

Interview with Miss Abigail Arnold

H: Your name please?

AA: Abbie Arnold.

H: Your date of birth and place of birth?

AA: September 25, 1937, in Baptist Hospital in New Orleans.

H: Have you lived in New Orleans all your life?

AA: Yes.

H: When did you first become aware that there was such a form of music as New Orleans jazz?

AA: I think for as long as I can remember.

H: As long as you can remember?

AA: Yeah.

H: What did you think of it when you first became --

AA: I didn't think anything of it when I first heard it because it was just all around me.

H: Well, when you first thought about it? Did you just, like it?

AA: Well, naturally, I always liked it because my father had a great deal to do with it; he played it more so than any other kind of music and so it just became more or less, part of me.

H: You mean he, he played instruments or he played records?

AA: Both. He played the piano and he had other people in to play other instruments, and then he has a pretty good collection of it on records.

H: What would you say your friends think of it? Or, thought of it then, I should say?

AA: Well, thought of it then? That was back around when I was --

H: When you first started going out to parties and stuff?

AA: When we first started going out to parties, it was just about the only form of music as far as my friends were concerned. It was the only kind of band that we would consider getting for a good time, and it was the only kind of music that we would go all the way down to the French Quarter to listen to.

H: You said most of the parties you went to then, about what age was this when you first started going out?

AA: Between 14 to 17; high school years.

H: Would you say most of the parties then tended to have jazz bands?

AA: Definitely.

H: What bands would they have usually?

AA: Well, they'd usually have Celestin, and then, and then, for serious dances, like sorority dances, every once in a while they would have pop bands, which never were accepted with too much enthusiasm. But it was just sort of the style that, when you were going have a serious dance you had to have semi-serious music.

H: In other words, jazz wasn't thought of as socially high-brow enough (...)

AA: Not socially high-brow enough, but at times, not in keeping with long evening dresses and tuxedos. But, not that it carried any social stigma as far as acceptable music for parties went.

H: What did your parents and your parents' contemporaries think of it?

AA: Oh, they were strictly for jazz and nothing else. As far as parties, there were only two kinds of music as far as they were concerned: classical music and jazz.

H: That's your parents. What about your parents' friends?

AA: Well most of my parents' friends thought the same way. They've always been great jazz enthusiasts.

H: How old are your parents?

AA: Uh, my father is in his early 50s and my mother is in her late 40s.

H: Have you noticed any change in attitude towards jazz since when you first started going out at about age 14?

AA: You mean among my contemporaries or my parents?

H: Among your contemporaries.

AA: Yes. It has branched out into other forms of jazz, progressive jazz [dog barking] and all that. It is still considered one of the best forms of party music, though.

H: That's what most of your friends would think, that it was one of the best forms of party music?

AA: Yes.

H: Have you ever thought about it as, did you think of it just as party music, or have you ever thought of it as an art form?

AA: I've thought of it as an art form only in the -- in its greatest musicians, and I don't think that its greatest musicians are in New Orleans anymore. I think that Celestin's band,

for one, can be considered one of the best jazz bands in the country, but not as a, um, not on a program that you would sit and listen to. I think you can hear the best jazz at a party because I think that part of jazz is its reactions in its audience, and that comes best at a party atmosphere rather than a concert atmosphere, but still I think that there are great jazz artists in the world that I would just sit and listen to rather than dance to, and --

H: That would be New Orleans jazz, huh?

AA: Well do you mean New Orleans jazz --

H: I'm talking strictly New Orleans jazz.

AA: As it is in New Orleans now or as it has originated from New Orleans?

H: New Orleans jazz and New Orleans jazz (...) as it is in New Orleans now, and also as it was in New Orleans --

AA: Well, are you thinking of people like Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, and Kid Ory and those; I think they are some of the greatest jazz artists in the world, and that they rate great sitting and listening to either on records or in person, but I think that jazz as it is now in New Orleans has strictly become more a form of music to be enjoyed, rather than to be sat and listened to seriously. For one thing, the best artists get paid more out of New Orleans than they do in New Orleans.

H: You said jazz was the most popular form of music when you were in high school. What about in college in New Orleans?

AA: Well, I think rock and roll is coming to the fore, as party music, I think it is now, because it's earthier.

H: Well, in some ways you would say that attitude of your friends and your parents and their friends, that jazz is a socially acceptable form of music?

AA: Oh, definitely! I think that people still look forward to a party with jazz much more than they would look forward to a party with any form of, um, pop music.

H: Now, do you prefer rock and roll more among you and your friends?

AA: Yes, because it makes for a wilder party, but --

H: Which do you prefer the most to listen to and dance to? Which do you prefer?

AA: Well, it depends strictly on the mood and on the type of party. I think that a beer-drinking, rowdy party is best with a rock and roll band. I think a party with a great variety of people with a great variety of ages, all of them respond to jazz because it seems to be a much commoner medium than rock and roll is. And I think everyone will have fun at a

party with New Orleans jazz where as only the, strictly the younger people will have fun at a party with rock and roll. But if you're speaking of jazz as a serious form of listening to music, well among the people who look at music at all consider it from a serious artistic standpoint, I think they definitely do consider jazz worthy to be listened to.

H: Most of the people, the majority of New Orleans people would be in accordance with that idea of yours?

AA: The ones who consider music seriously at all would enjoy sitting down and listening to a good jazz artist.

H: Can you think of anything else you could add on the topic of social acceptance of New Orleans jazz, among New Orleanians, acceptability?

AA: Well, I think that the social acceptance of New Orleans jazz by New Orleanians is strictly based upon New Orleanians' love for a good time, and that jazz has always represented a good time, and it still represents a good time, and even though rock and roll, which is only a degenerate form of jazz, has come to the fore lately, it still can't replace jazz completely as good time music.

H: Anything else?

AA: Well, the bit about listening to it seriously; I think that there are few people anyway in New Orleans among my (...)

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[Abigail Arnold interview continued]

AA: ...who sit down and give a lot of time to listening to music anyway, and I think among those who do, they will appreciate the fact that there are many jazz artists who are worth sitting down and listening to.

H: That's all.

AA: That's all.

H: Thank you very much.

AA: You're welcome.