

MILFORD DOLLIOLLE
REEL I [only]
May 22, 1965

INTERVIEWER: William R. Russell
NOTES: Richard B. Allen
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

[WR says he is interviewing Mr. Dolliole at 732 St. Peter Street, and the day is May 22, 1965. WR spells out his name.

My name is Milford Dolliole. I was born on the 23rd of October, 1903 at 2010 Bourbon Street, Downtown...

My dad played trumpet years ago. Joseph Dolliole. My brother played trumpet. Joseph Dolliole Jr. He was one year older than I am. Mama didn't play nothing at all. She used to sing little songs. Things around the house. Work things, and all.

I used to follow the bands when they played the funeral ,and all, different thing. I got interested in the drums.

I used to like to hear this fellow on the bass, used to play drums for Manny Perez's band. That was [Nathaniel] "Bebe" Matthews from over the river.

I used to like to see him. I used to follow him all the time. He played snare drum. That was with Manuel Perez. It must have been the Onward [Brass] Band. I was quite small, though.

[The parades came] all around. They used to come to the church right around the corner from my home. That was Morris Brown Baptist Church. Very strict. We didn't belong. I was Catholic. Very strict Catholic.

My very first instrument was the drums. I used to play on the steps, and different things like that, until I bought a drum.

After, I bought a snare drum...I was a kid around about 15

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[years old] when I started [playing on the steps, and like that.]
I was about 19 years [when I got my first drums].

I started [studying] with Mr. Louis Cottrell [Sr.], the old drummer. My daddy recommended him. I took a few lessons with him, and then - I don't know - I just stopped.

I like to jazz. I didn't care too much about reading. I'm sorry I didn't kept it up then. He was very interested in me. I should have kept it up.

He was pretty strict. You couldn't put nothing over on him. He was playing with Manuel Perez on the Roof Garden [by City Hall.] The Pythian Temple Roof Garden. That's years ago.

I [had a full set of drums] when I started. A bass drum, and everything. Yes, four cowbells, and everything. Cymbals. I had one large crash cymbal. [It was the Chinese one, turned up on the edges] in the Chinese style, and a Turkish cymbal.

I used an overhead beater first. Then, when it come in style, a floor beater. I used both. I worked in both of them. I wish I could get [an overhead beater.]

[WR speculates that all of those were thrown out when the new floor beaters came in. But, it would be nice to see an overhead beater work.]

The first job I played was with Ulysses Jean. He was a trumpet player, a good friend of mine. He's the cause I stopped playing trumpet. Because he was playing the trumpet, and I said:

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well, I'll play the drums then.

He's living. Every now [and then] we work together, over the river on a project. It must be about four months since I seen him. He's living in Baton Rouge, but he comes down here to work. [WR saw him only once, in 1944.]

I used a little tom-tom, a little Chinese tom-tom. I play a woodblock, too.

[Louis] Cottrell [Sr.] was a very good drummer. I was interested in what he showed me. He was a very nice fellow to get along with. Nice disposition. When I'd go to his house, he would greet me with a smile.

He lived on Annette [Street] between Derbigny and Roman [Streets]. I went to his house twice a week. He had a little [practice] pad. I just had to take the sticks. [He had] a little pad made out of skins, and stuffed with cotton, or something like that.

He [advised me to have] light sticks, I believe it was A-1. I went twice a week for lessons. It was just 50 cents a lesson. A lesson was about a half-hour, forty-five minutes. He was interested in teaching it, because my dad was good friends with him.

[A bird has been loudly chirping throughout interview. In an aside, WR says if the bird is bothering MD, he could move it to another room. MD says, it's o.k. He must like you, WR notes.

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Sitting on your shoulder.]

I heard Louis Cottrell with [Manuel] Perez. He played snare drum.

My first job was with Ulysses Jean. He was born in New Orleans, and he was raised on Urquhart Street. I was raised on Bourbon Street.

He's the same age as me. He was born in December [1903]. I was born in October. We're the same age. He taken lessons from his uncle, Nelson Jean.

[WR has heard of Nelson Jean, but never talked to him, or Ulysses.] I'll pass the word around to [UJ's] brother when I see him [to speak with WR at Preservation Hall, or thereabouts.]

He doesn't play trumpet anymore, I don't think. I don't know if he's interested in it, or what, any more. I'll talk to him about it. [WR saw UJ play - just one night - at a lawn party in 1944.]

I can't remember who was in that band [for my first job.] It was a four-piece band. There was a clarinet player, but I lost trace of him, who he was. I just can't remember him.

WR has a picture which MD lent to AL Rose for his book. It is the [Original Tuxedo Band.] I can name most all of them [in that picture.]

There was Eddie Marrero, etc. [See Rose, Al and Edmond Souchon, New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album. Rev. ed., Baton Rouge

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and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978.]

[MD names the band members.]

I was about 19 [years old,] when I played in my first band. They played just around town, little house parties. This was for some Italian people, we played that [first] night. I always think about my first job.

My brother [Joe and I], we had an orchestra. I played with him for quite a while. It was the Original Cloverleaf [Orchestra.] I played with them. [My brother played] trumpet.

He's living, but he doesn't play anymore. He's sick. He tries, but I think he...I don't think he can come to the standard [any more.]

I played in rake-up [i.e., pick-up] bands. I played with Buddy Petit. I played with Chris Kelly. I played with [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin too.

I just played jobs [with Chris Kelly] when he hired me, but I was never a regular. I was a regular with Cloverleaf. When Cie [Frazier] taken sick, I played in his place almost a year, probably, in the Young Tuxedo Band.

So many different fellows I played with...Raymond Brown. WR mentions that [Kid] Twat [i.e., Joseph Butler] said he played his first job with Raymond Brown. He's dead, as I understand it, MD continues. His brother played trumpet. They used to call him "Bat" Brown.

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We used to go to rehearsal, way Uptown. He used to come down here all the time. The fellow was well-known. He had plenty of little jobs. We played plenty of little jobs with him.

He was a good trombone player. He played the kind of style as Jim [Robinson] down there. He was very loud.

I didn't know [when Raymond Brown died.] I had got out the music business. I was so interested in traveling, and the plastering business. I'm a plasterer.

Johnny St. Cyr was a good friend of mine. I played music with him with [the] Georgie Parker band at [the] Happy Landing out at the Lake. We played there about four years. That was in the late [19]40's.

And Emile Barnes. I played by the Harmony Inn with this guy who played the piano. He died, too. Walter...Walter Decou, and Lawrence Toca. Emile Barnes. I worked down there quite a while [at the Harmony Inn.] Three nights a week, I played in the [19]40's.

I'm coming back on the music business. I have a set of drums, and everything. I slacked down - like I say - about 1949, 1950. That isn't too far back. You don't lose too much practicing that you learned. You'll be a little rusty, but you'll be back strong.

I never played much parades in the street. All of my jobs were sit-in jobs.

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I liked [Cottrell, as a drummer, when I was young]. Chinee [Foster,] and I were good friends when I was young. I learned a whole lot from him, and he was interested in me.

Another fellow I was interested in playing [with], I used to like a lot--he's playing...Alfred Williams.

WR mentions he just died a year, or two, ago. A good drummer. I was interested around them sort of fellows...because I learned different things, catch on.

I'm right-handed. [WR mentions some left-handed drummers.] All those left-handed drummers were good drummers. Klebert Cagnolatti...WR mentions [Clifford] 'Snags' Jones who left here pretty early. [He] played with King Oliver, and all that.

Most likely, [parade drummers] played because their bands had jobs, contracts with societies. That was the type.

Most likely, all the time it would be Chinee [Foster] would be with the [Original] Tuxedo Band. Alfred Williams, and Cottrell was with Perez. Bebe' [Matthews] was with the Onward Band.

I remember Bill [Matthews] when he played drums. He was a good drummer too. Remus [Matthews], I knew too.

I think Bebe' [Matthews] was the best drummer. 'Cause I heard him play in a string band, and everything like that. He would play snare drums in the parades, good snare drums.

We used to call it a string band because it had the guitar, and the bass. It meant the full dance band.

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We would call the brass band, the nine pieces, or the 12 pieces - like that - on the streets. [The string band meant the regular dance orchestra.]

They used string band during my lifetime. They don't use it too often. It died out. People never used it too much. I heard the elder people use it, that's all. [It meant with the horns, drums, and all.]

[Red] "Happy" [Bolton], and [Arthur] "Zutty" Singleton [were other favorite drummers.] I remember when [Zutty Singleton] played at the Lyric Theater [201 Burgundy St. Burned in 1927.] with [John] Robichaux['s Band.]

What happened was pretty good. "Red Happy" was very good. He played with Chris Kelly a while.

And then, he was a show drummer. He used to play in the show all the time at the Lyric Theater. That's before Zutty.

Joe Lindsey. I remember him. He was a good drummer. [WR met him in Chicago, never heard him play, though.] Yeah. He was a good drummer. Real good.

Johnny St. Cyr and I worked the same [plastering] jobs together. We plastered together, and we played music together.

[WR saw him in California, and he was doing plastering there, too.] I spoke with him in California last year. He lived out there on Wall Street. [WR and Professor Manuel Manetta stayed there for a week.]

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I lived just about six squares from him. I never could get to see him. I left before I saw him. But then, I really wanted to see him because he was a good friend of mine. He used to go to work at 1:00 [p.m.], and that's the time I'd be working.

[WR mentions how St. Cyr is working at Disneyland, and has to commute.]

I've always lived Downtown in the same section. I was born there at 2010 [Bourbon Street], and I live at 2028. That's about four houses [down.] It's called [Pauger], but it's the same street.

I tell fellas...I say I was born on Bourbon street. So, some fellas would say he's just saying that because Bourbon Street is famous.

But, during that time it was Bourbon Street all the way...from Canal [St.] to the lake. They discontinued at Calumet [St.], and called it Pauger. That [was] around in 1936.

WR mentions that Lizzie Miles would tell people she was born on Bourbon Street between Burgundy and Dauphine - or something - and people wouldn't believe her.

They would say that doesn't cross those streets. It goes in the same direction. They wouldn't believe her. Then, she'd have to explain that they changed the name where it turns down there.

I remember Ernest Trepagnier. He was a good bass drummer. I heard him in several dances. He played pretty good. He was a good

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bass drummer. I remember "Black Benny" [Williams.] Played mainly with the Onward Brass Band, too.

I remember Buddy Petit's band. It was Lawrence Marrero, and Eddie Marrero. Eddie played bass, and Lawrence played banjo. Let's see...Emile Barnes played clarinet [in Chris Kelly's band.]

I played at the Economy Hall. I played at the Perseverance Hall, at the New Hall, and at the Hope's Hall. They tore it down because of storm damage [last September.]

I played at the Merry-Go-Round [Hickory & Eagle Sts.] once. It was way up in town. [That's still up there at Carrollton, according to WR.]

I played up at the Tulane [Athletic] Club. Those were all noted halls for dances, and banquets, weddings, and things.

The banquets used to be on Mondays, from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. The other dances would be from 8:00 [p.m.] to 3:00 in the mornings.

They usually had dances on Sunday nights, particular on Sundays. Now, Saturday is the big night. But, during those times - I don't know - it was a regular tradition of giving a dance on a Sunday. And they started on Monday nights giving dances.

Mondays was the banquet days, from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m.. Societies' banquets. Bonquet [in Creole.] It was invitation. It was society.

At the end of the year, they'd take money out of the

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treasury, and have a big lay-out with ham, and beer, and soft drinks, and chicken, and potato salad, and all that kind of stuff. Everybody'd join, and be happy.

[WR remembers musician union banquets at the San Jacinto Hall.] I played at the San Jacinto Hall also.

They had a union [in the old days.] [That was Local 496, American Federation of Musicians, when there was a separate black union,] and [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin was the president.

I kept a card, but it just got out of my way. How it got out, I don't know.

[MD contemplates a picture of the Young Tuxedo Band that he kept through the years.]

[For trumpet players,] I used to like to hear [Henry 'Kid'] Rena. I used to like to hear [Papa] Celestin, and Manuel Perez, during his time, when he was living and all.

Ulysses Jean was good, and Chris Kelly, and Sam Morgan. Albert Snaer, and my brother was a pretty good trumpet player. He was a sweet waltz player. You couldn't find a man played better trumpet than him. He's just taken sick is all.

[On clarinet,] I used to like to hear Willard Thomey, and Adolphe Alexander [Jr., "Tats"]. I played with Big Eye Louis [Nelson.] I worked with him in a little place called Dutch's on Frenchmen and Claiborne.

Then, I played with [Alphonse] Picou for Dutch's on

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Claiborne and Frenchmen. I played there about five years, we played on that job. With Elmer Talbert, they used to have..."Coo-Coo" used to play the clarinet, and the cornet. Albert Glenny was our bass player. That was his job. Harry Robichaux used to be the guitar player.

My other favorite trumpet player was "Shots," Louis Madison. Oh yeah. Oh man, he was good. I used to like to hear him play second trumpet.

Ricard [Alexis] was good, too. [WR heard him, too, at a parade. He once played alto at WR's house...]

END OF REEL