

JOHN JOSEPH

I [ONLY] -Digest-Retyped

January 18, 1962

Also present: William Russell, Richard B. Allen

Discussion is about photograph of the Holmes Band, of Litcher [Louisiana]; "Papa" John Joseph was once a member of that band. The bass drummer shown had only one hand; his missing right hand had been replaced with a hook. JJ says they were all "musicianers" [i.e., readers]. John Porter, playing baritone [horn], is shown. The bass player, Floyd Jackson, now lives in Bridge City [La.]. Davy Jones is shown; he, Jackson and JJ are the only survivors of that band. Clarinetist shown is [Dennis?] Harris. Professor Holmes and Joe Porter (brother of John Porter) were the cornetists; Joe Porter also had only one arm. Henry Sawyer was playing slide trombone; JJ says Sawyer was the first he saw playing slide, as all other trombonists were playing valve trombone then. Davy Jones didn't play snare drum [shown in photo] very long, as he didn't like it; he switched to melophone. He went to New Orleans, and then to Chicago; when he returned to N.O., he was playing saxophone. WR says Manuel Sayles credits Jones with teaching the N.O. musicians chords [i.e., the names and structures of the various chords and their use in playing variations on a theme]; JJ says Professor Anthony Holmes first started the practice [of teaching harmony]; Holmes taught JJ music. Holmes encouraged JJ into taking up cello; when saxophones became popular, JJ took up sax. JJ could always play a little clarinet; he began playing with bands three weeks after he got his saxophone. JJ was the first man in N.O. to have a saxophone; he got his in 1944. Floyd Jackson was a good musician; he never played in the city, only in the country. All the musicians in the Holmes band were good; JJ played with them when he went back to Litcher in 1913. Holmes had the only band in Litcher at that time. All the Holmes musicians played both "by head" and from written music. Holmes had confidence in JJ, and would have him fill in for any musician missing for a particular

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occasion. The photograph of the band was taken around 1901. The band played both for parades and dances; they used to "run" the N.O. bands, when they would come to N.O. for carnival. They had a banjo in the band, although none is shown in the photo, which was of the brass band. Three-string banjo was first; guitar supplanted it, later to be replaced by four-string banjo. Talk of five-string banjo. Talk of mandolin; JJ plucks one belonging to WR.

JJ identifies personnel shown on photo of Kid Ory band; Foster, bass [see below, p.3]; "Stone" [Matthews], guitar; Ory, [trombone]; a drummer; a violinist; no clarinet or piano (piano was not used in bands then). JJ thinks only the violinist could read music; the band played "tunk" [I.e., rough, or blues, or barrelhouse] music. The Ory band was from St. John [the Baptist parish]. The Ory band would come to N.O. for Carnival and various other occasions. The only mute used then was a derby.

Holmes taught JJ music; he started him on clarinet.

JJ played only a few times with Ory; Ory played for him, as JJ used to have a dancing place across from his [barber] shop, at First and Liberty [in N.O.]; Kid [i.e., King] Oliver, Ory and others [including Buddy Bolden] played for JJ; JJ wasn't a member of those bands, but he was playing music at the time. [WR says that JJ would not discuss Bolden with him. RBA, Jan. 7, 1966.]

The violin player shown in Ory's band is still alive; he lives "front of town" [i.e., near the river in N.O.] The violinist had a son who played trumpet, but went blind; he had a son who played piano; both sons still live uptown, in the Irish Channel.

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JJ plucks on the mandolin a bit; it belongs to Sylvester Handy; WR says the Handy brothers probably used it in their band in Pass Christian [Mississippi] thirty or forty years ago.

More talk about the photos of the Holmes band and of Ory's band. Talk of the various drum traps used then, and the ones used now. Ory is shown playing ~~valve~~ trombone; JJ says ~~valve~~ was what Ory played when he came to N.O.

JJ says he knows that he is [at least] 85 years old; he wasn't able to find his birth certificate when he applied for his old-age pension, so he used the date of birth his mother had entered in the family Bible, which was 1876. His mother died about nine years ago; she was not born during slavery times, but his father was "ten years old in slavery."

The bass player in Ory's band was no relation to George "Pops" Foster or his brother, Willie Foster; he was the brother of Dude Lewis, and is identified as "Fostair" [i.e., Foster] Lewis, who later played trombone; JJ says "Fostair" also played trombone in church; he died as a church member. RBA knew Dude Lewis, who played with the Joe ^VAbery-[Wilbert] Tillman band at Tyler's [Beer Garden].

(Eddie Summers enters.)

The drummer in Ory's band is identified as "Rabbit." The violinist is identified as Raymond Brown; at one time he was a trombone player; he was the father-in-law of [Fred] "H. E." [Minor]; "Clifford" Brown [^{Raymond Brown's} his son and not the modern trumpet-player] was a trumpet player, away from N.O. now. [Cf. other photos of Raymond Brown (then on trombone) in Mack Dorsey's Footwarmers; some others in that band: Tome ^VHarris, bass; Dorsey, banjo; Joe Harris, saxophone; Sammy Penn [drums]; Freddy Jones, trumpet; JJ, sax. Eddie Summers said that he played with Dorsey for a while, too.

JJ played bass with Claiborne Williams band. He knew Freddy Landry,

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says he was one of the best trombone players in the world; he now lives in Donaldsonville [La.]. JJ remembers Sullivan Spruiell [sp?] who "tried to play clarinet, but wasn't much on it." [cf. Esquire Yearbook Of Jazz, 1945.]

[Richard] "Myknee" Jones was from up Lutcher way, but from the other [i.e., east] side of the river; he was a good trumpet player, playing E flat trumpet, and a good piano player. JJ played bass and his brother played guitar for a picnic for some musicians, including Jones, Wellman Braud on violin (later with Duke [Ellington] on bass) and "Bowlegs" played with Claiborne Williams; Bowlegs courted a daughter of Williams, but Bowlegs was so dark Williams didn't approve of the match. Bowlegs was such a good drummer, however, that Williams allowed the marriage, which didn't last very long. The daughter, a good pianist, has a beer parlor, doing good business, in Donaldsonville.

JJ would like to see Floyd Jackson again; Jackson, perhaps close to seventy years old, played trumpet, organ, piano, slide trombone, bass violin and bass sousaphone. "He was a bitch on sousaphone, tuba."

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