

ADOLPHE "TATS" ALEXANDER [JR.]  
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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins  
and Harold Dejan.

AA says he has played each Mardi Gras day for the past 7 years with Harry Robichaux, guitar (WR says Robichaux is related to [Louis "Kid] Shots" [Madison], for a Carnival club dance. WR says the dance is held at The Court of Two Sisters.

AA was born at St. Philip and Derbigny streets in New Orleans, on July 15, 1898. His father [AA, Sr.] originally played trumpet, but got his teeth broken at the place where he worked; then he played alto horn, and later, baritone horn. His father played in the Golden Rule band; he did not play in the Excelsior [Brass] Band, and AA says he doesn't think there was an Excelsior Band in those days. AA, Sr., also played in the Onward and in the [Original] Tuxedo bands. He was 57 years old when he died, about 33 years ago [c. 1928]. AA's father tried to give AA his start learning trumpet, but he did not have the patience to teach the boy, so AA was sent to the father's friend, [Paul] Chaligny, to study trumpet; AA was about 15 years at the time. When he gave up trumpet, he began studying clarinet, at about 19 years of age, with [Luis] "Papa" Tio; he studied with Tio almost all the way through the Otto Langey method book, at which time Tio became ill, and AA began taking lessons from [Alphonse] Picou, taking two or three lessons and finishing the book. In answer to a question, AA says the Tio brothers

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were better teachers than Picou. AA started on an Albert system clarinet, switching to Boehm when he was in the Navy [1942]. HS says that [Boehm system] was all the Navy would buy for the musicians. AA does not remember what his first job playing music was; he says it was with a band they had gotten up, a jazz band, and included in it were Paul Galas [sp?] and Edgar Briscoe, the latter a banjo player. HD says Briscoe did the brick work on his [HD's] house, and told HD he had played banjo, and HD did not believe him. Besides playing trumpet [in the beginning], clarinet and sax, AA has also played baritone horn, which he learned by himself, having played trumpet in the WPA Band-- he says the professor needed a baritone horn player, so he told AA to play baritone. AA says his father tried to teach all of his children to play something, but he did not have the patience required. In answer to a question, AA says his father played in ragtime bands, which is what the early jazz bands were called, besides playing in brass bands; AA says his father would play jazz in the brass bands, on baritone horn. AA says his father took lessons on trumpet from an old French professor; AA's uncle, Willie [Lazaux ?], also took trumpet lessons, but did not continue long. AA's brother (who is younger than AA) [Milford Alexander] used to play piano, but has given it up, [professionally] although his interest continues. AA says about 3 of his sisters were started on piano, their father forcing all the

children to begin on something. AA himself admits to having played piano "by head."

In answer to a question, AA repeats that the first band he played with had Paul [Galas?]; Edgar Briscoe and others in it; [it is doubtful that he says what name that band had, although he is questioned about it]; he answers a question about a name, saying it was named for the leader, Omer Bernard [this was probably the second band he played with]. After the Bernard band, he was recommended by [Luis ?] Tio to join the Tuxedo Band, under [William "Bebe"] Ridgley and [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin; he was with that band 2 or 3 years. He played clarinet in that band. Just before he left that band, an alto saxophone was bought for him, and he began playing it. When he left the Tuxedo, he went with Manuel Perez, playing in the band at the [Pythian Temple] Roof Garden. After Perez, he joined Sidney Desvignes, playing on the [Streckfus steamer] Capitol. Desvignes left the boat and organized Sidney's Southern Syncopators, in which AA played; AA says he was with Desvignes 7 or 8 years. AA then played with Clarence Desdunes, a violinist. AA says Piron was getting the work then, [and AA played with Clarence Desdunes some at Tranchina's?]. When times got hard, AA joined the WPA Band. Then he went to New York [after WW II]. When he got back to New Orleans, he joined Celestin; he had a stroke after playing with Celestin [or at the same time?].

WR mentions the records AA made with Bunk Johnson ['s Brass Band]; AA played baritone on the session, and [Isidore] Barbarin played alto horn; the session was held in the back yard of George Lewis. The next winter he was in New York, WR says. In answer to a question, AA says he remembers Gene Williams, and says Williams jumped out a window [and killed himself].

Upon questioning, AA and HD say that those in Manuel Perez' band at the Roof Garden were himself on alto sax and clarinet; Eddie Cherrie, tenor sax and clarinet; Maurice Durand [, trumpet]; Caffrey Darensbourg, banjo; [Mr..] Oceola Blanchard, piano; Earl Humphrey, trombone; [Henry?] Kimball, string bass, who was replaced by an un-named bass player. [Compare photograph in JAZZMEN] AA admits that Darensbourg was a good banjo player, one of the best in New Orleans; Darensbourg was killed in Texas. HD says a sister of Darensbourg lives in New Orleans, and AA says she lives on Annette and Galvez streets. AA says he used to play with Johnny St. Cyr all the time; [it is not clear in what band or bands they played together].

AA responds that brass bands used to be 11 and 12 pieces; he says the Eureka [Brass Band] started the custom of using only 10 pieces. The old brass bands used only one alto horn. AA's father played alto at first in the brass bands, and then changed to baritone. The bands did not use saxophones, but AA modifies that statement, saying that

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Manuel Perez used saxes in the street, using AA on alto and sometimes Barney Bigard on tenor or, according to HD, Eddie Cherrie on tenor, also. Manuel "Hoss" Manetta played baritone [horn ?]. AA says Manetta was called "Hoss" because he was always "Pawing" like a horse [scraping the ground with his feet]. AA says Manetta does not like to be called "Hoss," that he wants to be called "Professor" [as he teaches]. One baritone horn was used in the old brass bands; baritone horns played baritone horn parts, except that in the WPA band the cello part would be adapted for the baritone.

AA says, in answer to questions, that bands playing for funerals today play about the same as they did in the days when his father was playing, except that AA does not hear a lot of the funeral marches that used to be played. He says funerals and funeral marches [the actual written parts] are easy to play because the music is slow, and that the coming-back jazz is harder to play because it is faster and requires faster execution.

AA's full name is Adolphe Leonce Alexander.

In answer to questions, AA says the old-time brass bands always wore uniform coats and dark trousers, the coats having braid on them. He says that two bands, the Excelsior Brass Band over the river and Manuel Perez' band, to which he belonged, had two uniforms. AA

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answers that the Golden Rule band had blue uniforms, the coats having braid and high collars, the trousers having a stripe down the seam.

WR asks if AA's father, and the bands he played with, had all their [parade] music on cards and/or in books; AA misunderstands, and says that his father had a lot of music, but his mother had him [AA] take what he wanted, and then she burned the rest. He says that the music of John Robichaux is gone, too, sold to Dave Frank [Tulane has acquired most of that music.].

In response to a question, AA says that his father did have pupils, although he did not have the patience to teach his own children.

End of Reel I

AA says that the first "scholar" he started is going to graduate in June in music from a college; he is Oscar Rouzan, Jr. AA does not have scholars any more; his eyes have gotten bad as a result of his stroke.

He still plays a few jobs.

AA answers that he is called "Tats" for his father, who was thus called, the diminutive for "Taton," meaning short. Dejan asks AA why he was called "Biscuit;" AA replies that he [AA] used to work for the Pelican Cracker Factory, that he ate a lot of crackers, and some people began calling him "Biscuit." AA says his father spoke Creole French a lot; Dejan says he spoke it most of the time, and appeared to have difficulty with English when he [Dejan] spoke to him. Dejan says he remembers the father quite well. Dejan answers AA, saying his brother is in California. AA says he has a son and a daughter in California. Dejan says he used to pass by AA's father's house every morning on his way to hooking up his double team of mules at his father's stable. AA says his son, now a postman in California, used to take lessons on tenor sax from him, and that he got pretty good; AA answers a question by saying that the son still plays a little around California.

AA, who has not lived at his present address all his life, was born at St. Philip and Derbigny streets, where his grandmother used to teach school, also.

AA does not know what band he liked best to play with.

Dejan says AA used to play at Luthjen's with DD and Billie [Pierce].

AA says that playing with Manuel Perez was strictly a reading job, but says that he himself, Eddie Cherrie, Caffrey [Darensbourg] and Earl Humphrey played jazz in Perez' band; AA adds that Caffrey didn't read the music, and Humphrey was not much of a reader. WR says he heard Humphrey is now in Virginia, and now playing bass [Humphrey has since moved back to New Orleans, and is playing trombone, and perhaps bass.].

AA is asked how many pieces there were in Sidney Desvigne band; AA says there were ten. Dejan, who asked the question, says that on Sunday afternoon battles between the band in which he played and Desvigne there were twelve pieces in the latter band. Dejan says [Tom Wiggle (Theodore Purnell?)] was playing, the band had 3 saxes, etc. AA answers another Dejan question, saying that he doesn't know what happened to Percy Severe, a very good banjo player who was with Desvigne; Severe may have gone around Baton Rouge. Louis Nelson played trombone in Desvigne's band.

AA says Maurice Durand and Willie Humphrey used to have a band; they had their band when AA was with Celestin and Ridgley. AA says when he quit Celestin to go with Manuel Perez that Durand was playing second trumpet with Perez; AA says he was a good trumpet player, but that he is not playing anymore. WR says he saw him in California two years ago. Dejan says he used to play with Durand every Carnival day, besides other jobs, for the Arabi Packing Company parade, from Arabi to the New Orleans Municipal Auditorium; Durand would get that job every year, because he was from Arabi, and was well-known there.

AA admits that he has played a lot of single jobs with different people, including many at the lake, and with Dejan a lot of times, too. Answering a question, AA says he has worked with a violin in the band; he played in a band with Paul Dominguez, on violin; [Alphonse] Picou on clarinet; AA on [alto] sax; Ernest Milton, drums and leader; Ike Robinson, trombone; Lawrence Toca [Martin], trumpet; Albert Glenny, bass; [ ] Simon [?], banjo. AA says the band worked in Buras 2 or 3 times a week, and also [at another time] worked some at the Autocrat Club. Other violinists with whom AA worked were Clarence Desdunes and [A. J.] Piron; AA used to substitute for Louis Warnecke in the Piron Band. Warnecke worked for Eugene Dietzgen blueprint company, and had to go to New York occasionally, and AA would work a month or two at the time for him. AA says

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he played in the Ridgley-Celestin Tuxedo Band with Lorenzo Tio. AA also played with another violinist, John Robichaux. AA says he didn't care too much for violins, but usually the violinists were the leaders. AA says Dominguez, Peter Bocage, Piron and Clarence Desdunes were good violinists, but Robichaux was not. John Robichaux was a businessman.

End of Reel II

Interview was at AA's home, 2421 St. Anthony Street.