

LILLIAN HARDIN ARMSTRONG
Reel I [of I]--Digest--Retype
July 1, 1959

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Also present: William Russell. The interview was recorded at
421 E. 44th Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Lillian Hardin Armstrong was born in Memphis, Tennessee; is a "little younger" than her ex-husband, Louis Armstrong [b. July 4, 1900]. Her father is said to have played mandolin. She tried to play her family's "front room" organ as soon as she could reach the keyboard; a cousin pushed the bellows pedals for her. Began piano lessons as soon as she entered [grade] school, with Miss Violet White; later went to Mrs. Hook's School of Music, "graduating in music" when 11 years old. Played only classics (Grieg, MacDowell, et al.), marches, hymns; exposed to jazz "a little at a time" by guitar-playing cousin; LA remembers his playing and singing "Buddy Bolden's Blues," otherwise known as "Funky Butt." LA attended Fisk University in Nashville for 2 1/2 years, as "music special"; moved to Chicago, with mother, in 1918. By chance, LA got a job in a State Street music store, playing piano to demonstrate sheet music; when her mother retracted her original objections to the job, LA went to work for \$ 3.00 per week, for Mrs. Jones, owner. She got a raise to \$ 8.00 in about 2 weeks, because her playing was attracting people. She had been there a month when Mrs. Jones, who also booked bands, sent her to a Westside Chinese restaurant to audition with a New Orleans band; personnel: Eddie Garland (who called the tunes) [bass]; Roy Palmer [trombone]; Lawrence Duhe (who

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kicked off the tempos) [clarinet]; "Sugar Johnny"[Smith, cornet]; Tubby Hall, drums; Jimmy Palao, violin. They did not use sheet music which surprised LA. In fact they did not even know what key they were in. She got the job, although she was too young to work legally in night places; she was afraid to tell her mother about the job, or to go back to the music store. The band worked about 4 weeks at that job, then went to the South side. LA was getting \$ 27.50 per week with the band, but was showing her mother only \$ 8.00, pretending she still worked at the music store. She worked until midnight. To explain her late hours, she told her mother she was playing at a dance studio. LA played the various places (the South side place being the DeLuxe Cafe) three months before an acquaintance told her mother she had seen her little girl playing with a band at a cabaret; LA alibied that the studio gave an exhibition, for which she had to play. Her mother accepted the first explanation, but LA was found out soon. Determined that LA quit, but deciding to investigate the "nasty, stinking" cabaret first, the mother sent LA's stepfather, Mr. Miller, who reported that the place was a regular sporting house; the mother went to investigate, but was flattered and charmed by Mr. Shaw, the owner, who had been forewarned by LA. LA was allowed to continue working, but her mother came to ex^sport her home every night, until she met the band and decided that Tubby Hall was suitable to bring LA home. Sidney Bechet came to

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Chicago with Mack's Merrymakers; he joined the DeLuxe band, making two clarinets in it; he quit when he discovered that Duhe was getting more money. The band moved across the street to the Dreamland; Freddy Keppard replaced the ailing Sugar Johnny. When the band broke up, LA stayed on as house pianist, playing with the band led by Wash, a violinist. LA played with Joe "King" Oliver when he brought his band into the Dreamland; from the Dreamland, LA went with the Oliver band to San Francisco, in 1921, where they played 6 months at a ballroom on Market Street; then to Oakland for a few weeks, and [then to Los Angeles?] LA returned to Chicago instead of going to Los Angeles and was replaced in the Oliver band by Bertha Gonsoulin; Minor "Ram" Hall had been replaced by Baby Dodds; Eddie Garland was on bass there. La returned to the Dreamland, working with May Brady's band. Oliver's band returned to Chicago in 1922, going into the Royal Garden, Gonsoulin still on piano; Armstrong had joined the Oliver band, on 2nd cornet, and LA met him when Oliver brought him to the Dreamland to ask LA to rejoin his band. Gonsoulin went back to California, and LA rejoined Oliver at the Royal Garden. In Spring, 1923, (LA says her mother made a diary entry which said LA went to Richmond [Indiana] on April 23, 1923) [Check date in discographies], the band went to Richmond to record for Gennett; Gonsoulin did not record for Gennett. LA explains the New Orleans Wanderers recording sessions; Tommy Rockwell, of Columbia, records,

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asked her to get a band together, and to write 6 tunes, putting Armstrong's name (as composer) on three and her own name on three; Armstrong was not to play on the session, as he had a contract with Okeh; George Mitchell played cornet. When the records came out, Armstrong's name was printed very large, as though he were playing on them, by the tunes he was credited with composing; misunderstanding progressed; Armstrong slapped LA (the only time he did so), accusing her of knowing all about the deal, and saying he had spent his half of the money she gave him (for the tunes she had composed). LA says the session was the first [jazz] recording session made using written arrangements; she says "Perdido Street Blues" was written out entirely, even to the solos; she made all the arrangements. The band had one rehearsal only. LA says the Hot 5 never rehearsed, except in the studio. LA tells of a singer, who was rehearsing with LA, Bud Scott, Johnny Dodds, et al; the singer stopped, saying, " I can't sing that song in that temperature (meaning tempo)."

Besides working with LA at the DeLuxe, Freddy Keppard^{she} also worked with ~~her~~ at the Lorraine Gardens (40th and State); LA says he was a very fine trumpet player, better than Oliver, but everything with Oliver and his band was so well organized, and rehearsed, although there were no written arrangements. FK was a jolly, carefree sort. When Armstrong was working with LA at the Dreamland (after he had left Fletcher Henderson), he began to be talked about; Keppard challenged Armstrong, borrow-

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ing his horn; Keppard played and played; LA said to Armstrong, when Keppard finished, "Get him!" Armstrong, who really played when he was angry, played so great that people were standing on chairs when he finished.

Other New Orleans musicians in Chicago at the time, and playing with LA at the DeLuxe (although later than the first-mentioned time): Manuel Perez, who was in Chicago earlier; Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], at the same time. [Richard Curry], the drummer with Franz Jackson's band, was also playing. Tony Jackson, accompanying four girl singers, played opposite the first DeLuxe band; he also played at the Pekin Theater; Jackson died shortly afterwards.

LA first heard Jelly Roll Morton play when she worked at Mrs. Jones' music store; Morton played some there. LA says she must have decided to play heavy and strong after she heard Morton, whose style she liked. LA says a lot of New Orleans musicians preferred her playing to that of many men, because she would play loud, and support them. While playing at the Lincoln [Royal] Garden with Oliver, LA would be tempted to get away from her usual band style piano; when she would begin making runs, Oliver would turn to her and say, "We already got a clarinet in the band." LA says because of her supporting role in the band, she rarely got a solo on records with that band.

End of Reel I

