

JIM ROBINSON
I[of 4]--Digest--Retyped
July 13, 1961

Also present: Richard B. Allen

Talk of a parade JR played in Baton Rouge; four bands: [Young] Tuxedo [Brass Band], Eureka [Brass Band], two school bands; it rained; played anyway, after sun came out; talk of effect of rain on drums: soggy, no good; drums the main thing in parade.

Talk of effects of playing with unskilled musicians. Talk of getting together all-star band: JR says they can play well together if they are good musicians. Talk of differences between organized and "jump-up" [i.e., put together for the occasion] bands; organized bands are better organized. JR likes playing with George Lewis's Band, with Kid Howard, because everyone in the band helps everyone else; if one horn man is taking a solo, the other two horns back him up. JR talks about his band's recording recently at France [i.e., Jeunes] Amis Hall, for Riverside; the sound was full, because the horns supported one another, and the solos were limited [but not as limited as JR wanted. RBA]. The first time JR heard a band allowing many solos was in New York, in 1945; JR was there with Bunk Johnson. Eddie Condon, guitarist, had a night club just around the corner from where JR and the rest of Johnson's band lived; JR heard Wild Bill Davison and band, in which every man was featured as a soloist [every number, probably--PRC]. JR says the Johnson band didn't do that up there. RBA says that the reason he would go to Tyler's Beer Garden, in 1945, was because the Joe Avery-Wilbert Tillman [Band] didn't ever play solos, that he heard. Talk about solos and ensembles continues; Louis Armstrong is mentioned.

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The largest Dixieland band JR ever played with was eight pieces; (Sam Morgan, with whom JR played had eight pieces); the smallest was two pieces--just Kid Howard, trumpet, and himself on trombone. In 1955, when George Lewis became ill, on the stand; the band, without Lewis: JR, trombone; Kid Howard, trumpet; George Guesnon, banjo; Alton Purnell, piano; Slow Drag [Pavageau], bass; Joe Watkins, drums. JR says he and Kid Howard alone played many parties--no rhythm, just the two horns. The people would dance to their music. Talk of time in band: JR says drummer most important, is timekeeper. JR likes piano and banjo together. Talk about cutting a band down: JR wouldn't want to cut off any man, but thinks the other men should take a little cut in pay, chipping in to pay the other man; RBA says that happened at Manny's Tavern. This keeps the band together.

RBA asks about JR's favorite musicians; JR doesn't name any. RBA asks about JR's favorite band of all time; JR says Sam Morgan had a good band; he comments.

The first time JR was ever on a radio broadcast was with Sam Morgan's Band, from Meridian, Mississippi, in about 1937 (Sam Morgan still alive). RBA mentions hearing JR on the radio, and going to radio station WTPS to watch the broadcast [1949 or 1950]; JR says they worked there one and one-half years, sponsored by Regal beer; Ed Hart and Tiger Flowers were the announcers. Charlie Hamilton played piano with the band; [Elmer] "Coo Coo" [Talbert] was on trumpet.

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[Looking at photograph in book, "Jassways"--JR recalls that it was [taken] at Laurel and General Taylor streets; Gene Williams, and George Rosenthal (of Cincinnati) were there.

People liked Sam Morgan's Band on radio [and otherwise]; they didn't play loud, but they played with swing. JR explains the term, "double rush"--says it means that two bands share the duties on one job, so that there is continuous music. He mentions playing with Morgan at the [Pythian Temple?] Roof Garden, and at the Pelican, in double rushes.

JR was also on the radio, with Morgan's band, when they played for sick soldiers at a hospital between Gulfport and Biloxi [Mississippi--probably Veterans Administration Hospital--PRC]. JR mentions the towns they might play in the course of a week--from the Mississippi coast to Mobile and Birmingham, Alabama, back through Meridian, and to New Orleans for a regular Saturday night job at the Wagon Top (Tchoupitoulas and Napoleon), and on Rampart Street[Astoria] every Sunday night. JR demonstrates the usual tempo Sam Morgan's Band played. He says that they would find the tempo to which the most dancers responded the best; the band would play in that tempo all night, except for waltzes, which they would jazz after they had played them in waltz time.

Asked about good clarinet players, playing before he started playing [trombone], JR says there were a lot of good ones: George Baquet, Jimmie Noone, Johnny Dodds, Sidney Vigne, Sidney Bechet.

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Vigne played with Zooey [spelling?] Seldon, trumpet player; some others in that band: Eddie Morris, trombone; Arthur Ogle, drums. Jimmie Noone worked with Joe Oliver; they played at the various halls (Hope, Perseverance, New, etc.). Noone came from St. Bernard Parish, where he was born. Sidney Bechet was working in the District, at Marais and Bienville, JR thinks. He doesn't really remember the names of the places, as he couldn't go through the district often; he wasn't twenty-one at the time [came to New Orleans in 1911 and was born December 25, 1890--Reel I, December 10, 1958]. JR says Bechet was playing with Buddy Petit at the cabaret at Marais and Bienville; there were about five pieces in the band. There were a lot of bands playing along Basin Street then, and in the District; Joe Oliver and Peter Bocage (then playing violin) were at the Big Twenty-five; when they left there, they went to Pete Lala's (Marais and Iberville).

In the same time, all the trumpet [or cornet] players were good; to name some: Willie Edwards, Louis Dumaine [who did record--PRC], Amos Riley, George McCullum. They were all musical [i.e, could read music], but they could play Dixieland. They didn't finger as fast as Buddy Petit, but they were good. Hypolite Charles was another good trumpet player, and there was another one, still living, whose name JR can't recall.

End of Reel I

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Also present: Richard B. Allen 5

Chit-chat about chewing tobacco. [JR often chewed RBA's pipe tobacco!!!RBA].

Talk about JR's appearances on radio broadcasts: with Sam Morgan, George Lewis--in Chicago, New York, several European countries. JR says the first time he was on television was over station WTPS [New Orleans which was radio only, never television--PRC]. He has also been on television in San Francisco, Oakland and Europe; he has been on television at station WDSU [New Orleans] several times--with George Lewis, with Emma Barrett and on a show produced by Art Ford (of New York). [Shown in New York and New Orleans. See archive's copy.] He has also been on television a lot in Los Angeles.

JR mentions trumpet player Peter Locaze, a good player; he had his own band, also worked with the Tuxedo Band, the Excelsior [Brass Band], many others.

Good drummers: Henry Zeno, Ernest Trepagnier, John Vigne, Arnold Depass, "Red Happy" [Bolton]. Vigne worked with Jimmie Noone [clarinet] and Peter Bocage (violin) at Pete Lala's cabaret; Joe Oliver (cornet) joined the band on week-ends. Others in the band: Arthur [Campbell?RBA] (who died in Chicago), piano; a guitarist. (JR says the use of banjos in bands came after World War I, and that banjo is louder than guitar, which makes it of more use in certain kinds of jobs, such as advertising jobs played on trucks.)

Talk about qualities necessary for good style in band: time [i.e., the ability of the band to keep steady tempo] is the most important element of good band style. Talk about drummers, and the necessity of their keeping good time. JR mentions the group with which he plays, at the old Absinthe House; it is a quartet, consisting of JR [trombone], Cie Frazier, drums, Percy [Humphrey, trumpet], Emma Barrett [piano]. JR talks of the way Frazier plays with the group, his conservative use of cymbal, and the good tempos of the group. RBA wonders why there was so much cymbal used in the George Lewis band; JR says Joe Watkins says Lewis wanted it that way.

Talk of the number of tunes a band should play on a job; places mentioned are Paddock Lounge and Larry's [Preservation Hall]. JR says Sam Morgan's band played a lot of numbers; the only times they would repeat a number [the same night] was when the applause of the dancers demanded an encore, which the band would play immediately. JR talks about the Dream Room, where the band could play what it wanted, to suit the dancers rather than the owners, as in some other Bourbon Street places. JR says the taxi dance halls, like the Budweiser and the La Vanda, were jobs not as hard as those at the Paddock and the Famous Door [no dancing at the last two places]; he explains that at the taxi dance places, the piano or guitar could start a number, giving the horns a rest, but at the Paddock and others the horn blowers didn't get a chance to rest. JR says that on the West Coast, at places like the Tin Angel [San Francisco] and the Beverly

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Caverns [Los Angeles], the boss would have them come off the stand when the place became crowded, because the patrons would buy liquor when there was no music. After a while, the boss would have the band return, play until the place had a change of customers, and then leave the stand again. RBA mentions Luthjen's [in New Orleans]. JR mentions the Hangover, in San Francisco, and the light the owner would turn on when he wanted the band to leave the stand. JR mentions Child's Paramount Restaurant, on Broadway [in New York], where they [the Lewis band] played; some people would be eating, some would be dancing, etc.

JR played a lot of parades when he was young, but the walking gets him down now, so he doesn't take any more parade jobs. In the earlier times, the paraders would walk steadily, not like they do today, stopping every few minutes, going slowly--and the spectators didn't get in the street, in the way of the band and the marchers. RBA says [Albert] Warner had his trombone knocked out of his hand [in some parade where spectators were not kept out of the streets]. Talk of lip troubles. JR didn't play with the very old brass bands, but he did play with a lot of later bands: Buddy Petit, Kid Rena, Chris Kelly, Kid Punch [Miller], Eureka, [Young? Original?] Tuxedo [all the preceding, brass bands, or brass bands of persons mentioned]. Petit's band played jazz numbers, the same ones that are played today: "Fidgety Feet", "High Society", etc. That kind of band played "head" numbers; others, like the Excelsior [Brass Band], played "heavy" march music, playing from the music. The music played by the reading brass bands of years ago was hard, harder than that played today. The organized bands, the ones that read--like the Tuxedo Band, Allen's Band, and the Pacific Band--played funeral marches from

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the music, and nothing but 6/8 marches on parade.

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Also present: Richard B. Allen

JR tells how the band he worked with [Lewis?, or the little group at the Old Absinthe House?] acquired an avid, new fan, the mother of an avid fan.

JR says the Old Absinthe House is a fine place to work; the management is fine, not interferring with the presentation or repertoire of the band. Those in the band then: JR, Percy [Humphrey], Emma [Barrett] and Cie [Frazier]; Willie [Humphrey] had gone on a trip with Paul Barbarin to Canada, so JR worked in his place with the Absinthe House band for seven weeks, until he got sick and had to quit; Willie came back the same week JR became sick, but Wendall Eugene was hired to substitute for JR for two nights, until Willie returned to the job. Talk about some trouble between Emma Barrett and JR, concerning a job at the place of Ken [Mills, (original proprietor of Preservation Hall)].

JR worked with Kid Rena quite a bit; he says, in fact, that he worked with most of the musicians who came up during his time. He names some: Willie Pajaud, Punch [Miller]. Rena's band then was playing spot jobs; in the band: Rena [cornet]; Joe René (his brother) [drums]; Morris French, trombone; Simon Marrero, bass; "Son" [Thomas], banjo; Zeb [Leneries], clarinet. JR substituted in the band, playing when French couldn't be on the job. JR never worked in a band with Sidney Vigne; Eddie Morris played trombone with Vigne some. JR played with Lee Collins in New York, in a concert at Town Hall; Collins came from Chicago to play the job. Others in the band: George Lewis, George ["Pops"] Foster, Zutty Singleton, and a white fellow [Art Hodes?] on piano. Georg Brunies's band played at the same concert.

Talk about the tune, "Ice Cream", one of JR's features. He says the bands play it too fast, that his recording for Bill Russell was not that fast. Bunk [Johnson] never did play it; didn't like it; wouldn't let the band play it when they were in New York. RBA mentions the recordings JR's band [under his name] made [for Riverside] at the Jeunes Amis Hall; says story on album sleeve quotes "Slow Drag" [Pavageau] as saying controversy over "Ice Cream" almost broke up the Bunk Johnson band. JR laughs.

JR did work with Lee Collins in New Orleans, at the La Vⁱda, substituting a few nights. JR later worked at the LaVⁱda for about six years, when he was in charge of the band; other members: Paul Barnes, saxophone (and sometimes clarinet); Kid Howard [trumpet]; Benny Turner [piano]; Robert Davis, drums; Sidney Pfleuger [banjo? guitar?]. Robert Davis, brother of James Davis (pianist "King Jimmy" Davis), left New Orleans a good many years ago, returning last year, when he was buried in this city. Robert, "a nice little drummer", played with a good many bands around the city, including a job on Decatur at Ursulines; JR thinks he worked with George Lewis there, for a long time.

JR has also worked with John Handy; he worked with him at La Vⁱda, before JR took charge of the band there, replacing Handy as leader, who was fired. Shelley [Lamelle? Spelling?], trumpet, and Handy were replaced by Kid Howard and Paul Barnes; JR thinks Shelley was the same one who played with Paul Barnes's big band, around Lake Charles; JR thinks Shelley is still alive; "the last time I seen him he was living." Shelley lives downtown somewhere.

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[Sidney] "Little Jim" [Brown] played violin, his first instrument, before he took up string bass; JR says he took up the bass after he got out of World War I. "Little Jim" played in New Orleans [as well as in and around Deer Range--see preceding reels]; one of the bands he worked in in New Orleans also had Zooley Seldon and Sidney Vigne in it.

JR first recorded with Sam Morgan. His next recordings were with Kid Rena [1940] (Rba says Harrison Brazley [trombone] told him he was supposed to make those recordings, but he couldn't do it). JR has also recorded with Kid Howard and Peter Bocage [in the Original Zenith Brass Band], for Rudi Blesh; before that, he recorded for Bill Russell [with Bunk Johnson, George Lewis, et al]. JR says Blesh came to New Orleans in 1946, for Carnival, and that the band recorded for him then.

JR says the Columbia Band, a jazz band, was good; he doesn't remember who the leader was, or any of the men in it. He mentions the Maple Leaf Band, and the Magnolia Band, saying he didn't know anything about those bands, either, except the names. There were a lot of bands, and they weren't known by the names of their leaders.

The first band JR remembers Sunny Henry playing with, in New Orleans, was the [Original] Tuxedo [Brass] Band; he later joined Hypolite Charles, playing at the lakefront; his street work was always with the Tuxedo [in those days--PRC].

JR has never played any really big funerals; he had an opportunity to play the funeral of Papa Celestin, but was working at the

time. He heard that Chris Kelly had a big funeral, but he was [with Sam Morgan] in Greenville, Mississippi, at the time of Kelly's death and funeral. Buddy Petit had a smaller funeral than Kelly; JR was in town then, but did not play for the funeral.

JR never worked in any theaters.

JR worked many times with "One-eyed Babe" [Phillips]; the band would be put together by Phillips, for the occasion; men who might be in the band: JR; Kid Howard; Phillips's son, "Gossoon" [Joe Phillips, Jr., guitar, banjo]; Alfred Williams [drum]; himself on bass.

Alfred Williams worked with many bands before he left New Orleans, in 1922; he went to El Paso, Texas, where he remained sixteen years. [Cf. Alfred Williams, reel ?] JR didn't work with him before he went to Texas.

The Marrero brothers--John, Simon, Lawrence and Eddie--are mentioned. JR worked with Eddie [and the rest?]; Eddie, Lawrence, Paul Barnes, Bush Hall (trumpet) and others had a band together; they played together about three or four years. JR worked many times with John Marrero, in the Tuxedo Band with Papa Celestin, substituting for [William "Bebé"] Ridgley, who having passed an extra job to the [Isaiah] "Young" Morgan Band, would take JR's place with Morgan so he could supervise that job, leaving Celestin to take care of the other.

JR never worked with Davy Jones.

JR worked with Joe Robichaux, who played in the Sam Morgan Band on the road some, including a couple of jobs in Birmingham [Alabama].

JR has worked a couple of jobs with Edmund "Son White" Washington, drummer. JR hears that Jackson is still living. Jackson played banjo. JR says Jackson is the father of [Robert] "Son Fewclothers" [Lewis]. JR has never heard "Son" play trap drums, having seen him only on the streets, playing funerals [bass drum], but he says he did play traps at one time.

JR has heard Kid Howard play drums; drums was Howard's first instrument. Howard substituted [with Sam Morgan] one time when Rudolph [Beaulieu, the regular drummer] got hurt, on the job; Howard just happened to come by the job, where he was enlisted.

JR played many jobs with Arthur Ogle; JR says Ogle played traps and street drums, was one of the best street drummers here. When JR first knew Ogle, Ogle was working with Sam Morgan, a long time before Sam got in the band with JR [Young Morgan Band, which became the Sam Morgan Band]; JR knew Ogle right after the [WW I] war, and thinks Ogle played three to four years with Morgan. RBA says he heard Ogle many times with the Eureka [Brass Band].

JR remembers Bud [Roussell--Russell] [Spelling?], bass player; says he worked with Kid Punch [Miller]. JR says Russell used to live on Louisiana Avenue, doesn't know whether he is still living; JR hasn't seen him for a long time; the last time (during the [WW II] war), Russell had joined the church, was playing his bass in church.

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JR says [Clarence] "Little Dad" [Vincent] was a good banjo player; Little Dad was playing banjo with Punch at the time [Bud Russell played bass with Punch?].

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Also present: Richard B. Allen

[Clarence] "Little Dad" [Vincent] played [banjo] with Punch [Miller] until Punch left New Orleans to go to Chicago, at which time the band broke up.

Sam Morgan got the tunes for his band from sheet music, which he could read; he would go to the music stores for his music. Dave Frank, at Werlein's, had a limited number of orchestrations to give away free to bandleaders, hoping the tunes would be played and that people who heard them would buy the piano music from him. Frank would sing the new songs, to piano accompaniment provided by a girl. Sam Morgan's band recorded the hymns because the recording company asked for them. JR says that people on the West Coast ask the band [George Lewis] to play hymns for them, even in night clubs.

JR played many jobs with John [Casimir]'s Young Tuxedo Brass Band; he could have been a member, but couldn't do the walking.

JR says the people in New Orleans don't pay much attention to the New Orleans music; people from out of town are the ones who listen to the music, at places such as Ken [Mills] runs [i.e., Preservation Hall].

May, a good piano player [worked some with Sam Morgan's band], might be located by Cie [Frazier] or Joe Robichaux; the last time JR saw May was at the wake of [Alphonse] Picou.

JR's brother, Sam [Robinson], played saxophone very little, sticking to clarinet mostly.

JR didn't play with the W.P.A. Band.

JR doesn't have any favorites among the records he has made, nor any favorite tunes or keys.

The brass bands of Magnolia [Plantation] and Deer Range played inside dances, as well as parades and other outside activities; they played for the various societies, organizations, etc., in the area.

JR heard Kid Ory and [Joe] "King" Oliver play together; Oliver's band, with Ory on trombone, played every Monday night at the Co-Operator's Hall; JR remembers that the band played on the gallery of the hall [to advertise the dance] for about thirty minutes before the dance began. [Band called Ory and Oliver's Jazz Band. Compare other interviews.] JR wasn't playing trombone then, but he admired the good ones--Zue Robertson, Eddie Vincent, George Fihle, Buddy Johnson, Yank Johnson, Harrison Barnes, Vic Gaspard. JR thinks Johnny Dodds was playing clarinet with Oliver at the time mentioned. Dodds also worked a lot with brass bands, including the Tuxedo and the Excelsior; he was a good reader, because "all them fellows [in those bands?] were good readers." Henry Zeno, a good drummer--fast--was playing with Oliver then.

The late George Washington was a good trombone player; he worked with Buddy Petit, after Petit split up his band; Morris French [who had been with Petit?] went with Kid Rena, and Washington joined Petit.

JR thinks the first tune he ever learned to play on trombone was "Home, Sweet Home." He learned it by following the violin lead

provided by his nephew, [Sidney] "Little Jim" [Brown]. He acquired most of his knowledge of the trombone from playing with the pianola (at the home of his sister-in-law). JR could play "Till We Meet Again", on trombone, when he came out of service; Ernest Himes [spelling?] taught that to him. Himes, from Napoleonville, (JR mentions Willie Foster [who also taught him],) could play trombone, clarinet, trumpet and saxophone; he taught JR every day [in service]. JR didn't fool around with guitar [his first instrument] after he got out of service; the strings hurt his fingers. The first tune he learned on guitar was "Nearer, My God, To Thee"; he also learned other hymns.

George Fihle, a good trombonist, played in jazz and brass bands. Vic Gaspard played with [John] Robichaux. Eddie Vincent played with Freddy Keppard, in the Olympia Band; Keppard's brother, Louis Keppard, was playing guitar in the band; the drummer was Henry Martin. A tall, dark fellow played violin in that band. The violin player in band "knocked 'em on and knocked 'em off" [i.e., set the tempos and length of tunes].

A band without a violin player was not a band. The only violin players JR can remember are [John] Robichaux, Peter Bocage and Jimmy Palao. Bocage had the Superior Band, with Bunk Johnson (JR knew Johnson in those days). RBA says Joe Robichaux tells of seeing "Big Eye Louis" [Nelson] playing with Robichaux's uncle's [John Robichaux] band, and how he thought Big Eye was reading; Big Eye was not, according to Joe, but was faking everything.

[John Robichaux's band was almost strictly a reading band--PRC].

After Zooney Seldon was killed, Eddie Morris [trombone], began playing with Kid Punch, remaining with him until Punch went to Chicago. Seldon is not to be confused with Zue Robertson, trombonist at the Lyric Theater (with John Robichaux); Robertson was replaced by Johnny Lindsay when he went to Chicago.

JR, not a regular member of Chris [Kelly]'s band, often substituted for Harrison Barnes, Kelly's regular trombonist. Barnes had a day job, as a welder, and would sometimes be too tired to play music at night, too. Sunny [Henry] played with Kelly a good while, until Henry joined Amos White, playing at the Halfrow [Hofrau?] House, at the lake, for about a year. When White left, going to St. Louis, Henry [rejoined?] Kelly; from Kelly, he went with Hypolite Charles; from Charles, to Louis Dumaine; from Dumaine, he went to the Music Box (Carondelet and Canal), where he worked three or four years.

Joe Grandison [spelling?], trombone and baritone [horn], was from JR's home [Deer Range, Louisiana]; he studied with Jim Humphrey, grandfather of Percy Humphrey (JR says Jim Humphrey turned out some good musicians: Granison, Pierre [Anderson], Harrison Barnes, Sunny Henry, others.

[Phillip] "Cripple Pill" Coycault came from across the lake, in Mandeville, not from JR's home area. [Compare other interviews.] JR heard of, but didn't know Pill's brother, Ernest "Nene" [check

spelling] Coycault; RBA says he made some records. JR says Pill was a nice clarinet player. JR says Pill, Buddy Manaday, others, have all passed away. He says people don't have fun today; he talks about the fun in the older days. He describes barn dances, where Dixieland [i.e., New Orleans] music was played, but where the costumes were rustic; the idea was that some people who might not be able to afford dress-up clothes would want to attend the dance. It was a good-time era; the District was open then. The dances lasted from 8[P.M.] until 4[A.M.,] enough dancing for anybody, according to JR.

RBA asks about Shelley Lemelle, cornet player; JR knew a Shelley, but not his last name. JR knew a pianist, Arthur, who played at Pete Lala's with Peter Bocage and others, and who might be the Arthur Campbell who went to Chicago and whom RBA has heard on records.

JR played with Willie Pajaud many times, at the Budweiser and other places; JR worked with Pajaud there when they didn't have a reed instrument in the band--piano, drums, banjo, trumpet and trombone only.

End of Reel IV

