

CHESTER JONES

I [of 3]--digest--retyped

July 10, 1961

Also present: Richard B. Allen

[Recorded at William Russell's record shop, 731 St. Peter]

Chester Jones was born in Cutoff, La., which is downriver from and on the same side of the river as Algiers. When he was about 1 year old, he was brought to New Orleans; he resided at 1115 St. Philip Street for 15 or 20 or more years; then he moved to the 9th Ward, on Law Street; then back to 1115 St. Philip for several years, and to 1325 Dumaine Street for several; he has lived most of his life in the same section. CJ speaks of the Tessitore [sp?] family, owners of the Caldonia Club, which CJ once lived near. It is mentioned that some wakes were held in the Caldonia Club; CJ says Clarence Blanchard was "waked" there, and (he thinks) Richard Martin also; CJ played in the band for each of the two funerals, which started from the Caldonia Club. CJ says the wakes were approximately the same as those held in homes. The band which played those two funerals was the Silver Leaf Brass Band, an organized band led by Kid Howard; some of the members: Kid Howard (leader), [George] "Sheik" [Colar] and Thomas Jefferson, trumpets' "Jim Little" [Sidney Brown], bass; "Jim Crow" [Robinson] and Homer Eugene, trombones; John Handy, [alto] sax; CJ, bass drum; Bat[iste] Mosely, snare drum. George Lewis regularly played clarinet with the band, but CJ can't remember if he played the two funerals mentioned or not.

CJ played one or two jobs in brass bands with Harrison Brazley, but he doesn't remember the name of the brass band, as it was just about the time CJ began playing drum. He began playing only bass drum at first, in a little band of friends who played on Carnibal day; one year they played for the Square Deal Club, and for other clubs other years. They had 8 kazoos and 2 drums in the band. Willie

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Parker, bass drummer (and years ago, baritone [horn]), heard CJ playing one of the Carnival parades, liked his playing, and hired him to play in his brass band; the first job CJ ever played with a brass band was with Parker on Carnival day and for the Arabi Club. "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] was playing trumpet in the band at the time. CJ continued with WP's brass band. CJ thinks that band was the beginning of the Eur^{ek}a Brass Band; the band rehearsed at Parker's home; RBA agrees with this information. CJ made only ten dollars, although the Arabi Club marched from the slaughterhouse [in Arabi, St. Bernard Parish] to St. Charles and Lee Circle. CJ didn't mind that, as he was young and it was his first time with a brass band. CJ played a second Carnival parade for the same club, with the same band.

CJ, who was born March 3, 1913, grew up within a few blocks of two halls where bands played regularly for dances; they were Cooperators Hall and Economy Hall; CJ observed the drummers who played there, and got his ideas about how to play. He didn't have any drums when he was a child, as there were 13 [children?[]] in his family, and his father couldn't afford to buy drums. CJ would carry the drums inside the halls for the drummers when they would allow it; CJ would stay and listen. He heard the bands of Chris Kelly and Kid Rena playing in those halls. One drummer, [Eddie] "Face-o" [Woods], knew that CJ liked his playing, so CJ was always allowed to carry his drums. "Face-o" was a good, rough drummer who played all over his drums, not confining his playing to any one part of the set. CJ describes "Face-o's" drum set as best he can. CJ recalls the first job he played with a trio, which comprised Harrison Verrett, piano, Homer Eugene, guitar, and CJ, drums; CJ had put his drum set together from various sources, including several gifts; trombonist Louis Nelson gave CJ a bass drum which belonged to his brother-in-law but was not being used. The job was in Lafitte, and had

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been given to CJ and the others by Kid Howard, one of two jobs he had booked for the one date. CJ had never played two drums simultaneously, having confined himself to the bass drum alone; the other members of the trio encouraged him to play the job; he did, and has been playing ever since. CJ then joined Kid Howard's ten-piece orchestra, remaining with him 5 or 6 years. CJ then played with other bands. CJ can't read music; he has learned drumming by observing. Some drummers he watched were Alfred Williams, "Face-o"^[Eddie Woods?] and Rudolph Beaulieu. CJ tells of seeing Beaulieu get cut by a woman; Beaulieu was playing a party with Sam Morgan's band; CJ was a youngster then. RBA says Kid Howard began playing drums that night, when he filled in the rest of the job for Beaulieu. RBA mentions an advertising job on a truck; Harrison [Verrett] told RBA of previously falling off of a truck and having to be taken to Charity Hospital; CJ was in the band; Dave Williams [piano] was also in the band. RBA and [Ralston] Crawford were on the truck. RBA says the trumpet player on the job was a young fellow who looked like [Melvin] Lastie. CJ has worked with Lastie, usually on jobs that Dave Williams led. Williams was playing piano from house to house, bar to bar when CJ first knew him; he didn't think he would be able to play with a band; when CJ opened a barroom, he told Williams he was going to hire him on the next job he got, which turned out to be a wedding party at Italian Hall; personnel on that job: Williams, piano; Kid Howard [trumpet]; John Handy [alto sax or clarinet?]; CJ, drums; Handy's brother, Sylvester Handy, bass. Then Kid Howard began hiring Williams, and CJ had him join the union. Williams began getting jobs in the French Quarter; his first job there was probably with "Smilin' Joe" [Pleasant Joseph]. Williams worked at the Paddock [Lounger] a couple of times. When [Oscar] "Papa" [Celestin] got ready to leave his job at the Paddock, he asked CJ to organize a band to replace his band; personnel: CJ, Thomas Jefferson

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[trumpet], [Worthia] "Showboy" [Thomas], trombone, Willie [J.] Humphrey, clarinet, Williams, piano, Jimmy Davis, bass; they played at the place for 7 weeks. After the band broke up, CJ turned jobs he couldn't handle over to Williams, who began working as a leader due to CJ's encouragement and advice; Williams always hired CJ on his jobs, provided CJ is available.

David Lastie, brother of Melvin Lastie, played alto sax on the advertising job mentioned earlier. CJ says David plays tenor sax now. RBA asks if CJ knew Ornette Coleman, a friend of Melvin Lastie, who was in N.O. several years ago; CJ doesn't remember him, at least not by name.

CJ's father played B-flat cornet; he graduated from Xavier on St. Charles;[sic] [or possibly New Orleans University]; he was in a little band at the Cutoff; his cousin, Albert, played trombone in it. Thomas Coleman [i.e., Copeland?], a distant cousin, played bass in the band; Coleman has been dead some years. William Jones, CJ's father, now 84 years old, lived at 1122 Barracks Street. [WJ died shortly thereafter.RBA]

CJ sometimes played the melodian in concerts at the church he attended; he learned how to play it without instruction. CJ was a [prize] fighter for a while; he quit when he began playing music. There were sometimes bands playing at the prize fights; Dave Bartholomew, trumpet, played at them; Kid Kifer [sp?], trumpet, from Algiers, also played at the fights; he was good, on the order of Thomas Jefferson; he is still alive in Texas; he is probably no more than 4 or 5 years older than Jefferson. Kifer's band consisted of trumpet, 2 alto saxes and drums. Kifer played a lot of fights at the Westside Arena; he also played at the Entertainers when "Father Al" Lewis played [guitar ? RBA] with him. Then bands played between bouts,

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and sometimes between rounds; they stopped when the main event took place.

Talk of equipment drummers in the time of CJ's growing up. Albert Jiles, drummer, is mentioned. "Face-o" had a slide whistle, on which he played waltzes. Drummers Sidney Montague, Stanley, and Alfred [i.e., Albert?] Martin are mentioned; they worked with big bands. Stanley worked with Sidney Desvigne and with "Papa" Celestin. [After the tape ran out, Jones added that "Face-o" had 4 tuned cowbells.]

End of Reel I

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Also present: Richard B. Allen

Stanley [drummer] is mentioned [see previous reel]. Sidney Montague, drummer, played with the Sunny South band, with Sidney Desvigne's band, and with numerous other bands. The Sunny South was a large orchestra led by a trumpet player named McNeal [sp?], now dead; McNeal studied with [Paul] Chaligny. CJ was a friend of Chaligny's grandson and visited that grandson at Chaligny's home; Chaligny was trying to teach the grandson to play drums; CJ and the grandson would play with the drum in the back yard. Albert Snaer, trumpet, studied with Chaligny; RBA says he is still playing, and lives near New York. It was rumored that Albert Snaer had died, but it was really (his cousin, his nephew ?) Joe Snaer, possibly a cousin; Albert had a brother named Joe Snaer, also. RBA heard Joe Snaer [the nephew?] playing with [Albert] Jiles, in the 1300 block of St. Charles. JS was about the same age as CJ. CJ played with his band and vice versa.

CJ speaks of balls [i.e., dances] and banquets; children were allowed in the latter, but not in the former; CJ sneaked into the former by carrying the drums and remaining, unseen, on or near the bandstand. [Eddie] "Face-o" [Woods] and "Red Happy" [Bolton] are mentioned.

Talk of types of dances, tempos. CJ demonstrates a jump tempo in which most of the numbers being played when he was growing up were played.

"Face-o" played a drum style comparable to that of drummers playing today [which drummers? PRC]; CJ considered "Face-o" the best drummer in the city, although others considered "Red Happy" and [Abbey] "Chinee" [Foster] the best. "Red Happy" played at the Lyric Theater; "Chinee," who played with "Papa" Celestin's band, was a good showman as well as a fine drummer.

Talk of fish fries, which became suppers, which probably went out of existence because they began cutting into the business of the bars; the barroom owners complained

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that they had to pay a lot of money for their licenses, but that the supper sponsors operated by making only a token payment, for a permit. CJ says his liquor license cost over \$700 when he was operating [his bar], the Blue Lamp, and that the cost is several hundred dollars more now. [CF. Ralston Crawford photograph for date.] While operating his bar, CJ began playing with a band called the Buccaneers, led by Earl Anderson; CJ got so much work for the band that he was declared the manager. The pianist with the band, Bruce (who now works as a golf caddy), was not a very good pianist, but was a good entertainer; he doesn't play music anymore. Bruce is not the same as Baby Brouss[ard], who is a mechanic as well as a piano player. In the Buccaneers, Earl Anderson played trumpet; [Charlie Tappo?] played guitar; the Knott brothers, Edward, tenor sax, and Duncan, alto and bariton saxes, were in the band. Edward Knott replaced Eddie Smith. CJ was the drummer.

CJ doesn't know of any Jones related to him who are playing music except his son, Eugene; he is not related to George Jones, who played bass and was an entertainer, nor is he related to Richard M. Jones, pianist and composer.

The first orchestra job CJ had was with Harrison Verrett and Homer Eugene [see Reel L]; the first brass band job, on the street, was with Willie Parker [see Reel I].

CJ, bass drummer with the kazoo band mentioned earlier, was the only member of that group who continued in music; the snare drummer was Joseph Harris.

Willie Parker lived 2 doors from Professor Chaligny for about 35 years; he moved to his present residence on St. Philip Street. Parker, Chaligny, Albert Snaer, Chris Kelly, Kid Howard and others lived in the same neighborhood; Kid Rena lived elsewhere, but frequented the same area. [Butler] "Guye" [Rapp], who played

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banjo, baritone and trombone, rented from CJ's mother; he gave CJ a baritone horn once.

Some members of Willie Parker's band: trumpets, "Wooden Joe" Nicholas, Willie Webber and Willie Wilson. Wilson later took over as leader, but Parker was the first leader of the band, [which was later called] Eureka. Willie Wilson's brother, Johnny Wilson, played baritone horn. The trombone player with that band was perhaps Petit, and perhaps a relative of Buddy Petit. [~~Perhaps~~ this man was Joe Petit] CJ was quite young when he played with that band; all the others were much older men. Joe Nicholas offered to teach CJ to read music; another cornet player, who had charge of the W.P.A. Band, also offered to teach CJ; he (Louis Dumaine) was also in Kid Howard's Brass Band.

CJ was about 19 years old when he took up bass drum; he was about the same age when he began playing with Willie Parker; the year was about 1922 [or 1932. Cf. age given in reel I, above. See below reel III, p.] CJ began playing with Kid Howard shortly afterward; Howard was then working at the Japanese Tea Garden, which later became the Caldonia Club. CJ sat in for Edgar Mosely, drums, sometimes playing the entire job except for the shows. Some of the show people were "Memphis," a comedian; Myrtle Jones was a blues singer; Sammy Hopkins [the pianist?] sang; Ferdinand Johnson was master-of-ceremonies. There were also dancers.

CJ says Kid Howard helped a lot of musicians get started. CJ played with him until he became ill. Howard later went with George Lewis; he wanted to have CJ play a job once when Joe Watkins was ill, but someone else was hired. George Lewis worked in Kid Howard's band when CJ was in it.

Besides having his own band on Bourbon Street at the Paddock, CJ has worked in Freddy Kohlman's band on that street, replacing Kohlman when he couldn't appear.

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CJ also worked with Ricard [Alexis], with several bands at the Paddock, and with Thomas Jefferson's band at the Club Slipper. CJ went out of town only one time, with Octave Crosby's band; they played 5 or 6 weeks in Los Angeles, California; others in the band: Alvin Alcorn [trumpet], [Albert] Burbank [clarinet], Crosby [piano], Jimmy Davis [bass]. [Louis] Nelson [trombone] couldn't go because his wife was sick, so [Irving] "Cajun" [Verrett], who lived in California, played with the band. The band recorded in California; the recordings have been [re] issued on Southland label, owned by Joe Mares. Al Vancourt did the recording; RBA says he came through town with Joe Darensbourg one time. CJ says he thinks he himself would have had a chance to play with Kid Ory, as Alvin Alcorn did after the date mentioned, if Octave Crosby had allowed him to play his own style of drums. CJ thinks his playing with orchestras is stylistically close to that of "Face-o." His bass drum playing [in brass bands, on the street] is close to that of "Black Benny" [Williams]. [was] The only band CJ remembers that "Black Benny" played in [was a regular member?] was Sam Morgan's brass band; Alfred Williams played snare drum in that band; CJ doesn't remember hearing Benny in a dance band.

End of Reel II

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Waldren Clement Joseph [Sr.],
William Russell

CJ mentions hearing "Black Benny" [Williams] play bass drum with Sam Morgan's [brass] band; a few of the other members at the time were Morgan [trumpet], [Butler] "Guye" [Rapp], trombone, Alfred Williams, [snare] drum, and possibly Paul Barnes, clarinet. "Black Benny" was about the height of [Robert] "Son Fewclothes" [Lewis] and that his style of playing bass drum was similar to that of the latter. One of the tunes featured by the Morgan band was "Over In The Gloryland," which Morgan learned from the hymn book belonging to CJ's father, who had given up playing music and was a Christian; CJ, who recently looked at the book again at his father's house, says he thinks the name of the book was the Victory Hymn Book. CJ's father formerly sang bass in the church choir; CJ heard his father mention that he formerly played B flat cornet, but CJ probably hadn't been born when his father quit playing.

Dave Bailey, bass drummer with the [E.] Gibson (formerly the Jackson] Brass Band, and brother of "Duck Ernest" [Johnson], is mentioned.

CJ says he and Batiste Mosely began playing drum solos [i.e., duets] in brass bands; the band was playing "One O'Clock Jump," and as everyone else was playing solos, Mosely called for a drum solo; CJ says he thinks they are the only team which plays solos. RBA says he heard Batiste Mosely and [his brother] Edgar [Mosely] do it about 10 years ago; CJ says he himself and Batiste were the originators. CJ always plays bass drum on the solo excursions; he has never played them with anyone but Batiste Mosely.

When CJ was "second lining" [ie., following parades--before he began playing drums], the brass bands functioning were Sam Morgan's brass band, the Tuxedo Brass Band, and the Olympia Brass Band. Some members of the Olympia then: Willie [J.] Humphrey, [clarinet]; Bill Matthews [trombone ?]; his brother, "Bebe" Matthews,

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snare drum; Charlie Love, [trumpet]; possibly old man [Joe] Petit, trombone.

Some members of the Tuxedo Brass Band then were: Eddie Jackson [tube]; [Alphonse] Picou [clarinet]; [Oscar] "Papa" [Celestin, cornet and leader]; Albert Snaer [trumpet]; [Ernest] "Nenesse" Trepagnier, bass drum.

RBA corrects date of CJ's first job to about 1932. [See above, reel II.]

Drummer Henry Zeno is mentioned. CJ remembers seeing [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.] playing [snare drum] in a funeral with [Henry] "Red" Allen [Jr.], bass drum that day.

Waldren Joseph says he thinks Cie Frazier was (and is) a swinging drummer who can swing even when playing soft. CJ says Joe Rene played softly, too.

[Abby] "Chinee" [Foster], "Red Happy" [Bolton], and [Eddie] "Face-o" [Woods], all drummers, are mentioned. CJ says they were "two" [i.e., the latter two] of the rough type of drummer. Alfred Williams and Rudolph [Beaullieu] were "soft" drummers. Rough drummers are classified by CJ as those who could play loud.

Talk of old style drum equipment and accessories.

Joseph's brother, Ferdinand [Joseph] sang on "My Josephine," recorded by "Papa" Celestin. Ferdinand is still alive. Waldren Joseph played a few nights with George [Lewis] at El Morocco, on Bourbon Street; Waldren Joseph has played all kinds of music, "everything in music but play a parade or funeral; I wasn't able" [as he is crippled]. He played New Orleans style music with Freddy [Kohlman]'s band, before they played on Bourbon Street and before Joseph went with George Lewis.

CJ paid almost exclusive attention to drummers in bands; he didn't pay much attention to clarinetists or trombonists; he did like trumpet players, however;

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some he liked were Punch [Miller], Kid Rena, Chris Kelly, Guy Kelly (heard him only a couple of times), and Kid Keiffer, who was from Algiers.

CJ heard Bill Matthews play drums a couple of times, on the street; WR says Matthews played last year at the funeral of Isidore Barbarin, father of Paul Barbarin; RBA says he played with the Eureka Brass Band for Armistice [i.e., Memorial RBA] Day at Chalmette [National Cemetery]. CJ played bass drum with Remus Matthews, snare drum.

Henry Martin was a fine bass drummer; CJ never knew of his playing in a dance band [cf. other interviews.] CJ says he thinks Martin worked with the Olympia Brass Band when he heard him. CJ also heard Manuel Perez [cornet], with whom Martin played bass drum; CJ doesn't remember the name of Perez's brass band.

Joe Lindsay, friend of Louis Armstrong, is mentioned by WR; CJ met Lindsay when Lindsay was working [not as a musician] at the Absinthe House; Kid Howard introduced them. WR mentions Kid Ory.

Thomas Coleman played string bass and bass tuba; he played tuba in Willie Parker's [brass] band; he played string bass with Sam Morgan's band. Coleman is a distant cousin of CJ, and is most likely from The Cutoff [see Reel I, this interview]. CJ says [Albert] "Loochie" [Jackson], trombone, is from the same area. WR says Tom Albert is also from there, and that Eddie Vinson, trombone, who worked long ago with Freddy Keppard, was perhaps from there. CJ says Tom Albert was in the Eureka Band when it began. [cf. William Parker interview and Tom Albert interview RBA]

After CJ joined Kid Howard's band, he didn't play many other jobs with other bands.

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The only time CJ went out of town with a band was the trip he made to Los Angeles with Octave Crosby. WR talks of N.O. drummers, feeling, drumming and lack of long drum solos. WJ mentions importance of playing for the people in N.O. RBA mentions the Joe Aberly [Wilbert] Tillman Orchestra which played at Tyler's Beer Garden [near Audubon Park] when he heard them. RBA mentions [Sidney] Bechet. Talk of silent breaks, tags, signals for beginning and ending tunes, etc.

End of Reel III