

DON ALBERT  
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May 29 1972

Also present: Richard B. Allen and Lloyd Gueringer

Digest and typing: Ralph Adamo

Notes: Richard B. Allen      Checked by: RBA

RBA says he's going to play some 78 [rpm] records and ask DA about the different parts. The first record is "Dreamland Blues" (part I) by Troy Floyd. Listening to the first chorus, RBA's question is, "Who's that?" DA answers, "That's me."

RBA asks how the music was worked up. DA says the full band is playing and those were his ideas on the blues in collaboration with Charlie Dixon and, he thinks, Siki Collins. They worked it up just by getting together; there were no written arrangements. Asked if they had rehearsed it much before the recording. DA says they did a little, not much -- but that they had already played it a few times at one of the regular engagements that Troy Floyd always had; they were at Shadowland at that time. Allen Van is at the piano; DA says AV is still active and lives in San Francisco. RBA says he would like to meet AV; DA says <sup>AV?</sup> RBA would be happy to meet RBA.

RBA wants to know who AV admired and if he is playing in some Texas style. DA says he had his own style. (Soprano sax starts on record.) DA says that is Siki, the one that is raved about. DA says that he must have heard [Sidney] Bechet. He [ie, SC probably] is one of the few masters of the soprano sax.

DA points out Charlie Dixon on the tuba. RBA asks if DA heard the trumpet in the background. DA identifies it as Willie Long, but he changes his mind, saying that he is playing segments behind the reeds himself. He is playing lead on the trumpet.

DA explains that in those days only one microphone was used for recording, and you can't get the full instrumentation. (Record concludes.) RBA comments that they must have had interesting endings. DA says they worked all these things up together in rehearsals, voiced everything by ear, and they listened to each other. Then they pieced the things together. DA says it was amazing. There were no arrangers. RBA notes that there is no real composition.

("Dreamland Blues" part II begins to play.) RBA says he finds this very pretty. He and DA agree it has great feeling. DA says the reeds are very good here and RBA asks how the reeds would be set up. DA says there would be three saxes (SC had a soprano); TF also kept a clarinet near him. He played it a little. [See also photograph.]

(Clarinet comes up on record.) RBA: "This here is --" DA concludes that it is Scott Bagby. SB was a great clarinetist who couldn't read but whose imagination was tremendous. DA agrees that SB played tenor in the ensemble. Troy Floyd played lead alto. Siki played alto. DA points out John Humphries on the drums.

RBA (listening) says this is a different sound and asks how they got it. DA says they just rehearsed, and that he had assembled that. The two trumpets are Willie Long and DA. Benny Long played trombone. DA comments on the change of key and points out that it wasn't written down. RBA asks if that a tenor or alto sax he's hearing. DA says that he agrees with Schuller Gunther [ie, Gunther Schuller, The History of Jazz, v.1, Early Jazz, 1968] that that sax must be Herschel [Evans, ts]. RBA notes that

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they're hearing the full band now. DA is barely heard. DA points out that the trumpet is bound to be in the background because it was, like all the brass, away from the mike. The reeds are in the front. [Record concludes] DA says the beginning of the [tenor] solo reminded him of Herschel, but SB was playing the clarinet. Possibly HE was just coming into the band. So, RBA says, they may have had four saxophones. DA says it is vague to him.

("Shadowland Blues" part I, by TF's band, begins to play. SC is playing soprano.) This record was made the same day as "Dreamland Blues," DA says. [Cf, discographies.] The record companies didn't have much time to spend with anyone. On this record, CD is off the tuba and on trombone. (Listening) DA says that's real blues, he [CD] has got real feeling. CD played on tuba and trombone for all the great blues singers of the time. RBA asks if CD traveled with these singers. DA says he only traveled in East, West and Central Texas.

RBA asks if DA saw many of the traveling shows featuring blues singers. RBA asks if he ever saw Ma Rainey<sup>c</sup> or Bessie Smith. DA says yes, at Ella B. Moore's theater in Dallas on Central track. It was one of the few TOBA theaters in the South. (Singing begins on the record.) DA identifies the voice as Kellough Jefferson's. He died young. San Antonio didn't have a TOBA; EBM's was the only one near. RBA asks who is behind KJ on the reed. DA says it is Siki on soprano sax. Behind the singer there is just Siki, a rhythm section, and Charlie Dixon [sic]. [CD is audible on the tuba. RBA, May 20, 1972.] Maybe there's some brass holding a blues chord way in the background. [Part one ends.] RBA says that these records seem very good to him. DA agrees, especially considering

the poor equipment that was used.

("Shadowland Blues" part II begins.) DA identifies Willie Long as the trumpet soloist. RBA wonders if WL ever used a mute and what kind. On this solo he used a Solotone mute, but he "had it half way in there. The sound a mute causes differs according to the different kinds of tonations [ie, timbre] of the people who use it. [Listening.] DA identifies the clarinet soloist as Scott Bagby. DA says he doesn't know why Scott Bagby sounded like HE to him in that tenor solo [on "Dreamland Blues" part II].

DA says it was KJ holding a note that sold the record. People loved that. Alan Van is playing the figures behind KJ. DA, CD, SC, and BL play. RBA says it has a unique sound. He asks about the different parts in the clarinet trio. DA says they are played by TF and SB. [sic. Three clarinets are heard.] RBA says he doesn't see how they ever worked it up. DA doesn't know; they just got it together right there. John Henry Bragg is playing the banjo. DA is taking the lead on the record with on the out-chorus <sup>with SC</sup> [featured on soprano.] RBA says the record was great.

[RBA cues up [Troy Floyd's] "Wabash Blues" [test pressing copy] on tape.) RBA says that Frank Driggs found this; DA thinks he sent it to FD when FD asked for it. RBA asks if DA made any other unissued records with his band. DA says no, though RBA seems to remember another session that wasn't issued. DA says that when they came to record, his band was at the [Armour's] Dinner Club and that the session took a whole day.

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RBA asks if DA was a charter member of the Union [Local 496, A.F.M.] (Record starts.) He was; the Union started in 1924 or 1925, here [in New Orleans] in a hall in the back of St. Katherine's Church. RBA points out that "Wabash Blues" has [Cf. notes] started. The same personnel are on this record as on the other [of Troy Floyd's band.]

RBA asks if there were any written arrangements for "Wabash Blues." There were none; DA says there weren't many arrangers in those days. RBA points out that the saxophones sound very much together. DA agrees. DA hears himself taking a trumpet solo. [Listening.] RBA asks how many trombones. DA says there is one sustained, but CD is doubling on his solos. Bennie Long didn't solo. (DA points out KJ singing; they listen.)

DA says you could always tell CD's tuba: he makes practically the same changes and the same sounds in his changes.

DA says they rehearsed the one or two numbers for two to four hours. It was no problem getting the harmony together because most guys played by ear and by instinct. [Listening.]

DA says the tuba certainly is a pronounced instrument on these records. RBA likes the ensemble. [RA likes the word 'ensemble.'] DA says they kept the microphone close to the reeds; he doesn't know why -- maybe they hadn't perfected a sense of orchestral balance in recording. [Cf. notes] ("Wabash Blues" ends.) RBA says it's hard to hear the trumpets. DA says they were kept in the background because they were supposed to be loud instruments. Now [in recording] it doesn't make any difference.

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("Wabash Blues" begins again.)

RBA says we have Ollie Ross, Texas Tommy, and DA's own band, and RBA asks which one DA wants to listen to or work on. DA regrets that the time is so limited and says he wants to spend more time on other trips. [DA is returning to San Antonio, Texas.] He wants to start at the beginning next time and talk about some of the incidents that happened along the way with his big band. He wants to go back even further to when he left New Orleans with Herchel Evans as an alto player. [See other DA interviews on the T.N.T. and the train trip.] A mutual desire is expressed to fill in many details. Many good stories are connected, DA says, so they will be getting into other musicians around Texas in the old days. He claims there were many good ones, and that no one ever interviewed them. Most are dead now. RBA says he's been trying to work up their stories.

RBA wants to play some of DA's Band's recordings]. DA says they have about ten minutes, and he hates to rush off, but they have six-hundred miles to drive. [DA's daughter is with him.]

(Record begins [IAJRC LP of DA's band] "The Shiek of Araby" is the first tune.) RBA asks if this was a common tune in those days, in the thirties. DA says no, it was just a novelty number that one of the arrangers decided to write for the band. Once when they did it with a vocal in Pensacola, Florida, they were cut off the air. DA says it was considered too suggestive to say 'the shiek with no pants on.' Other bands picked up and used the words to this song,, but not the arrangement. [Listening:]

DA says Louis Cottrell [clarinet] sounds as though he were imitating his teacher, Barney Bigard. [Cf, LC interviews.] Herbert Hall is the baritone sax soloist. DA believes that these arrangements were twenty-five years ahead of <sup>their</sup> time. His only regret, he says, is that he burned his "book" [ie, library of the arrangements.] He wishes he had kept it. Harold Holmes arranged "The Shiek." DA points out Lloyd Glenn on piano, Hiram Harding [tp] --"Dallas Boy", and comments that this is LC at his greatest.

RBA says that New Orleans bands still do "The Shiek of Araby" the way DA's band did it. DA responds that musicians often copy something if they think it's catchy. [Listening at the end of the song:] RBA says one knows who that is, and DA says, "Yeah."

["True Blue Lou" begins to play.] DA says it is Lloyd Glenn's arrangement. [Lloyd Gueringer enters booth] [DA had previously said that:] many singers sang in this high-pitched voice [like (Bill Kenny) of the Ink Spots]. DA points out that it's Merle Turner singing and that he sings after the style of Orlando Roberson. Only higher, RBA comments, repeating DA's statement.

RBA comments on the good saxophones. DA identifies LC, Herbert Hall, and Dink Taylor. [Cf, discographies.] DA points out Billy Douglas, and RBA asks if he was "in good shape that day" [ie, sober]. DA answers yes and says twice: "one of the good times." (LG speaks.) DA says that he should be on his way.

RBA asks how many trombones they're hearing. DA answers three. [See also RBA's article on DA in Storyville, no. 31]

LG asks when DA plans to come back to New Orleans. DA mentions "Lynnie" [,his daughter] and Hazel [,his wife.] He is coming back

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to New Orleans maybe in July or August. [Song ends.]

("On the Sunny Side of the Street" begins.) DA says that this is not a written arrangement; all the figures and everything else is worked out by head. The main objective of doing this song was to feature Billy Douglas. Lloyd Glenn plays piano. Dink Taylor solos[on alto.] DA points out that you can hear Albert "Fats" Martin on drums.

RBA expresses surprise at the originality of BD's trumpet style on this piece. DA says that some people claim BD copied an unknown trumpet player or Jabbo Smith, but that JS never played like that. BD was original in everything he did, including arranging. RBA says Alvin [Alcorn] told him that BD liked Cuban Bennett. DA says he is the player DA was referring to, but he'd never heard of him. DA concludes that if BD did copy a style, he did "a tremendous job of copying."

RBA suggests they hear one more song, "Liza." BD arranged it. DA says that this band had five arrangers, all individual stylists. Once in a while the band "copied" a number, but they did not record these. They copied mainly from Duke [Ellington's] group. DA says they were closely-related since each had two bassists. [See also RBA, "Don Albert...", Storyville, no. 31.] For DA's band they were Harold Holmes and Jimmy Johnson. BD was the trumpet soloist. Alvin Alcorn led the trumpet section when DA stopped. Once, for a short while, there was a man named Charlie Anderson [on lead trumpet.] DA says CA copied BD's style. Dink Taylor was the alto sax soloist.

DA is ready to leave.

[Releases signed.]

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RBA asks if the saxophone soloist is Cottrell. DA says he is Herbert Hall.

[END OF REEL]

