

DAVE OXLEY

Reel 1--Digest--Retype

January 6, 1965

Also present: William Russell

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David Samuel Oxley, Sr., was born May 1, 1910, Sunday at 7:30 in the morning, so his mother told him. He was born on Adams Street, between Oak and Zimple, in New Orleans, La., in the Carrollton [section].

He heard his uncle, John Thornton, try to play trumpet. He was not a professional musician. Members of his family sang, and had quartets. DO heard bands, and followed parades. He lived in Carrollton for many years. He moved several times, but ended up in Carrollton. As a child, he started beating on steps. He whistled and kicked the steps, and made drumsticks off the rounds on a chair. He was around six or seven years then.

He bought his first drum set when he was about fourteen, from Werlein's. First he got the snare drum, then the stand, then the bass drum, etc. [His family] had a phonograph and records of [Papa] Celestin and King Oliver. DO played along with the records, and later played with Celestin. He played with the records of "Wolverine Blues," "Tin Roof Blues" and Louis Armstrong numbers.

DO's mother had Saturday night fish fries with homebrew. DO played drums with the phonograph at the fish fries. People would come in and buy fish and homebrew. DO attended Thomy Lafon and McDonough #24 schools. "They" had no school bands. McDonough #24 is the same school that Mahalia Jackson went to. "They" had piano and singing there.

When DO was almost fifteen years old, he had a job working at the Jahncke Dry Dock. Then he could buy more traps. His first music job was at Milneburg. He played with Punch Miller, tp; and Bubber Green, cl, on this first job. Bubber Green is still alive. "It was Chris Kelly's band then" [2 trumpets?]. They rode the "Smoky Mary" train out to Milneburg. The band would start at twelve noon on Sunday, and people usually wouldn't get back until one or two a.m. on Monday. DO's father wanted him to come home early.

DO's favorite drummer was Red Happy [Bolton], who was at the Lyric Theater.

DO played with Kid Howard and others.

DO went on the road with Johnny Lee Long and His Playmates. JLL was the manager, owner, and straight man. They went on the TOBA circuit to New York and back via Mobile, Birmingham, and Atlanta. They stayed for five or six months in New York before they got another job. DO played at the Monogram on 35th and State in Chicago. Discussion of theaters in Chicago. The Roosevelt Theater in Cincinnati was only about a block from the station. In 1926, DO left New Orleans with JLL in February or March. He made sixteen [years old] on the road on May 1. The only New Orleans man in the band was DO. He got \$18.00 a week. DO had an act. He jumped over the drums, used six drumsticks at a time, and used Red Happy Bolton material, i.e., put the cymbal behind his back, juggled with the sticks, etc., on "Bugle Blues".. His pay was raised to \$25.00.

DO went with Miller's Midway Show, a carnival, for around two years. They traveled through the South, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Some New Orleans men were in the band, such as Calvin Distance, piano, who was killed in St. Louis, Jazz Baby, tb, who lived in New Orleans, but was not originally from New Orleans, and Willie[E.] Humphrey, who played cl, and was the leader. WEH died last year. DO was out of New Orleans around seven years in the Northeast [until about 1933]. Then he returned to New Orleans, playing with Kid Howard, then Henry Russ, then Henry Harding. Then DO went on the road again.

Then DO came back to New Orleans, and played with Jimmy Davis. He also had his own bands. He played with Dave Bartholomew at the Robin Hood [nightclub], at a club on Eagle Street, ~~and at~~ the Greystone [Hotel], and with Joe Robichaux at the Rhythm Club. The band broadcast nationwide from this club.

In the French Quarter DO played at the Pig Pen, the Caliente, the Cat and the Fiddle, Hyp Guinle's Famous Door, Gaspar's, the Paddock, Dan's, the Palm Garden, the Dreamland, Tony Bacinó's, the Gaslight, the Village Bar, the Spotlight, and the Absinthe House, where he played with Fats Pichon.

He only played one funeral. [DO is crippled now. RBA, Sept. 3, 1970.] Kid Howard's band played the funeral. "Henry] Allen, [Sr.] was in the band. It was hot and long; they marched for miles in gravel. The last Carnival parade DO played was with [Anderson] Minor for the Corner Club. It was long and wet. [AM played for them for years. See AM folder.] DO quit playing parades.

DO doesn't remember the names of old-time drummers from marching bands in general. He remembers Chinee [Foster], Black Happy Goldston, Black Benny [Williams]. He doesn't remember [Ernest] Trepagnier.

DO played in many shows. He was with the Jay C. Lintler Mighty Minstrel Show, and Naylor's Mighty Minstrels. They had colored and white audiences. They would have the main show, then they would have the concert with a featured blues singer, or a similar special act. The concert charged an extra admission. DO worked his last minstrel show in 1937: the Broadway Rastus Show. Bessie Smith was on the show. In 1937 DO was already with the show when Bessie Smith joined. The show belonged to E. S. Winsted, of Fayetteville, North Carolina. BS did concerts. Her husband was with her there. [The accident occurred] about two weeks before the closing of the show. It was getting colder. They played Saturday nights in smaller towns. [Cf BS article, ESQUIRE, June (1969?).] They played a show in Darling, Miss. It rained after the show. DO drove the [show's] bus for extra money. BS and her husband left ahead in a pink Packard to go to Hollandale, Miss. The fatal accident happened around ten miles to [north] of

Clarksdale. BS and her husband were probably one to one-one half hours ahead of the bus. When the bus arrived on the scene of the accident, BS was unconscious and probably dead. Her arm was out of the window. They had hit a seed truck while they were passing it. BS's arm hit the seed truck, and her arm was barely hanging on. They (not the people in the bus) tried to call an ambulance from Clarksdale. There was no ambulance for colored. They couldn't take her in a car. They called to Memphis for Hayes & Langston, undertakers. BS was dead by the arrival of the ambulance. They took her body. There are many untrue stories in magazines. There was no tractor in the wreck. It was a cottonseed truck, which was high.

The last song BS sang was "This Is My Last Affair." WR heard her, probably in 1937, at the Apollo and the Harlem Opera House. That morning the bus pulled out. Eight couples were quartered on the bus, to keep from having to look for rooms. DO went to a grocery store porch to buy some food to eat on the bus. A drunken white accosted DO [who is now lame]. He shot a pistol in the floor to make DO dance. DO danced. The white gave DO a drink, then he drank after DO, which DO remarks upon. The white gave DO a dollar and the rest of the pint of whiskey.

Around one week before the accident, Joe Snaer, tp, had left the show. He is now dead. Clement Tervalon, tb, left the show at the same time. They left the show in Memphis, and came to New Orleans. The band played a concert, a show and a parade in the same day. They paraded every day in every little town, and then in the evening before the show, they paraded again. The band had about twelve pieces. The comedians in the show walked in the parade. DO played the snare drum. The band had three tps; three saxes, two of whom doubled on cl; and a bass horn. The bass drummer was a comedian or a piano player. They had two tb. They played one night stands. A minstrel show with a carnival is called a jig show. There were also Hawaiian shows, athletic shows, and [?] shows.

They called them that because they jugged around. The carnival used a train car to travel in [?? confusing here]. Palmer had a road show which used trucks and a bus. It was cheaper than a railroad car.

End of Reel I.

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Reel II [of 2]--Digest--Retype

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In this show, Bessie Smith and her husband had a car. The stage manager had a car. The minstrel show would perform in the tent first, then the people would leave the tent, and then they would return for the concert. They paid 25¢ or 35¢ to get in the second time. DO scats some of the songs Bessie Smith sang: the "T[.] B[.] Blues", "Death Letter Blues", "Pink Slip Blues", "One Hour Mama" (which WR heard her sing), "One Sweet Letter From You," a pop tune, and a song about a park. WR heard BS sing only blues. BS's fatal car accident was early in the morning, about 4:30 or 5:00. BS was not in the minstrel show portion of the tour. [Leading here.] She would come on in the concert maybe before the last act. BS liked tunk, a card game. DO's former wife was a chorus girl and a friend of BS. She is now living on St. Philip St. BS was in good health while they were touring, and liked to drink.

DO was with Ida Cox in 1940. He left New Orleans. Ida Cox was from Knoxville, Tennessee, and had no winter quarters. Her show was the Darktown Scandals Review [or Revue?] Jack Schenk of Brooklyn, New York, and his son booked the show. WR first heard Ida Cox in 1938 at St. Louis. DO suggests it was at the Regal Theater. In 1940 DO and Ida Cox were stranded in St. Louis, for about five months. They played the Regal Theater. They stayed at the Calumet Hotel on Jefferson. Then they went to Kansas City. DO played with George E. Lee for six or seven months. His sister, Julia Lee, was on piano after Jessie Stone, piano, quit. DO knew Baby Lovett. He also knew Count Basie before his big band was at the Grotto Club.

DO was with Ida Cox for almost a year. He left her in Huntington, West Virginia, after they had been to Charleston. DO stayed in Huntington for about one month. Then he went to Charleston, [W. Va.], for six weeks, where he joined a band, then he went to Charlotte, North Carolina. Ida Cox's show had a bus. It had dancers and chorus girls (several from

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New Orleans). DO's wife was in it. Lonnie Johnson left the show in Piqua, Ohio. The show had a bicycle act. Chief [last name unremembered, June 9, 1971.] performed on the bicycle.

DO sings with George Lewis now. He sang in the shows. DO sang two or three songs on each show, while still at the drums. 1:57 Ida Cox sang "Death Letter Blues", "Pink Slip Blues", "One Hour Mama", and some pop songs, but Annette Bailey, of Birmingham, Alabama, sang most of the popular songs. DO thought Ida Cox was older than Bessie Smith. WR heard Ida Cox at the Cafe Society with Edmond Hall's band. She was there for a month or so. Ida Cox used a mike, unlike BS.

If he had time to think, DO could talk about jobs, e.g., circuses, his ten-piece service band, in France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Korea, Okinawa, Japan, Panama.

DO leaves for his job at Preservation Hall.

(end of DO interview, followed by Sing Miller, December 11, 1964, interview).

