

*unedited
first draft*

ALLAN JAFFE
REEL I [only]
April 16, 1969

INTERVIEWER: Tom Bethell
ALSO PRESENT: Mrs. Jaffe
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

[TB begins, saying, today is April 16, 1969, and I'm interviewing Alan Jaffe. O.k., Alan. Could you tell me the story about how Preservation Hall started?]

Larry Borenstein had sessions...in his art gallery-- Associated Artists. I think about...I think it was 1955, or [195]7, somewhere around there where he started having Punch Miller play.

Kid Thomas was playing there, and the [bazooki?] trios...gospel singers, and things that come by...several times a month. Sometimes it would go several months without having any activity. [That is now Preservation Hall....]

When Preservation Hall became a, sort of, full-time activity...Larry moved his gallery next door to the dress shop, and we used to put on non-union things over there; including Billie and DeDe [Pierce] used to play there every...

Preservation Hall used to close one night a week, and that night, we used to run a concert next door with Billie and DeDe. And we used to have Sunday morning gospel things over there with Alfred Williams, the gospel singer. That was done on Sunday morning, the gospel.

Anyway. Kent Mills. - when he came to town, when he did the first Punch record - he talked to Larry about having a place

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where the bands could rehearse. At that time, they used a patio where they played back here. [That was 1960.]...

[I got started in New Orleans] March of 1961....At that time, Larry talked to Kent about running concerts, and he was interested primarily in doing a series of recordings.

He was, in [19]61 had come to town. (Can't remember details)...There was, at that time, Kent was here. (Tape stopped.)...

So, when we first got here, the first music we actually heard other than [at the] Paddock [Lounge], and Famous Door, was driving down on St. Peter Street, we saw some guys from the Eureka Brass Band - [Kid] Sheik [Colar], and [Oscar] "Chicken" Henry - and then stopped in Bill Russell's shop.

We parked, and were told that they were playing at the Cabildo; and went with them to that concert, and then, after the concert, went over to Larry's gallery, which is now the dress shop, not Preservation Hall, because he had already moved his gallery.

At that time, we met Kent, I think, [and] Dick Allen. Dick Allen had talked at the Cabildo, and Bill Russell. We met Bill before because the musicians had wandered into Bill's shop [cf. above.]

[This was] a couple of weeks [after we arrived.] Andy Anersdyrunp, from Storyville Records, was there. He was working

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for Bill Russell then....(Voice at door interrupts).

[I'm trying to remember the first Preservation Hall session.] It was on a Sunday. And I keep thinking it was on a Mother's Day, but...I'm pretty sure it was before.

The band used to play in the back of the hall, over by the back door....There were two clarinets, Israel Gorman, and George [Lewis]. [Louis] Nelson, and George Guesnon, I think. [Emmanuel] Sayles. Punch was playing. That was Sunday afternoon.

It was not so much a session, but more of a party. Everyone used to bring in beer, and everybody would just sit around.

The band didn't play as continuously as it does now. They would play a number, then [after] about 12...30 minutes, move around, or something, you know; five minutes, or so, later decide to play a number. There'd be lots of discussion about everything.

We got to talking then with people because we were so disappointed. We had expected to find a lot more music here in town.

I guess we had the Folkways series. It had just come out shortly before we came down here, maybe around six months before. [cf. discographies.] We really thought that all these people were still playing, and it was relatively easy to get to hear [them].

We got talking to Mrs. [Aline] Willis...Larry. He suggested that these things be done. Kent was running...the responsibility of hiring the bands, things like that; but he didn't actually

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want to get involved in passing a kitty, and sweeping the floors, and stuff like that.

So...when we were passing the kittys, we used one of this big Mexican plates...and Sandy [Jaffel][who worked at Larry's gallery], more, or less, said she would collect [the kitty]....

We use June 15 as an anniversary, of sorts, and that was the date we began paying union scale. As long as the band ran, on an occasional basis - it was just Sunday afternoons really - and then went to nightly concerts.

It ran for about two weeks, maybe three, before we ran it nightly. It ran nightly about two weeks before June 15th. It started right around June 1st. Around Mother's Day, which was the beginning of May, everybody got together, and we started talking about it.

When the Hall was running, Larry, sort of...No one was paying any rent, and Larry, sort of, approved everything, or disapproved of everything that went on. Like Barbara Reid wasn't involved at that time because Larry...disapproved of her being involved in it.

Larry went to get married, and he was away for about two, or three, weeks. He got married in San Francisco, and he drove across country, and stuff. (Tape off.)

(Internal discussion.) [Sandra Jaffe says,] The people involved in then Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz

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were Barbara Reid, Mrs. Willis, Bill Russell, Mills....(Tape off.)

[O.k., now it's started again, TB says.] [Also involved, AJ continues were] Walter Icelanks, a photographer, but also a drama teacher at Binghamton University in New York. [i.e. SUNY-Binghamton.] He was Belgian. And Mrs. Willis. And Sylvia Shannon. The officers of the society were Ken, Barbara, Sylvia, Mrs. Willis, and I was sergeant-at-arms....

[The society was all done while Larry was away] to get married. It was in that time. The society, I don't think, lasted a month....

[Originally Kent Mills was hiring the band], and also making up the difference, because at that time band costs were just about \$92.50, \$93.50 a night, and we weren't...for weekend nights, they weren't making enough to cover [the weekday] deficit. Every week was running a deficit.

[When Larry got back,] he was mad...[because the society had been formed.]...[There were arguments over which bands to use.]

[I took over the business of hiring the bands, and running the hall] in September 1961....We started off three nights a week, four nights a week. I think we were running four nights a week when DeDe said they'd give us a better rate if we went six nights a week. We went six nights a week, and sometimes where the nightly concerts would be on a Sunday afternoon instead....

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The hours were changed. The ones they finally settled on were 8:00[p.m.]-to-12:00[midnight.] There were other times that it ran earlier, and later. We have schedules from those days. [TB has them.] We used to make them out of jello [i.e. gel] transfer plates. That was when the society was going.

We published a list one time, put it in the back of the program. So, I don't know who was here on any given day....

When [Preservation Hall] started, we used to use the door behind the plant [as] the main entrance. People came in there, and we moved the band from the back of the room to the front of the room, pretty much once this concert started.

There was a lot of argument about it. A lot of people...The arguments about that would be a major meeting, and everybody...

You wouldn't even ask people for money when they came in. You would pass the kitty...when the band was playing a fast tune, or something, and Sandy would try to remember who she got, and which people hadn't put anything in. You'd have to insult them, to put something in.

But, at that time, if someone put 25 cents in...I remember the first time I put a dollar in for the two of us at a gospel thing and...but people would be approached to contribute, twice a set, at least. Then we stopped...when we took over. We stopped passing the kitty, and used to ask people to give money on their way out....

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We had a lot of trouble with the people across the street. Noise problems.

We ended up closing the door behind the piano....Most of the people came in at the door that is now closed. We closed that door, you know, keep the door to the rooms closed, and [they] stopped complaining about the noise. They complained about other things, but they stopped complaining about the noise.

And then we used to...just use the [door] over there. That's when we started asking people to put money in the kitty as they came in....

A lot of people would get approached [for money] so many times, and other people wouldn't, and it was sort of unfair. I always felt bad, walking in front of the band, and asking for money, [so we started charging 50 cents admission.] [TB mentions that it is a dollar admission now.]...

[AJ and his wife spend some time discussing why 50 cent, and then \$1 admission charges were instituted, saying that each time they were away, and others were responsible for the increasing charges...]

[George Lewis] was one of the few musicians who was known before I came here....After we got to town, and talked to people about where we could hear music, and stuff.

They would also talk about George Lewis as one of the name musicians....He had the reputation, then, as being the last pure

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musician in town.

The musicians, themselves, thought of him as, sort of, just another guy hustling for a job. Even at that time.

He was playing the first time we went to a session at the hall. And I remember Dick Allen saying, that's George Lewis, when he came in.

Right when the hall started, George left town, and he never played at the hall when it was actually the hall. The first time he really started playing, he came back from a trip.

[He went to Europe] in [19]61. He came back, and he came over here. And I asked him if he would like to bring in a band, and he said: no, he would rather be a sideman.

So, he started playing with [Kid] Thomas's band. He played with them, maybe three, or four, times....I'm pretty sure he was out-of-town, all during the actual, real beginning of the hall.

[There is some discussion between TB and AJ about where GL was at that time...]

But, I remember [GL] coming back, and I specifically remember him saying he didn't want to be a leader of a band. And also, the other musicians didn't want to play with him.

That's how Sayles ended up being the leader of that...the George Lewis band [with] Kid Howard. [The George Lewis All-Stars.] He was the only one who had played with [that] band, and the only other person who was suitable [to be leader] to

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everybody else in the band was (baby crying) Joe Watkins. I don't remember why we didn't use Joe as leader....

So, Sayles became leader, but he, sort of, understood that...He knew why he was the leader of the band. Everybody came, and picked up their dates separately. He didn't call guys in the band. He paid the tax, and stuff like that.

[George was still playing with Jim Robinson in those days.] He used to have a quartet then with four pieces. There was Joe...Joe Robichaux on piano; Joe Watkins, Jim, and George.

But the piano player used to change. Sometimes, they used... they tried Alton [Purnell] for a while. They used Dolly Adams for a while. There was never any one, regular piano player.

They played together until we stopped using quartets....I don't remember when we stopped using quartets....There was a lot of good music then.

I miss hearing [George Lewis.]...I don't know. There's maybe a dozen, really king musicians. People who are really worth listening to. (Baby crying very loudly throughout.)

They can carry a band. Jim with a big band, can really carry it. Percy [Humphrey] can play a weekend by himself, and just the difference in what he's playing can make jazz interesting. [Kid] Thomas. George was one of those musicians....

(Unrelated discussion with others takes place in background.) (Tape off.)

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I think the main thing that we always wanted to do was present the music. We felt people had a chance to listen to the music, you know, on a musician's own terms. At least [be] successful enough to support itself.

I think that...setting up the hall was something that-- probably the way someone from out-of-town pictures a...little bit of what a place in New Orleans should look like....That's the way we wanted it....

[We don't want it any bigger.] It's just a good size because you can still have five or ten people in there...you can even have three people in the hall, and it looks like an audience.

The most difficult thing is for the band to play to an empty room. There are very few nights when there wasn't anybody out, but even those nights, Sandy and I could go, and sit in the hall, and it would look like...

[There were times with no one in the hall.] It was very difficult when it opened. No one came in, frequently, for the first half-hour. You think maybe this is going to be the night when nobody came....

The biggest change, actually, came last year, two years ago. When it was the first time, people, large crowds of people actually came to Preservation Hall because they were looking for it.

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When we first opened, a lot of people just wandered in, and for the next couple of years, people came here, but it was just a small amount of people.

There always were people who came to the hall. Local people brought guests, and other people from out-of-town; but, you know, we still had to count pretty heavily on people coming in off the street....

I think it was a gradual [change.] I also think that probably the touring...playing in lots of cities. We played also in the areas where people...

People from New England, for instance, don't come, and spend time in New Orleans. They go elsewhere for vacations. And people from the Midwest, and the Southeast, are the tourists here, and that's also where we've done the majority of our touring....

[AJ discusses a Summer 1963 tour of Boston.] The date at the Boston Arts Festival was two nights. They had this beautiful farm in Peterborough [N.H.]...We all stayed there [at an architect's beautiful home.]

They wanted as close to the George Lewis band as possible. We took the band that was actually playing the hall, and we took Charlie Hamilton instead of Joe Robichaux.

I remember they never said anything about who was playing and...had I realized they had wanted Joe, Joe would have made the trip instead. I remember they specifically didn't request

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anybody.

That was one of the first times that...We went from here, took the Southern [Railroad] up, and went to Washington.

We had to change trains in Washington. I remember that I made everybody take a tour. We had, like, two hours, and we put everybody in one of those train cars to see the city.

We went to Boston. We waited in the station. I remember asking George, what sort of [] would you like. And he said, don't worry (Loud chair noise.), I'm gonna meet you....All of a sudden, a big guy, he yells, George Lewis; comes running clear across the station; picked George up, you know, swinging him around in the air.

Then George went to Peterborough where we stayed at the [] home. The whole band stayed there a couple nights.

And that was over the Fourth of July weekend....We set off firecrackers on the Fourth. Big fire in the fireplace. It was cool up there.

That day we played in Greenville. We played for a town meeting. They had a big town meeting on every Fourth of July; then had a picnic afterwards, and we played outside...and all the kids were playing around the band.

Then, we went to Boston, and played dates at the Public Arts [Festival]....I'd say two dates....

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They had it on stereo, AM-FM radio. They broadcast the whole thing, and it was on Educational T.V. The concert ran, went on for about three, or four, hours...They had about 10-12,000 people, and had a very good review in the Boston paper.

Then we went, and played in Seven Answers to Medicare [Concert]. Then we went, and played a benefit somewhere, I remember....

Of course, the first things we did [with the Preservation Hall band] was up in Ohio, in Cleveland. The Tudor Arms.

Then, we did one up in Charleston, West Virginia. I think that was before []. And I'm trying to remember the Thomas-Dutrey date. The Kid Thomas band....

We all stayed there, at Dr. Blackburn's house. I remember George warming up out there on that trip. He was just sitting around there. He tucked the handkerchief in the [billow?] of his clarinet.

And he's playing little things out of operas, and stuff, popular arias. And Dr. Blackburn, and I, were sitting in the other room, listening to him. He was playing them very softly....

[GL] said his neighbors used to complain about him playing...loud squeaking. So, he learned to play...learned to practice quietly. And the handkerchief was...

And George also...George used to say the sound comes out of the holes. Whenever he recorded, he wouldn't move the belt of the

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microphone. He would always move the finger holes.

He was playing stuff like from [Pagliacci?]. He knew the themes from the arias, and stuff. He said that learning to play soft like that was what gave him such good tone....

[TB asks about the tour of Japan.] There was no sickness. No one missed a concert. They were well received. [They didn't have to play long.]

Every night, George would make a speech. And every night, it got longer, and longer; and people used to sit there so intent to everything he said, and he'd get very dramatic.

And every night, they'd present him with a bouquet of flowers. It started off with...one night, he threw a flower into the audience to some girl, or something. The next night, there were two flowers, and everybody started throwing flowers, and then it became a bouquet.

And finally...the Japanese said it wasn't a gracious gift throwing back their flowers. Maybe, they were taking it like you weren't accepting it.

So, then he started in with a piece of formica. He broke off a green leaf, and said, this is an evergreen. Evergreens stay green forever. And our friendship will stay on forever. And this...some nights would go on for 15 minutes. They would be playing "Till We Meet Again..."

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[GL certainly liked Japan, TB says.] Some people treated him well....[He played] 42 concerts [that year, six weeks.] It was sold out every night. The thing was, it really was...people didn't come more than once. It's hard to believe....

[TB asks about the future of Preservation Hall.] I don't know. It's hard...It certainly has continued to get more successful each year. Things that I would never have expected--like when we started, and look at it like the way it is today...saying, if we can reach that point, that's the most successful thing.

Now, there's really a chance to get the band, and have a hit record out where, you know, have a television series. They're not that far away from those things.

I don't think I'm really that interested in it [the t.v. series], in myself, for playing. Being away from New Orleans for six months is [something] that I'm really not that anxious to be doing....

[Some discussion about thinking in five year terms. TB believes the number of musicians available to play in the hall has dropped by half over the previous five years.]

Think of the musicians that have died that are really missed. Like John Casimir. There's no replacement. George Lewis. There's no replacement....Alfred Williams was a good drummer, who's missed. Chine'e' [Foster]...Bill Matthews. Kid Howard was a

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good trumpet player....There are other good trumpet players - maybe not as good, as good as him - but someone else can replace himself.

[TB says the time may come when only two bands play at the hall. They had seven, and now they're down to three, or four.] I think as long as we can have wonderful bands playing wonderfully, you'd say fine. Basically, when I wouldn't be happy with the music is when I'd close....

[TB mentions how some of the musicians play even though they don't get good money.] George did. Even to the end, he was talking about arranging a tour [because he loved playing.]

When Kid Thomas made his tour - his first trip [with AJ] as his booking agent - George asked me to wait....He still wanted to make that trip [even though he was ill] until ten days before we left.

I was out-of-town. I kept putting it off. Finally, I spoke to George on the phone, and I said, the doctor said, no. But, again, he asked not to be replaced. He wanted to be...said don't put anybody in my place, maybe I'll make the next one....

Touring, now, is a pretty good thing. Not only financially but...they have the type of adulation that is very satisfying, and also travelling is very comfortable. Plus, they enjoy being with each other.

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[TB asks how Jim Robinson likes touring.] I get the feeling Jim would like to stay home. It's a job. [He does] his job, comes back home, and that's fine. He travels well. He talks about [how] he'd like to make a trip to Europe. Not to play, just to go visit, and stuff....

When Billie and DeDe [Pierce] first went on tour, it was first supposed to be [Louis] Nelson and George [Lewis.] They were supposed to be the clarinet player, and trombone player. They took another job instead. They went over to Europe, and they weren't back in time.

And I didn't think Jim [Robinson] would go with Billie and DeDe. For all sorts of reasons. I also thought he deserved the opportunity of first refusal. And I asked him. He said, sure. And you know, our first tour, the band was playing decently. It wasn't a lot of money, and we also travelled by station wagon.

Now, when a band goes out on one of those tours, they know the type of conditions that they're going to be living in. At that time, it was a fairly adventurous thing to do. I was surprised that Willie Humphrey accepted. I didn't expect him to, but again, he deserved the opportunity. At times, I offered Willie to go on trips, and he turned down, and Jim also....

[TB asks how the music is received by college kids now....Do you think it makes much of an impression on them now?] I think the best indication is now - at whatever colleges you play - the

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kids themselves arrange the program of who is going to be there.

We're booked solid [for] 1970. When we finished our tours through the Southeastern states, late in March; that same period, we have seven weeks next year with which to book the band. We have three empty dates.

And also, the reception of the band at the Fillmore made a real impression. The kids talked to the musicians. They wanted to learn from them.

It's a type of acceptance...Here's a band doing their own thing, and we're enjoying it. I think that the honesty, and the integrity, of the music, of the musician, comes across very quickly to the college audience.

They really appreciate it. Most of the stuff they get to hear is pretty hokey...and they feel [this is genuine.]

The reception at the Negro colleges is [also good.] The Southern Conference of Negro Schools just booked the band for eight dates....Most of the schools we go to play...the black students will always be there...

END OF REEL