

ALBERT, DON
Reel I, side I
Jan. 1, 1974
Draft: Marie L. Spencer
Check: Richard B. Allen
Retype: Evelyn M. Rinnert

Others Present:
Richard B. Allen
Hazel Guerringer Dominique
(wife of Don Albert)

- 4:15 This interview takes place at the home of Don Albert,
715 St. James [Street, San Antonio, Texas] on January 1, 1974.
[Don Albert and RBA look at DA's scrapbooks.] They look at
the letter of May 25, 1961 from the late William G. Nunn,
editor of the Pittsburgh Courier and also one of the founders.
The letter mentions George Pitts, to whom DA might write, and
Billy Rowe, a well-known newspaper man from New York and Phila-
delphia, who was affiliated with "mostly Negro publications."
DA mentions a letter from Tulane University. RBA says it's on
file in the Archive and is from Paul Crawford. A letter from
Joe Glaser tells of an agent's offer to DA to go to Japan and
Las Vegas; the agent advises DA to contact Paul Barbarin. DA
had turned this offer down but can't remember why. In the
San Antonio Light of Dec. 21, 1964, p. 37, "Bexar Facts" by
Morris Willson says that DA was going to reopen the Keyhole
[Nightclub] on West Poplar [St.] for nightly dance parties
and floorshows beginning on Dec. 25, 1964. DA kept the Key-
hole open for one to two years. It was not the same as in
the '50's when he first opened. Trouble with the police and
the case in the courts concerning integration made the dif-
ference. On October 11, DA used a local group playing at the
Flores Country Club. It was not exactly Dixieland. DA says
it was a rock and roll band with good musicians. DA used a
good Dixieland drummer, the late Ardley Mosley, who is
now dead.
- 4:31
- 4:42 An article in the San Antonio Light of Jan. 1, 1928,

prompts RBA to ask about Christmas dances. DA says that Christmas dances were just big dances for "some club or something." In 1928, DA was with Troy [Floyd]'s band playing at Shadowland. RBA reasons that watch dances were dances on New Year's Eve, watching for the coming of the New Year. DA has never heard of these dances. DA affirms that people used the roof of the Saint Anthony [Hotel]. The Crystal Ballroom of the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio was so named because of the crystal chandeliers. DA played with his band and with Troy [Floyd]'s band on one night engagements at the Crystal Ballroom.

4:43 RBA and DA discuss the San Antonio movie houses and the bands there. The Royal used films; the Empire used stage shows and films. DA didn't play at the Empire. There were lots of bands in those days including Vic Ensirilla. Most of the great Mexican musicians played at the Empire. The Majestic featured stage shows and pit bands. Duke Ellington, Cab [Calloway], "all the big bands," and the Ink Spots were booked there. The Texas Theater used big bands and an organist who now has a big cafeteria. The Palace featured both movies and bands.

Competition was strong then. Movie houses did what they could to draw crowds. These theaters used local bands and a banjo player. Don T. Sarli was one. Good musicians [i.e., readers?] were hired as a rule in these days, no Negro musicians. [Cf. other reels. DA is not implying that Negroes were not good musicians.] DA mentioned Don Sarli directed his own band. Vic Insirilla was another band director. The Princess was a small "flick" playhouse.

The Aztec is still a big motion picture theater. The Rialto was another small movie house. DA doesn't remember the Alamo Country Club. RBA suggests that it could have been small.

5:09 DA talks of hotel jobs. At the Plaza Hotel with Troy [Floyd]'s band, they played six nights. They had one night off. Usually Monday was the off night. Reading from the [San Antonio] Light of Jan. 1, 1928, p. 6, sporting news section, RBA states that the St. Anthony [Hotel] Roof advertised dancing Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights from 9-12 p.m. The rest of the week the bands played dinner music in the lobby. [When DA and RBA were in the hotel lobby itself], DA and RBA have discussed Jimmy Joy [whose band] played there. These short hours of 9-12 were usual for Texans. It was also the prohibition era, DA adds. Herman Waldman's great band played at the Gunter [?] Hotel. DA explains that Rollie Moore called Waldman "Hymie." His given name was Herman.

RBA reads an ad for the Gunter which mentions "Henry Lange and His Recording Orchestra." There was dancing on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights. DA says these were the big nights. In the hotels bands played dinner music to "offset" the six-night engagements [i.e., to make up a six nights per week job]. DA knew band leader Henry Lange only slightly.

One of the oldest hotels in Texas, the Menger Hotel, did not have a sustained musical program, only an occasional dance. RBA adds that they had a special musical program on Sunday, Jan. 1.

RBA reads an ad for a Monday night dance with Henry Lange's orchestra on Jan. 2, 1928, at the Gunter, a Baker Hotel. DA says that it was probably sponsored by a club.

DA thinks that Mr. and Mrs. Robert Skiles of Kansas City, Missouri, musicians shown on page 1B in the same newspaper, are the parents of Dude Skiles. Dude Skiles is almost sixty years old now. A photograph of musicians interests RBA; it shows the Skiles, J. A. Williams, on banjo, of St. Paul, and A. L. Phares, drums, of Burlington, Kansas. They played at the Conopus Club twice a week. Mrs. Skiles played the piano, and Mr. Skiles played the violin and novelty instruments.

5:4 Billy Payne, drummer, mentioned by DA, played with Count Basie. [Cf. discographies. The drummer is given as Sonny Payne.]

5:43 DA and RBA discuss DA's wanting to travel to Europe, which they see as a sentimental journey for DA. DA hopes to get jobs and see friends in Australia, Europe, France, or even Japan. This, DA thinks, would round out DA's life in the world of music. DA will not then close the door [i.e., to other jobs?].

5:49 DA played at Swingland in Chicago and at the Three Deuces. DA had trouble with the [musicians'] union in Chicago. His uncle [Natty Dominique], being a charter member of the Chicago union, interceded for him and helped him get into these places without too much trouble. DA talks of hearing Jimmie Noone at the Savoy Ballroom in Chicago on Dec. 31. JN played in San Antonio at the Tropics, and DA went down there and "blew with Jimmie for a while." Even though this was in his waning days, JN played every night for an engagement of a month or two. DA remarks that the Tropics [club] has been gone for years and years.

5:57 RBA asks about the number of pieces arranged by Wallace Mercer. DA doesn't know, but says there was a controversy over

one number he arranged, "Egotistical Baby." WM called the piece "Egotistic Baby." DA calls it a jump or swing tune that fit into the pattern of the DA tempo. The musicians felt that the squabble over a few letters in the title of a number was not important. All the musicians went on playing the number as Wallace wrote it.

6:02 RBA asks about the reference, in James E. Scott Sr.'s letter, to Richard McLean, from New Orleans, playing "stick" (clarinet) and guitar. DA and RBA never knew McLean to play a "stick." McLean was one of the top banjo players. DA says that McLean played with Kid Rena a long time. DA remembers McLean as a "sporty" guy, always neat, similar to Big Eye Louie [Nelson]. DA can [still] see him with his "top black hat."

RBA asks for more information on WAOI. In those days, this 6:09 [San Antonio radio] station was one of the strongest in the country. With 50,000 watts, WAOI's program with DA could be received as far away as Cincinnati, Ohio. DA received many letters from the Ohio area. Larry Herman operates [The Roaring Twenties, Formerly the Shadowland. He is a bandleader. DA to RBA. Nov. 23, 1977.]

RBA asks DA for clarification on the Ella B. Moore Theatre.

It was located on Central Track, near Elm [pron. Ellum] Street in Dallas, Texas, and was on the TOBA circuit, also.

6:18 DA says that Billy Douglas and Philander Tiller sometimes couldn't play their own arrangements. DA explains that he would hand out the different parts of the arrangements to the various sections. Then Herb Hall and [Louis] Cottrell, who were sight readers, would have to spend an hour or so with Phil Tiller to read his own arrangement. The same kind of deal was necessary for Billy Douglas. This was the time that DA would have to pick up his horn and play it for them.

6:21 DA says Philander Tiller's illness is not a happy thought. PT was a big strapping fellow, about 6' 1" and 180-190 lbs. in weight. Being a sentimental person, it brings tears to DA's eyes to remember seeing him on a visit to New York. PT had crippling arthritis, from which he finally died, and was almost in a coma. PT did wake up long enough to recognize DA and was happy to see him once again. This visit to New York city was on one of his few travels after he had retired. It was the same year DA visited Buddy Tate and Milton Larkin. It was in the 1960's.

6:29 RBA asks about the tune used when Alvin Alcorn, or "Mickey," sat in DA's lap. DA replies that "Nagasaki" was always used for this stage presentation..

DA says there were some bands who imitated his band. DA did not feel it would be right to name these bands. RBA adds that some recorded some of his tunes. RBA says people can figure this out for themselves. DA said that each of his musicians had his own individual style; therefore, imitating them was difficult.

6:33 DA says today there are no jam sessions due to the union's clamping down on them. To keep his "chops" or embouchure together and to keep together his thoughts and feelings, DA finds some place with a fairly good band, which does not play too much rock. Eventually DA comes up with five or six numbers suitable for the band. There are a group of fellows here which DA uses on "project jobs." DA hires some musicians from this group [i.e., Highsaw's brothers, pianist Frank Garrett, and George Prior, bass, "when you can get him."]

6:39 RBA asks about jam sessions in other areas of Texas. DA says today one won't find jam sessions because today's musicians differ from the ones who jammed together years ago. Mostly the musicians play guitars and electric basses. Today trumpet and saxophone players are scarce. Al Pinkney of San Antonio is a good saxophone player and a fine musician from the old school. Al Pinkney can also sit and blow rock. There are no jam sessions in New Orleans now that DA knows of. DA does sit in with the various New Orleans bands. RBA and DA agree that jam sessions used to be held all over the country. DA says "that trend has gone down the drain." DA recalls that years ago it was great to go to New York and hear Louie Armstrong jamming at the Downbeat or at the Rhythm Club where LA would be jamming with "all the good top men in those days."

6:47 DA remembers Billy Douglas playing with Roy "Little Jazz" Eldridge. Roy Eldridge was scared of Billy Douglas if he was sober. DA says many musicians would "put their horns away" if Billy Douglas was sober. If BD was drinking or high on reefers, the musicians, aware of his bad playing, would "cut at him."

DA knows the area of Navarre and Crockett which was the location of C. G. Conn's small business and George Foster's repair shop. He was a tremendous repairman. He's still living, in his 80's, and very active. There were small jam sessions in GF's shop. The musicians loved to talk to GF because he knew most of the great musicians of that day. GF talked especially about his idol Louie Armstrong. GF didn't play the trumpet; he "piddled around with alto." Being a mechanic, "he tried to blow all of them." DA says GF's playing was "nothing exceptional." DA describes "one hell of a jam session" at GF's place: GF on the

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piano, which had no strings, only knockers; one guy imitating Louie [Armstrong] with no horn and humming Louie's "riffs"; and the bass player playing the bass with no strings.

Re iterated - End

[End of side]