

Unedited first draft

ARMAND HUG
REEL III [only]
February 13, 1976

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ALSO PRESENT: John Perhonis
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

It's rolling, RBA says. Friday the 13th. We should put that on there. It's our lucky day. We should, JP agrees. Yeah.

But, I want to ask Armand to...if he could play something that could be representative of what he just described as playing a style that Jelly Roll [Morton] might be playing in 1976, if he were still alive, or [anything] like that. Do you have one in particular that you'd like to do on that?

Yes John. I do, AH replies. I think I have a tune that I would like to demonstrate, if you might call it that. Why, it was written...by Jelly in later years, and it was a rather pretty little melody. A little something different from his regular tunes that he wrote.

As I discussed with you off the tape there, John, that I feel as though...now [as] I try to play Jelly Roll. You ask me what styles, or what has most influenced me now.

I think that, now. I would say, at this point, where people are conscious of jazz, more than they have ever been. New Orleans jazz, and Dixieland, and me, being here in New Orleans--people [are] looking to me as a representative of New Orleans.

Of course, I have to play things that are New Orleans. I still feel, as though, I basically have to play Jelly Roll for these people.

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But, I do like to use some of the styles that I picked up during the years. Lots of Bix [Beiderbecke]'s influence, and maybe a little bit of Earl Hines, Jess Stacy, or Fats Waller.

Anybody you want to name, I heard them all. At some time, or another, I may put this, or incorporate this into something that I'm playing by Jelly Roll.

I like to feel that, maybe, this is the way Jelly Roll would play this tune. I think this gives me a lot of inspiration.

(RBA moves the mike over.) So I can untangle them, he says. They're all tied up together. You looked at the tape recorder, Armand? RBA asks. You talked to the tape recorder...just like it's a human being. Do you know that?...

It's not like this is a professional recording with good mikes and everything on them. We just want to document...

[AH plays...]

Very nice, JP says. I can see some things working in there, the combinations. That'll be up to you now, AH notes, to be able to pick out the spots that you think sound like Bix, and Hines. I certainly heard Earl Hines there, JP says.

I was wondering, RBA begins, about something. Did Jelly Roll use many augmented chords? I never thought about this before, AH says. I believe so.

He never seemed to go towards a whole tone scale, RBA observes. It seems to me that when there's an augmented chord, it

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leads you right into the whole tone scale.

I don't know of anything that he used, the way he used the whole tone scale too much. He used diminishes, though, a lot. Well, that's another whole thing though, RBA says. Yeah, AH agrees.

The difference between a diminish, and augmented chord, RBA says, is very different...AH interjects, yeah. They're so different, RBA notes. Yeah, very different, AH agrees (and demonstrates).

Maybe, we'll take something a little, with a little more...a little up, AH adds. A little faster...

You want to do something of Bix's? You want to talk about it, or do you want me to play it?

[AH plays bars from "Sweet Sue," while saying,] I believe you had asked me, John, if he used the piano. I told you that he did tell me that he did, basically, use a lot of piano when he was thinking of these solos.

I can find this evident in the great solo that he did on "Sweet Sue," particularly in the bridge. I'll just give you an example of it, and I'll play most of the solo that I can recall right now.

But, the bridge was a...let's see if I can get it on. [AH plays bridge of an "Sweet Sue..."]

He's got, right there, he goes down from (AH demonstrates)

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to E-flat ninth chord, which I'm certain, that's exactly what he had in mind when he worked it out on the piano, you see, and then he goes (demonstrates).

He gets to the minor, he gets the A-minor chord, and puts an E-flat in, it (demonstrates).

There's nothing more to be said there about the creativeness, and the genius that he had in there, AH states. It had, definitely, to be worked out on the piano, as you can see.

I don't know of any...let's see if I can think of something else that may stand out as much as that does. Well, would something like "Davenport Blues," be used? JP asks. Well, yeah, of course that is a piano solo, AH notes, but it was also played with a band.

I believe he recorded it with the Wolverines, didn't he, Dick? I think with another group, RBA says. Bix and his Rhythmic Jugglers, I believe. Another group, AH agrees.

That's in the book, RBA continues. We can look it up. Now, that we're getting old, we look things up.

Well, of course, "Davenport [Blues]" is basically a piano thing, AH says. [AH plays "Davenport Blues..."] He used the whole tones. ["Davenport Blues..."]

No one else was using those whole tones, that whole tone part in there was something completely new to music? JP asks. Well, they may have used it before him, but certainly not, not

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the way he did, AH states.

You never find it in a piece like this? JP asks. No, and something I might point...might bring out here, John, is: you asked me what...in which way did he influence music a lot?

I think, as I would think right now. [It was] his use of intonation, his blues, his flats, flatting a note, and using it to a blues note. For instance, like (demonstrates) he got the most out of a blue note like that.

Taking, and flatting it, and really making it something. He gave it so much feeling, you know. I mean, it's hard to explain it unless you just hear it. Let's see if I (demonstrates).

He just had such a beautiful soul for music. That's the only way we could put it.

Like, Johnny Hyman once said. He could understand. Like, Johnny Wiggs, I mean. I referred to him as Johnny Hyman, that's his real name, but Johnny Wiggs once said Bix had to have a beautiful soul, he says, because no one could play that kind of music.

He said it had to be, and I can understand it because everything that he played. That's why, today, I'm playing these same things that I played 50 years ago when I first heard them. They're every bit, to me, as inspirational, as beautiful as the first day I heard them. They haven't changed. They haven't lost anything.

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Of course, I think that you really have to understand what Bix was trying, what he was trying to say there. As to put it into the modern vernacular, you know, as they...say, he was trying to say something.

I'm sure he was saying it, and he was doing a good job of saying it. If you are able to understand what he was trying to say, [it's] because, certainly, it's his feeling. That's what I always said, the feeling.

Anyone can hit this note, anybody. But, if you hit it, and do something with it which he knew what to do with the notes--how to get the most out of them.

Let's put it that way. He knew how to get the most out of a chord. He knew how to get most out of a rhythm pattern.

Like, for instance, in, I believe it was a very obscure record that they made by Joe [Verges]--"Bungalow Dreams. " They made, Bix and Trumbauer.

That rhythm pattern that they take right before Trumbauer's chorus (demonstrates). You see, I mean, things like that. He could take something, and just get the most out of it which basically is nothing to it, but it's the way he did it. (Demonstrates.) That was Trumbauer with his solo.

That's the thing. He could take just a tune that really wasn't a great tune, like the bridge, (demonstrates) and his solo in the bridge was this (demonstrates). You see how his

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inflections...how he is?

He would drop those notes. See, his little inflection like that. That's how he got a lot of effect. (Demonstrates.)

His genius for rhythm, and syncopation was just absolutely unheard of. Like, for instance, his solo on "Old Man River." [AH plays solo from "Old Man River..."]

As you analyze each, and every, bar of that, it's just a work of art. Each measure. I noticed in that particular one, the way the rhythm changes, JP observes. His rhythm and his phrasing...

That first part, AH continues, where he comes in (demonstrates). Isn't that beautiful? Now is that all...

There's almost a rhythmic shift there where he changes his... that part in the middle seems to change, JP observes.

Yeah, he bends the notes, AH states, and changes the rhythm of it, like when (demonstrates). What he's doing there is what they called...what we used to refer to as delayed rhythm.

It's triplets, but he takes it, and utilizes it in such a way that you've never heard triplets played that way. (Demonstrates.)

Now, these are his cornet solos? JP asks. That's his cornet solos, AH says. Cornet solos.

Of course, with his piano work. Well, "In a Mist," (demonstrates). [AH plays more of "In a Mist."] Beautiful

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harmony.

Now, Eddie Miller once told me he had spoken to Bix about the ending of "In a Mist," and that Bix told him he had words for it, that he was supposed to give them to him.

You know the ending of "In a Mist." (Demonstrates.) Yeah, Eddie Miller told me that he told him he had written words for that ending, and it seems to be telling me something every time I play that ending.

What I can hear is...like, you left me here standing in the rain. or in a mist. You know, like (demonstrates). It sound like something very sad, and melancholy to me.

I don't know. It just is the way his life ended - it seems to me - that's what he was trying to say, and it would be great if we would have had those words.

[He just had words for] the ending, just the ending that he had written words for. I never heard of him writing words for anything, RBA says. That's fascinating. That's fascinating, AH agrees.

We've got to see Eddie Miller now, RBA notes. Maybe, Eddie Miller's got those words, AH says. We better dig him up.

Is there something else of his? JP asks. I don't know of anything else of his, AH replies. Of course, everybody knows his work "Candlelights," you know, has whole tones again, you see.

(Demonstrates.)

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He utilized that break...and this, also, was one of his beautiful passages I liked. (Demonstrates.)

He had to be a man with plenty of feeling. I imagine, basically, he was a romanticist. He had to be because his music was beautiful. That's what made it so great.

I think that any music has to have some kind of feeling, kind of. That's why, to me, some of the music that's played today is so meaningless.

They had a band playing here last night. I was sitting down with the night manager, and he kept saying: I heard them for three hours, playing, and I can't recognize one thing they played yet.

It's unbelievable, and I'm sure they were good musicians. But, they sounded like they were practicing at Julliard Conservatory, or some conservatory, you know, and they were just making a lot of noise.

That's one thing with Bix playing. Every note meant something. Like they once said about Jack Teagarden. Every note that he ever played on the trombone meant something. There wasn't one note that didn't have a meaning.

Do you hear, for instance, Debussy in that? JP asks. I can hear it, AH replies. Definitely, in there, sure. (Demonstrates.)

I think Bix was...basically...he had a good education in classical music although he may not have actually had the concert

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training.

He knew the classics. He had a good classical background, and I think, with that, combines with his feeling for jazz, and his mixing of the New Orleans music with his knowledge of classics...

"In a Mist"...is embellished with a lot of progressive harmonies. That's a good way to put it.

That's always the way I felt about it. It's old-fashioned, yet it's new. No matter how many times you play it, it sounds that way. It always comes out the same.

One thing I noticed, RBA observes, is that you don't play things like the...composer, and performer, like Jelly Roll. You never quite copied them, by any means.

A lot of times, if you sit there, and analyze it; you see that Armand would even re-arrange the structure of these, where he plays one strain quite differently, you know, in a different order, I'm trying to say. Yes, that's right, AH agrees. I do.

I don't think that you should try to copy the composer. Then, you kind of lose something when you do this because there can only be the composer. You can't copy him.

I never like to hear anybody say I copied such, and such, a person. You were inspired by him, something like that. That's true.

I just wanted to ask you one thing about what you said, JP

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continues. You said earlier - very early in the discussion - about a person you knew that played fake. Was that a term that was used, and is still used?

Yeah, AH replies. Fake was always a term that we used because most of the New Orleans musicians were non-readers. As Dick Allen knows, the old-time musicians like Papa Laine, and...well, Sharkey [Bonano] wasn't much of a reader.

Was there any stigma attached to that? The fact that you didn't read? Was that bad? JP asks.

If you want to know what it has [attached,] AH replies...My first big job, as I told you, was the Fern Dance Hall. When I went there, I had some music that I used to carry around with me. Some sheet music, and some of the popular tunes of that day like "Yes Sir, That's My Baby," or something like that. I would have [it] tucked away just to brief myself on, a little bit, in case I needed it.

When I walked in with this music under my arm, [William] "Von" Gammon, the drummer, says, what do you got there, kid? I said, I got some music.

He said, what are you going to do with it? He says, they don't read music here. He says, if you take a look around, and see how dark it is here, you couldn't see the music to start off with.

I said, well, how am I going to learn? He said, we'll teach

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you the numbers.

I said, I don't know tunes like "Jazz Me Blues," and "Panama," and "High Society," and all the old traditional tunes. I don't know those tunes. He said, don't worry about it. We'll teach them to you.

That's the way I learned them. We'd start off a tune. They'd say, we're gonna play "That's A Plenty," or something in that order. I said, I don't know it.

Harry Shields would be calling out the...he'd be telling me what chords are coming next. I wouldn't play the melody. He'd say, just play the chords, that's all. Don't worry about the melody. Just play the chords until you get to learn it.

Very often, I'd be going through some tune with him, and I'd hit a bad chord. Harry Shields had a wonderful ear, you know. Harry would say: no, no, that's the wrong change. Oh my lord, you're hitting a bad change there. That's not the change, and he'd tell me what the right chord was.

But, this is the way the New Orleans musicians in the old...days believed in learning. They listened to one another play, and that's the way they played.

They felt that if you read music, you weren't playing jazz as well as it could be played. Basically, they are right because you don't read jazz music, and play it with the right feeling.

In other words, their interpretation was--to play it, you

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had to play it from your heart, and play it from your mind. But, not reading it from the notes.

Of course, you can use music as a guide, and then put your own feeling into [it]. That's what came along, later on.

But, the reason most of the New Orleans musicians didn't read was that...one reason, because they felt that if you read music, you weren't a real good jazz musician. That to play good jazz, you had to play by ear, just pick it up.

Do you feel that way about Bix's music? JP asks. That the kind of things he worked out there were worked out on an ear basis? Oh definitely, AH replies. He worked it out, surely. He worked it out of his head, and out of his mind, and out of his heart. Sure.

That's what they meant by: creativity has to come from within. I mean, you know, you just don't read that on the music.

You can play somebody else's ideas that are already written down. But, I mean, to bring out your own ideas, you have to create them. You have to bring something else out, and that can't be done unless you bring them out yourself. This, you might say, is playing by ear. Sure. That's what it, basically, amounts to.

It's been pointed out in that book that just came out about Bix, JP continues, that a lot of solo passages he managed to create...all could have been created by someone who played by ear because he went off on a...

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I know, for instance, that a person who read, a well-trained, read musician would have thought it was a mistake, and completely stopped the song. But, Bix managed to go on because he didn't have that reading knowledge. So, it actually worked to his benefit.

Yeah, sure, AH agrees. This is true of many of the people who have studied music.

Like, I have people come up right now, and tell me...I'm playing something, and they say how long did you study? I say, oh, I actually studied about six months.

They say, six months! I've studied 10 years, and I can't play anything you know. They say, all I can do is when I got the notes there, I can play it. But, when they take the music away from me, I can't play it.

That's what the old musicians in New Orleans used to avoid. They didn't want to fall into that category of just being able to play from the music. They'd rather pick it up, and say they played it by ear, rather than say they read it.

Of course, it didn't work out too well when you had to go somewhere. I'll never forget the time I went to work with Johnny DeDroit--one of the old New Orleans trumpet players who was a very fine musician. He wasn't a great jazzman, but he was a very, very fine musician.

I went to work with him at Suburban Gardens. They had a

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night club, and they had a terrific dance act.

The music was so complicated. I had never seen anything so difficult in all my life. It was written in three sharps, four sharps, five sharps--all keys that were so foreign to me because, in playing jazz, you don't use those keys too much.

I started trying to read this music. I read the first three, or four, bars, and that was it.

So, Johnny DeDroit came over to me. He says, I didn't hear any piano. I says, well, there's a good reason. I said I wasn't playing.

He turns to me, and says, that's the trouble with you dance musicians. He says, when you get something to read, you can't play it. I says, well, I have to agree with you. You're right.

So, he says, take it home, and woodshed it, and see what happens.

The very next act came up, [and] didn't have any music. So, he says, what are we gonna do? We can't play it if you don't have music.

I said, what number do you want? They said, "Who's Sorry Now." I said, "Who's Sorry Now," I said, I can play that. He says, can you play it? I said, yes.

I asked them what key they wanted it in, and I gave them an introduction. I started playing, and the dancers were...oh, they were just thrilled, that I could play it behind them.

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So, he says, well, he says, I have to admit that the dance musicians have got some good points..

So, you see, the faking, or as we called it, (inflection) faking, did have a real great part in music. It's something that -even to ,today - I guess the musicians are happiest, the ones that are still playing the old time music...

If they're playing something, a carnival ball, and they've been reading music. They'll fold up the music, and say, let's forget about it. Let's play. Just jam, or fake...

END OF REEL