

DISC 1048

Interview with Evelyn Sinclair Moyer, May 6, 1958

HH: All right, this is being recorded on Thursday night, the 6th of May, 1958.

ESM: I was born in 1912, December 13th.

HH: And you were born in New Orleans?

ESM: I was born in New Orleans in my family's home.

HH: And you've lived here all your life?

ESM: I've lived here all my life except for a few months, about 10 or 15 years ago, when I lived in Pennsylvania for maybe five or six months.

HH: When's the first time you [remember hearing] jazz music?

ESM: I guess I can almost remember that from the time I was a child that noticed anything. But when I first took an interest in it, I suppose like most kids of today, was when I was in my early teens.

HH: When you first heard it as a child, did you have any opinions expressed on it by your parents, or friends of your parents?

ESM: I don't remember my parents telling me so much when I was a child, but when I became maybe 15 or 16 years old, and we got a victrola, and some of us started buying jazz records and bringing them home, I can remember my mother thought they were perfectly awful. She liked good music and always had and just didn't care for the jazz.

HH: Did she like classical music?

ESM: She was interested in classical music only, and to this day she is interested in classical music only. And my father was tone deaf, so he always said any music, good or bad, always seemed a racket to him. It didn't seem to matter much if it was opera or Dixieland jazz. All of it, he didn't care for.

HH: What about friends of your parents? Did any of them see anything good in the music?

ESM: I don't really remember many friends of my parents even discussing jazz to any extent. I know that we all liked Dixieland jazz, and I started going to dances and things.

HH: You and your friends?

ESM: My friends, we all loved it. We liked Papa Celestin and he was probably in his glory then. Better then than he is even now.

HH: About when?

ESM: I would say in about the late 20s and early 30s. I can remember Papa Celestin playing "Hold that Tiger" and we'd dance and whirl around. We didn't jitterbug in those years. Now a few years later after I was married, the Jitterbug came into being, but before that we did the Charleston and a few things like that. And we loved Dixieland jazz, and frankly I think we danced a lot more to it. It was real dancing that had a rhythm and a beat, much better than the music that you all have nowadays.

HH: ... About what age?

ESM: It goes back a little, I'd say around 1930. All of us were dancing to Dixieland jazz and they even had some white bands that played some of that and some sweet music like ... and "3 O' Clock in the Morning" and a few things like that that were on the pretty side and we liked the combination of both. "I'm Yours," that was a pretty song. They could play both Dixieland jazz and pretty music, and we had some white bands and some colored bands that played both. I don't think the Dixieland jazz that they played in my day was exactly like some of the music that they call Dixieland jazz today.

HH: Jazz was accepted and used at parties? By good people?

ESM: Oh yes, Papa Celestin was at quite a few. And I'm trying to think of the names of - - there was another white band that was very good that used to be considered tops and they played Dixieland also. But even Dixieland had more melody.

HH: Do you remember the names of the other bands?

ESM: I can't remember the names of the other bands, although I know we had a lot of them -- when the fraternities had parties and at the country club every Saturday night.

HH: Remember A. J. Piron?

ESM: I remember the name vaguely. I just can't remember the name of this band. Oh just most all of the good bands had, one particular band, that was a white band. But played...

HH: Halfway House Orchestra?

ESM: No it's not in existence now. I know they had some shoe salesman; that worked in a shoe store in the day time, and in the band they wore hats and they used to clown a lot with that band. I don't think we have any band here in town locally that does that now. They had more singers in their bands than they have now. But with all of that, Dixieland jazz was in some ways different from the Dixieland today. It had more rhythm. You could go away from the party and you could remember it; you could sing some of it. Where as I think in a lot of cases today, Dixieland jazz, just because it's a colored band is playing something with a beat, it's almost considered Dixieland jazz.

HH: You're thinking of rhythm and blues, rock and roll?

ESM: Well rock and roll is completely different, but I'm trying to think of a band that was considered by the organization here of Dixieland jazz, they have some kind of organization...

HH: New Orleans Jazz Club?

ESM: Yeah, the New Orleans Jazz Club, and I know one person that was a member of it was Celestin was so wonderful we went out to a party at the country club one night when they were out there about maybe five years ago. Somebody Lewis?

HH: George Lewis?

ESM: George Lewis. And you could hardly distinguish one piece he played from the other because they were just different beats. Rather than a theme, a tune, a melody, or whatever you want to call it, something that you could remember after or while you were dancing, you could say, oh they were playing such-and-such -- what you could do in our day, when they played Dixieland jazz. If they were playing "Hold that Tiger" you knew they were playing "Hold that Tiger." What are some of the other ones? If they were playing "Bourbon Street Blues," you knew they were playing "Bourbon Street Blues." Even Dixieland jazz of today, in a lot of cases, you could hardly distinguish one from the other.

HH: Going back to 20s and 30s, did you make a debut in New Orleans? Did you go to a lot of debutant parties?

ESM: Yeah, I made my debut and went to a lot of parties, most of them were given at the Patio Royal, a few at the Orlean Club, and of course some in people's homes. But for the most part, most of them were given at the Patio Royal. There were a few given at the Roosevelt Roof and a few at the country club -- not so many at the country club though, because they didn't really... too much then.

HH: Did they have jazz bands at the debutant parties?

ESM: We certainly did.

HH: What about the carnival balls? Did they have jazz bands?

ESM: They didn't have a jazz band at the carnival ball. I can't ever remember any carnival ball and they playing what you would strictly call Dixieland jazz. Now, they played popular music, like they do today, the pieces that were popular at that time. I don't recall just which bands they had, but it wasn't Dixieland jazz at the carnival balls, no. Al Strieman was a band that was fairly popular in those days, and I know now he still plays. I don't believe he's popular anymore, but he's still around town. He seems to be going down, he always had some attractive girl singer in his band in those days.

HH: Jazz was socially acceptable, then? As a form of music?

ESM: Definitely. It was definitely socially acceptable.

HH: Can you sort of trace it down through the 30s and 40s? Did you continue to listen to jazz? Did you switch away from it? What you can remember?

ESM: With Dixieland jazz, I don't think we would have gone and sat and listened to Dixieland jazz like you all do today. I don't ever remember doing that in the late 20s and early 30s. You had a Dixieland jazz band to dance to, but you didn't stand around and listen to it, and you didn't go anywhere and listen to it. It was more to dance by, than it was to listen to. And in my day, people danced, they didn't sit.

HH: Can you carry jazz forward? Did it continue to be played at parties during the 30s? Were jazz bands still at the parties in the 30s? Dances and stuff like that?

ESM: Oh yes, they were hot. You're speaking of Dixieland jazz?

HH: Yes, always speaking of New Orleans jazz.

ESM: Well Dixieland jazz, yes, a lot of people went out of their way to hire bands that played more of that type of music than others. But in other cases, maybe some other party would hire a band that played more popular music than Dixieland jazz, and it was just the type of party, and what the place who gave the party liked.

HH: But there was a ... in the 30s? What about in the 40s and up until now?

ESM: All during the war years, the early 40s and middle 40s Dixieland jazz was popular for parties and for dances, with my age group. With the younger age group, I know there were some places where you'd see kids sitting around just listening to it. I don't think my age group ever cared to sit around and listen to Dixieland jazz. To a large extent, it was more to dance by. Even in the 40s, from the time we were kids on up, at least that's the impression I had for myself, and from some of the friends I know. But I mean even now,

we go to dances. A lot of times they have jazz bands, although the consensus of opinion, with the people I know, the band most of them prefer, not all of them, but most of them, Rene Louapre, which I'd say plays more popular sweet music, now, at our age. But they all... still ... the Dixieland jazz, and think that Papa Celestin and his band is the best, but I guess it depends on who you're talking to.

HH: Ever since you can remember, though ... parents... you always felt it was a valid form of music and used at social functions in New Orleans ever since you can remember?

ESM: Ever since I can remember, New Orleans Dixieland jazz, they had it at a great many parties, ... social parties in New Orleans. I cannot speak for my parents' friends, because I don't remember hearing any of them voice an opinion, I can only speak for my own parents, and I think I said earlier that my mother liked classical music and my father was tone-deaf, and didn't care for any music, but I can't speak for their friends because I don't remember ever hearing them voice an opinion.

HH: Thank you very much.

Interview with Miss Marietta S. Moyer

MSM: My name is Marietta Moyer. I'm 22 years old and I was born in New Orleans in 1936. You wanted to know what I think of New Orleans jazz, and when I first knew of it. Well it seems like to me, that all my life -- well it's just been part of my life, I've always known. I can't put my finger on a definite place where I first heard, say, the "St. Louis Blues," or "When The Saints Go Marching In," but I guess it did become part of my life when I was in my teens and I started going to parties and dances. They always had, or usually had jazz bands. But I do think that it is definitely a part of New Orleans. One thing, when they didn't have a jazz band, say at a formal, and they just had a regular dance band, they always played the New Orleans jazz because it was expected. It just wouldn't be a dance without kind of a few jitterbug pieces so to speak. At the balls that I've been to, they've never had any jazz bands. As I said before they do play the jazz pieces, but I guess because they had to play certain marches, and things like that, that a jazz band just wouldn't have been really appropriate.

HH: What about debutant parties? When you made your debut?

MSM: Well at the debutant parties, usually if they had a brunch, they would have a, maybe a small part of a jazz band or they would have this group Noon [Johnson] and Sam [Rankins]. One would play a bass, and one a guitar, or a banjo, and one instrument that's made out of a long bedpost that used to be quite popular, and quite antique, and it made a strange humming sound, it was like a trumpet in a way. But they could really make up the rhythm with those instruments, and we enjoyed listening or jitterbugging to this music.

HH: Well, old were you when you started dating? Going to parties and stuff like that?

MSM: Well, actually when I was really dating, when my mother wasn't picking me up or something like that, I think that was about, oh, fourteen.

HH: And at dances then, did they have jazz bands?

MSM: Well, they would kind of mix them up. There were several dance groups in town, the Younger Set, Subdeb, and maybe at the spring dance they would have a jazz band, then one dance they would have just a regular dance band. It was kind of a run, but I think that the jazz bands, I think usually when they were there the parties were a lot more fun, and had a lot more spirit because people enjoyed themselves, kind of let themselves go and ... the rhythm that the Negroes would put into it, because they also had a deep feeling about their music.

HH: Do you remember some of the bands?

MSM: Yes, well the most popular of course was Papa Celestin. I think anytime there was a party where there was jazz band they would always call him first. Also there was George Lewis, and several other ones that were, oh say, young bands starting out, that weren't well known. And they were really quite good also, but I still think that Papa Celestin stands much higher, you know, ahead of the other ones.

HH: And just about all of your set liked jazz?

MSM: Oh definitely. In fact we even used to go down to the French Quarter at Paddock, and listen to them. And I remember the Dukes of Dixieland, which is a white band, even though they were very good they still didn't have the rhythm, or the spirit that the Negro band had at the Paddock. Of course I always preferred to go to the Paddock as much as everybody else did also, but both were very good. We used to like to listen to it and the people who couldn't dance, who didn't like the jitterbug would always be kind of sitting back and listening to it. I think that jazz is, with this rock and roll coming in now, I personally don't like it myself, but I do think that jazz is something that maybe younger people don't realize, don't hear much of it now, but I think it's going to live, whereas rock and roll isn't.

HH: Well would you say jazz has been accepted as a valid musical form and has been very popular in New Orleans?

MSM: Oh yes, definitely. I think it's here to stay, I really do.

HH: Do you think it's still popular today?

MSM: Oh I really do, very definitely. It may take a step down maybe when new people bring in something crazy like rock and roll, but it's like, maybe, I think like a work of art in a way. It's kind of a masterpiece. It's going to live for a long time. It has a lot of depth

to it, whereas this other doesn't. In a way it's kind of like folk music. It means something. It means a certain era maybe, or a group of people and I think ...

HH: Do you have anything else you care to add along these lines?

MSM: No, I believe that's all. I like it very much.

HH: Thank you very much.

Interview with Charlotte Dillyer (Mrs. Homer Dupuy)

HH: Give me your name please.

CD: I'm Mrs. Homer Dupuy.

HH: When were you born?

CD: I was born May 18, 1923.

HH: Where?

CD: In Evanston, Illinois, but I've lived in New Orleans since I was six years old.

HH: Do you remember when you first became aware there was such a form of music as jazz in New Orleans?

CD: Oh, I'd say probably in the middle 30s.

HH: Do you remember what it was thought of by your parents or your parents' friends?

CD: I don't think the majority of them cared for it. I think there have always been those who have liked it very much, but I don't believe the majority of my parents' generation were wild about it.

HH: What about your generation?

CD: I think it's still very mixed. There are definitely those who think it's here to stay, and those who don't like it at all.

HH: What about when you were growing up? When you were a teenager and started going out and going to dances and all that? Were jazz bands playing at the dances?

CD: Very few. There were some.

HH: And that was during the middle 30s?

CD: That's probably going into the 40s. Late 30s, early 40s. But that was much more in the era of "Stardust" and "Deep Purple" and music like that.

HH: And your set didn't think too highly of that?

CD: Not terribly, no.

HH: And did you notice any increased interest in New Orleans jazz as you went along?

CD: I think there's definitely been an increase. There's much more, I think since the war there's been an increase in the school of jazz.

HH: By increase, I mean increase of interest.

CD: That's what I mean, increase of interest.

HH: Among people of your social status?

CD: I think so, I think definitely since the war.

HH: You say you yourself don't particularly care for it?

CD: No, I don't frankly; at the expense of being labeled a square by the generation of my interviewer, I must admit that I am not a proponent of New Orleans jazz. Would you like to know why?

HH: Yeah, okay.

CD: Well, I find it with very few exceptions, too blaring and too dissonant and too lacking in melody to be pleasing to the ear. I do think, however, that there is definitely a place for jazz in the evolution of music -- that it's as much a part of folk music of America as our hillbilly tunes or our Negro spirituals.

HH: Well, on the whole you'd say that your generation doesn't think too highly of jazz, or it wasn't accepted too much in New Orleans, as music for something to listen to or something to dance to?

CD: Well, now wait; it all depends on which period you're talking about.

HH: Well, in various periods, could you trace it?

CD: Well, I just think the majority of my friends were not particular fans of New Orleans jazz during the pre-war period; I do think there has been an increase in interest since the war.

HH: You say jazz wasn't played too much at parties, things like high school fraternity and college fraternity parties?

CD: No.

HH: What about debutant parties?

CD: Are you talking about before the war or since the war?

HH: No, when you were coming up and also after that, since the war?

CD: No, I think, that's what I said, I don't think it was played nearly as much before as since.

HH: What about during the war?

CD: Not particularly, not any more so than just before the war. I really think the increase in interest has happened since the war.

HH: Well have you noticed it being played more at parties since the war?

CD: Yes, definitely.

HH: Right now it would be acceptable have a jazz band playing at a debutant party?

CD: Oh, yes, I think it's definitely accepted.

HH: What about carnival balls? Do they have jazz bands playing for carnival balls?

CD: No, not really. New Orleans jazz bands, no.

HH: Do the bands at carnival balls play jazz?

CD: Once in a while. Not often. Not the kind of jazz you're talking about.

HH: Okay. Do you have anything you'd like to add on the subject?

CD: No, I think that's pretty well covers it.

HH: All right, thank you very much.

Interview with Dr. Homer Dupuy

HH: Your name please?

HD: Dr. Homer Dupuy.

HH: Date of birth and birthplace?

HD: August 7th, 1913 in New Orleans.

HH: Did you live in New Orleans all your life?

HD: Yes.

HH: When did you, as well as you can remember, first become aware that there was a musical form of New Orleans jazz?

HD: I guess in the early parts of my high school days.

HH: About what year?

HD: In 27, 28, 29, 1927, in there.

HH: What did people think of it? Did they regard it as a valid form of music?

HD: I think the majority of people at the high school level at that time were very much interested in jazz.

HH: What about your parents? Did they think anything good?

HD: No, I don't think they were familiar with it. The only thing my father was familiar with in life was the Gershwins, George Gershwin's type of jazz; Paul Whiteman's type of jazz.

HH: Did your parents or any of your parents' friends as well as you can remember like it?

HD: No, I don't think they did.

HH: But your high school set liked it?

HD: Yes, very much.

HH: They had it at parties and stuff like that? What bands did you all listen to?

HD: Papa Celestin, Piron...

HH: George Lewis?

HD: George Lewis.

HH: What did you have mostly at parties, high school parties, jazz music of some kind?

HD: Jazz was usually played.

HH: Did you go anywhere else to hear jazz? Nightclubs or anything like that?

HD: No, we didn't go out specifically to search for it, as a lot of people did.

HH: But it was accepted?

HD: It was the accepted form of dance music at that time.

HH: Did people collect records or anything like that?

HD: Yes, they did. Some did.

HH: What about when you were in college?

HD: In college, the trend was more to swing music.

HH: Was there a large group of New Orleanians that liked jazz?

HD: I think that lessened for a little bit at that time. The enthusiasm for it lessened and the trend was more to popular music and swing music. There were some exceptions. There was still some played at the parties, but the general trend of the music at the college level at that time was more along the lines of swing music.

HH: And that was about when?

HD: That was in the 30s.

HH: Do you like jazz especially?

HD: I do.

HH: Do you have some small interest in it?

HD: A small interest.

HH: Can you trace the popularity of it up to the present day as much as you can?

HD: Well it seems to me that there is more enthusiasm since the war for it, particularly with the people I know, than there was at any time. I'm personally not a great devotee of the type of jazz that you have in mind. If you contrast it to classical music, I like classical music, and I like jazz in general, but I'm not a particular devotee of New Orleans jazz.

HH: And you said many of your friends are?

HD: Some. I think just one or two are. I think we are all interested in it, we all like it, but there are just one or two of my friends that I would classify as devotees of it.

HH: But you would say a large majority of them would classify it as a valid and worthwhile musical form?

HD: Definitely.

HH: What about at social functions? Do you see jazz increased at social functions?

HD: I think it is now. I think it is on the increase again, at the debutant parties and that sort of thing.

HH: What about at carnival balls?

HD: No; very seldom.

HH: At debutant parties and stuff like that do they have a jazz band?

HD: Yes, they would. But I don't think it's ever played at carnival balls.

HH: Can you think of anything else you might like to add along those lines?

HD: Well I think one thing of interest is that during the war, Papa Celestin, who rose to great heights locally, here in New Orleans, to give you some idea as to how people felt about jazz, or at least maybe there just wasn't enough manpower to do it; during the war, Papa Celestin gave up the leadership of his band, I think it dissolved, and he was a chauffeur. It wasn't until after the war that the revision of the enthusiasm for jazz, that his band again collected, and he became one of the outstanding people in this part of the country on jazz, as did all the others that come back after the war.

HH: Thank you very much.