who, after that, was forever out of town on jobs. Then he went to violinist George Carrere (brother of sax player, Sidney Carrere), who recommended he get some other instrument to learn music reading on; RM bought a clarinet

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel II [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1959

8

from Sidney Vigne (later fatally injured by an automobile), and took five lessons from a Cagnolatti (probably a relative of Ernie Cagnolatti); from his clarinet lessons he was able to teach himself to read banjo parts [and presumably how to read bass, etc., music?].

RM plays banjo very seldom now; he played it one night [recently] on a job in Baltimore [Maryland]. He hasn't played clarinet in years, having forsaken it soon after the five lessons; he did become proficient enough to play one job on clarinet with Kid Rena, however.

RM played only a short time with Don Raymond; sometime after he left Raymond, Paul Barbarin, on the recommendation of Albert Walters, hired him to replace Stewart Davis on bass, as Davis did not want to take the out-of-town engagement Barbarin had. RM became a regular member of Barbarin's band, leaving when business became slack and going with George Williams for over three years. Then he went back with Barbarin, on Bourbon Street. In 1955, RM began playing with Bill Matthews [at the Paddock Lounge], with whom he plays today.

RM has taught music; he has taught his son [Ernest]; his first student was Sidney Cates; he taught two brothers, Irving and Curtis Trevigne, fine guitarists. He also taught others.

RICHARD McLEAN
Reel II [of 2]--Digest--Retype
May 27, 1959

9

WR says Professor [Manuel] Manetta and George Guesnon have commented on RM's prowess as a banjo player.

RM's favorite instrument is bass. He liked to hear bass players, even before he began playing the instrument [or any instrument?]. He liked to go to parades to hear the [brass] bass players; Eddie Jackson was one of his favorites on brass bass (Jackson could play string bass a little, but didn't seem "to care too much about it."). Jackson had a good ear and an easily recognizable style.

WR and RM talk of instruments. RM played electric guitar and, later, a straight [i.e., acoustic] guitar with a pick-up [and amplifier] with Sidney Desvigne. RM shows a Bacon banjo, a Montana model, which was named for Bill Montana, a banjo player who appeared at the Palace Theater [New Orleans]. RM plays it demonstrating the use of the mute.

End of Reel II

