

JASPER TAYLOR  
 I [only]--Digest--Retyped  
 [Probably] June 30, 1959

Also present: William Russell  
 Bob [SKW] ?]

Jasper Taylor was born January 1, 1894, in Texarkana, Arkansas-Texas. His first musical impressions were from his mother, who played hymns on [reed] organ and later, piano. JT remembers seeing Scott Joplin (also from Texarkana), but he didn't hear him play; he knew a relative of Scott, Essie D. Joplin, with whom JT went to school. A trombonist, Willie [Turrentine?], married Essie D. JT became familiar with Scott's music later, when he played "Maple Leaf Rag" and other of Scott's compositions. JT's first instrument was drums, which he prepared for by beating on pots and buckets, etc., with home-made drum sticks; he and some young friends had their "tin can band". He first played on a real drum when joined the military band at the industrial school he attended; he played snare at first, and then played a set of drums in accompanying a woman pianist playing for dances. The best bands JT heard before he went on his own were minstrel bands, from shows such as the Rabbit's Foot Minstrels, A.G. Allen Minstrels, Dandy Dixie Minstrels, Georgia Minstrels, Al G. Fields and Lew Dockstader shows [check spelling]. JT played in show bands during the summer months, returning to school in season. When JT left Texarkana in 1912, he had played music professionally only with the woman pianist; when he left, it was to play with the Young Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. JT was in the regular brass band, which played parades and for side shows.

JT says that the only kinds of music he had played by 1911 were marches and ragtime, that the band he was in had only one blues, something a trombonist had made up. When JT left the Wild West show, (about October, 1912) he joined the band and orchestra of the Dandy Dixie Minstrels, in Mexico. JT began serious study of drums and other percussion instruments, including orchestra bells and xylophone; the trumpet player with the band, Wilson of [ ] Pennsylvania (who played many other instruments), instructed JT in his studies, including reading music. WR says Baby Dodds said JT was the only "finished" drummer in Chicago-- that is, he said JT could not only play drums and read music, but he could play the accessory instruments as well.

While in Memphis, Tennessee with the Dandy Dixie Minstrels, JT listened to Eckford's [spelling?] Orchestra, which was playing in some cafe; the drummer's snare drum head split, so JT got his own drum for him. Then JT was invited to sit in, where he proved all his claims of ability. He was persuaded to leave the minstrel show to work in Memphis. A Mr. Baker, who was the pit drummer at the Metropolitan Theater (and a mail carrier by day), split his work at the theater with JT. The time was part of 1912 and part of 1913. JT met [W. C.] Handy the day after his decision to stay in Memphis; at that time, Handy operated a musicians syndicate, employing one hundred or more men, which sent bands (from two pieces to fifteen pieces) to play dances in the states of Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi [and presumably, Tennessee]; Handy also handled the society work there [i.e., around Memphis?]. JT thinks Handy wrote "St. Louis Blues" about 1914, when JT was working for him. WR says "Memphis Blues" was copyrighted earlier

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than "St. Louis Blues." Among New Orleans musicians playing for Handy were George Williams, a great trombonist (WR says Roy Palmer said he got his inspiration from Williams), [Cf. Roy Palmer interview?] Higgins, banjo and vocalist and Archie Walls, a great bassist. JT mentions the bands which were in competition with Handy then: Bynum's [spelling?], Eckford's, and the Big Six (of Vicksburg); Bynum's was the most popular of the three, and among its musicians were Jeff Clark, trumpet, [probably actually cornet] and Alec Valentine, trombone. Johnny Dunn, of Memphis, younger than JT, was playing part-time in the Metropolitan Theater; Dunn studied with Charlie Williamson, and his father ran a clothing store on Beale Street. JT says Handy was inspired to write "Mr. Crump" (which later became "Memphis Blues") in answer to Jeff Smith's "Beale Street Squabble." Then all the bands began writing their own tunes including waltzes, and eventually each band had its own blues. JT, asked about funerals with music in Memphis and Texas, says he didn't know of any in those areas, but that he played a few funerals in Chicago. He went to Chicago in 1917, to play in Clarence Jones's band, the house band in the Owl Theater, still under construction at that time, at 47th and State. Two of the members of that band were Arthur Hill, trombone and Wyatt Houston, violin. JT met many New Orleans Musicians in Chicago, but he points out that he met [A. J.] Piron, violinist ("and what a violin he could play") and Clarence Williams, singer and pianist, when they came to Memphis to plug one of their songs,

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"I Can Beat You Doing What You're Doing to Me" [copyright 1916]; they toured with the Handy band during the same period. JT also met William King Phillips, a great clarinetist in Memphis by way of Florida and New Orleans; Phillips was a great admirer of [Lorenzo] Tio, [Jr.]. JT first met and heard Tio in Chicago, when Tio came up with the first (that JT heard) Creole Band; some other members of that group were Armand [i.e., Manuel] Perez, trumpet, Eddie Atkins, trombone, and [Louis] Cottrell, [Sr.], drums (JT says Cottrell was a fine, steady drummer). [Compare photograph in (Esquire Jazz Yearbook 1945)]. The band gave a concert for Chicago musicians, who thereupon began trying to play like the New Orleanians. The music of the New Orleanians was different from that of any other city, except that medium and slow blues were pretty much the same everywhere. In speaking of styles, JT says that if a person [in Chicago] couldn't play the classics, he wasn't considered [as a musician]; when the New Orleans band had played, everyone wanted to play that way. The music was first called Dixieland, then jazz, then --. Most of the New Orleans numbers were played in a medium two-beat. JT says the band played Artie Matthews's "Weary Blues", and that he doesn't know how they had it; WR says the bands in New Orleans have played that one a long time, but usually call it "Shake It and Break It." JT says Robert Campbell, former trumpeter with Handy's band, and a close associate of Handy, told him that Handy got his idea for Spanish rhythms (viz., "St. Louis Blues") from having been in Cuba, with Mahara Minstrels, about 1906. [Cf. W. C. Handy, , and (Tom Fletcher ?) (One Hundred Years of

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the Negro in ,Show Business?.)] JT tells of meeting Freddy Keppard, at the Asia Cafe, 35th and State, which was a hangout for musicians and entertainers. (JT says that any place along State between 31st and 35th Streets that had entertainment had a band; he refers to the area as "The Stroll.") Bob [ ? ] talks. JT played in theaters and in after-hours places. WR states that JT was on the only recordings that Keppard made under his own name, "Stockyard Blues" [i.e., Stockyard Strut,] and "Salty Dog"; there were also some sides under JT's name. JT says "Stockyard Blues" was his [tune]. Some of the others on the recording date were [Arthur] Campbell, piano and [Eddie] Vinson, trombone. The band was about twelve pieces. [Cf. record] WR reminds JT that some years previously, at John Steiner's, he had identified the clarinetist as Johnny Dodds; JT agrees. JT played woodblocks on the recordings. JT only played washboard with James [Jimmy] O'Bryant's trio. [Cf. discographies. (JT, wb, with Clarence Williams?)] He began playing washboard at the same time as he began playing slapstick, with Handy's band on a date in Mississippi; he had been clapping on part of "Memphis Blues", but he decided to put two boards together to do his clapping. He got the boards from a woodpile, and at the same time picked up a washboard; he got the idea from seeing a man who played harmonica accompany himself by strumming on several lengths of bamboo tied together [alongside each other]. JT could do a lot of acrobatics with the washboard.

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JT thinks the records under his name and the ones under Keppard's name were made on the same date. [Cf. discographies] JT then talks of Jelly Roll Morton, whom he met in Memphis, and with whom he played a few jobs there; Morton had his own "Jelly Roll Blues" then. They later met in Chicago, and JT played drums on an early [the first?] Morton recording session, for Gennett. Morton later told JT that he was the first drummer to play a solo on record, but JT can't remember the incident. Morton was a fine pianist; JT got along with him well. Morton would say, "I am great and I know it"; JT says, "And he was." JT thinks Morton was the one who started riffs in music; he cites "King Porter Stomp" as an example. JT doesn't know whether Morton got the riffs from playing in a band; he says Hillmans, who worked with Morton in New Orleans, said Morton usually worked as a single there. JT played many times with Morton, on dance dates.

The names of Jimmie Noone and Joe Oliver are mentioned. JT speaks of good New Orleans drummers: [Fred "Tubby" Baby] Hall, who had a great reputation for holding a steady tempo. Differences and technical aspects of press rolls and five-stroke rolls are discussed; Hall played five-stroke, Baby Dodds used press (Zutty Singleton came as close to Dodds' press as anyone). JT talks, saying a really good drummer must be able to "feel the beat"; Hall, Dodds, Singleton and, to some extent, JT could feel the beat; also, Gene Krupa.

JT thinks Jimmy Bertrand came from New Orleans, through Memphis and on to Chicago, where his professional music career began. Bertrand, besides being a washboard player, was a schooled drummer, and a good one. He had studied xylophone and tympani with Rusick [spelling?], of the Tivoli Theater band, and with several other good drummers. J.T. studied drums with Russick [spelling?].

JT talks about Jimmie Noone, saying he was a great musician; he thinks Noone wrote "Sweet Lorraine", which was his theme song; he thinks Noone's wife was named Lorraine. [Check composer! Not Noone?]

JT didn't ever play in New Orleans, although he went through there on a bandwagon. He was reared thirty miles from Shreveport, Louisiana, and has played with many musicians from the state, and that all had good rhythm.

JT tells of Freddy Keppard's joining Tim Brymn's [chek spelling] band at the Coconut Grove in New York, of his success there, etc. JT says Keppard had a strong tone. Keppard could read, but usually preferred to play by "head."

End of Reel I

