

EDMOND SOUCHON, M.D.
I [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
February 17, 1962

1

Also present: William Russell

Dr. Edmond Souchon II, grandson of Edmond Souchon I, son of Marion Sims Souchon, was born October 25, 1897, in New Orleans, on St. Charles Street at First Street. He can remember as far back as when he was four years old, as he pointed out in an article he recently wrote about Joe Oliver [in the Jazz Review.RBA]. Discussion about memory. His first memory of music was of the singing of two cooks, who followed [succeeded?] each other at the Souchon residence; they were Aumontine [spelling?] and Adele; both had fine contralto voices, and both sang hymns in the same style of Mahalia Jackson. ES remembers funeral parades [i.e., funeral processions]; the cook would take him to see them; they started at the Bulls Club and always passed Terrell's Grocery (where ES and cook joined second line) on First Street, on their way to a cemetery on Washington Avenue. ES was impressed by the young Joe Oliver, who played in those parades; ES says Oliver worked in the neighborhood, on Magazine at First or Third; WR says it was at Second, that he took pictures of all four corners there, that Bunk Johnson showed him one that it was not, but that Louis Keppard, who worked with Oliver in those days [identified the correct house?]. ES admired Oliver's white teeth; Oliver always chewed a hunk of tar. ES's mother played piano a little; once she played a waltz and a mazurka for him and told him that was the sum total of \$5,000 [cost?] of lessons. His father told him he played French

EDMOND SOUCHON, M.D.

I [of 3]--Digest--Retyped

February 17, 1962

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horn in Spring Hill [College, Mobile, Alabama], and that he fooled around with guitar enough to sing a few ditties. At ES's grandfather's house were a player piano and a phonograph; one of the numerous cylinder phonograph records was "The Iceman", sung by Billy ^{Murray}~~Jones~~ and Ada ^{Jones}~~Murray~~ (sung by ES here). ES's grandmother played piano a little, and would teach him songs; one early one was [some of the words are] "Oh, my baby, my curly-headed baby, we'll sit beneath the sky and sing this song to the moon." An aunt brought him a small four-string ukulele from Hawaii, but he couldn't learn from the instruction manual which accompanied it. When ES was eight to ten years old, he took three lessons on guitar (and also in solfege) from Miss [Marie] Cazenavette, the sister of a doctor friend of the Souchon family; ES was declared hopeless; he has a fond memory of being featured, with Bernie Shields, at a concert twenty years later; his former would-be teacher was in the front row of the audience. Around the same time (ES's age eight or ten), dancing classes were started at the Victor Grima house, a few doors away from the Souchons; at first, there was a white woman (about seventy years old then, but lived to be ninety) who played ragtime on the piano; later, she was replaced by a colored trio, consisting of piano, guitar and bass. ES, reluctant at first to attend, was soon the first to arrive for the lessons, so he could hear the music. His interest in guitar was stimulated by watching the guitarist at the dancing lessons, so he began fooling around with his own instrument, which had been neglected for some time. When he was about ten years old, he visited the George W. Clay family (first at Bay St. Louis, then at Pass Christian [Mississippi]) one summer; a Clay boy played piano and mandolin; he and ES played together; about once a month a band

would play for dancing there; ES (to the dismay of the family [his?]) began taking guitar lessons from the band's guitar player, who played mandolin at the lessons and charged ES twenty-five cents an hour. The band was led by the Clays's chauffeur, Armand; the band was eight or nine pieces and had two saxophones in it. [Check Summer Labat, reel ?] The band competed with Buddy Petit's band; Petit worked around Covington and Abita Springs, a lot then; ES heard Petit then. Talk of Petit, the way his neck swelled when he played; WR says Louis Armstrong's neck swells, Georg Brunis's entire face swells; ES says Jim Robinson's cheeks puff out. On the pier at Pass Christian, a spasm band of four colored boys would play from seven to ten PM, for two dollars; instruments: Home-made guitar, home-made bass, harmonica and comb [with tissue paper]. The boys sang, also. ES remembers one verse of a repetitious song the boys did; it was called "Yonder Come the Hoodoo Conductor Man." (He sings some of it). Petit's band was the only non-local band which played at the Clay dances; ES noticed a difference between the local band and Petit's; he thinks it was the saxophones [in the local band], which he did not like at all. When ES was eleven or twelve years old, he was invited by the brothers Bob and Harry Reynolds (guitar and mandolin) to their house (on Prytania at Marengo) to play (ES and others had discovered that other boys played musical instruments); he left his guitar outside, so he could find out how good they played; they were not better, so he joined them. They began having playing sessions every Sunday afternoon; the final instrumentation became

two guitars, mandolin, banjo, two violins; ukulele; personnel:
Hilton "Midget" Harrison, violin (he was a classic violinist and his mother taught violin), whom ES compares with Joe Venuti, Eddie South and Stephany Grappelly; Roland Rexach (also classic violinist, different style from Harrison), violin; Bernie Shields, banjo (sometimes mandolin); Harry Reynolds, mandolin; Bob Reynolds, guitar; ES, guitar; Charlie Hardy, ukulele. Others joined at odd intervals: Bill Gibbons, guitar-mandolin (about the size of ukulele, strung with six double strings), on which he played melody. They practiced in that house for about three years, until they were about fourteen years old; then they began going out. There were some older boys in the crowd, about fifteen or sixteen years old. Continuing their Sunday afternoon practice, they also began going to some girl's house to play on Sunday evenings. The sessions became regular, Saturday and/or Sunday nights; no one was invited unless he could sing or play. ES met his [future] wife [Marie Estoup] at one of the sessions; she was a classical piano teacher, but could play good ragtime. The style of playing was changing; he thinks that their playing not really ragtime. Competition for the group in which ES played was provided by "The Invincibles"; Bill Kleppinger, an orphan who lived across the street from the Reynolds, was in that group; he was a better musician than any of ES's group. Others in "The Invincibles": Frank "Red" Mackey, bass and banjo; Rene Gelpi, banjo; Eblen Rau, violin; Rolla Tichenor, guitar; Monk Smith, guitar and ukulele. There were seven or eight in the group. They were much better than

ES's group, but the latter ^{EN?} buch had group vocals worked up, and had zip. (ES says that people think he has no voice now; in that early group, his voice was considered so bad that he wasn't allowed to sing solo.) "The Invincibles" eventually became the [New Orleans] Owls. Monk Smith took up clarinet and saxophone (also played guitar with the band); Gelpi, banjo; Benjy [check spelling] White, saxophone and clarinet; Red Mackey, piano and bass. These were about all who went into the Owls. ES says that they ["The Invincibles"] broke up as soon as they added wind instruments.

The only other lessons ES had on guitar were informal ones from Johnny St. Cyr, which ES received while listening to St. Cyr play with Joe Oliver's band at the Tulane [University] Gym. ES and St. Cyr still are friends and still correspond. ES mentions [John] Slingsby, who told him St. Cyr was going into the hospital for cataract operations.

ES remembers Jack Laine's band at Mardi Gras time; he says he doesn't remember it as "Jack Laine's band", but that there was one fine jazz band which immediately before or after the king's [Rex] would be met at the river front the day before Mardi Gras; Laine's band also played for that occasion. ES's first memory of Mardi Gras with a jazz band [Laine's] was when he was six or seven years old; he doesn't remember how many years the band appeared in the parades.

ES's interest in music slacked off for a while, as he started

Tulane and had to study; he says Oliver and his band began playing at the Tulane Gym relatively late; ES went to dances there, with Oliver, before he, ES, graduated from high school. While in high school ES attended dances held by high school fraternities (e.g., OBD, DTO); ES remarks that bands like those led by [George?] McCullum were usually hired. [Restricted] McCullum always had pretty good men; Louis Warnick ^{clarinet} [saxophone] (later with [A. J.] Piron's band, then not formed) played with him. Another band used rarely was one having Louis Armstrong in it; Armstrong was too loud for the hall, and perhaps not so good then; ES says Armstrong didn't become really good until he was playing on the steamer Capitol. Other bands ES danced to then: Silver Leaf, Maple Leaf, Gold Leaf [?], Tuxedo. Later, he began going to LaLouisiane [restaurant], where [John] Robichaux had the house band; Robichaux was a most polished gentleman; he was a left-handed violinist, also. All his men were readers, with music on their stands, but there were always one or two hot take-off men in the band, which was basically six pieces; either the trumpet or the clarinet would be a take-off man. ES is certain he often heard [Manuel] Perez with that group; Perez would be hired for a big dance. Lorenzo Tio, Jr., also played with the band once in a while. Robichaux's music was more strictly from arrangements than Piron's was. Other than an occasional waltz (danced only by chaperones and a few younger people), there was only

EDMOND SOUCHON, M.D.
I [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
February 17, 1962

7

one dance step--the two-step used; it could be very intricate (ES mentions Irene [and Vernon] Castle, who came to New Orleans and danced an exhibition to Piron's music). Talk about dancing. The "Charleston" was done by only a few. ES mentions Mrs. Lewis's dancing school.

End of Reel I

EDMOND SOUCHON, M.D.
II [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
February 17, 1962

Also present: William Russell

Mrs. Lewis's dancing school, although having some people signed for a course in dancing, was more well-known for the Saturday night dances held there; the dances were open to the public; when there were no script dances at Tulane, the young people would go there.

Joe Oliver's band, playing at Tulane, received twenty³eight dollars for seven men, plus a guarantee of four quarts of whiskey. As the evening wore on they played more blues. ES mentions Johnny [Wiggs]. ES says the drummer with Oliver, [Henry] Zeno, or perhaps, "Happy" Bolton would sing songs. [Restricted] ES mentions "Mama's Baby Boy" and "Camellia Gaspergou." Many times the Six and Seven-Eighths Band (ES a member) didn't dance, but hung around the Oliver band to listen. ES thinks Oliver was at his peak during this period. He began changing his rough style (ES heard him at the Big Twenty-five), polishing it so the dancers could dance to it. ES mentions that "High Society" was used at dances only at a very slow tempo, for people to line up for supper; no one could dance to it then. WR mentions that "Gettysburg" march is still used in a similar manner. Some of Oliver's personnel: [Kid] Ory, Johnny Dodds, (but not Baby Dodds), [George] "Pops" Foster or Ed Garland or another bassist. Oliver's band changed style in Chicago; ES says they were trying to play like white bands; he says the band closest to the style of the early New Orleans Oliver band was the Ory band, on the West Coast [1940's] with Mutt Carey, Joe Darensbourg [later], Bud Scott, and

(WR adds) Ram Hall. (ES says that from a doctor's viewpoint, he is convinced that Oliver had diabetes, as he would drink buckets of sugar water while on the job.) ES talks of some of Oliver's unusual articles of clothing. ES says the people at the Tulane dances knew Oliver only as "Monocle", because his bad eye [KO sustained a traumatic cataract in a fight) stuck out and looked like a monocle.

Banjos came into jazz bands much later than guitars; Oliver didn't have a banjo in his band until Johnny St. Cyr began using his home-made, six-string banjo. St. Cyr used a homemade capotasto and a pick which he had made from a bone toothbrush. Most of the guitar players ES heard were pickers, using their thumbs and forefingers. ES heard a lot of guitar pickers in Amite, [Louisiana], where Percy McCay's family had a plantation. Percy (an official of the Whitney Bank) and his brother Thompson (consulting engineer with a Dallas firm) both played guitar; Thompson was better than Percy; he could play just like the Negroes in the country. Snoozer Quinn was the best guitarist ES ever heard or expects to hear; he could play lead, accompaniment and bass simultaneously. WR mentions records he made with Johnny Wiggs; ES says he had played much better than those records show. Quinn was a good singer, and a marvelous violin player. ES mentions Joe Venuti. Nobody could play when Quinn was around; even Joe Oliver, at the Tulane Gym, stopped when Quinn came there with his guitar. Quinn didn't play with many bands around New Orleans; he did play with some hillbilly bands, and played with

the Owls at the Suburban Gardens on a regular engagement, where he played violin, guitar and did some singing. The Owls were about ten pieces at the time. Speaking of instrumentation of early bands; piano and guitar were not used together in a band [Compare photographs]; the Oliver band at Tulane never used piano.

Steve Lewis, of the [A.J.] Piron band, never played with Oliver, although Piron (violin) led Oliver's band at the Tulane Gym for years. They [Oliver's band?] practiced at Piron's barbershop, which was near the Big Twenty-five. Piron's band used written arrangements, but they also did a lot of take-off playing; the best one was Lorenzo Tio, [Jr.]. ES enjoyed hearing Louis Cottrell, Sr., drums; Cottrell was tall, very dark, good features, white hair; his eyebrows would move up with every beat of the drum--on the off-beat. Piron's band had a banjo in it; Charlie Bocage was in the band on that instrument for a while, and then John Marrero, who also played [later] in [Papa] Celestin's band. [Compare Peter Bocage, Charlie Bocage, and other interviews]. Piron's band, a society dance band, featured the tuba, ES doesn't remember tuba in other bands; Oliver always had string bass. (ES mentions Chink Martin, carrying a tuba under one arm, string bass under the other, hurrying along the street.)

ES prefers playing banjo in a band, because he can be heard, and he thinks the banjo helps kick the band better. Guitars couldn't be heard in bands before amplification; ES thinks the guitar was there to supply chords for the band, rather than for the public to hear it. Blues shouldn't be played on banjo.

ES heard the bands of Tom Brown, Happy Schilling and Johnny Fischer when he was young; he recalls that he liked Schilling's band best of the ones which played for prize fights; Schilling used all brass, with the exception of drums and clarinet. [Compare Happy Schilling, reel ?] ES was attending a rush party at the Phi Delta Theta fraternity house at Tulane in the Spring of 1915; he was a freshman; the band (he thinks it was Brown's band, or perhaps the one which went to Chicago after Brown [Stein's?]) was so good that it was kept playing until morning; then the band marched from the frat house, on State near Claiborne to the railway station to board a train for Chicago. Discussion of personnel of Brown's band at the time: Larry Shields first on clarinet, replaced by Gussie Mueller; Shields replaced Mueller with [Nick] LaRocca. [Compare H. O. Brown, The Story of The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, et al. RBA] In Chicago from 1921 to 1925, ES did not hear any of the white bands, including the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, who were playing in that area then. He did hear Oliver. ES heard Bix [Beiderbecke, playing with Charlie Straight's band at the Rendezvous; Bix and four others formed a small band within the big band and would play between dance sets; ES didn't like their music; it was not dance music like Straight's, nor was it New Orleans music. ES heard Oliver at (probably) the Royal Garden. He heard Coon-Sanders at the Blackhawk; he heard Jimmie Noone at The Nest (later the Apex Club). Another place he

went was the [Kelly's?] Stable. ES finished his medical studies, returned to New Orleans to get married, took his bride to Chicago, where he interned for two more years.

ES mentions the [New Orleans] Owls, Gussie Mueller, Ray Lopez, Marilyn Fletcher [as suthor]; ES was unable to place with publishing companies a book Mueller and Lopez have written; ES says the book couldn't miss. Returning to the Owls: Mose Ferrer played piano with the Owls; when Arnold Loyacano, original pianist with Brown's band [in Chicago] quit, Ferrer replaced him for about a month. Ferrer's brother was a violinist, his mother a music teacher; they lived near Napoleon Avenue and St. Charles. (WR mentions Papa Laine, who told him Arnold Loyacano is quite sick; ES says he is better.)

The music of the Owls changed from dance music to listening music; their tempo was too fast for the dancers; they used arrangements, most of which were bare outlines or head arrangements. ES mentions Red Long, trumpet [?] [a pianist. RBA]; thinks he played with Owls a while. [Must mean Red Bolman.RBA]

ES describes the Halfway House, which was at City Park Avenue [Metairie Road?] and the New Basin Canal; its reputation was bad, but ES says the interior was innocuous. He has a picture of it. The band was four or five pieces, but he doesn't know who was in it. Charlie Cordilla, a member of the Halfway House band at one time, is a patient of ES's; he has been helpful with information about that band. The Brunies's not only had the band there; they had a brass band of sorts, made up of members of their family. ES didn't know them then, as they lived in another neighborhood.

EDMOND SOUCHON, M.D.
II [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
February 17, 1962

13

ES says the present-day old musicians are the only ones playing like the musicians of the older times, and that they will not change because they don't know how to change.

End of Reel II

ES says the reason the bands of the earlier times sounded so fresh was that they didn't play every day, and so remained enthusiastic; they all had day jobs, too. The old-timers now playing at Preservation Hall have begun to sound not so enthusiastic, what with customers often asking for "The Saints", etc. Also, bands which play together a lot get tired of hearing the same things played by the various members of the bands. ES likes the dynamics of Negro bands; he says that no white drummer has ever played like a "Nigger", except Jack [Laine], who claims not to have been exposed to music played by Negroes. [Restricted] ES says one can see all the fine old New Orleans French and Spanish names in the Negro sections of St. Louis [Cemeteries] Numbers One, Two and Three, that the offspring of a white man [of French ancestry] and a woman of color assumed the name of its sire; if the child was a boy, he was given a liberal education, including music. [John] Robichaux and [A.J.] Piron employed light-skinned Negroes in their bands, with the exceptions of Steve Lewis, who was quite dark, and Louis Cottrell, Sr., who was extremely dark.

Steve Lewis had middle fingers, on each hand, which were not permanently stiff; he didn't use those fingers for playing piano, merely keeping them stiff. (ES says Piron's recordings do not present Lewis well; he also says the Piron band sounds very different on the recordings from the sound they had in New Orleans; he says the band went to New York and had to hang around for about two weeks;

during that time they rehearsed, all Piron compositions, some not very good; when they recorded they were stilted from too much rehearsal, and had stage frights, too.) Lewis is presented well on his recordings with New Orleans Willie Jackson. ES mentions hearing Lewis and Jackson playing at an open-air ice cream parlor at West End or Spanish Fort; the place was run by B. C. Brown (who later became head of Brown's Velvet Dairy). The Bienville Roof was at West End; it was a restaurant downstairs, with a dance floor upstairs, where the Owls played a long time, and Monk Hazel's Bienville Roof Orchestra also worked at different time. [Or the West End Roof. Compare Monk Hazel, reel ?Benjie White, reel ?] The Bienville Hotel, at Lee Circle, had a band in its Bienville Roof, which was not on the roof, but on the top floor. Many Negro bands--Peerless Orchestra, [Papa] Celestin [and?] the Tuxedo Orchestra, Kid Ory--played at the lakefront Bienville Roof. Lewis's piano sounds like Fats Waller and Earl "Fatha" Hines to some people. ES talks about copying; names mentioned: English bands, Lu Watters, Baby [i.e., Johnny] Dodds. Lewis was a good band pianist; he wasn't frilly except on his solos. No bass in the band most of the time; instrumentation: cornet, trombone, clarinet, saxophone ([Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.] and Louis Warnick), drums, [piano--Lewis]. The Piron band was very popular; they played every Saturday and Sunday afternoon, from three until six, at the [New Orleans] Country Club; then they went to Tranchina's for the evening job. There would be around five hundred

people in the audience at the country club; all at once, people lost interest, but the band was kept on for two more years. The band would try out new numbers, some of their own, such as "Purple Rose of Cairo" [Lewis and Piron] (ES says the printed sheet music of that song has completely omitted a very pretty bridge section).

ES heard Jelly Roll [Morton] only twice; once was when Morton, in a pickup band, was traveling through New Orleans from the Gulf Coast. ES was about eighteen years old. Although Morton was not leader, he dominated the band. Morton was sour and not obliging. ES says words [about Morton] were put into Charlie Hardy's mouth on the "This is Your Life" program [featuring ES]; the only place Hardy could have heard Morton was Lulu White's, which was too expensive. People could hear music if they hung around outside the houses, but the inmates and the police discouraged that practice. WR mentions Tony Jackson.

ES didn't hear the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, but he thinks he heard [Nick] LaRocca, Larry Shields and [Eddie] Edwards working as a front line with another band, in some cabaret (ES doesn't remember which one, but thinks of the Pup, the Sans Souci and the Cadillac). ES remembers hearing Shields, because he also played with Tom Brown. ES considers Shields the best musician of the whole crowd [O.D.J.B.?]. Emile Christian joined the band later. (WR says the Archive has a short interview with Christian and Tony Sbarbaro.) ES talks about the Brussels World's Fair, saying he was commissioned to pick out two colored bands and one white band to go from New Orleans,

[RESTRICTED section]

Johnny [Wiggs]'s band had been more or less invited by Lord Donegal [to England]; the Brussels affair, however, fell through, and only bands already in Europe were asked to attend and play due to financial difficulties; Benny Goodman was there, and Sidney Bechet; both were recorded by Columbia.

The white New Orleans bands ES remembers from the early days are Tom Brown's, [Happy] Schilling's and [Johnny] Fischer's. He doesn't know which group played for the Phi Delta Theta party [see Reel II, p. 11]/

One colored pianist ES heard, other than Steve Lewis, was Clarence Williams, who, with Piron, had a music publishing house at about 1315 Tulane (it is now a photographic studio [Frank Moore-- 1317 Tulane]). William's playing was always blues-tinged, as were his compositions. He was a good band pianist. Williams's head was peculiarly-shaped, as was the head of Snoozer Quinn. ES says a colored porter in the Pan-American [insurance company] Building told him that he wrote the words to "Sister ^{Kate} ~~Pate~~" and helped Piron put it together; the then nameless tune had been floating around New Orleans for years before Louis Armstrong was supposed to have put it together. WR says Armstrong told him that Piron paid him perhaps twenty-five dollars for it. ES says Armstrong's story now is that he had Piron write it out for him, as he himself couldn't write music, and Piron appropriated it then. WR says Armstrong told him about selling the tune; it was at the Strand Theater in New York; Armstrong didn't appear to be bitter about it.

Talk about minstrelsy. Marshall Stearns is mentioned. ES attended minstrels as late as World War I. There were white and Negro minstrels; Negroes better; had better musicians and artists. WR mentions the Rabbit Foot [Minstrels]; says they were still going perhaps five years ago.

When [Tom] Brown's band broke up, Ray Lopez (and possibly, Gussie Mueller) joined Blossom Seely. ES says the bands appearing as corny bands were not really like that, that it was part of their stage act. The O.D.J.B. was not as corny as it appeared, nor were Brown's "The Five Rubes"; they had to act that way for the show.

ES didn't play with a band using wind instruments, except perhaps at private parties where he would sometimes sit in, until Johnny Wiggs got him into it. Wiggs's band had a feeling more Negroid than any white band playing at the time; WR says Al Rose agrees. Harry Shields played entirely different with Wiggs from what he played with Sharkey [Bonano]. ES mentions Shields with the Dukes of Dixieland. Raymond Burke had a lot to do with the sound of Wigg's band; so did Emile Christian. ES mentions Paul Crawford. Armand [Hug] is probably the best pianist in New Orleans, but he plays alone so much that he has developed a cocktail style. ES says he is much better with a band than otherwise. Talk of Wigg's quitting music and of his and AH's hearttttrouble. Talk of session with [Bob] Greene, Wiggs, et al. Talk of Wiggs's idiosyncrasies. Good Time Jazz and Golden Crest [recording companies] mentioned. Wiggs was leader of the band on Rex's bandwagon in 1961. Sherwood [Mangiapane] is mentioned.

EDMOND SOUCHON, M.D.
III [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
February 17, 1962

19

Talk of TV program, "This Is Your Life": presented life as doctor, life as musician; neither doctors or musicians satisfied with presentation. Had good jam session afterwards; ES and the others in the [Six and Seven-Eighths] string group played with others; Ray Bauduc, drums; Merle Koch, piano; Muggsy [Spanier, cornet]; Bob Havens, trombone; Matty Matlock [clarinet]. ES says it was the best jam session he ever heard; Ralph Edwards liked it.

End of Reel III

