EDMOND SOUCHON
Reel I only
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The interviewee gives his name as Dr. Edmond Souchon. The interview is held [in his home] at 523 Betz Place, Metairie, Louisiana. [He was a physician.]

007 He was born in New Orleans on 25 October 1897. He adds, "Still going strong--I hope."

009 Souchon became aware of New Orleans jazz, though not as jazz, through his Negro nurse. It was not called jazz then. Occasionally
013 his mother would let him go with his nurse to the grocery [store] about five squares [i.e., blocks] from [the Souchon home on] St. Charles Avenue towards Dryades Street. She always went when there was a funeral procession with a marching band. She seemed to know about it by the grapevine.

Souchon was enthusiastic and loved to join the bunch of white
019 and Negro children who followed the band along the street. He was listening to Joe ["King"] Oliver.

022 His parents looked and listened at "marching parades, funeral parades, Negro processions" which passed with tongue-in-cheek
025 enjoyment. [See also Edmond Souchon, M.D., "King Oliver: A Very Personal Memoir," in Martin Williams, Jazz Panorama (New York: Collier Books, 1964, p. 21-22)]

The next part in his introduction to music came about through his family. His grandmother sang and played the piano very well.

His father played the guitar a little bit and the alto horn.
028+ [See also Edmond Souchon, Golden Crest CR 3065, 12" LP]. When
030 Souchon was nine, his grandmother bought him a guitar, and "they" hired a lovely lady to teach him. After three lessons, she told his family lessons were a waste of time and money because he was hopeless so the guitar was put aside for about two or three years.

034 The neighborhood mothers of the families like the Grimas, Haynes [i.e., The Frank B. Haynes ?] Downmans, [Felson Paiges?], [Esbarbertos,?] and Fenners decided there should be a neighborhood dancing class. Souchon had to have a terrible spanking to make him go to the class [as] he had no idea of having anything
040 to do with girls.

Once he arrived, he found a trio of piano, drums, and bass.
043 He now knows they were playing ragtime because they were playing what was called "Lizard on the Rail." He says, "It's "Hiawatha" --'Red Wing.' " [See the Lakefront Loungers 12" LP, GHB 6, for a jazz version with Souchon of "Hiawatha" which is given the
045 title "A Lizard on a Rail"]. From then on, they had no trouble getting him to go to dancing school, but he never danced unless
046 the teacher made him do one or two steps with her. He listened to the music instead. From then on, he watched the guitarists in bands and tried to play what he observed at home.

049 A group of [boys] about twelve years old discovered that each one had secretly been trying to learn a string instrument. They finally began to practice on Sunday afternoons at the Robert Reynolds" home on Marengo and Prytania [Streets].

053 At last, they bacame proficient enough that the seven or eight of them would call on girls on Sunday afternoons and play 056 the whole evening for sandwiches and Coca-Colas. Their music was quite acceptable to everyone because it was not loud. Their 057 instrumentation was a violin (or sometimes two), banjo, two guitars, 060- bass, and mandolin. They jazzed up the music of the day.

He has examples of their music [because] four of these seven musicians still play together [and have recorded]. The band which was in its infancy became known as The Six and Seven-Eights 063 String Band. It became very popular, even playing for the Queen of Carnival's supper dance at the Stratford Club on Mardi Gras night of 1912. They added "ringers" to bring their number up to twelve.

070 The music they played was definetely not ragtime. Souchon describes the difference, put as simply as possible, between ragtime and jazz as one being jerkier than other. The difference 073+ between ragtime and jazz is the same as the difference between jazz and swing.

076 Their interest in music grew much deeper, but they had no idea of analysis, style, or details of the musicians' lives. They only knew the musicians, like Oliver, [Kid] Ory, Johnny and Baby Dodds, and Clarence Williams. Because Souchon's group danced so much, the musicians knew them.

082- A[rmand] J. Piron had a great band and for many years it
085- was the top society band. [John] Robichaux played many of the society jobs, too. His band also played at La Louisiane, now Diamond Jim Moran's. It was a magnificent, well-run restaurant
087 in those days, and wonderful parties were held there. This
089 was from 1914 to the outbreak of World War I. Souchon says, "Then after the War, it [the band? the restaurant?] resumed again."

091 Those [Piron's and Robichaux's] bands were all readers and wonderful musicians. Some of Piron's sidemen were Lorenzo Tio
092 [Jr.] who goes down in history as one of the greatest clarinetists; Pianist Steve Lewis, who, Souchon thinks, was the model from which "Fats Waller got...most of his great stuff"; and drummer Louis Cottrell, who is credited with introducing the press roll
097 into music. [Compare other sources on Steve Lewis' ability to read music and on the influences on Lewis and Waller, e.g., Joan M. Wildman, "The Function of the Left Hand in the Evolution of Jazz Piano," Journal of Jazz Studies, V, 2(Spring/Summer 1979), 37-8.]

These people were playing society music and could not really
099 "blow their top in real rat-gut, barrelhouse jazz." Both bands were made up of light[-skinned] Negroes.

100 Robichaux was a left-handed violinist. His society orchestra always had one hot man who would take off on choruses [i.e., improvise variations], but the straight readers predominated all
104+ the way. They had fine rhythm.

106 The Original Dixieland Jazz Band and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings did not exist in New Orleans until they went away and began
109 recording. Then they had to make up names. [Compare other sources on the origin of their names.] Souchon knew these musicians individually, and the bands were continually interchanging "musicians and personalities."

111+ These musicians were about the same or perhaps a little older than the [set of musicians to which Souchon belonged], and they
113 would go home and try to play on string instruments what they heard the former group of musicians play.

115 Souchon's father [Marion Sims Souchon, M.D.] said one of the slaves, called "Snowball," [although] he was black as the ace of spades, was called in to play piano when [Marion Sims Souchon] was around eighteen. "Snowball" was uninstructed, but he played
119 ten-fingered piano magnificently for dancing. "They" danced the schottische, mazurka, and other old-time dances. "Their" attitude
121 was that he was an entertainer a fine musician with good rhythm, but

123 there was no idea of a [socially-]leveling process through the music. He was considered a hired person. Even the slaves were
126 paid if they did something special of this kind. [When was the father born? Should not this be considered family folklore rather than oral history?]

132+ Souchon seldom remembers white bands playing until 1915 or 1916. A few, like Tom Brown's, Happy Schilling's, Bud [i.e., Johnny] Fischer's, and the DeDroit "boys" made inroads on the
138 Negro bands. Johnny and Paul DeDroit, a strictly white band, played over Kolb's Restaurant and also on other jobs outside. [? - over restaurant, not in? Seperate dance hall?]
Colored and white bands never played together, but all [these] colored and white bands played jazz, but it was still not known
141 as jazz music. [Is there an implication that some white bands were not strictly white, that is, had musicians who passed for white? See other sources, e.g., Charles Edward Smith, Jazzmen, Johnny Lala's interview.]

There was no radio or television, and the films were silent
145+ [but accompanied by live musicians]. "We" had to afford a great deal of our own entertainment by playing stringed instruments. Their families approved of this because it kept them together and the families knew where they were "and all that." He says,
148 "and outside of the music gradually bringing us into places that were questionable--which we didn't always tell them where we had
151 been--the attitude was that they were glad to see us play it...."

Following the career of a musician, especially a jazz musician,
153 was probably damned to perdition.

156 The parents considered jazz merely for dancing. Souchon thinks
157 listening to that type of record annoyed them. Souchon thinks race records, which had a fine market among Negroes, did not come out until probably 1918 or 1919. [Compare other sources.]
162 Grunewald's and Werlein's and other white music stores did not
163 sell them because whites did not buy them. Only Negro singers
167 and players were on race records. [Compare other sources on numerous exceptions.]

171 Souchon does not think his parents' contemporaries understood this music at all. It had a very definite beat, and the dance steps were quite simple in the earlier days. Although the steps
173+ became quite complex with the coming of the Charleston and all that type of step before "we" finished college.

179 [Earlier] the dancers' bodies always touched, never permitting freedom of the feet. There had to be perfect synconization of
183 partners, and the tempo was rather slow for that reason. The one step was danced with one step to the measure.

188 The tempo picked up. The two step was considered very complicated when it came out. If Souchon's memory serves him right, it fitted the ragtime idiom very well.

194 The social question never occurred in their mind. Jazz was
196 not considered as an art which started in New Orleans or as a
198 form. "The old folks" objected to the loudness of the bands
201 which were used to playing in halls rather than homes.

Hired musicians, white or colored, did not mingle with guests.
205 If the musician was fed, he ate in the back in a private little dining room or an anteroom or the kitchen. This was true for whites and Negroes.

209 In Souchon's younger days, the jazz musicians who played
216 in homes were not always in big bands. There might be a pianist, with [other] rhythm [section musicians], or two or three [musicians
217 playing] stringed instruments. [The bands] grew to five [pieces] gradually; then to seven, but a full band required the larger homes.

220 Jazz bands usually played for his high school dances. Souchon went to Tulane [University] from 1915 to 1916 when the war broke
224 out and he left. He returned in 1918 or 1919 and started over. [Compare Edmond Souchon, "King Oliver: A Very Personal Memoir", ibid, p. 25-26.]

228 When "we" were seniors in high school, [sub]script[ion] dances
229 were already being put on by young kids at the [old] Tulane gym on Saturday nights, and admission was a dollar a couple. There
231 were no refreshments except for ice water from a cooler. The

gym is now the Navy ROTC building.

242 The finest jazz bands available in the city were always
289 there. The young kids who hired them insisted on this. This
292 was from Souchon's early high school days through college. Joe ["King"] Oliver's was the most popular band, and Souchon "remembers going down to the old [red-light] district where he was playing in Storyville to hire him...for those dances." He played from
287 eight to twelve [in the gym] unless they passed the hat to get
248 enough money to keep him until one o'clock which was the limit.

256 In spite of a remarkable awakening in the last ten years
259 to the young generation's suddenly discovering and accepting
260 jazz, Souchon still thinks that, in the old folks' mind, jazz has nothing of value and is probably degrading. It was not spoken of in polite society as anything but "a nigger band for dancing."

267 When [dancer] Irene Castle came to the St. Charles Hotel around 1920, she begged Piron, who was playing there, to come
270- on a tour with her [dance team made up of] a white couple. Piron
271- refused [since] he was perfectly satisfied here.

Although Souchon loved the band and its music and although
272 he knew many of the men initimately, its music was not real New
273+ Orleans music. It was more polished and closer to swing than the real jazz.

275+ As for the real rough bands, "we" were not so crazy about Ory's because he blew the most foul trombone you have ever heard. He never blew right on the note [i.e., was out of tune?]

The older he has gotten the more he has improved, particularly
280 since he has been on the West Coast. [Souchon is probably speaking about Ory's revival records from 1944 on rather than about Ory's style from 1919 when he first moved to California.]

281 "We" never hired [Louis] Armstrong, who was just a kid, unless "we" were absolutely broke and could not get anyone else.
283 because he blew false and too loud and because he was a rough, rough character.

294 When World War I broke out in 1916 or 1917, Storyville [i.e., the main red-light district] was closed, and many fine musicians moved to Chicago. However, Souchon differs from the opinion of
300- the so-called jazz authorities who do not live in New Orleans
302 and spend a week or two before writing "a tome about all they know about jazz."

302+ Souchon's personal opinion based on a little research is that less than 5% or, being very generous, 10% of the musicians
307 ever played in Storyville. They probably got the most recognition from that. Many of them, particularly the fine white bands, would not even go there. It was not only a very low area, but
312 it was a very dangerous place. There were shooting and cutting.

314 The real, authentic Negro bands were the Silver Leaf, Celestin's, the Columbia, the Eagle, the Gold Leaf, and the Maple Leaf. They were off-shoots of the [larger] marching bands which were broken

down to five or six [pieces] for dancing.

322 The more polished big parties always had white bands which, even if they played jazz, toned it down. This was later when the twenties were coming in.

327 Many of the Negro musicians were servants who supplemented their income with [paid] music[al jobs].

339 Souchon is not posing as an authority because he has gotten more pleasure from jazz than anyone would dream. He says that he is the only born-and-bred Orleanian who has done any research at all on jazz until now. The two men [William Russell and Richard B. Allen whom William Ransom] Hogan and the Ford Foundation 349 selected could not have been better, but neither are Orleanians. It has been a lonesome one-man stand.

352 Whenever he talks on the subject, he brings out the fact that the attitude of the New Orleans public has been tolerance of [what they consider] minstrel entertainment which provided fun or a good beat. The attitude of of the upper crust is even now of slumming in tuxedoes in the French Quarter listening to 364 bands. They still do not know what it is all about, and Souchon thinks they do not want to be bothered.

367 There is a very limited clique which appreciates jazz. This part of the jazz cult is just as much a fraternity as Beta Theta Pi

or Sigma Chi or any other [Greek letter fraternity]. You have entree (anywhere) almost any place in the United States "if you know your stuff about jazz." Souchon is not saying that you will get into the inner sanctum, but certainly you will be lead to be
377 able to meet the right people for getting into it.

In New Orleans, "they" have been very kind. Souchon has spoken before Tulane University's combined history classes, the Fine Arts Club at Loyola, a social club, business clubs, the
384 library society, and the entire student body of a high [school].
387 He has been invited as a guest to the annual meeting at Music Inn, Lennox, Massachusetts, and he spoke at the invitation of
394 Florida State University at the Ringling Museum of Art in 1956. There he stressed the meaning of the music and "where its origins came from" more than the social side.

398 Souchon thinks Hillyer's approach to the music [i.e., the social acceptance of jazz] is brand new in New Orleans. Hillyer says he is just writing a small paper. He is talking to experts
409 like Souchon, people who like jazz casually, and people who hated it to get a general picture of what Orleanians have thought of
414 jazz through the years.

416 Souchon says Hillyer will find a few exceptional members of intelligentsia who would like it and would want to hear it without considering that they were doing anything wrong or off the beaten track. But they do not know what they are listening to and "have

421 no desire to fraternize with it or get on better terms with it at all. [Does Souchon mean musicians by "it"?]

425- Souchon would say that the general public in New Orleans likes jazz. The middle and lower classes accept it more than the upper
435 crust. It is the lower classes' music and came from its members.
437 This form of entertainment cost nothing and stemmed from a desire
438 to be creative. They had and <u>still</u> have their own fun with it.

442 By upper crust, Souchon means executives, people probably in the social register, people with high incomes, and the under-paid
450 teachers "at the colleges and schools." When Hillyer speaks of the upper crust, he means the middle and upper classes who go to
455 debutante parties and belong to "good New Orleans fraternities" [i.e., fraternaties which considered good in New Orleans] at
460 Tulane. When Souchon says upper crust, he means a very limited few.

461 The middle classes are larger than ever before. [They are] well behaved and soft-spoken, and they have some education.
469+ Regardless of background or extraction [i.e., national origin], they are becoming America and must be considered in this dis-
367+ cussion. They generally accept jazz much more than those who are
369 highly trained or "specialize in any learning" or "who are blue
373 noses--blue bloods."

401 Bigger bands with strict arrangements cramped the style of a jazz musician like Muggsy Spanier or Bix Beiderbecke who was
409 completely lost in the Paul Whiteman outfit.

You could not find a jazz band in New Orleans for fifteen
420 or twenty years. Only one or two continued. [Papa] Celestin
kept a band fairly well together. Although it did not play often,
428 it was available as were two or three other Negro bands.

You had to hunt for them in small restaurants and places like
433 Mama Lou's on Lake [Pontchartrain]. At Little Woods, there were
[camps] built over the water. Some were restaurants which served
a big plate of seafood and had archaic jazz played by real old-time
442 Negroes on Friday or Saturday nights. [Compare other sources.]

When swing was king, Souchon would say during the late twenties
451 through 1945, the authentic jazz bands died out. The upper crust
Orleanians danced to bigger bands. Souchon thinks they were only
too happy to exclude [jazz?] from their minds.

458 Even though Souchon is a purist and loves authentic New Orleans
music, he cannot understand why so many Negro bands continue to play
464 so many discordant notes. Being "hell-bent-for-leather" with a
fine drive and being thrilling and exciting, the discords make no
difference, and they make no attempt to correct them. Bad tone
[color], out-of-tuneness, and discords offended people who knew
music.

476 Hillyer asks if any of the discords were intended as dissonances.
Souchon does not think so. Souchon thinks Marshall Stearns and Rudi
007+ Blesh are "backtracking in their early theories" [i.e., rationalizing

their taste? Their lack of training? Their lack of ethnocentrism? I do not understand Souchon's meaning. RBA, 9 April 1983.] Blesh
010 states that Johnny Dodds purposely tuned his clarinet a little bit
014- flat to give an acrid effect like vinegar in a salad. Souchon says this is dead wrong because, first, "they" were playing on poor instruments which were retrieved from ashcans or second-hand stores. "They" could not get the instrument in tune or their ears were not good enough.

026 In the early forties, Scoop Kennedy was a guiding light in
029+ the formation of the National Jazz Foundation which promised to be a great thing. There were chapters all over the world. Its mimeo-
033 graphed magazine [Basin Street News] did not amount to too much. His secretary [Pat Spiess] put it out. [Compare magazine.]

The National Jazz Foundation had some of the greatest concerts
033+ here, sponsored by Esquire. The winners of all the Esquire contests came to New Orleans. "We" had "a national hook-up" [i.e., a Blue Network broadcast in January 1946 in Municipal Auditorium.]

036 One band which came to New Orleans had James P. Johnson on piano, Pops Foster on bass, Johnny [i.e., Baby] Dodds, and Zutty Singleton alternating on drums, Jay C. Higginbotham on trombone,
040 Louis Armstrong, and Sidney Bechet-- Bechet stayed here for quite a while. He was not so mad at New Orleans. He was fed up with
043 Chicago when he walked out of Jazz Ltd.

045 Among other things, "we" had Bunk Johnson's marching band on

stage also. [Compare newspaper articles.]

046 The winners of this individual award were here. Duke Ellington's band was on the West Coast [in Los Angeles], which had won the
049 band contest, and Benny Goodman, who had won the clarinet contest was in New York. There were broadcasts from New York first, then New Orleans, and then the West Coast. For a finale, Goodman, Ellington's band, and the front line from New Orleans were mixed
054 together.

The National Jazz Foundation lasted for about three or four
054 years before it blew up. World War II came along, and Kennedy
056+ left the organization. He went to Europe where he was in charge of YMCA entertainment. There was no one here who was able to take
059 his place and the Foundation folded. [Compare other sources.]

062- The New Orleans Jazz Club was founded in 1948. They have had some fine concerts. Without patting themselves on the back, Souchon
063 believes two-thirds of the old musicians who are playing today are [doing so] due to their efforts of digging them up. [Souchon was a longtime officer and board of directors member.]

068 Papa Celestin was still playing, but he played any number of concerts for the New Orleans Jazz Club. Eddie Pierson's group, Paul Barbarin's group, and George Lewis' group, to mention only Negroes-- Sharkey was a stevedore. [Souchon never completes his thought. Pierson took over the leadership of the Papa Celestin

band when he died. The New Orleans Jazz Club got much work for Paul Barbarin's band. See George Lewis' biographies for more
069 on his career.] Harry Shields was running a railroad engine at night and so on. [Compare other sources.]

"We" would jam, bring them up to the club['s meeting], and
073 finally gave some concerts. Hype Guinle [of the Famous Door] heard one and put Sharkey in the Famous Door where he stayed for
074 five straight years. The other [Bourbon Street nightclubs] built up. The Paddock [Lounge] picked up [Papa] Celestin; El Morocco, now a strip-tease place, had George Lewis at his best. Souchon
077 says, "He had Elmer Talbert with him, and, boy, that band would roll [if he was playing good?]" [Compare Robert W. Greenwood's notes.]

079 Souchon does not understand "the stupid thing" of people listening to jazz and not dancing. Musicians would prefer it
081 [since] they get a great kick of people's reaction. It is boring to every one [other than musicians] merely to listen. This is appropriate for bop or progressive [jazz since its listeners are] cerebral music lovers. These styles are no fun, and they are sad.

089+ The use of small bands at private parties is increasing. This includes not only Negro and white union bands, but also any number of young bands which play as closely as possible to the old [style?] Souchon wrote a chapter for Eddie Condon's book [

?] which is to be published soon.

Souchon made a point that the old Negro musicians should be

098 recorded as much as possible because Negro jazz will be gone when this generation goes. The younger Negroes want to get away from jazz as far as they can because it smacks of Jim Crow and slavery.
101+ They want to forget jazz's African origins. Any of the younger Negro musicians who play at all now, will try to learn "progressive" [jazz] rather than jazz [i.e., the older style of jazz] or, if they lack the education required to play progressive, they will play
106 rock 'n' roll. Souchon hopes rock 'n' roll will be dead damn soon.

In Souchon's opinion, rock 'n' roll is a very bad combination of hillbilly [music] and blues--race records. He thinks the reason rock 'n' roll has caught on with the younger generation is that they [i.e., the musicians and composers?] have returned to a very
113 simple pattern which any one can remember.

115 Souchon has spoken in churches [and temples]: Jewish, Methodist, and EEpiscopal. A speaker comes there once a month and talks in their rectories. This shows some acceptance [of jazz].

Tulane [University], which rebelled so long against jazz,
125 is showing interest. The Ford Foundation is helping Tulane, and this shows great promise of acceptance. Souchon does not think jazz will ever be universally accepted, but he never thought it would be accepted as much as it is now.

129+ Hillyer asks if Orleanians in general have not thought too much of jazz as a form until recently and used jazz only when they had to. Souchon replies, "That's exactly right." They probably used [jazz bands] more in the old days without caring

about jazz's meaning, origins, and social significance. Now Orleanians are using more and more jazz bands [than when?] with
138+ an understanding of what they are listening to. And they are interested in where it has come from and is going.

Souchon thanks Hillyer.

END OF INTERVIEW