

MIKE DE LAY

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September 2, 19~~48~~ 1958

Also present: William Russell

Mike Joseph De Lay was born in New Orleans on September 29, 1909, at 1839 Laharpe Street. His mother, a fine, non-professional pianist, wanted him to play violin, but he wanted to play cornet, because of the influence of Manuel Perez; (one of Perez' sisters, the only living member of the Perez family, Lillian Perez, lives at 1136 Touro St.; she is MD's godmother.); MD's mother would take him to Perez' house, where MD would hear Perez giving music lessons. One week after his 16th birthday, MD took some money he had saved from a paper route and other jobs and bought a short cornet, a C.G. Conn "Wonder" model; when he had taught himself 6 or 7 tunes, he played a Carnival day parade in 1926. He then began taking lessons from Perez, his first teacher; after awhile he became discouraged, put the horn away, and didn't resume playing for about 2 1/2 years, in the latter part of 1928. His first job then was with Paul Barbarin's youngest brother, a drummer (MD says there are 3 Barbarins who are/were drummers; he names Louis as one [CF. Paul Barbarin & Louis Barbarin interviews]); a banjo player named Charles "Fushnick" [sp?] and Edgar Saucier, saxophone. WR comments that he knew a Saucier in Chicago who played drums there with Lee Collins; MD says Edgar lives in San Francisco and agrees that the two Sauciers mentioned are probably related. Edgar is his wife's first cousin. MD studied form the Arban method with Perez, who went to Chicago after MD had had only a few lessons;

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Perez recommended that MD study with Sidney Desvigne, a Perez student 12-15 years previously; after a few lessons, Desvigne also left town (MD thinks he went to Chicago, too; [Cf. SD interview]); then MD studied with the old man [Paul] Chaligny, who lived on Dumaine and St. Claude and who charged 25 ¢ a lesson, for about 2 years, around 1929-30. Chaligny had a son who played a nice cornet. In the latter part of 1929, MD took a band into the Fern Dance Hall, his first steady job, for about 2 1/2 years; he agrees with WR that Kid Rena played there (WR says he met him in 1940) later, and says he met Rena when he himself played there about 1937, with Butler ["Guye"] Rapp's band. MD "fooled around" with the piano at his home when he was young, learning chord structures and how to play them; he was given a banjo by a stranger, which he learned even before he took up cornet, because a friend, Sidney Cates [now an official of Musician's Local 496, New Orleans] was studying that instrument at the time. MD also played ukulele at one time. He says he should remember all the bands of his youth, because his aunt, Calise [sp?] De Lay, his father's sister, used to give dances, at the Economy Hall, the Co-operators Hall, the Jeunes Amis Hall and the Francs Amis Hall; he was taken to a lot of the dances, where he heard Manuel Perez, Kid Rena, Punch [Miller] and Buddy Petit, among others. MD was also sent to take the leaders their percentage of the gate money. MD says he

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lived near San Jacinto Hall when it was being built; the house on the lot was owned by a German family; the boy of the family, about MD's age, was named Norman, who had an older sister named Yvonne, for whom MD's younger sister, born in 1915, (MD is oldest of the children, the middle child being a girl) was named. MD doesn't remember when the house was torn down to make way for the building of San Jacinto Hall; he does remember the storm [hurricane] of 1915. MD says a favorite of the "second line" kids was Louis Armstrong; his own first favorite was Perez, and later his favorite was Armstrong. Other favorites were Petit, Rena, Punch, [Louis] "Kid Shots" [Madison] and Papa Celestin (MD played with Celestin in later years). MD says Petit played a "running" style of cornet, what today would be called playing the [member notes of] chords; MD practiced that style, wanting to play a lot of notes. In those days he was imitating Louis Armstrong; one day in 1930, Professor [John] Robichaux, who lived above the Fern Dance Hall (and played at the Lyric Theatre next door), told him he played nice, but he shouldn't just imitate somebody else, because in doing so he was just pushing the other person; he should get his own style. MD was impressed. He was influenced by Gene Proter, a saxophonist who had been with Desdunes' band (Desdunes had just died, probably in Mexico); Porter and others, including a trumpet player named [Craig? Grey?] and Henry "Killdee" Holloway,

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used to come to the Fern to play, just to keep in shape. MD was amazed that Porter could play tunes he didn't even know, by having someone who did know them call the chords to him. MD began playing chord system then; he says he was one of the first musicians around New Orleans to do so, as far as actually knowing [the names of] what chords he was playing. MD says people around his own age, like Eddie Pierson, can verify his statement. He worked [with Pierson, too?] with [A.J.] Piron for about 2 years, on the steamer President; when Piron quit leading the band, Paul Barbarin took it over, and MD stayed with him about 2 1/2 years, until MD went into the Army, in April, 1941. Barbarin's band was the last band MD worked with in New Orleans; after 4 1/2 years in the Army, he came back to New Orleans for three weeks, to visit his parents, and then went to California, where he has been ever since. He did play one job in New Orleans during that three weeks, with John Handy, and on piano; Joe Robinson [Robichaux?] was sick, so MD played piano for the one night. MD changed to trumpet in 1930, when he bought a Buescher, which he didn't like and which was later stolen. He then bought a Conn trumpet, and another, then a Martin trumpet (which he forgetfully left on the sidewalk in Downey, California), then another Martin, which he still has and still likes and uses. He has 5 horns at present: a Buescher trumpet, a King cornet, a Frenchmade Cachira [sp?] cornet, a Lyon

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and Healy cornet and the Martin trumpet. MD also plays bass; his first job was with Ernie Cagnolatti, at Delpit's, probably at Calliope and Franklin [now]; he also worked some bass jobs with Johnny St. Cyr and Adolphe "Tats" Alexander [Jr.]. In California, he worked 7 or 8 months on bass with Jonas Hodge from Minden, La. (MD was his sergeant in the Army.) MD says he can make more money playing bass [gets more jobs than on trumpet]. MD says that until he joined the Southern California Jazz Society and began playing with the members he didn't really know many Dixieland tunes, but he had no trouble learning, because he remembered them from a long time ago. MD joined Joe Darensbourg, who has a book with a lot of the Dixieland tunes in it, about 15 months ago; the band had about 7-8 months steady work, but Joe is not doing much now so MD has his own outfit now. MD says that at some of the dances held by his aunt there would be sandwiches, punch and ice cream, and that at midnight the band would play "Gettysburg" march as a signal for the dancers to line up and get something to eat. His aunt also gave dances in Artisan Hall, and in almost every other hall in the Tremé section; the dances were strictly invitational, and everything was paid for in advance. MD tells of a trick he had when he was small; he was a good speller, so he would tell the people around the steps of his home at Dumaine and Villere what the names of the street cars were as they came off [South] Rampart Street [4 blocks away] onto Dumaine, pretending to read the signs, but in reality knowing the colors of the signs for the different

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cars. MD remembers hearing bands on the Villere street car; the musicians, on their way to a hall [Economy Hall?] at Ursulines [and Villere?] would often play while riding the car.

MD remembers Sam Morgan. Lee Collins was one of his favorites; MD would go to the Tuxedo Garden to hear him play "Ain't She Sweet?". The Tuxedo was at Bienville and Franklin [now Crozat], and was run by Eddie Groshell, who owned the Doghouse in later years; MD worked there for Groshell, with Octave Crosby. MD worked with a lot of bands in New Orleans, and in a lot of places; he changed jobs often.

MD says Perez, in teaching him, did take out his horn a few times. MD was embarrassed because Perez wanted MD to sing his notes first, but MD claims he himself had no voice. MD doesn't remember how Chaligny taught, but said Lionel Ferbos studied with him, and that Ferbos is a good musician, although he doesn't fake much. He has had asthma all his life.

The majority of older musicians didn't believe in lessons.

MD says Chris Kelly was a good trumpeter; Bunk Johnson was also good; Bunk often stopped playing. MD also saw him in later years in New Iberia [Louisiana], where he would go with Isaiah Morgan. Bunk sounded nice then.

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