

JIMMY "KID" CLAYTON
Reel I--Digest--Retype
June 23, 1961

Also present:
William Russell
Ralph Collins

Jimmy Clayton was born March 2, 1902, in Jasper County, Mississippi, near the town of Laurel; he moved to New Orleans when he was about three years of age. The first [jazz?] music he [remembers having] heard was played by the bands of Papa Celestin, Kid Rena, Kid Punch [Miller], around the time of World War I. There was a pump organ in the Clayton home, on which members of the family played hymns. JC's first instrument was a ukulele, which was soon replaced by a trumpet, which he found on a garbage can. He and [Allen Hunter] Gardette (long since moved to Detroit, where he died) took turns playing the instrument; they got up a little band (JC was about fifteen years old at the time); Jim Humphrey taught them. Some others in the band, all from the same neighborhood as JC (he lived at 4604 Magnolia Street), were [Humphrey, Willie/clarinet], and Earl Humphrey [trombone], and Harry Johnson. JC's family music background: his mother played [piano and organ?], and his sister attempted piano, but failed. JC remembers Joe Oliver. JC has played with Louis Keppard, brother of Freddy Keppard. JC "rested up" Kid Punch when Punch was playing at the Astoria. Wesley "Kid" Dimes, a good trumpet player, is mentioned; [JC played with him?] Dimes, who was killed in Baton Rouge, was about the same age as Punch; Dimes had his own band. Punch's style then was the same as now--featured fast runs, the vogue in New Orleans in those days. [Cf. phonograph records.] JC heard Freddy Keppard. JC played with Chris Kelly, Louis Dumaine--in fact, with every band in town. JC heard Bunk Johnson, a great trumpet player. From the band with the Humphrey brothers, Willie Humphrey went to work in a cabaret on Iberville Street; JC went to work at the Hummingbird, a cabaret on Bienville Street. WR says George Guesnon tells that the first

[jazz] music he ever heard was by Clayton at the Hummingbird. JC says Guesnon became associated with him there, that Guesnon was "given a break" by Professor Cook [see below, page] there. JC worked at the Hummingbird from 1925 until the depression [c. 1929]. WR says Guesnon heard the band about 1927; Guesnon says he is a 1927 musician, claiming he doesn't know [some of] the tunes before that year because he didn't begin playing until then. Others in the Hummingbird band [from time to time? and including Guesnon] were [Xavier] "Tink" Batiste, piano; George Williams (the same man who now leads his own brass band), drums; Eddie Summers, who would play when he got off his regular job (at the [New Orleans] Athletic Club); Peter Bodie, saxophone; "Captain" John Handy, clarinet (who had just left "Toot" Johnson's band in Baton Rouge). Handy, who was great, worked with JC until depression times, when the job ended. JC then joined the W.P.A. band, about 127 pieces. JC says the District was [still] wide-open when he was working at the Hummingbird. There were tables for whites, although the place was for Negroes, in the main. The operators of the place were JC's uncle, George, and Professor Cook (the latter also performed in the floor show); the owner was Ben Compagno, who also owned a grocery at Iberville and Marais [streets]. JC says that he himself had been on a Texas tour; when he returned to New Orleans, broke, he happened to meet Cook, who told him he wanted his band to play at the new place [Hummingbird] he was just opening. The tour band, JC's first, went to work immediately. JC had worked before the tour at the [One Hundred Men (i.e., the 101)] Ranch, later known as the Entertainers, and such places.

The W.P.A. Band practiced in Jackson Square; their headquarters [for rehearsal] was at 518 Dumaine Street, which was Patorna's

Cabaret [check spelling]. The 127 pieces were broken into three smaller units: Louis Dumaine had No. 1 [D'jalma?] Ganier had No. 2, and J.C. had No. 3. A Mr. Gilbert was the supervisor. JC agrees with WR, who said Wooden Joe [Nicholas] told him JC took all the hot solos; JC says he and Sam Williams, trombonist (who now lives in the Little Farms area, near Kenner, and who plays only in church) had to take all the hot solos, that they were overworked in that respect. Louis Nelson was also in that big W.P.A. band. Louis Dumaine was the director of the big band [encompassing the three smaller units]. Paul Chaligny played alto horn in the band; Pinch-back Tureaud was also in the band. The band had to move to other rehearsal headquarters, so JC "found" the Tulane Club; the building was so bad the musicians had to hold umbrellas when they rehearsed during a rain; they pooled their resources and put a new roof on the building. It snowed that year (1935). The band worked out of the Tulane Club until disbanded; JC has played dances at the Tulane Club in the years since that time. JC has always called his band "Kid Clayton's Happy Pals." The W.P.A. Band played at places such as Parish Prison, at a graveyard in Shell Beach [for memorial occasions? RBA], etc.; from about ten pieces to the entire strength were used. The later, smaller bands [three in number] would play "Dixieland" at various schools, and at various parks, for both white and colored. JC says the band had to be good, that they rehearsed eight hours a day.

Trumpet players JC liked in the old days were Punch Miller, Kid Rena, Chris Kelly--Kelly played with a "Creole twang" to his tone.

JC talks about the use of toilet plungers as mutes; he tells about playing a job once, at which a child was watching him; the child didn't want to leave until he had seen JC use the plunger. JC explains Creole style playing, saying it is sweet and has a lot of feeling in it. Sam Morgan had a sort of Creole style. JC knew Buddy Petit, having worked parades with him; he also gave him a job at a taxi dance, a job JC was tired of. Chester Zardis booked the taxi dance job; Zardis now lives in New Iberia. JC was to play a job for Zardis, in Alexandria, [or in New Iberia?] but difficulties prevented it; Emma Barrett was playing piano with JC at the time. JC speaks of the late Edgar August [French pronunciation] Saucier [spelling?], trombonist and bassist, who had a band in Biloxi, and with whom JC played; Saucier's son, Edgar, is now on the West Coast, a fine sax player. Some musicians still play around Biloxi; the Benoit boys live over there, and Sumner Labat, clarinetist, does also. JC played with SL for years. JC heard Louis Armstrong when Armstrong worked at Tom Anderson's; [JC was at the Hummingbird?] [Chronology is faulty--JC into Hummingbird 1925, Armstrong to Chicago in 1922.] he later met Armstrong in Chicago, where Armstrong was playing at the Vendome Theater. [Armstrong?] and JC would visit at the barbershop of Arnold "Nene" Depass, drummer.

The taxi dance hall of which JC spoke [job he gave to Petit] was on the downtown river corner of St. Charles and Poydras. JC did not play at the Fern Dance Hall, but says Andy Anderson did. JC also played taxi dances in Gonzales, and played in Raceland every Saturday night.

JC has played with [and/or had in his band?] Harold Dejan, Oscar Rouzan, Clarence Tisdale (a ~~grea~~ banjo player)--in fact, with every band. JC was feared by some bands, because he could play numbers from Louis Armstrong recordings; he says the son of Dookie Chase had a band which was supposed to battle JC's band at the San Jacinto hall; the Chase band didn't show up, afraid of JC's Armstrong numbers. Steve Angrum also worked with JC, on clarinet. JC's favorite clarinetists were [Albert] Burbank, Henry ["Dog"] Franklin, George ~~Boyd~~^B Boyd--Boyd played with Punch Miller. Franklin, living now on Robert around Robertson, is an old-time clarinetist who sounds somewhat like Emile Barnes. [Alphonse] Picou also worked with JC, as did Andrew Morgan; Morgan is shown in a photo taken at Germany Hall [i.e., the Deutsches Haus], Galvez and Palmyra Streets.

End of Reel I

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Talk is about some photographs [probably some by Ralston Crawford--RBA]; in one, JC is singing; he says he was singing a blues-type song, an original by him entitled, "Don't Take My Gal Out Fishing." A picture taken last year of a [JC] band called "The Hummingbird Stompers" shows [JC?], John Handy, Alex Bigard, George Guesnon, and Lester Santiago.

JC and RC talk about JC's working at Gramercy [Louisiana] in 1957 as a carpenter's helper; JC does that kind of work when not playing music; music work is slow at the moment, too. JC tells of serenading his father on this birthday, serenading being an old-time event not done much now (except by JC); Paul Barnes, who plays regularly with JC, was in the band, and so was "Big Foot Bill" [Phillips], drummer.

JC speaks of playing at Milneburg, where he worked every Saturday and Sunday some years ago, playing places such as the Log Cabin and Sam's Camp. JC and Andrew Jefferson had the band which worked for some time at the lake spot, Mama Lou's; JC speaks of the deterioration of and demise of the business after Mama Lou died. [She had a heart of gold?] JC also worked at the Happy Landing, with Israel Gorman; that place has also ceased dance operations [has ceased all operations; ~~XXXXXX~~ was gutted by fire in late December, 1961--PRC; see miscellaneous files]. JC also worked at a place called Mary's Camp [near or at the end of Hayne Boulevard], a very tough spot; he talks about a fight, mentioning that Abby Williams packed his drums and crawled into the toilet with them.

JC played with "a tall, bright [i.e., light-colored] fellow" whose group was called, J.C. thinks, the Supreme [Brass] Band. When JC gets a job for a brass band, he calls the Eureka or John

Casimir [Young Tuxedo Brass Band] to take the job, and plays with them. He remembers some of the old timers who played with brass bands such as the Excelsior and the Onward; he played with men from the Excelsior Brass Band and from the Excelsior Jazz Band. "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] was one of the outstanding players with the Excelsior. [!!! RBA]

JC worked with Dan Moody [trombonist], of Bogalusa [check this--RBA], traveling Louisiana, up to Memphis, to the coast of Mississippi. JC tells of sleeping in a dance hall where he [with Moody's band] had just played, in Hazlehurst, Mississippi. JC tells of another incident, near Crystal Springs, Mississippi, and of falling off a drop; he mentions the names of George Guesnon, [Theodore] Purnell, and bass player Hosey [Harris]. JC tells of missing a bus out of Columbia, Mississippi (after a job with Abby Williams) and of running eight miles to the next town to catch it. JC speaks of an auto wreck, in which a little Creole drummer from downtown broke his ankle. JC tells of playing at Jones Jewelry Shop, in Picayune, Mississippi, and of having an auto wreck in which the car he was riding got bumped into a barbershop.

JC played at Mama Lou's every Saturday and on holidays from the time he came out of the W.P.A. Band [about 1936] until the place closed [early 1950's], with the exception of the time he was in service during World War II. [Cf. other interviews and photographs. See Jazzfinder '49 yearbook for photograph.] JC mentions a police Captain DeLatte [spelling?], also a bass player, who was foiled by his wife in an attempt to tip the Mama Lou band too generously.

During his time of studying with Jim Humphrey, JC used the Otto Langey method book. Speaking of notation, etc., JC says he taught Punch [Miller] (then playing with Mack's Merrymakers at the Lyric Theater) how to play "Muskat Ramble"; JC got the tune from a Louis Armstrong recording. The Merrymakers wanted JC to go with them, as Punch "jumped" the band in Houston, returning to New Orleans; JC didn't want to go, however,

JC tells of playing with Earl Foster, in Bogalusa, and of the tire trouble they had on one trip from New Orleans to Bogalusa in Foster's car.

JC tells of playing in Chicago, being in and out of that city, around 1922, and of "bumming around" with Louis Armstrong there, when Armstrong was playing at the Vendome and at the Sunset [Cafe. C. 1922--RBA]. JC was stationed [?] in Ohio; he had a trio in Akron at the same time; he played piano and trumpet in the trio. JC tells of returning to New Orleans, becoming "famous" [i.e., well-known], traveling with his nine-piece band in Texas; he tells of an incident in Orange, Texas, when the driver of their advertising truck was shot and killed by rivals, perhaps bootleggers; the band were not harmed, but JC says he doesn't even want to eat an orange again. JC says he does not [want?] to go on the road again. He will go on Bourbon Street, if given the chance; Ricard [Alexis] wanted him to play at the Mardi Gras [Lounge], but JC was then working during the day at Gramercy, with good pay. RC also worked on the Gramercy job; he and JC reminisce.

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JC mentions [Edgar] August Saucier [spelling?] and his band;
JC worked with them at the Reed Hotel in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi;
JC would get a drummer and George [Guesnon] and Albert "Fernandez"
[Walters] and "send" them over there [to play?].

End of Reel II

