

KIMBALL, JEANETTE  
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped  
February 10, 1962

Also present: William Russell

Jeanette Salvant Kimball was born and reared in Pass Christian, Mississippi. (WR says [John] Handy came from that town; JK says Ricard Alexis was from Bay St. Louis.) JK graduated from high school in her home town, and then joined Papa Celestin's Tuxedo Orchestra, after Celestin split with [William "Baba"] Ridgley. [Compare discographies for date.] JK was the only member of her family who was really interested in music, although her sister took piano lessons for a time; JK began studying the piano when she was about seven years old; her mother encouraged her in that. JK was a member of a Catholic church in her home town; there was music in the church, including that at social activities; she also played for plays in school (attended elementary public school and Catholic high school). She played any type of music, including popular.

Sam Morgan's band played for dances in her home town, and although she didn't attend them (because they were public), she heard the band as they played on their advertising truck. Celestin's band began coming over later, and she heard them. Celestin auditioned JK, at her home; she had never seen an orchestration before, having played only from sheet music [i.e., piano copies], but she played "Alabama Bound" and other pieces well enough for Celestin to ask her to join his band; her mother gave her consent when Celestin

promised personally to take care of JK. There had been several piano players with this band before JK joined; one was Emma Barrett; another was Sadie (possibly [Goodson], sister of Billie Pierce). JK joined the band in 1926. That particular band remained intact about two or three years; then Celestin organized a 14-piece orchestra, with JK as a member of it. Members of the 1926 band: Celestin [trumpet? cornet?]; Paul Barnes, alto sax; Sidney Carrere, tenor sax; John Marrero, banjo; Simon Marrero, tuba; August Rousseau, trombone; Abbey "Chinee" Foster, drums; JK, piano. JK recorded with that band, for Columbia; titles of some of the tunes, which were written by John Marrero: "Station Calls" and "It's Jam Up;" another one was "My Josephine," written by Barnes and Celestin. The band had several recording sessions when JK was with them. WR says "Shots" Madison was second trumpet on some recordings with the band; JK says he was in the band before she joined; trumpeter Ricard Alexis was also before her time with the band. Guy Kelly, trumpet, was in the band during JK's tenure, and made records with them later than the session containing the tunes mentioned above; Kelly was a wonderful trumpet player; he was in the big band. [Compare discographies.] JK remained with Celestin, in the big band, until 1935, when she quit playing to rear her children and further her education. [Compare reel II, p. 5. She did not travel, but did play]. She rejoined the band in 1953; the band was still led

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by Celestin, until his death in December, 1954. Celestin's eight-piece band, the 1926 band, played mostly stock arrangements; Paul Barnes and John Marrero did a little writing for the group. The fourteen-piece band used special arrangements, exclusively; Cecil Thornton, alto sax player, of St. Louis, Missouri, did the arrangements; JK liked them because the piano parts were difficult and challenging. The 1926 band played most of the society jobs in New Orleans; they played Carnival balls, for both white and colored organizations; the [white only?] balls were held at the Athenaeum.

JK credits her first teacher, Mrs. Anna Stewart with giving her the fine foundation of her musical training and piano playing. Mrs. Stewart is now retired, and lives in New Orleans. JK still studies music. When JK was in school, she tried to play any piece of music she could get. The first piece of sheet music she ever played was "My Gal Sal." JK has always been able to improvise. JK taught a large music class when she was eleven years old; it consisted of both adults and children; some of her pupils are now teaching music.

There were a few two or three piece bands playing for dances and parties in and around Pass Christian when JK was growing up, but they didn't sound like Sam Morgan's band. Kid Rena's band also played some in Pass Christian, and Tom Albert (now about 83 years old, and living on Burgundy Street, says WR) also brought over a band

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very often; at that time, there were dances held almost every week.

[Compare Tom Albert, reel                   ?] While still a child, JK played at a hotel, the Inn By The Sea, with the Watson brothers-- mandolin, guitar, banjo and bass; they played at the place on weekends. JK knew the Handy brothers, who had a string band, according to WR; JK went to school (intermediate grades) with them. WR mentions Sylvester Handy. JK didn't know Ricard Alexis until she came to New Orleans; a brother, Lester [Alexis], drummer, now lives in Biloxi. Ricard Alexis had mentioned that he played with and studied with Lorenzo Tio, Sr., who had moved to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. JK knew only Lorenzo Tio, Jr., clarinetist, a member of [A. J.] Piron's band, whom she met after she came to New Orleans.

JK says she lived at the piano when she was beginning her studies; she took three lessons a week (cost of all, fifty cents); her teacher couldn't keep her supplied with new material because she played so much. JK mentions Ruby May Townsend, who began studying piano when JK did; RMT was also quite talented; she was a public school music teacher later, and died about four years ago.

Talk about playing piano once considered "sissy" for boys; WR mentions Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton as one who had to be talked into playing the piano because of that reason. JK says quite a

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number of boys took piano in her home town, but there were more girls taking piano, and [the girls? the boys?] didn't think of playing in dance bands. Women who have played in dance bands, other than JK: Emma Barrett, Wilhemina Bart, Mercedes Fields, Billie Pierce and her sister, Sadie. It is now rare for a woman to play in a dance band, says JK; she taught her girls piano, but didn't want them to be musicians, and was glad when they "chose other fields." Celestin's was the first band JK played in. When she joined the band, she came to New Orleans, where she lived with a friend of her mother until she [JK] got married. The friend took care of JK, as she knew JK was only sixteen years old [born in 1910?].

JK's first music date with Celestin was on the [Pythian Temple?] Roof Garden, where she heard Manuel Perez's band, also on that job the same night; they played for the New Orleans University [senior?] prom. Mercedes Fields was Perez's pianist. JK says the job was September 19, 1926.

JK heard Buddy Petit and Chris Kelly in New Orleans, although they may have played on the Gulf Coast when she lived there.

Manuel Manetta had quit playing piano when JK joined the Celestin band; Manetta substituted several weeks for Paul Barnes [alto sax]. Steve Lewis, pianist with Piron, is mentioned; JK says he died soon after she came to New Orleans. JK admired the playing of pianist

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Walter ["Fats"] Pichon (now blind); besides being a great pianist, he is also a fine arranger, and wrote some for the Celestin big band.

When Celestin and Ridgley split, Emma Barrett went with Ridgley; JK joined Celestin several years after the split, as the Celestin band had had several piano players before JK joined. [Compare discographies.]

Some others in the Celestin big band: Louis Barbarin, still with the band [Celestin's Original Tuxedo Band], [drums]; Narvin Kimball, banjo; Meyer Kennedy, Oliver Alcorn and Clarence Hall; saxes; Guy Kelly, Celestin and Herman Franklin, trumpets; John Porter, bass [tuba].

End of Reel I

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John Porter played tuba [in the Celestin big band]. August Rousseau was the trombonist in the Celestin eight-piece band; Bill Matthews was the trombonist in the big [fourteen-piece] band. Matthews stayed with Celestin; he, Louis Barbarin, Narvin H. Kimball and JK were original members of the band [???]. Meyer Kennedy and Clarence Hall were original members of the big band, but they now play with Dave Bartholomew. JK says the band was kept busy day and night. They did a lot of traveling throughout the South. JK says Celestin didn't have two bands when she was with him; there has been a story that he had one band which traveled, while another band filled his New Orleans engagements; JK says he might have had two bands when she was out of the band, from 1935 until 1953. [Celestin had two bands when he played at the Paddock Lounge. One played his outside engagements and the one at the Paddock was actually not under the leadership of Celestin. Compare interviews with members of these bands, i.e., Louis Barbarin, Sidney, Octave Crosby, and Ricard Alexis. RBA] Celestin was out of music during the [World] War [II], and also when he broke his leg, says WR. Celestin used Octave Crosby when he went into the Paddock [Lounge, on Bourbon Street?]; JK says he also used Mercedes Fields during the same period. [In the "outside" band.] Albert French and Joseph ["Brother Cornbread"] Thomas were with Celestin then, too; JK is in the band with them

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now; Eddie Pierson, now dead, was with him then, too [in the "outside" band]. JK did play with other bands between 1935 and 1953; she played with Herbert Leary for about five years; she also played solo and with [about] a six-piece group at the Dew Drop [Inn] for about two years. She says she was still in music, but couldn't travel, so she played with "stationary" bands. She didn't do much teaching, as she was rearing her children and going back to school, studying [academic?] as well as musical subjects. She hasn't got her degree yet, but doesn't feel that she is too old. Both of her children have college degrees.

JK recorded with Celestin's band for Joe Mares, on his Southland label; she was on the recording of Celestin's "Marie LaVeau." She has also recorded for Mares with Johnny St. Cyr and with Doc Souchon; she has been on quite a few sessions. The [long playing] record with "Marie LaVeau" is called "Golden Wedding," JK thinks. She didn't do any recording with Celestin's big band.

JK says music students should have a good foundation--written work, [musical] catechism, etc.--before they begin playing the instrument; she says that kind of study has paid off for her. JK says she owes everything to her first teacher, Mrs. Anna Stewart, who is still living, in New Orleans, in retirement. She was a graduate



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of the Boston Conservatory of Music. WR mentions sight singing, which students had to study years ago. He mentions Manuel Perez, who taught students in that manner. JK says her ability to transpose has been very valuable. JK has not composed, but when she and her husband [Narvin H. Kimball] were in music together, he composed and she helped him; he also arranged, and she helped.

End of Reel II