

Retyped

Russell: It ought to be on now, we may have to move that up a little bit for you [noise], must have put the speaker on. Okay, that seems to be on now. Now you might tell who you are Mr. Elgar, your birthdate, is the thing we'd like to know, if you don't mind telling how old you are

Elgar: No, I don't mind that at all--I am rather proud of that; I was born on June the thirteenth, 1879 in the city of New Orleans.

Russell: Now, what is your full name?

Elgar: Full name is Charles Anthony Elgar.

Russell: Had your family been musical?

Elgar: No, I was happen to be the only one who was stung by that particular bee.

Russell: When did you start in music, what was the first instrument you started on?

Elgar: My first instrument was violin, which was my major; I started on that when I was six and I studied with a French teacher who was assistant conductor of the French Opera in New Orleans.

Russell: Well, what was his name, do you remember?

Elgar: By the name of Francois Karkel, that'd K-a-r-k-e-l, and I studied with him six years.

Russell: Now, what was the very first music you ever remember hearing? Can you remember was it ah

Elgar: Well, ah

Russell: The Opera maybe or the street bands?

Elgar: Well, mostly opera because my father and mother were both opera fans and we had the New Orleans French Opera which was not very far from where I was born.

Russell: Where were you born, by the way?

Elgar: In New Orleans.

Russell: I mean what part of the city--downtown?

Elgar: In French town.

Russell: About what street?

Elgar: And, on Burgandy Street.

Russell: Oh, yeah.

Elgar: And, at least a couple a times a week they would always take me to the opera and of

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Elgar: course having been a student of the conductor, I became all the more interested in the opera, because of him and through him; and he made it possible for me to even attend many of the opera rehearsals, so I could hear the thing in action; and the more I heard it, the more I fell in love with it. And I think that has much to do with my knowledge of classical music now.

Russell: I think so.

Elgar: And I delved in that particular phase of music mostly during my younger days, up until the time I began to study the clarinet with Luis Tio.

Russell: That was the . . .

Elgar: That was one of the Tio brothers from Mexico.

Russell:Senior, yes, because there later was Lorenzo, Jr.

Elgar: Yeah, there was; that's Lorenzo's brother. And at that time, then after I took up the clarinet and I began going for the popular side of it.

Russell: Oh, could you tell me while you mentioned the Tios so we don't forget it, that they came from Mexico, you said.

Elgar: Yeah, they originally, they were from Mexico, both of the brothers. But they migrated to New Orleans oh I suppose ooooh when they were about in the 30's.

Russell: They were about thirty years old.]

Elgar: Yes, and Luis, Luis was better known than Lorenzo; Lorenzo the older brother was--he went in mostly for teaching. If you look back and could compare the playing of all of our old fine clarinet players, such as George Baquet, ah Charlie McCurdy [Soard's 1915 Directory], ah and what was the boy who died here? --- Jimmie Noone. . .

Russell: Yes, Jimmie Noone

Elgar: And ah

Russell: Omer Simeon studied from the young Tio.

Elgar: And you'll find all of those boys are a product of those Tio brothers.

Russell: Albert Nicholas

Elgar: And you'll ---Albert Nicholas...

Russell: Barney Bigard

Elgar: Ah, Barney Bigard, all of that, all of those boys are of that same school; if you

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Elgar: compared their style, you'll find that they all follow pretty much in that same pattern of technique which is different from the average clarinet player that you hear, these days.

Russell: They're all dead now, that's why I'm askin' you; I don't like to bother you with a lot of questions....

Elgar: You mean the Tios?

Russell: The Tios are all dead.

Elgar: Oh, yes, even the sons.

Russell: Yes; you're one of the few people that can remember them, and about--that's why I wanted to ask you.

Elgar: And I'll tell you another boy who's a product of that school, too, Buster Bailey.

Russell: Oh, yes.

Elgar: Yeah.

Russell: You say Lorenzo, Sr. is the one that taught.

Elgar: Lorenzo did more teaching than Luis; Luis, during his younger days did a lot of traveling. See, in the old days we had minstrel troops, and we had companies that traveled the country--just like the show that we have now--and they carried their own orchestras and band; and Luis went in for that type of thing, for a number of years. But Lorenzo always stayed right in New Orleans; he never did much traveling.

Russell: I notice you say Lorenzo Tio came with the Banda Roma.

Elgar: Banda Roma from Mexico.

Russell: There was one big band that came up, Mexican band, for the Cotton Exposition in 1885, you don't happen to be--I know you don't--you were pretty young then.

Elgar: No, no, I remember that; yes, I remember that very well, but I don't think, at that time, either one of those Tios were with the outfit. No.

Russell: They were already in New Orleans, you mean.

Elgar: Oh, they they, oh sure, they were already stationed in New Orleans

Russell: They'd been there...before 1885.

Elgar: Uh-huh.

Russell: Oh there was a famous national Mexican band; I have some of the sheet music with

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Russell: their picture on it.

Elgar: Yeah

Russell: I think "Over The Waves" was their theme song; they introduced that to New Orleans.

Elgar: Uh-huh.

Russell: They have their picture on the sheet music--quite a big band; fifty pieces or more.

Elgar: Uh-huh. Oh, yes, it was a huge thing, it was really a symphonic band.

Russell: Yep, uh-huh.

Elgar: Because they had cellos, bass violins, and all that sort

Russell: Oboes, bassoons---you see everything in there.

Elgar: Yeah, all the things that you find in a regular band plus the strings.

Russell: Yes.

Elgar: And the only band that I've heard, that compared with that outfit was the Garde
Republique from France. . .

Russell: Oh, really?

Elgar: . . . when they came here during World War I. We were, we were then playing at the
Pier, and we didn't play the Sunday afternoon that they were to give the concert because they
used the same stage and auditorium where we were.

Russell: Oh, yes.

Elgar: But having been employed there we were permitted to stay and listen to the concert.
One of the most wonderful experiences I have ever had and I shall never forget it.Russell: Do you remember any other real early music when you were a boy; did they have any
of the street parades? You know, they have now a lot of the parades they even use them for
funerals.

Elgar: Oh, Christ yes. Yes, sure.

Russell: They had the brass bands when you were a boy; you remember that.

Elgar: Uh-huh. Because I had a taste of that myself, after I began running around the
country. That was one of my first trips. I went away with an outfit that was organized in St.
Louis, and we traveled around the country for awhile, and had the misfortune of being stranded.
And from there we highlined up with a very famous trumpet player we had by the--who was at that

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Elgar: time with the Fourpoen Ring Brothers Circus. His name was P. G. Lowery.

Russell: Oh, yes, I've heard quite a bit about him.

Elgar: Very, very, very famous trumpet. Well, he was the band master then; he heard me play and asked me if I would take the orchestra. And we left St. Louis with that outfit and went to New York to the Old Madison Square Garden.

Russell: Oh, yeah.

Elgar: And, we rehearsed there for a couple of weeks before we went on the road. And then we went on the road, and I stayed out with that outfit, oh, about two years. Then I went back to New Orleans..stayed in New Orleans, and, of course, the ol' man got after me about running around the country and I stayed home for awhile; but the bug had stuck me and so I had another opportunity to leave and I left and came to Chicago.

Russell: I wonder what type of music you heard in the churches? Which church did you belong to? Were you a Protestant or Catholic?

Elgar: No, no, I'm Catholic, have always been a Catholic.

Russell: Find the usual music in the Catholic church, I guess it's never changed, as far as that goes.

Elgar: Yeah

Russell: You left New Orleans at what date then?

Elgar: Ah, I left there about oooooh the first part of November, 1902.

Russell: You were about twenty-three years old then.

Elgar: I was just about--yes, just about twenty-three when I came here. Ah, this local, 208, had just been given a charter that..the July of that year. And this picture you see up there...

Russell: Oh, yeah.

Elgar: . . . is a picture of all of the presidents; the man in the upper left--hand corner was the first president, his name was Alexander Armand, originally from New Orleans, himself.

Russell: Oh, he was?

Elgar: And I became a member here under his administration and have been ever since. These are all presidents we have had up to the present Mr. [Greyor] Gregg you see in the center there.

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Russell: Oh, yeah, still President now.

Elgar: uh-huh.

Russell: Huey Smith.

Elgar: Now Smith is gone; ah George--both of the Smiths is gone--the upper one, Ed Smith, and George Smith is gone; the one at the bottom there is Rona (?) Biggs--he's gone; and Swan up in the right hand corner. . . he's gone.

Russell: Is Mr. Swift still around?

Jarrett (?)

Elgar: Now, Stewart is still here; [Hugh] Swift is still here, Dr. George is still here, and Mr. Cregg.

Russell: Uh-huh.

Elgar: But all of the other persons have practically retired from the music game.

Russell: You were almost a charter member of the union here.

Elgar: Well, I came immediately after they got that charter, so I couldn't say that I was a charter member.

Russell: Well, no, no.

Elgar: But I was among the first members during the organization.

Russell: How long have you been an officer of the union?

Elgar: Oh, my dear (Russell laughs)

Russell: Ever since I can remember, but that's not so long.

Elgar: Yes, I've been an officer most of the time; now (?) from the very first time I came here--in some capacity. I've been vice president, I guess, about twenty years now. . . maybe longer. I've never had any desire for the presidency because I've never felt I wanted to give up my music activities, which I would have to do if I was at the head of the organization.

As it is, I stay in the background as its vice president. I can still function as a musician.

Russell: Well, that's wonderful. I think if you have that interest in music--because a lot of people who have been in the business that long, they get tired of it.

Elgar: No, and I still do it, because I now have the concert orchestra that's working under Music Performance Trust Fund; we give free concerts around schools and hospitals. And I'm gettin' a tremendous kick out of that work.

Russell: That's wonderful.

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Elgar: It keeps me young.

Russell: I wondered about the--I know a lot of your activities have been in the concert field; we have here this paper--may we keep this copy, by the way? . . .

Elgar: Uh-huh.

Russell: . . . so we will have that for our files, too--which also states your education and experience. The Nelson Academy. . . we might go through a few points there.

Elgar: That was my first school.

Russell: Now, where was that located, I don't remember . . .

Elgar: That's in New Orleans.

Russell: About where, though, what part of town?

Elgar: That's right next door to where I was born.

Russell: Oh right down on . . .

Elgar: Uh-huh. It was a private institution.

Russell: Uh-huh.

Elgar: Yeah

Russell: I didn't know it.

Elgar: Yes, it was a private institution. See, my father . . .

Russell: And the Southern University

Elgar: . . . at that time didn't believe in sending us to public schools. My brother and I both finished there.

Russell: Today, even, they say about half of the students in New Orleans go to Catholic schools.

Elgar: Most of them, yes. Especially in that south, in that French section.

Russell: Yes.

Elgar: A very few of the kids there went to public schools.

Russell: Ah, the Southern University

Elgar: That's now merged with the New Orleans and now they're in Baton Rouge.

Russell: Same organization.

Elgar: Yeah.

Russell: And then the other was when you came to Chicago; we have here [referring to paper] the Marquette, up in Milwaukee.

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Elgar: Well, I had two years at Marquette where I had a course in public school music, and then I studied at Kimball Hall with Professor Manley and I took my teacher's course there on violin. And I had a course of philosophy with Dr. Baldoff at the Central Y.M.C.A. College.

Russell: Yeah. Now, this conducting course under Lorenzo Tio. . .

Elgar: Yes, that's--we had, in those days, an organization known as the Club Lyré; that was composed of a symphonic orchestra--people who played just for the love of music--it was a non-profit organization. Their sole purpose was to sponsor talented young people. We used to give two concerts a year, and whenever we found a talented person, we would sponsor them. We sent. . . I remember we sent one boy to Europe--a pianist. And, I don't know--we've never found out what really happened; he died the week that he was to graduate----after spending almost four years in Europe. Then we sent a young violinist there, by the name of Edmond Dédé, [see Desdumes] and he never came back to America until he was an old man. And he died of cancer of the mouth. But that was organization, that was--it was through that organization I got my first training as conducting under Luis Tio.

Russell: Was it Luis or Lorenzo, then?

Elgar: Luis.

Russell: Luis.

Elgar: Yes, uh-huh.

Russell: Did he have regular classes at that time for it or just take you as a private student, or how?

Elgar: You mean in . . .

Russell: In conducting.

Elgar: Oh, yes, he did his private work, but this was something that he was interested in, and we used to meet once every week.

Russell: Who conducted the orchestra of the Lyré Club?

Elgar: This orchestra I'm speaking of?

Russell: Yes.

Elgar: Oh, Luis - - Luis Tio.

Russell: Oh, he was the conductor?

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Elgar: Oh, yeah, Luis Tio.

Russell: He was the conductor at that time . . .

Elgar: And when he found out that I was interested in that, then he used to let me take some of the smaller things that he felt I could handle.

Russell: Do you remember . . . ?

Elgar: And I became deeply interested in that phase of it, then I thought I'd study it.

Russell: Do you remember who else played in the orchestra, the other clarinetists?

Elgar: Well, his brother was, Lorenzo--Lorenzo was one of them; I don't remember the others, no.

Russell: Remember if Alphonse Picou ever played?

Elgar: Who?

Russell: Alphonse Picou?

Elgar: Oh, no, you see, those--those boys didn't go in for that type of--they had enough training on the instrument, but they they didn't go in for that classical side; from the very beginning they went into the dance field. Yeah, and they stayed in that dance field.

Russell: I had thought that Picou did some classical music, too, I think somebody told me--we haven't interviewed him very much so far; did have one interview with him.

Elgar: He was qualified and capable of playing it if he wanted to, but he was more interested in the popular scene.

Russell: Yes.

Elgar: As, as you well remember, at that time, the Dixieland music was just the thing.

Russell: Yes, yes, of course that's our main study, is going to be in that type of music, but we're glad to get all the classical background, because all of that helped, undoubtedly.

Elgar: Oh, my gosh, yes, it had as much to do, because until you know your instrument, such as those boys do, you can't be very successful in that Dixieland music.

Russell: No, no.

Elgar: Because it calls for a lot of technique.

Russell: Most of them actually can read, too, . . .

Elgar: Oh, yes, sure. Oh, yes, sure. Now when you hear this outfit that's at the Prevue, Franz Jackson ['s band], you'll see just what I'm referring to.

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Russell: Yes.

Elgar: Every man in there is very thorough musician.

Russell: Course I've heard lots of those groups, too, in the last twenty or thirty years myself. But, when you first came to Chicago, was there any of that type of music here, that what you call the Dixieland type? Or did it compare at all to the . . .

Elgar: Oh, yes; the Original Dixieland outfit had been here; that was the outfit--the first outfit that came through Chicago and played here before the colored Dixieland outfit came in.

Elgar: That was Bill Johnson's outfit.

Russell: Bill Johnson . . .

Elgar: Now, Bill Johnson's outfit was the first colored Dixieland outfit I can recall who came here and ah . . .

Russell: Do you remember about when ? . . .

Elgar: They played, they played at the 8th St. Theatre with Trixie Friganza.

Russell: Do you remember about what year that was? I know it's hard to think right exactly the year, but do you remember about when, like in relation maybe to the first World War? Was it before that?

Elgar: That was around, I would say in the vicinity of the 15, 1915.

Russell: Around 1915.

Elgar: Uh-huh, just a little before the war, because just about that time, I went--I was playing at the Washington Theatre here at 31st and State and I sent for Manuel Perez, Lorenzo Tio, [Jr.], Louis Cottrell, and -- I can't recall the other two boys--[pianist Frankie Haynte, trombonist Eddie Atkins]--but anyway, I brought an outfit here to work for Mike Fritzel.

Russell: Yes.

Elgar: At that time Mike Fritzel had a place on Madison and Follana (check sp.)

Russell: Was that the Arsonia?

Elgar: The Arsonia, that's right, and I put them in the Arsonia for Mike, and I had intended--as my idea (?) orchestra developed, I had intended to take them over with me; but they were doing so very well at the Arsonia, and Mike was so very, very pleased with them, that they decided to stay there.

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Russell: Excuse me for interrupting your train of thought, but is Mike Fritzel still here, you think?

Elgar: No, Mike died.

Russell: He's dead.

Elgar: Yes, uh-huh. You know he had this restaurant here at State and Lake, ah yes, State and Lake.

Russell: Yes, about State and Lake. About four years ago, I remember seeing . . .

Elgar: Yeah, the place is still there, you see, and it's still called Mike's. Most people still call it Mike Fritzel's place.

Russell: Yeah, I was going to say maybe we could interview him too, while I was trying to get all the story, but I didn't know he was dead. What kind of music did the Chicago musicians play?

I'm not trying to ask you to run down the music or do anything of that kind - - I mean the New Orleans type, you know, was quite different; I mean, did it compare, was it as good dance music, or was it a different type, or . . .

Elgar: Well, well, that is if you want to compare it in the Dixieland field, then it is different.

Russell: It was different, huh?

Elgar: Yes.

Russell: I wasn't trying to put you on the spot because I know you have friends in New Orleans, and friends here, too.

Elgar: Well, I don't mind that.

Russell: Of course, in those days, most of those people aren't playin' any more, and I wondered if you could compare what types of music was here? How was it different?

Elgar: Because, they, they don't, they don't match up; they don't match up with those boys. They don't match up with those--well, now I'm not afraid to say it, because they had not developed themselves musically. See, you take the young fellow today, after he's had a few lessons and he can run a few scales and he can play a few what they call "riffs", then he stops right there.

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Russell: Ha, ha, I know what you mean.

Elgar: See, he gets in what they call a combo and that's as far as he goes. Half of the time you hear him playin', you don't know what he's playin'.

Russell: That's what I think.

Elgar: And, of course, people are accepting it, and they tell you, well, it pays, yes, it pays, but where are you getting?

Russell: But the New Orleans fellows you felt had higher musicianship, higher quality of training. . .

Elgar: I'm not afraid to say that...by all means. No, there are, then--there are a number--of course nowadays, there is an evolution that's takin' place now that I'm very happy over . . . that among the younger fellows who are in collage now, you'd be surprised at the number of young people who are going in for the serious side of music. And they are meeting with great success and they are--now that the field is broadening and that this prejudice is dying out, there are many, many openings that they are getting into now then heretofore they didn't get a chance to enjoy. Now we have one man who's going in--one of our boys who is going in Grant Park symphony next month.

Russell: Oh, he is. Yes, what instrument?

Elgar: He's cello.

Russell: Cello.

Elgar: A man by the name of Donald White. He is now with the Cleveland Symphony, has been with the Cleveland Symphony; this is his second year. We have another chap from Chicago here, a bass violinist--Richard Davis; he took the audition for the St. Louis Symphony and he was offered the chair, but he refused it because he is with Sarah Vaughn where he makes triple . . .

Russell: Yeah.

Elgar: . . . the salary that the Symphony pays. But the opening is there for him anytime that he wants it.

Russell: What's his name again?

Elgar: Richard Davis.

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Elgar: that could make, and then too, it was the old-fashioned recording where you had the horns hanging from the ceiling and it wasn't at all satisfactory.

Russell: Let's see, was one of the titles called "Nightmare", or something?

Elgar: One was "Nightmare" and the . . .

Russell: And it was a nightmare to you, then----(laughs)

Elgar: I forget the other two, but they never did get very far with those.

Russell: I haven't heard those for several years now, because I hardly ever play 78 records, but I did pick those up some years ago. Who were some of the outstanding musicians in that orchestra at that time?

Elgar: Well, we had Darnell Howard, clarinet and violin; Joe Sudler on trumpet; we had Will--this old memory doesn't function too much--second trumpet; Harry Swift was on trombone . .

Russell: And piano player. That was . . .

Elgar: Ah, the pianist at that time was Logan Thomas.

Russell: Darnell Howard played . . .

Elgar: Darnell was playing clarinet, sax, and . . .

Russell: . . . clarinet

Elgar: . . . Clarinet, sax, and violin.

Russell: Yes.

Elgar: Richard Curry . . .

Russell: Yeah.

Elgar: . . . was on drums; now, he's with Franz Jackson's outfit now at the Pevue.

Russell: We might go through these pictures--these aren't very good prints; this is the band that came from Milwaukee.

Elgar: Now this, this boy was the pianist at that time. Now this is Joe Sudler.

Russell: Is this Junie Cobb?

Elgar: No, no, no, no.

Russell: Oh, that isn't?

Elgar: No, no, no. That's Logan Thomas.

Russell: I showed this to Baby Dodds earlier this evening, and he said it was . .

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Elgar: No, that's Logan Thomas and this is Omer Simeon. He's ^{with} ~~will~~ Wilbur DeParis now in New York.

Russell: On the, on the . . .

Elgar: Yeah. And this is Harry Beasley.

Russell: On drums. Simeon in the middle, then, of the three sax . . .

Elgar: Yes, uh-huh. And this is Joe Sudler, trumpet player. And this is old Will Washington, and now he's passed on.

Russell: That's what Baby thought, too.

Elgar: Yes, he's passed on; so has this boy.

Russell: Well, if he's Sudler, I'll make just for the record here--on the left, the trumpet player on the left facing the camera.

Elgar: Yeah, uh-huh. And this is Bill Buford. One of the most marvelous tuba players I've ever heard.

Russell: Oh, yes, he's been on other records, too. The trombonist?

Elgar: Ah, Strange, his name was Henri Strange. I don't know whatever became of him after he left Chicago.

Russell: Is this that same violin you were talkin' about?

Elgar: That's that same violin, that's that same violin.

Russell: And the other sax player, did you tell me what his name was next to you?

Elgar: Ah, I can't think of that chap's name; it's been so long.

Russell: That's all right, as long as we have the others placed. Now, this is a bigger band here and it's a hard picture to see.

Elgar: Now, this is Simeon again.

Russell: Yes, I know, I got that from Mrs. Simeon.

Elgar: And this is Ernest Smith; he just died here about three months ago; he was livin' in St.---in Cleveland. This is the same banjo player, Washington; this is the same pianist, same drummer; this is Joe Sudler--in fact this is the same unit, this is the same unit.

Russell: Same unit, then, practically.

Elgar: Same unit--on a smaller picture.

Russell: I see.

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Elgar: Uh-huh.

Russell: Was this picture taken at Milwaukee too, I believe it says . . .

Elgar: Yeah, that was taken at the . . .

Russell: Wisconsin Roof, is that the name?

Elgar: . . . Wisconsin Roof Garden.

Russell: That's the way the band stand looks there.

Elgar: That's right.

Russell: That was up on top of the hotel?

Elgar: Yeah.

Russell: It sits up there. And how long were you up there in Milwaukee about?

Elgar: Well, the first time--when we opened the Roof Garden there, we stayed there two years, and I came back here and worked eighteen months, at the Stratford Hotel and went back and stayed another eighteen months at the Roof Garden and then left there and opened up the New Eagles Ballroom, on--at that time, they used to call it Grand Avenue. Well, we opened that ballroom when it was first built; we stayed there two years. Then, when we left there, we came here to open up the Savoy.

Russell: Oh, yes, that's right. I've heard about your band, there too.

Elgar: That was about 1927.

Russell: Many of these same musicians were in the band, were they, at the Savoy?

Elgar: When we were here at the Savoy?

Russell: Were they, or are they . . .

Elgar: Most of them---most of them.

Russell: Can you remember many of the people from New Orleans that you worked with? I know Baby Dodds said he worked a few nights at least in that band. I think Zutty Singleton had too, and different ones around town.

Elgar: Uh----Zutty. I tried to get Louie [Armstrong] at that time, but Louie just about that time had made up his mind to organize his own band. And I had Freddy Keppard.

Russell: Oh, Freddy Keppard.

Elgar: Yes, I had Freddy Keppard.

Russell: While I think of it--I don't like--well, it won't hurt to have this on the tape

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Russell: either; but do you know if Freddy Keppard's widow would be living here anymore?

Elgar: I don't know, I never

Russell: Oh, would you have pictures of her?

Elgar: never see her, never see her, never hear anything more since he's passed.

Russell: I know his brother Louie Keppard in New Orleans.

Elgar: Is that so?

Russell: We've already interviewed him.

Elgar: uh-huh

Russell: And he's a wonderful man--he plays guitar--really a fine fellow. And we enjoyed seeing him. I was going to ask again, about--I know you never did much in the dance music in your early days, but do you remember much about the dance music that you heard in New Orleans--say, any of the big balls, or even Carnival Balls, or other kids of organizations?

Elgar: Oh, gosh, yes, because I played, I played with--even while I was studying classic side, I played with an orchestra there--the name--Fields and Flanchard (check sp.); and that was a popular combination from most of the club dances, and I did quite a bit of playin' with them.

Russell: Do you remember any of the clubs that you played for? the halls? or anything?

Elgar: Well, I remember--well there's one hall there, which was the popular hall for club dances was called--it was a French name, France Amis . . .

Russell: Yes.

Elgar: means. Friends.

Russell: Yes, on Robertson St., or about in there.

Elgar: And I can't remember the other hall, but there were two halls there, that were the popular halls for club dances and we did . . .

Russell: Preserverence or . . .

Elgar: . . . we did quite a bit of playin' there.

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Elgar: Ahhhh.

Russell: That's working alright now. We get another half hour on each side of that.

Elgar: Can you imagine that!

Russell: Most of the machines now are being made this way.

Elgar: Ahhhh.

Russell: turn it over and it records only on ^{can be taken} half of the tape, and the upper half, now.

Anything else about the dance music, what kind of band, they always had a violin, did they, in those days, I understand, and

Elgar: Well, I, in later years, I took up ^{the} saxophone,

Russell: I mean, in the New Orleans band, did they always use a violin in the dance bands?

Elgar: No, no, no, not as much as the clarinet, because having more or less on the Dixieland idea. There was always that clarinet.

Russell: That's what I always thought the violin, didn't fit in so well myself. They still tell me.

Elgar: No, but we did have orchestras, oh any number of orchestras. They used violins in those days much more with those dance orchestras than we do now,

Russell: What kind of part, if they played in more or less a Dixieland Band, say a six or seven piece group- what kind of a part would the violin play?

Elgar: Always, of course, the lead.

Russell: The--stick to the lead, you they didn't try to get fancy.

Elgar: Well, well, yes we yes we had boys there who were pretty, pretty clever with that sort of thing, you mean improvisation?

Russell: Yeah, improvisation, yeah.

Elgar: Yeah

Russell: They did that then too, I ~~wondered~~ ^{wondered} if they just stuck to the lead. Did you hear any parades when you were a boy--Can you remember--of course, the Mardi Gras parades--I guess you can't miss those.

(End of spool)

Elgar: Oh, my gosh, yes, parades and funerals with bands,

Russell: Used a brass band.

Retyped.

Elgar: And the very last job that I booked before I left there was the the Carnival Parade of that year. I had a band that played for the King's Chariot. That was my last big job before I left and came to Chicago.

Russell: Was that on the street or the Carnival Ball?

Elgar: It was on the street.

Russell: Oh, the street.

Elgar: Oh, no, we never played any of the balls.

Russell: Yes. That was in the parade.

Elgar: That was the parade, yes.

Russell: What did you play in the parades, sax?

Elgar: No, at that time I was playin' baritone horn.

Russell: Baritone horn!

Elgar: uh-huh.

Russell: I wondered about the saxophone when you were a boy there or young, I don't mean by a boy, five years old, I mean up to the age-----

Elgar: I didn't start the saxophone until I came here to the Stratford Hotel.

Russell: Did they use many

Elgar: At that time, if you remember the Brown Brothers here used to be in Vaudeville

Russell: Yeah, the Six Brown Brothers-----

Elgar: Well, we decided we'd all take up saxophones. And we went over to Conn and bought a whole set of saxophones and we had one of us, a man, the only at that time, the only tenor saxophone player we had among our group happened to be workin' with us, and he was our instructor. And we bought these saxophones, we had a baritone, we had tenor, two altos, and after a few lessons, we developed a couple of quartets, and during the dinner hour, we used to lay down these regular instruments and then play saxophone quartets. Imitating the Brown Brothers. And then of course everybody they liked it so well, we just stayed with it.

Russell: Did they use the saxophone very much in New Orleans that you can remember?

Elgar: No. No, no, no, no, no,

Russell: Are the big brass bands, do you remember, or, say, the Lyre Club, they wouldn't have used any saxophones of course, there, but I mean the other band.

Elgar: No, no. No, the saxophone came into popularity much, much later than that.

Retyped.

Russell: I think they say the saxophone was invented by a Frenchman or some Belgian who

Elgar: By the name of Sax.

Russell: Adolphe---

Elgar: Yes, Adolphe Sax. uh-huh.

Russell: ^{So} you would think that if it were a French--

Elgar: It is a development from an instrument that was called the Sax butt [confused here on this] [Sackbut Forerunner of trombone]

Russell: Oh, yes, I remember. I read I was wondering, since you remember the old French Opera, but can you remember anything about the orchestra, how many players, was it a pretty big. . . .?

Elgar: You mean in the orchestra, at the opera?

Russell: In the pit, yes.

Elgar: Oh, my gosh yes, I don't think far as I can remember, anyways, there was under fifty men in the pit. Regular symphonic outfit.

Russell: Symphonic

Elgar: Oh, yes, yes. Oh it was a monster thing.

Russell: Did they have opera about every night?

Elgar: Yes, uh-huh.

Russell: Did you go maybe twice a week.

Elgar: And ah the thing that made it nice for us, that you can go, you could go in the gallery for thirty-five cents.

Russell: Thirty-five?

Elgar: uh-huh.

Russell: That's pretty good.

Elgar: Yeah.

Russell: The opera prices are high now.

Elgar: Yeah, the, and we heard some very fine, very fine artists.. ^{some}

Russell: Can you remember any of them?

Elgar: Very, very, fine artist.

Russell: Any famous singers?

Retyped.

Elgar: Well, course I don't know if they would match up with the present day opera singers, but in those days, why we thought they were very wonderful.

Russell: I always heard, too, the New Orleans French Opera was one of the best in the country, and

Elgar: I don't think they have that any more.

Russell: No, no, they do have some opera in the auditorium, now, maybe,

Elgar: Yeah, but they're not, they're not the Original New Orleans Opera Company.

Russell: No, no they're not

Elgar: They don't have their own Opera Company as they did in those days.

Russell: No, they don't even have the Opera House; it's in the Municipal Auditorium.

Elgar: Oh, yes.

Russell: The opera house burned down in 1919.

Elgar: ooooooooooh.

Russell: So, they

Elgar: That's the old opera house on Bourbon Street.

Russell: On Bourbon and Toulouse.

Elgar: Yes, yes.

Russell: It's a big parking lot now.

Elgar: Is that so?

Russell: A big parking lot, and all the night clubs are along in there, night clubs, and strip joints, and you know, for all strip girls, and that's all.

Elgar: Sometime I might run down there and look the field over; I haven't been there in

Russell: I was going to ask--how long?

Elgar: I haven't been there now -- let's see, my father died in '22, and I haven't been there since.

Russell: 1922--oh, do you have any other relatives living there?

Elgar: Not anymore. What few relatives we have left; they have moved to Seattle. A couple cousins--retired schoolteachers--and my sister and brother, they've been here with me, oh, any number of years.

Russell: Your teacher at the French Opera, you say he was the assistant conductor.

Retyped.

Elgar: Assistant conductor there.

Russell: Did he play an instrument, too, sometime-----

Elgar: Oh, yes, he was a violinist.

Russell: Oh, the concert master.

Elgar: Oh, yes.

Russell: I know a lot of times the concert master is the assistant conductor and I didn't know if he just waved the baton....

Elgar: Oh, he was a wonderful man. I shall always be thankful to him. He was marvelous.

Russell: Do you remember hearing any good concert violinist when you were a boy, a student there at that time? Did they give recitals in the French Opera, too, or just opera?

Elgar: Well, we didn't, we didn't get too many, 'cause of course you know what New Orleans was in those days. The only one I can remember very vividly -- this old man I told you about, Edmond Dédé, that this orchestra sent over there to study.

Russell: Oh, yes.

Elgar: And when he came--he made one trip after he was a grown man and gave one recital.

Russell: And you got to hear him.

Elgar: I played in the orchestra that was on the program. At that time I had developed enough to play in the orchestra that played.....

Russell: Can you tell me some of your favorite musicians that you've heard? I'm not trying to put you on the spot because I know in your position

Elgar: Well, there's so many, there's so many, I

Russell: maybe some of the oldtimers maybe that aren't even livin' now, and on different instruments that you've liked.

Elgar: Well, there, there are a lot among the newcomers that I admire greatly and have all the respect in the world for them, on various instruments. There's a young fellow I met about four or five years ago, he is originally from Cleveland, he is living in New York now--a violinist by the name of Everett Lee (sp). He is also a very fine composer. He has toured Europe, and the last card I had from him he was touring South America, conducting in all the various symphonies there. When he first came to New York, it was just when "Carmen Jones" had started

Russell: Oh, yeah

Retyped:

Elgar: And Leonard Bernstein had the orchestra.

Russell: Oh, yes.

Elgar: And Leonard Bernstein was so carried away with his talent that they made him the concert master, of that orchestra. And anytime Leonard felt that he wanted to take a rest, he'd let Everett take the orchestra. And after they closed the season in New York and went on the road, he didn't leave New York, he sent Everett Lee with the outfit. I've been trying, since I've met and heard him and saw him in action,--I've been tryin' to get him a date here in Chicago at the Grant Park. I haven't been successful so far, they always have some lame excuse. But the boy's done a grand, grand job.

Russell: I was going to ask, too, about Eddie South. If he's still playing around here.

Elgar: Eddie is not doing as well as he should, with his talent.

Russell: How's his health?

Elgar: Do you know-----naw, his health is fine. You'd never know that he was sick a day. He's big as a house, and looks fine. By the way, he is my pupil.

Russell: Oh, is that right, I didn't know that.

Elgar: That's right.

Russell: You can be proud of him, I think.

Elgar: But there's something wrong with Eddie's makeup, that's holding him back.

Russell: uh-huh

Elgar: As you know, he has all the talent.

Russell: Yes, I thought so too,

Elgar: Very gifted...very talented..but there's something that's holding him back, and it's not his music.

Russell: Yeah, He's lucky that his health recovered anyway...one good thing.

Elgar: No, no, no, because after he came out of the hospital, they put him right to work. But ah I don't know. He doesn't seem to

Russell: I heard him about four years ago, when he was up on the North Side, you remember, Clark Street, there I think or State Street, rather, State Street, a little place. About State and I don't know--Division. He played there all winter long.

Retyped:

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Retyped

Elgar: Yeah. Uh-huh. He's had--he's had a few spots here where he'd do--he was on Rush St., I can't think of the name of the place, oh, but he was there for possibly for four--six weeks.

Russell: Are there any other of your pupils that you can think of now, that are famous, well-known names?

Elgar: Well, not as much as Eddie because Eddie was fortunate enough to make this European tour which really had much to do with his success because he was--he was a huge success at that time. But I have had quite--quite good success with most of the pupils I had at that time, but they didn't go in for concert work; they did most orchestra work. There was Jimmy Bell, and when they had the orchestra at the Regal Theatre, we had a couple of boys in there . . . I can't think of their names now.

Russell: To get back to some of the other instruments, like on trumpet, you've of course, heard a lot of King Oliver, and Freddy Keppard, and of course Louie Armstrong and all of those New Orleans trumpet players; so many great ones, that I don't know which you could

Elgar: Yes, yes,

Russell: How did they compare?

Elgar: There are a lot of new fellows now, and I don't know these boys only by reputation, who are -- the boys who are with ah [Count] Basie, and Duke [Ellington]; oh, those boys are just wonderful, marvelous.

Russell: Yeah, they have alot of technique and range, but I

Elgar: Oh, my yes, but it brings us back to what we were speaking of in the beginning. Those boys have had fine training,

Russell: Yeah.

Elgar: fine schooling.

Russell: Can you remember much about the Oliver band when they were here?

Elgar: Well, they were pretty much on the same order of the average Dixieland outfit; they were all very good, but, I wouldn't say nothing too extraordinary.

Russell: I wondered about their reception. Of course people like myself that are more or less a fanatic on the New Orleans style of music and to me they were so wonderful, just to hear them on the record, what's left, and I wasn't here in those days to hear them. Did they go over unusually well, I mean did they have the general public or was it just a certain

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Russell: group. The cafe group?

Elgar: No, no, no, not at that time. See, the public hadn't ah taken to the, to the Dixie-land idea of music. Course the music lovers who liked that type of thing, they went for it but not as it, as popular as it is now. You take now, you take these young colleges, these young boys who are in colleges now, my gosh--they go out for that type of thing. And they're even having these fellers lecture in these colleges. You take Duke--Duke has lectured at Yale, at Harvard, and all these fine institutions. Look what's happening at Gra----Ravina. Lionel Hampton is on the bill there, Errol Garner is on the bill there; those things were unheard of years ago.

Russell: That's right, yeah. And I wonder if it--the general public or if it was just a small group, I know it wasn't just the Southside--

Elgar: It's the general public if you judge from the attendance.

Russell: I mean in the Oliver days, back in the 1920's, say, when Keppard and Oliver, and Manuel Perez and all those people played here, if it was just a small group that followed them or if it was a lot of the whole Chicago public that would come to dance to their music. For

instance, say at Royal Garden, now was that mostly

Elgar: Royal Garden, that was just another night club.

Russell: Just another night club.

Elgar: Just another night club.

Russell: Was that mostly for whites or the colored?

Elgar: No, no that was for everybody.

Russell: Everybody.

Elgar: Yeah.

Russell: People from all over Chicago would go.

Elgar: Oh, yeah, yeah. Sure, sure.

Russell: It wasn't just restricted like neighborhood place.

Elgar: No, no, no, oh, no, no, no, no.

Russell: The whole city would go there then at times?

Elgar: Uh-huh.

Russell: Course in those days they didn't have much radio and naturally no television, so they

Retyped

Russell: didn't get a chance to become nationally known.

Elgar: That's it, that's another thing. See, that's an advantage the present-day outfit has, now. The radio and T.V., we didn't have that, even in my days, you see we never had that. Course, we had the good fortune of having a man who was a wonderful promoter--Paddy Harmon.

Russell: Oh, yes, I must ask about Dreamland.

Elgar: And he did all the publicizing of our outfit; in fact, he was the making of the outfit. Because we had the orchestra picture all over the El stations. It was nice

Russell: Is that right, I took some pictures of that twenty years ago.

Elgar: Yeah, sure.

Russell; Of Harmon's Dearmland out on Paulina and Van Buren about

Elgar: That's right. Then we'd go from one job to the other, because he was running the pier--at that time it was called the Municipal Pier.

Russell: Is that where the Navy Pier is?

Elgar: That's where the Navy Pier is now. At that time he had the contract with season runners; we'd go from Dreamland on Sunday before Labor Day and move over to the Pier on Labor Day (not clear).

Russell: And stay there in the winter, huh?

Elgar: And stay there all winter.

Russell: See if there is any more questions here about dates, and early days. It is mostly the early days that we are asking about because there are a lot of the later things that we can read in the newspaper and magazines, back before they had a Down Beat for instance.

Elgar: Yes, uh-huh.

Russell: Paddy

Elgar: Well, well I went in with Paddy with five pieces, that's when the craze of Dixieland music had just begun to hit Chicago. And, I went . . .

Russell: What year?

Elgar: Yes, and I went to see him and ask him to give me a chance with this outfit. At that time he had an eighteen piece orchestra; Frank Ksvoller (check sp.) had the orchestra there. Well, he kinda hesitated for a minute because he didn't know how the people would go

Retyped

Elgar: for it. And I was fortunate enough to sell him on the idea of giving it a trial, which he agreed to do. Well, we went in there with the understanding that if the thing didn't go over and if the authorities didn't--because there was no such thing in any ballroom in Chicago prior to this time.

Russell: Yeah

Elgar: He said now, there was a Mrs. Benfore who works through the welfare workers. He said now, she comes in here all the time, and if she doesn't go for this type of thing, he say, I'll have to let you go. I said, that's perfectly all right, I'm willin' to take my chances. Well, we went in there on a trial. About the second week, well she came in there, and begin to say that our type of music was a little too boistroous for the young people.

Russell: Too rough got to start

Elgar: Rough, so

Russell: Who's in the band, do you remember?

Elgar: So, huh?

Russell: Your trumpet player for instance.

Elgar: We had Joe [Sudler], the same boy, Joe, you see, I, I didn't change very much.

Russell: Didn't change.

Elgar: No, no, no, those boys stayed with me right on through.

Russell: The clarinet, can you remember?

Elgar: I was playin' clarinet and saxophone myself.

Russell: Oh, you were playing clarinet, then, yourself.

Elgar: Yeah, and ah after the second week, he said well, I'm afraid we're going to have to dismiss you because, he says, she's complaining too much. I said, well, that was the agreement. That's all right. Well, we were there just long enough to have won over the young dancers, all the young people--at that time they were mostly young Jewish people, Italians--from over in that area, and they all went for our type of music, and they start complaining about--"When ya' gonna' get this band back? When ya' gonna' get this band back? When ya' gonna' get this band back?"--so after about a month here comes a telephone call and say you had better come over here and let me have a talk with you. So I go back over there and have a talk with them, he said well we're gonna' make another stab at it, and see what happens.

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Elgar: Well it was funny. He said, now I'm gonna' let you see who Mrs. Benfore is. And whenever she come in that door, regardless of which you're playing; you start playin' a waltz. And I followed instructions. And, finally, we see her come in and she'd sit around there and maybe sometimes a half hour or maybe an hour, we didn't play anything but the sweetest type of fox trot. You know.

Russell: Uh-huh.

Elgar: Then, we finally won her over. See, well that was the story. After we did that, well there was no more trouble. In the meantime, why, Paddy decided that he wanted to increase the band, and we kept on adding first one and the other and then we'd add another until we had from five, we had increased the orchestra to fifteen pieces.

Russell: Was the bandstand right at that corner like here is Van Buren and . . .

Elgar: No, the bandstand was, the bandstand was about the center of the hall; if you remember, that hall was a whole block long.

Russell: Remember then, the elevator had been right over that one corner.

Elgar: No, at that corner there was where the bar was, on one side, and the orchestra set on the opposite side. But the bandstand was way up about the center and in the later days, it was in the center of the floor. Right in the very center. People used to dance around us.

Russell: Yes, I remember now seeing a picture with Jimmie Noone sitting on the bandstand . . .

Elgar: Yes, that's right.

Russell: . . . with [Freddy] Keppard, and Charlie Cook was there.

Elgar: Uh-huh. We had a picture there with Charlie Cook, because . . .

Russell: Yeah.

Elgar: Charlie Cook followed me in the

Russell: I've seen that picture.

Elgar: Well, that was put right in the center of the ballroom.

Russell: Yeah, it does look like it, now that I think about it.

Elgar: Yeah, yeah.

Russell: I remember now. Yes, that was a great place I guess. Ah

Elgar: Yeah, we spent some many very happy hours there.

Retyped

Russell: Before we stop, I don't want to keep you but another two or three minutes, but since there are none of the Tios left to speak for themselves and give us any of their history, is there anything else you can think of--I don't like to keep harping on them--but I thought one more final chance, anything about--was Luis Tio was your teacher, (That's all right, don't worry about that. That's all right). Can you remember, did he speak much English, or did he speak ✓ in Creole?

Elgar: Oh, yes, oh yes, oh yes, sure. Oh, yes.

Russell: Or was it Spanish if he came from Mexico?

Elgar: They spoke Spanish, but they, they, they developed the English and French. Oh, yeah, yeah, you'd never know, you'd never know that they weren't original New Orleans fellows.

Russell: Because I have heard sometimes people would imitate their talk a little bit, and they would use sorta French accent.

Elgar: Yeah, but they didn't even have the Spanish accent.

Russell: They didn't even have that.

Elgar: No. But, when you saw them you knew you were lookin' at a Mexican. They had--you know, there is a certain type.

Russell: I've never even seen a good picture of them.

Elgar: No!

Russell: Lorenzo, Jr.--I've seen him--he had sort of long, black wavy hair . . .

Elgar: Uh-huh.

Russell: A real good looking fellow a great big, tall

Elgar: Oh, yeah, they both were.

Russell: And how was their . . . ?

Elgar: And I can't, I don't know that I've ever seen a picture of the old man.

Russell: I don't think I have.

Elgar: Neither one--Lorenzo nor Luis.

Russell: Were they fairly--oh, I know--somebody told me that Joe Oliver's widow, Stella Oliver has one in New Orleans, I haven't gotten . . .

Elgar: Is that so.

Retyped

Russell: We'll get to see her, and maybe she'll have it.

Elgar: Uh-huh.

Russell: I don't know which one, if it's Luis or

Elgar: Are you on your way there from here?

Russell: I just came up from there, I'll be there, I'll only be here a week, then I'll go back down there.

Elgar: I see.

Russell: So, I'll get to see her in a month or two now. And she had a picture of one of the Tios, either Luis or Lorenzo. You knew them both I guess, then, fairly well, did you?

Elgar: Oh, of course, yes, I should say. Very, very well.

Russell: Your teacher was Luis.

Elgar: Yeah.

Russell: Luis Tio. He's the one, I think, they used to call Pápá Tio.

Elgar: Yeah, that's right. That's right. Luis is the one we used to call Pápá Tio.

Russell: Yes. And the other was Lorenzo, Sr., then call him now, and Jr. is the one that was with [Armand J.] Piron's band. Went to New York. He made records.

Elgar: Yes.

Russell: And the others never made records. Well, unless there is something else you can think of about the Tios I think we can . . .

Elgar: Well, I think we have about covered everything I can think of, so far as they are concerned. You know?

Russell: Yeah, yeah. Unless there is something else you would like to tell about either your life or your early days in New Orleans.

Elgar: Oh, I can't think. I guess, I guess I've about covered everything I can think of, now.

Russell: Well, I think, we've covered everything pretty good, but I thought that you might be something you could think of, but if not, I want to thank you again for the interview.

Elgar: Well, that's all right.

Russell: It's been a pleasure to talk to you and have your voice down on record. So we'll just turn it off.

End of Reel I, Track II
Charles Elgar