

GEORGE HENDERSON

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May 3, 1961

Also Present: William Russell, Ralph Collins,
Harold Dejan, Mrs. Henderson

[Interview recorded at GH's house, 1726 North Dengibny, New Orleans,
Louisiana].

A photograph of the [Young?] Camellia Band is being shown; personnel identified: George Henderson, drums; [Elmer] "Coo Coo" Talbert, trumpet; Georgie Stewart, sax [also a clarinet; see p. 3 below]; Clarence Tisdale, banjo; Johnny Prudent, bass; Albert Warner, trombone. (The photo came from Warner, and was delivered [to WR] by [George "Sheik" [Colar]]). The photo was made around 1923, although there is pencilled "1925" on it. WR says [Albert] Glennie told him the first person he ever saw picking a bass [violin] was Johnny Prudent; GH says Prudent was almost as old as Glennie. Glennie said Prudent's widow was living near him, and he was living [at St. Anthony near Marais at the time?]. GH says Prudent was living at [Rampart and St. Claude?].

Talk of and description of the drums in the photo. Mention of slide whistle, which GH used to play the melody in waltzes; mention of [drummer] Joe Strother, who also played slide whistle.

The name of the Camellia Band came [from the fact that the band played on the Camellia, an excursion boat? PRC]; when the original Camellia Band broke up GH and others formed the Young Camellia Band. The original Camellia Band was composed of "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas, trumpet], Georgie Stewart, Johnny Prudent, Ambrose [Powers], trombone, and others. GH says Stewart was from New Orleans; he lived on Esplanade near Rampart, near Prudent; Stewart was at least a couple of years older than GH.

Georgie Louis [sp?] Henderson, Jr., was born September 17, 1900, in the same New Orleans neighborhood where he lives now. His mother

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sang. GH began fooling around with drums around the age of fifteen years; the first musical organization he played in was a little symphony orchestra at Corpus Christi School, although he didn't attend that school. GH is a Catholic. GH got his first set of drums at Duggan's Music House. Some others in the Corpus Christi orchestra: Adolph [check sp] Alexander [Jr.?], Barney Bigard, and George Bellair [sp?], who played violin and was conductor of the orchestra. There were about five violins, one cello and three trumpets in the group, plus other instruments; one of the trumpets was played by [?] Jefferson. The orchestra played mostly marches. HD mentions Manuel Perez, who lived in the Corpus Christi School area.

Talk of banquets, which were held on Monday afternoons; HD says the day was called "Blue Monday;" anyone who even went to work on that day would get off at noon to go to a banquet. The banquets were attended by invitation, and there was no admission charge; the musicians were fed and paid. Dances with paid admission were held on Saturday and Sunday nights.

George Henderson's first job was with the Camellia Band.

Clarence Tisdale was a pretty good banjo player; he worked in the Camellia Band with GH for several jobs, and also in a five-piece group [of his own?] later. GH says he went to Chicago, but GH hasn't heard from him in three or four years. HD says Tisdale worked with Kid Rena (HD also in the band) at the Gypsy Tea Room for a long time.

The way a band lined up on a job was in a straight line, in the order following: drums, trombone, trumpet, saxophone, guitar and bass. Discussion of narrow bandstands. [Mrs. Henderson enters.] General babble. Mrs. Henderson says she has another picture [of a band], taken

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at Milneburg. Georgie Stewart played clarinet more than he did sax. "Smoky Mary," the train to Milneburg, is mentioned. The Milneburg photo is discussed; names mentioned as personnel of the band shown: Henry Cazenave, sax; Henry Julian, clarinet and sax (HD says, "The great Henry Julian"); Clarence Tisdale, banjo; Albert Burbank; and Joe Dolliole, trumpet. GH says the date was back in nineteen twenty-[five?]. GH says Julian was tops at the time. HD tells of going out to the seawall [along the lake] to ask GH if he wanted to go to New York with his band [aboard the S.S. Dixie?], in 1930; HD went in the car belonging to Milfred [check sp] Dollhole, drummer, brother of Joe Dolliole.

GH began playing drums without formal instruction, but he studied in later years with Louis Cottrell, Sr. (father of the [present] president of the [musicians'] union [Local 496--Louis Cottrell, Jr.]). The first [professional] band GH played with was the Camellia Band; he had completed his study with Cottrell by that time; he studied with Cottrell about two years. WR mentions Baby Dodds and Dave Perkins.

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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins,
Harold Dejan, Mrs. Henderson.

Johnny Prudent played both bowed and plucked bass violin, Georgie Stewart sometimes had a bigaret in his mouth when he played clarinet. Elmer "Coo Coo" Talbert, trumpet player, is mentioned. Talk of the old times, of the numbrous parties, fish fries, etc., which were held on Saturday night, and of brick dust, which was used to clean walk areas, steps, etc.

Mrs. Henderson's favorite band was that of her husband; her second favorite band was that of her uncle, George Baquet, clarinetist, who has been dead eight or none years [or longer. RBA]. Baquet was the husband of Mrs. Henderson's mother's sister, Agges Baquet. Another favorite band was Don Albert's Texas band, with Mrs. H.'s cousin, Ferdinand Dejan, in it. It is mentioned that Louis Cottrell [Jr.] and Arthur Derbigny were in the Albert Band. Baquet's sister has a place, Gross's Chicken Coop, on Bienville and Roman [streets]. WR mentions the Jolly Bunch parade, which stops across the street from the Chicken Coop, says HD. Ferdinand [Dejan] has been dead a year or two. [Cf. obit]. Baquet left New Orleans when Mrs. H. was about seven years old; he traveled with bands, not returning to New Orleans "until he was a man; in other word, he deserted my aunt; my aunt died of grief." The wife died in [1915?]. A female godchild of Baquet is "a policeman out in Chicago." HD mentions [cprmetøst] Arnold Metoyer, who also traveled a lot. The Hendersons have a happy marriage; they were married in 1922. HD says he himself was thirteen years old then, and play@dng clarinet at the College Inn, with [Ernest] Roubleau.

[Sax player] Henry Julian is dead; [sax player] Henry Cazenave is

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in California or Chicago, or somewhere, says HD. HD says Cazenave's picture is shown in a picture of the Moonlight Serenaders. HD's brother, [trumpet player] Leo Dejan, is in California.

Mrs. H. says some of the students at St. Augustine [High School] have formed a little, old-style^{V. 134}band, and sound good; the drummer, who lives across the street from the Hendersons, is studying with Louis Barbarin.

GH played in Elmer Talbert's band at the "jitney" [i.e., taxi] dance halls, La Veeda, Fern, and Alamo (the latter on Dauphine near Canal). GH played at the Japanese Tea Garden at Milneburg, [for?] Al Verges. HD says he played [there?], with on violin, "Big Foot Bill" [Philips, drums], and Louis GALLAUD [piano]. Mama Lou's and Luthjen's are mentioned; talk of various camps around the Little Woods area; GH thinks the camp where he played as shown in one of the photographs was called Cinderella. GH was with Georgie Stewart's band at the Japanese Tea Garden; he played "over there" [Luthjen's] with Billie [Pierce]'s band. He played in his own band, the Black Diamond, on Decatur Street, immediately after he left the taxi dance halls. HD's band was playing at the Popeye, on Decatur Street; HD says he started the music on Decatur Street. GH says his band started at the Rose Bowl (also on Decatur) after they left the jitney dance halls. HD and his band, including GH, went to New York on the boat, the steamer Bixie, in 1930; the round trip took seventeen days; they made one trip in 1930; Bernell Santiago was the piano player in the band. HD went back on that boat in 1936; he left a job at the Cotton Club, with Cassmier Paul, to take the boat job.

HD played regularly?] in the [Young?] Camellia Band [see reel I] and in the Black Diamond [band]; he substituted in Buddy Petit's band, and in the bands of Kid Howard and Omer [Bernard] Omer was a nice trumpet player.

GH talks about the drummer's keeping the time in a band; he says that if a band started a tune with a tempo which didn't feel right, they would change to a tempo which did feel right, and then hold that one. A drummer could change the sound of a band. Mutes weren't used much on bass drums then. Talk of a bass drum foot pedal which had a cymbal beater attached; cymbal beater struck a cymbal mounted on the bass drum each time the beater struck the bass drum.

Mike Delay played trumpet in the band which worked on the Dixie the first time; Cassmier Paul played guitar; Santiago played piano; Cleo was a very good bass player.

The cymbal beater, attached to the bass drum pedal, was not used on 4/4 tunes; it was used only for slow fox trots and waltzes. Bands were very loud in those days, especially the ones which played advertising jobs on trucks. The cymbal beater described is not used now, probably because bands don't play so loud any more.

Permits for dances in the old days had no time limitations as they do now, when a dance permit has stated on it the time the dance will begin and the [probable] time the dance will end; the old-time permits were open-minded.

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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins,
Harold Dejan, Mrs. Henderson.

GH continues his explanation of permits for social occasions; talks about differences in prices between the old times and the present; talk about differences in young people, same times; differences in customs in general. There once were many societies [ieeee, social organizations], but there are few now; GH belonged to the Inseparable Friends for thirty some-odd years; the group dissolved just last month, because no new members were joining. The clubhouse was on St. Philip between Robertson and Claiborne [see Noah Cook interview]. Dances were held there for years. Insurance companies have taken over the basic functions of the clubs, which were founded to provide medical and burial benefits. People were more friendly in the old days; they also responded to music in a more amiable way; musicians were more respected. Talk about problem drummers and bass players had with transportation; they couldn't ride street cars without first obtaining permits. Talk of picnics, at West End and Spanish Fort which were usually held on Sunday, usually beginning around ten o'clock in the morning.

WR mentions [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.], GH's teacher. Other drummers GH liked were Arnold DePass, leader of the Olympia Band, and Red Dugas, who usually worked in cabarets. (GH's father died last week.) GH played only two parades, as he didn't like to walk; WR and HD say drummer Ernest Milton told them the same thing about himself. Two parades drummers GH liked were "Black Benny" [Williams] (HD says Benny's son-in-law works with him) and "Red Happy" [Bolton.]. GH and HD agree that everyone like the bass drumming of "Little Jim" [Mukes], who lived over the river; he had the biggest bass drum of any, although he was

quite small; he is still living over the river, but doesn't play now, says WR. GH also liked Paul and Louis Barbarin, and [Ernest]"Nenesse" Trepagnier; Trepagnier was especially good on funerals; he played bass drum on parades.

GH liked trumpet player Manuel Perez. GH mentions "bucking" contests between bands on furniture wagons, playing advertising jobs. GH mentions Kid Ory and Joe Oliver. He mentions Buddy Petit, with whom he played, and Kid Rena. He says he played with Kid Punch [Miller]. GH knew about Freddy Keppard [cornet], who went away in the band with George Baquet (uncle [by marriage] of GH's wife [see previous reels, this interview]); Keppard was supposed to come back to New Orleans, but GH doesn't remember that he ever did. Keppard's brother, Louis Keppard, has played with GH. GH never played with Kid Rena, as his brother, Joe Rena [sic], played drums with him; Joe is still living [see Joe Rene interview]. GH played with Chris Kelly on several occasions. GH went on the road with Sam Morgan; after Sam's death, his brother, Isaiah Morgan, took over the band, and GH traveled some with him. The people in Bay Stl Louis [Mississippi] dubbed them "The Rain Band," as it rained every time they went to that town; the people would say (says GH), "Here comes the Rain Band, we're not going to wash today." GH says the Hundred Men Pavillion, where the Morgan band played, still stands; it took its name from the society of the same name: the society had only one hundred members.

Clarinetist Georgie Stewart had a nice tone and liked to play soft; he was all right until he became angry, when his playing would suffer because of his anger. Stewart lived opposite Johnny Prudent; they were the founders of the Camellia Band; they argued. Stewart has been dead fourteen

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fourteen or fifteen years. Some other clarinetists GH considered good were [Alphonse] Picou, Zeb [Laneries], Lorenzo Tio [Jr.] and Dave DePass, brother of Arnold DePass. Stewart's clarinet style was somewhere between that of Emile Barnes and of Israel Gorman. Stewart could read music slowly. He was ill for about two years before his death, but had played until he became ill. He played with "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] at one time [see Reel I]; HD says he remembers hearing Stewart once at the Alamo, when Willie "Kaiser" Joseph had laid off; HD says Stewart's playing resembled Kaiser's; GH agrees. WR says Kaiser was a brother of bassist John Joseph.

[Albert] Warner, who now claims not to have played much dance work, played with GH [in the Camellia Band?] for a couple of years; GH agrees with HD that Warner was a pretty good man for dance band work.

The first man GH ever saw "pick" a bass [violin] was "Teet" [sp?] [Rouchon?]; Johnny Prudent started picking the bass about the same time. [Albert] Glenny and "Teet" always tried to outplay each other. They used the bottom of the bow for picking; GH agrees with HD that Chester [Zardis] used that technique to perfection.

GH says he might play again, but he is not playing now.

The only recordings GH ever made was with Kid Thomas [Valentine], in Algiers, about ten years ago, for the "kids from Harvard" [David Wyckoff and Alden Ashforth], says WR. Probably some people recorded GH at Luthjen's. when he was playing there with Billie [Pierce]. GH says someone, probably Sam Charters, got them to rehearse and record when he was writing a book; GH says the man was supposed to send copies of the

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records, but so far as he knows never did. GH stopped playing because his wife became ill when she had a nervous attack; he decided not to leave her alone at night anymore.

GH always had a day job, except when he played at jitney dance ha#ls.

End of Reel III