

CORDILLA, CHARLIE
I [Only]
May 17, 1952

Also present: Edmond Souchon, M.D.

[Interview is source material for article or articles in The Second Line. Photographs are also reproduced therein.]

Charlie Joseph Cordilla was born May 25, 1899, in Baton Rouge [Louisiana]; he moved to New Orleans when he was about six years old. In his family were five boys and four girls, all living but one; CC is the youngest. He has been married about 27 years, has no children. CC became interested in playing music around 1916; he studied for about two or three years; his first instrument was trumpet, from which he switched to clarinet, Albert system. He has also played tenor sax. His last "official" recording session was in about 1924. [Compare discographies.]

CC's father was named Anthony Cordilla.

CC talks about various clarinets he had, saying his best one was an old Penzel-Muller. When he played at the Halfway House, [Leon] Roppolo would come sit in and play CC's clarinet, which he liked. (CC thinks Roppolo was about the same age as himself, and thinks that he took clarinet lessons.) Roppolo, Buzzy Willoz (with his guitar) and Angelo Gemelli (with a new Conn clarinet) once met on Canal Street; they decided to go to the lake at West End to play music; they stopped at the Halfway House, where CC was working, on the way; by leaving his new clarinet with CC as a pledge, Gemelli persuaded CC to loan his clarinet to Roppolo; trio went to lake, began playing; Roppolo missed several "licks," became angry and threw CC's clarinet into the lake. CC kept AG's clarinet. CC says Roppolo was clear-headed at the time, early in his career, but that he was excitable. Edmond Souchon remembers

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remembers that he and his friends considered the Halfway House a den of iniquity, until they finally went in, where they found people who only sat around and who danced; there was sand on the floor, too. The first Halfway House band CC played in consisted of: Abbie Brunies, trumpet and leader; CC, clarinet; Emile "Stale Bread" Lacoume, banjo (and piano at [other ? RBA] times; Lacoume was already blind at this time); Mickey Marcour, piano; Emmett ["Snottsy"] Rogers (brother of "Buck" Rogers). (Mickey Marcour's violin-playing brother was named Oscar Marcour.) CC later began doubling on saxophone, when that instrument became popular. The band began working at the Halfway House in 1920. ES asks if CC was about 23 years old when he started playing. [Compare above and below. Leading] CC had worked at music before that time; he had worked at Pop Toro's cabaret, Burgundy and Iberville, sometime after the District had been closed (1917). [Leading] In the band were CC on clarinet, Georg Brunis on trombone, Eddie Shields (brother of Larry and Harry Shields) on piano and a drummer, and Lacoume on banjo. CC had replaced Roppolo on the job. Roppolo went to work in Bucktown, with a small outfit consisting of violin, drums and Billy Neuberger on piano [now plays drums--PRC]; Roppolo stayed about a month, quit and was replaced by CC, who stayed about four or five months. It was a rough-and-tumble place. ES mentions a photograph CC had given him of Lacoume, Abbie Brunies and CC at West End; CC says it was taken when they worked at the Halfway House. [See Second Line magazine]. Out of work for a while, CC later joined

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Sharkey [Bonano] for his Saturday night engagements at the Tonti [dance hall? social club?]; he went into the Halfway House band from that job. The first recording CC ever made was under the name of the Halfway House band; on the recording were: Mickey Marcour, piano; Emmett Rogers, drums; CC, clarinet; Emile Lacoume, banjo [and Abbie Brunies, trumpet]. [Compare discographies] CC says he thinks the first two records were "Pussy Cat Rag" and "Barataria," for OKeh. According to FS, Roppolo was also on these recordings, but not on the two later ones, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" and "Maple Leaf Rag." There were later sessions for Columbia. [Compare discographies] CC confirms. CC played at the Halfway House for about 5 years; he left (before the place closed for lack of business) to join Paul Mares and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings [who had come back to the South--PRC], with whom CC also recorded, for Victor. Roppolo was supposed to play clarinet on the records and CC was to have played tenor sax, but Roppolo and Santo Pecora [trombonist] had an argument at the rehearsal a day prior to the recording date, and Roppolo walked out of the session; CC switched to clarinet. Paul Mares was [leader] and made the decision. The recording was done at one of the music houses on Canal Street; it was electrical, one of the early sessions using microphones and electrical recording process; the OKeh [Halfway House Orchestra] sessions had been acoustical, using [cone-shaped] horns to pick up the vibrations from each instrument. CC says that one of the tunes he recorded with the NORK was Santo Pecora's "She's Cryin' For Me Blues." . . . CC played his own solo.

[Compare, Second Line,] CC says he thinks the NORK

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session was the last recording he made [He has been recorded in the 1950's or 1960's by Joe Mares--PRC], although he continued playing clarinet. He worked in the Silver Slipper, on Bourbon Street, after Tony Parenti had worked there; CC worked there on tenor sax with Abbie Brunies (leader) and trumpet, Monk Hazel, drums, [Irving] Fazola on alto sax, Red Long on piano, and Lefty Eiermann on tuba. CC then joined Sharkey, playing at the Bienville Roof (of the Bienville Hotel, at Lee Circle); when he finished that job, he began playing spots [or casuals], doing that for about ten years. He then got a job at a local shipyard, where he worked for about four years, during World War II; he also played in a big brass band there, which played for ship launchings. Henry Raymond was the leader; among others was Earl Christian, [clarinet(and sax?)] a nephew of Emile Christian. Except for some casual jobs with Emile Christian, CC did not play with anyone associated with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band; he also was not associated with any of the [New Orleans] Owls, except Pinky Vidacovich, with whom he played quite a bit. CC worked on the [Mississippi] Gulf Coast, across the lake, etc., and in Milne^Uberg, where he played a lot with Alfred ["Hook", "Pansy"] Laine, son of ["Papa"] Jack Laine; CC also worked with one of Jack Laine's later bands. Georg Brunis played trombone in the Alfred Laine band when CC worked with Laine; a photograph taken of the band in Alexandria, Louisiana, around the time of World War I, is mentioned. [Compare The Second Line, Jack ^{Laine?} Lewis,] reel (?), etc.] CC worked with the band of Sharkey and Leon Prima aboard the steamboat Greater

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New Orleans; the band had just completed an engagement at Pattengill's Dance Hall, on St. Ann Street. There is mention of Fate Marable, Steve Lewis (who worked a long time with [A.J.] Piron) and the calliope on one of the boats, Louis [Armstrong] and King Oliver. In around 1930, CC worked with a band at a resort in the Catskill Mountains of New York State; Sharkey was supposed to play the job, but he and Leon Prima opened the Circle [dance hall?] on St. Claude Avenue, New Orleans, so Bill Gillen was given the trumpet player's job. Others in the band were Sidney Arodin [clarinet and sax], Freddy Neuman [piano], "Red" Jessup on trombone, Leo Adde on drums and Chink Martin, bass (brass and/or string). [Compare photograph in The Second Line.] CC also played many parades, especially Carnival [Mardi Gras] parades; he says the last one he played was about 1928, but ES reminds him that he played a parade in 1952 for the Spring Fiesta. Tony Almerico led the band [trumpet]; others were George Girard, trumpet, [Pete] Fontaine [Fountain] and Nina Picone, clarinets, CC and Bill Bourgeois, tenor saxes and Joe Rotis, trombone. There were also two drummers [and probably a tuba--PRC].

ES talks about the Dixieland revival.

CC considers "Maple Leaf Rag" as the best recording he ever made, and "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" [the reverse of the previous] second. CC considers Irving Fazola the all-time greatest clarinetist. He likes Louis Armstrong on trumpet, and also Sharkey. Georg Brunis

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is his favorite trombonist. Monk Hazel, drums, and Chink Martin are mentioned. ES credits Jack Laine with saying that the only difference between the ragtime of his time and the jazz of later years is that the latter is smoother than the earlier. CC agrees. CC says that Emmett Hardy was a great trumpet player, and likens Hardy's style to that of Bix Beiderbecke, who CC heard in person. CC agrees with ES that he thinks Bix tried to copy Hardy's style. Hardy worked several jobs at the Halfway House, for Abby Brunies. CC says Abby and Georg Brunis worked in bands together at one time.

CC prefers clarinet over saxophone.

End Reel I