

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins.

This interview was conducted at the home of Stephen Angrum,
2105 Allen Street, New Orleans, La.

SA was born one of seven children in New Roads, La., Pointe Coupee parish, July 4, 1895. His maternal grandfather, Paul Woods, and his uncle, Daniel Woods, both played violin, not professionally, but at informal gatherings, such as old-time suppers. SA came to New Orleans in 1907; his father was dead, and his mother remained in Baton Rouge, and SA was reared by a cousin, his father's brother's son. SA's father was a Methodist minister, and the family moved from place to place. From New Roads, they went to Baton Rouge. SA says an old man named Price Mitchell had a little "field" band there, consisting of drums and a flute. SA made himself a flute out of a reed, boring it out with a hot umbrella handle, then boring six holes in it. He says he could play pretty well. He got with a three-piece field band--bass drum and kettle drum, made of larger and smaller washtubs, and his flute. Later he began playing with another three-piece group, above Baton Rouge; Goodly Kelly was leader of that one. SA says people used to hire them to play at picnics, and sometimes at dances, even when he was a very small fellow. In about 1907, boll weevils ruined the Angrums' cotton and corn crop, so they sold all that they had left, and SA came to New Orleans. SA says no one was

STEVE ANGRUM
Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype
August 8, 1961

2

using flutes then, so he decided to get a clarinet, the popular instrument. He got a job washing dishes in a restaurant in the Treme market, Marais and Orleans streets (he lived nearby, at 818 Burgundy). When he had paid \$15 down to Werlein's for his clarinet, he took it out of the store, and decided he would have to get a teacher, as he did not know how to play it. He went to [Paul] Chaligny; other clarinetists taking lessons at that time were Joe "Brother Cornbread" Thomas, Albert Burbank and [Andrew] Morgan. The students met once a week. Chaligny's method was to have the student begin with the lowest pitch of his clarinet, learn how to produce a good tone on that pitch, and move up to another pitch, until the student was able to produce a good tone on any pitch. SA says he took about a month before he could produce a good tone on the first pitch. The next pitch was fingered the same as the original, but the student now pressed the register key, [producing the sound the interval of a 12th above the original; then the student would drop back down to the next highest-pitched fingering, and work his way up the clarinet in 12ths.] Answering a question, SA says he did not have his home-made flute with him when he came to New Orleans; he bought a metal flute, a 6 holer, no keys. SA heard dance music at picnics, Scotland[ville] being where he lived when bands from Baton Rouge, such as the Victor band, came to play a job. He has heard of Toot Johnson's band, of Baton

Rouge. He has heard of the Claiborne Williams band in ^{Donaldsonville} ~~New Orleans~~, but says he doesn't think they came to Baton Rouge. SA answers a question by saying he never heard or saw a brass band until he came to New Orleans, that New Orleans was the only place he knows of that ever had music like that. He says when he first got here that there was at least one parade every Sunday, and a lot of funerals throughout the week, that every society had music at the funerals of its members. He says there are not many funerals now. Bands mentioned as playing funerals now are the Eureka, John Casimir's [Young Tuxedo Brass Band], and SA says George Williams band, of which he is a member, plays a funeral once in a while, that he has played about 4 or 5 with Williams since he has been a member. He says the band he used to play with, Chris Kelly's, played a lot of funerals. CK has been dead about twenty-five years now. Kelly's band used 10 men. Size of bands is discussed, WR saying that people have told him that there have been bands of only 8 or 9 pieces; they agree that the ~~union~~ now requires brass bands to have 10 pieces on parade. SA contends that the bands should be at least 12 pieces, that a baritone horn and an alto horn should be added. [Isidore] Barbarin is mentioned as having played alto; SA says he played many times with him. SA says he does not know of any baritone players now; WR says [Adolphe] "Tats" [Alexander, Jr.] used to play baritone; WR says that he is playing

sax a little now. Ricard [Alexis] is mentioned as having played alto at one time.

SA used an Otto Langey method when he studied with Professor Chaligny. SA was then in his twenties. He loaned the book to [Worthia] "Show Boy" [Thomas, a trombonist], who misplaced it when he moved. Chaligny organized a reading band from his students; the band would play for advertising jobs, for shows, etc.; the members would be paid two or three dollars for their work. In answer to a question, SA says that Chaligny taught all the instruments, but was a trumpeter by bent. SA studied with him about 3 years; the lessons cost \$.50 each. SA says Chaligny didn't tell his students anything about reeds or mouthpieces; SA got his information from [Harold] Peterson, who has a music store on Broad Street. SA began playing clarinet using a soft reed, Vibrator brand; he now uses a hard reed, strength number 4. SA says he uses a stiff reed because with it he can play all pitches with ease, even very high ones. SA says he began using a stiff reed when he had had the experience of trying to blow against some of the "tough" clarinetists, like Zeb [Lenoir] and [Phil] "Pills"] Coycault, who could get a full, penetrating sound while SA would be puffing, "blowing my [cane? can?] off", but not being heard. SA decided to stop at Peterson's, then on St. Peter and Claiborne close to his house on St. Ann between Villere and Robertson; he explained his

plight. Peterson said his reed was too soft, and told him to take a stiffer reed and practice, because he would not be able to play it until his jaws got stronger. SA finally got used to the reed. He says he was playing [later] with a band, The Dixie Band, including in it a trumpet player named Hunter [Gardette (sp?)?], since dead, and Joe Gabriel [bass?]. They went to Raceland, where John Handy, clarinetist, was playing with the Victor band from Baton Rouge. Handy was playing so well that SA was afraid to get on the bandstand. Gabriel told him to have a drink, get on the stand and blow. SA took the one drink, got up and played; he says the people liked the band from New Orleans better than the Victor band then. He says Handy remembers the incident, and talks about it sometimes.

WR asks SA about bands he played with after he left Chaligny. SA says he played with a lot of "little piece-a bands," sometimes with bands so bad he was ashamed to get on the stand with them, although he admits he couldn't play much better. He says he played with a lot of bad bands, but he also played with almost all of the good bands later. WR mentions a picture of a Kid Thomas [Valentine] band, SA being a member then; SA says the picture was taken in the [19] 30's.

End of Reel I

In answering RC's question, SA agrees that he did not consider his playing as good, when he left [Paul] Chaligny's band and instruction. SA says he improved and became good by listening to the ideas in the various bands in which he played; then he would go home and practice those ideas he liked, until he made them a part of his style. This cannot be taught; you must have feeling and practice and play with several bands. He says that he played with good bands and with not-so-good bands; he goes on to say that a person who plays well and who happens to be playing in a not-so-good band should try to help those others in the band by showing them how to play some things, and by playing as hard as he [the good one] can, so as to make the others sound better. SA says a good musician should never discourage one not so fortunate or skilled as he, but should always encourage that kind, and always say to the less-skilled that they sound good.

Answering RC's question, SA says he played a long time, probably the longest of his career, with [Jimmy] "Kid" Clayton; he played with [Henry] "Kid" Rena, but not stationary [not as a regular member, or for long?], [Ernest] "Punch" Miller (not stationary), and a long time with Chris Kelly. He liked playing with Kelly the best; he says Kelly had stock arrangements of the popular songs, and that each band member had a music stand on the job. Kelly had an arrangement of "Gettysburg" march. The band played a lot of blues, too. In the band were seven pieces; "Red Happy" [Bolton], drums; Ike Robinson, trombone; SA,

August 8, 1961

clarinet; Kelly, trumpet (and alto and guitar) [and bass?]. Sometimes Walter Preston played guitar with them. Robert Hall, [one of the many Halls, including Edmond], played alto sax, sometimes doubling clarinet when SA was not on the job. One place the band played many times, for dances, was the Italian Hall on Esplanade. SA says he never did play around with any saxophone, that all he wanted to play was clarinet. He never played any clarinet of a different pitch than the usual B^b. He never played Boehm system; he says the Albert system, to him, has a heavier tone. SA agrees with RC that he is the loudest on the street in this time. SA says the clarinetists used E^b clarinets in the old street bands; he thinks Willie Humphrey started the use of B^b clarinets in the street. He agrees with RC that playing sax upsets a clarinet embouchure. SA uses a single embouchure. WR says Manuel Manetta learned double embouchure [covering both upper and lower teeth with the lips] from Sam Dutrey, Sr., and says that Barney Bigard uses that system [as does Albert Burbank. See his interview. RBA.] SA says he heard Lorenzo Tio, does not know what embouchure he used, but says he was a good clarinetist. There is discussion of where the pressure is in SA's embouchure. There is discussion about clarinets of various numbers of rings and/or keys. SA's present instrument, about the fifth one he has had, is a Penzel-Muller, which he has had 20 years.

SA made his first recording two days before this interview, recording with Punch Miller at [the big place belonging to Larry Borenstein at 1110] Royal and Ursulines.

SA did not ever play with Buddy Petit. There is talk about Kid Rena; SA says he played with Rena every Monday, advertising for Maison Blanche. He says Rena, noted high-note artist, did not bother him with his range, that he would play under Rena until he "took down," and then SA would come out strong. SA says he wouldn't "buck" with Rena. SA says Kid Clayton plays much louder and higher than he used to, that Clayton used to play a lot of soft music, and would use his mutes a lot. SA says that the bands on St. Peter Street [Preservation Hall] are the same as they were back in the Thirties [meaning that the sound and style are the same].

SA says he remembers "Big Eye" Louis Nelson [Delisle] and Alphonse Picou, but that he did not hear [Charlie] McCurdy. He heard George Baquet, who was playing with Freddy Keppard. He liked Baquet. He says Keppard was a good cornet player, on the order of Punch Miller's [present-day?PRC] style. Keppard was big, over 6 feet and 200 pounds. SA's favorite clarinetist was Johnny Dodds. He says that when Dodds was playing at the [Knights of Pythias] Roof Garden, he, SA, could not get to the place fast enough, that he loved to hear Dodds play, which is why some of his own playing sounds a bit like

Reel II [of 3]--Digest--Retype
August 8, 1961

Dodds. SA especially liked Dodds' "High Society," and he scats a bit of it, apparently liking Dodds' use of various registers]. Dodds was playing with [Ory and? RBA] Joe "King" Oliver['s band? RBA] then. He did not care much for "Big Eye" Louis who also played with Keppard. SA responds to a question by saying that long ago Alphonse Picou was a "terrible" [i.e., great] clarinetist, quite rough, and he was the talk of the town. Picou was playing with Manuel Perez in that time. Picou was the best "musicianer" [reader, etc.] of all the clarinetists. SA says the Tios were all fine "musicianers." SA says he has played with Sam Dutrey, Jr., that Dutrey played tenor sax and clarinet on the jobs. SA says Honore Dutrey played trombone with Oliver [Chicago, etc.]. SA says he remembers Zeb [Lenoir], and then mentions [Phil] "Pills" [Coycault], saying he was another good clarinetist, and a relation of Zeb. Pills used several pitches of instruments--B^b, A, C, etc., and played on the order of Picou. He says George Boyd was a good clarinetist, playing a style similar to Dodds; he was Punch Miller's clarinetist. Boyd could "spell" a little, but could not read. WR says that George Lewis has said that he liked Boyd's playing and perhaps copied him some. [!!! George Lewis told RBA that he copied no one.]

The George Williams Brass Band is the first regularly-organized brass band that SA ever played with; he has been with the band about

10 years. [Compare photos] He says he played in brass bands before Williams', such as with Chris Kelly, but that those bands were just got together for single jobs--pick-up bands. SA really likes [the Williams band?, and] street work. He replies to RC, saying that he doesn't take his horn down much in the street because the two saxes do not play the lead, and that the members do not know where they are in the tune unless they can hear the lead. He rests three or four minutes [!!!!] when the trumpets play lead again. [This is a very long time. Not so according to my memory. RBA]

End of Reel II

Reel III [of 3]--Digest--Retype
August 8, 1961

A picture of the George Williams Brass Band is shown. WR asks about old-style uniforms. SA says they were very heavy and hot, and that their wearing was discontinued starting in the Thirties. He says a lot of the old-time musicians were not able to endure a five-hour parade because of the uniforms, but that since bands have taken to wearing only white shirts and dark trousers as uniform, the heat is not so bad, and one can play a long parade. SA says the next parade the Williams band has is in September for the Young [Men's] Olympians, uptown. He agrees that the Jolly Bunch will not have a parade this year, but are having an anniversary parade, going to the church. Answering RC's question, SA says he never played [regularly] with a brass band, until Williams', because he was afraid he would not be able to walk and play at the same time, but that he has no trouble now. There is talk about time at funerals. SA says Chris Kelly used to play a lot of them. He had music, but he would usually say that the sun was too hot to read the music, so the band should play "by head." SA says they played things like "Just A Little While To Stay Here," "Last Rest" and "Just A Closer Walk With Thee." SA says to play "Last Rest" a band should have 12 pieces. Kelly's band did not use saxes, but had alto and baritone horns instead, plus clarinet. Discussion of the relative popularity and merits of sax and clarinet in bands follows. The Eureka Brass Band is mentioned.

The Eureka and John [Casimir's] [Young] Tuxedo Brass Band are mentioned as having been recorded; the Williams band has not recorded. In answer to WR's question, SA says Chris Kelly was easy to get along with, although he drank a lot. WR asks about Ike [Robinson]. SA says Ike was good, and he can't understand why he quit playing. RC asks if having clarinet and trombone play together [trombone as accompaniment], as do George Lewis and Jim Robinson quite frequently, was a regular thing in the old days. SA says no, that is just something they "thought up in their minds." SA says clarinet and trumpet duets are pretty, and ~~that~~ Kid Clayton can play plenty of duets like that.

Answering WR, SA says he used to play at the lake every Sunday, in the Thirties, with Kid Thomas' [Valentine] band, at Manuel's pavillion. Others in the band were " 'Tit" Rouchon, someone named Tommy and "Loochie" [Albert Jackson]. SA mentions that Loochie quit playing when he joined the church. At the request of the others, SA says he does not know why some men quit music when they join a church, that he was brought up Methodist and has gone to church all his life, goes every Sunday if he does not have a job. He says the church does not require a man to quit playing, that it is just the individual's choice. SA says he did not play many lawn parties and fish fries because he did not like the possibilities of being raided because of rowdiness. SA says the music at picnics was the same then as now

Reel III [of 3]--Digest--Retype
August 8, 1961

[being played anywhere, not just picnics]. SA says the young people dance altogether differently now, although [a lot of] the music is the same. There is discussion of the way ensemble and solos, including dynamics, should be used. SA says the reason bands "blast" on the last chorus is to let the people know the band is finishing the tune. RC says it seems to be customary that a band immediately repeat a just-finished waltz as a fox trot; SA says that has always been the custom. SA says the reason for this practice is to show the people that the band can take a waltz and made a fox trot out of it. RC comments on the "encore," the practice of immediately playing a tune again but shorter if the applause warranted it. WR asks about the practice of playing a march [for a grand march, no doubt] at a dance; SA says that practice is from taxi dance halls; when the band plays the march, the patrons "come off the rail" to dance. SA says that in the rural areas, people at a dance won't go to the bar for a drink unless the band plays a march as a signal.

Answering WR, SA says the only time he worked on Bourbon Street was to replace Willie Humphrey [with Freddy Kohlman's band? RBA] at the Mardi Gras [Lounge] for two nights. WR says that SA's son-in-law, Snookum Russell, has been on the street for a long time; SA says he is still there. SA, questioned, says he does not like the fast tempos played on Bourbon Street; he says the job at the Paddock has worn out

a lot of trumpet players, mentioning Lee Collins and [Ernie] "Cag" [Cagnolatti], and [John] "Pickey" [Brunious]. SA says the old-time bands played slower. SA says the old bands at dance halls would play something for each age group. SA says he likes to play "fraternity" [probably means "society," considering what follows] dances, because all they want is slow numbers--waltzes, etc. He likes a variety of tempi. SA says the old bands played a lot of slow blues, that Chris Kelly was the main one for playing blues. White and black were crazy about the blues. SA says the blues were mostly instrumental; he says Louis Armstrong is the one who started that singing. SA supports RC, saying that Kid Clayton always did sing. Asked to name the good bands he worked with, SA names that of [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin, saying he played with that band around 1943. Others in that band were Junior [i.e., Julius] Handy, a cripple, guitar (a brother of John Handy); Bill Matthews, trombone; Albert Walters and Clayton, [trumpets?]. SA acknowledges that he worked with [Louis "Kid] Shots" [Madison], trumpet player, but says Shots was not with Celestin at the time SA played in it. SA says the Celestin band was good.

SA says that his grandfather used to play "fish fry" music, in the country, at informal gatherings. He played jazz music, and always played by himself, never with a band. SA's uncle played a

lot of "jig songs," fast, fiddle-type music. SA never heard his grandfather play a blues, but the blues were sung a lot, not played--the people working in the fields would shout the blues. SA never heard any railroad work songs.

RC says someone, possible [Kid] Thomas, told him that blues is not considered music by some. SA says that may be because blues is easy, usually. SA says all the church hymns come from blues. RC asks if SA finds blues easy to play; SA says it depends on the key.

End of Reel III