

## NICK LAROCCA INTERVIEWS

May 26, 1958: Reel I

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: <sup>e</sup>Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Bartholomew  
(Buddy) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen; Ralston  
Crawford

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[LaRocca:] Well, you see this here, sir? I bought it. I didn't buy it, it was given to me, as a present.

[Crawford:] How long ago, Mr. LaRocca?

[LaRocca:] This would be in 1920. This was given to me. I think it's the only left-hand instrument that you'll see [on] a sign up at Tulane. They have a big photograph of Buescher instruments. This is a Buescher. See you finger it from the left, now ordinarily you played with the right.

[Crawford:] Yes, yes.

[LaRocca:] Don't ask me to blow it because I have heart trouble, and I'm not supposed to blow on the instrument any more. Not drink, nothing.

[Crawford:] How long since you have played?

[LaRocca:] Well, before I had this last heart attack, I used to sit down and blow a little bit, and ----.

[Crawford:] Just for yourself, that is?

[LaRocca:] Just for myself. Yeah, you know, just to sit around and blow a little bit on it.

[Crawford:] But how long did you play with an actual group of musicians--with bands?

[LaRocca:] Well, with bands I been playing from 1904.

[Crawford:] Yeah, but how long? I mean what is the last time--though--?

[LaRocca:] In <sup>1936</sup>~~1938~~ I reorganized the band when this music was being taken away from New Orleans. They were calling it Chicago Swing. Benny Goodman was in ascendancy then, and what he played, if you look at it the "St. Louis Blues," is a copy from my cornet part and also Larry Shield's clarinet part. He admits to listen to records of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band when he was only eight

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years old. And I played, when I first start playing in a group would be about 1904. Most of these groups I play with were young boys about my age. They played string music, and the only brass was in the band was me, so I play with one group was--. I think I've repeated myself. Is that all right?

[Allen:] No. Go ahead.

[LaRocca:] In Long Beach, California--not California--Long Beach, Mississippi, where we played for dances. There was Henry Young, Joe Giuffre, a fellow by the name of Joe the Barber, and myself. While Joe Giuffre played the guitar, Joe the barber was the bass. Henry Young was a talented violinist who was a learned man. He could play any kind of obligato or variations [when you learn his in books?] against any melody. Well, at that time I only knew strict melodies--you know, straight melodies. Well, we come back to New Orleans that winter; I had joined another group called Tujague's Band. Well, Tujague--he was a butcher in the Magazine market--and him and his brother played. The one played guitar, one played bass, and Henry Young and "Foncy" Price, who is now dead, played viol, second violin to Henry Young here. It was 1905--could [have] been 1906--I start learning breakdown. Breakdown was a piece of music that they would call, well, and uh--. This man was a little older than I was, could be about six, seven years older than me. I could of been about eighteen, this man about twenty-five, maybe twenty-six, and breakdown was just to start in one key, and then they come to another key so when they hit down to B-flat on the guitar-- which this man play before you hit down to B<sup>b</sup> they'd to holler breakdown. Now if you've ever fingered a cornet that you know, if you played the instrument on one key, and then you try and you're not a good musician--if you try to play another

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key you either have to try to play a little harmony, a little melody, a little something that come to your mind to fit in with it. Now it was easy for the string instruments to go down on these different keys because they were playing in easy keys, but I wasn't a learned musician, I was just a faker, and comin' up. You know what I mean--I couldn't transpose. If I played in one key I'd have to play it in that key in that early day--the earliest stage of the game--and by changing the key made me play different things. Well, I start fittin' in different little things to the music and they thought it was great because they were carrying on with the two violins. Henry was playing variations and the other fellow would keep on to the melody. By the time we had gone to the F, by the F key, this fellow would holler "B<sup>b</sup>." Break down, I see, breakdown was everybody for themselves. Incidentally, I got a tune called "Everybody For Themselves." Now later, in my later days I made this tune, but it's never been made published. But it's copyrighted and I copyrighted it under an assumed name. I can hum a little bit on here for you. Do you want to hear it?

[Allen:] I'd like to hear it.

[LaRocca:] [Scat sings a bit.] And so on. I have the music; it's copyrighted in 1921. I had that copyrighted. It's called "Everybody For Himself," and it's under the name of Billy Johnson, but it's copyright owner is D. J. LaRocca. It's my own number.

[Crawford:] Now why did you do that?

[LaRocca:] Well, I'll tell you why I did that. The reason I did that, because I had so many numbers owned by me, by Nick, and I had to share with the guys in the band. You understand what I mean? I try to look out for myself. Up to this time these fellas rode my back. They compose nothing--only . . . Shields

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who collaborated on some of the numbers. Ragas' name is on some of them, but he did nothing but just hold the chords down on the piano which I gave him to play. Shields collaborated an' on the numbers that Shields collaborated he's got his name on there.

[Allen:] Yeah.

[LaRocca:] Now, I'm trying to break away from this and get money for myself. I seen the handwriting on the wall, that some of the fellows wouldn't work. All they was doing was taking roy--getting the royalties [and] contributing nothing to the music. How would you feel? Then I start putting out popular numbers. "Some Rainy Night." Their name is not on that either. "Ramblin' Blues." Their name was not on that--just Shields and my name on that.

[Crawford:] But Shields was a real collaborator?

[LaRocca:] Yes sir, Shields collaborated from the begin--not from the beginning. I had four tunes out before Shields ever collaborated, but his name was on the "Ostrich Walk," but I had them numbers before I left New Orleans. I had brought them there. Now these guys say they played these numbers. Possibly they did. How many bands did I play with? I jumped off this breakdown here. You question me, that's how I got to know how to form melodies against a chord construction. From then on I was on my own. Now where was I back on the other side? We was talking about collaboration of Shields.

[Allen:] Yeah.

[LaRocca:] That begins in New York. We collaborated on "Jazz Band Ball," on the "Fidgety Feet," and I think on the "Clarinet Marmalade" was one of my numbers that he collaborated on there--just he and Ragas' name on that [unintelligible], see, because everyone of the names on it, the guys were getting jealous, they'd

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think that my name should, they name should be on there, so I put one of their names on there. Now you bring me into a place a little ahead of time, but I just as well go onto it now. So "Livery Stable Blues." The "Ostrich Walk," which was than at New Orleans, I called that "Tear Eagle's Nest Down." One was named "HUNYARD!" [Mr. LaRocca's spelling].

[Allen:] Oh, excuse me, but where did you get that name, "Tear The Eagles' Nest Down?" Did it have anything to do with it?

[LaRocca:] I thought it was cute, you understand? It was real hot, you know what I mean, something when I'd blow this out there, the nest--the birds' nests--and the things may fall. You know what I mean, like the kids. Foolin' 'round, I thought something would come down because it was such a--I thought it was a good number, which became one of the pieces mostly copied after in American music even down to "Tiger Rag." Now we come to that part, the "Tiger Rag." I'll let you know how I composed that, and maybe the world'll look at me as the man that never didn't do nothing but copy; but he wasn't just only copying. If you notice the ending of my tune like I showed you, that negroes used for the background of their thing eight years after us. [Scat sings.] Now you take the first part of the "Tiger Rag," what's it say? [Scats.] Now what is that? [Scats.] Did you know what it was? No, you wouldn't know? [Scats.] It's a piece of tango. Why did I put it in there? Because being a faker when they ask me for tunes, and I didn't know it, I'd blow back at 'em [scats]. That mean to say, "Get over, dirty, yeah, get over dirty," just like "where did you get that hat?" That was out before I made mine, but the idea came from those things, "Get over dirty." That was one people--they say this thing was taken from a quadrille. They're wrong. It was taken [from]--I had told you before,



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the "London Bridge." And that's the second part of the "Tiger Rag."

[Allen:] "London Bridge?"

[LaRocca:] Yeah, yeah, in stop time. [Pause] It's strange, ain't it?

[Allen:] And we've [you've] got the sheet music for "London Bridge" but you never have seen the sheet music for the quadrille, have you?

[LaRocca:] No sir, I never seen the sheet music for the quadrille.

[Allen:] Have you ever--.

[LaRocca:] I wouldn't know how to read it.

[Allen:] I never heard of the sheet music for this particular quadrille that "Tiger Rag" is supposed to be taken from. But we've got sheet music for "London Bridge"--so what does that prove?

[LaRocca:] Well, I'll show you how you prove it: [scats "Tiger Rag" and then "London Bridge"]. Now you put the stops to it, and I'll lay my head on the track if it ain't it, because I created it. And I know where it come from. Now we come to the back part. The other part is a rehash of the "London Bridge." In other words, I could compose tunes. But I had a simple mind. I was, as they say, elementary. But I had more originality than all these people that live today in this music. Now we come to the last part. I played a melody against John Philip Sousa's--let me see, I'm mixed up--"National Emblem March." [Sings. Trio sung as "Oh the monkey, etc."] Because these numbers was on the phonograph, and I played along with 'em. Now the idea come for the next part. Did you ever hear the German band--umpapa, umpapa, umpapa? Pa, pa? Now elongate those notes and you get [Sings these notes with Jack Carey background for clarinet.] I'll tell you, this is no negro talking; <sup>this is the white man that created this tune talking--</sup> not a man that they filled with liquor. I didn't have liquor, and I never had needles in my back pocket, either, to talk.

*Getto check with LaRocca on this "Jack Carey" business!  
 9/10/58*

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You ask me something I'll tell you where it come from and how--it came about. We come to the next part. "Hold that, Hold that Tiger." Well, I wouldn't want to put this on tape, but this gentleman says to do it. Well, my place that I ever composed music was sitting in the back house. That's where I learned how to play in the toilet--on the toilet. Well, once during the spring and the winter my mother used to give us a purgative. I don't think I should put this on there.

[Allen:] Well, go ahead.

[LaRocca:] Go ahead with it?

[Allen:] Sure. Nobody'll hear this, you know. We can save it, you know and--

[Crawford:] Put it down right.

[LaRocca:] [Scats "Hold That Tiger."] By blowing the cornet I was making, by forcing, the back part would go bfstlpt. You understand what I mean. And that give me an idea of putting that into the tune; and I tried to make that on the horn, and I made it on the horn. On the horn, see, on this cornet. Not this one. The one that I had was a little bitty piece of junk. Now that's the whole "Tiger Rag" in completion, and there's no part of the quadrille, and if anyone says that they have it in there, if he'll play the "Tiger Rag" against what I told you about [scats]. You see I wouldn't say this because I put my neck [out]. If a good musician heard it, and it ain't gonna be right, but I know where I got it and that good musician can't say that it's different.

[Allen:] Well, I'll believe that they got it from the quadrille when I see the sheet music. You know, that makes sense.

[Crawford:] You've never seen it?



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[Allen:] No, I've never seen the sheet music, and nobody else has.

[LaRocca:] I'll tell you what it is. It's all lies concocted by a bunch of Communists who received money from Russia, the NAACP. Bill Handy, who was a big member in that, and I believe was the start of that, he couldn't even play jazz or the blues he committed to paper. This negro here had went into the hands of a receiver; and I know this tune ["St. Louis Blues"] by the name of "Jogo Blues," and I used to play it in the band. And Russel Robinson says to me, "You know whose tune that is?" I said "No." "That's Handy's tune," and I says "it's a damn good tune," I said. I say, "let me go over and see him about it; [I] may be able to record it for him." At that time he was in the hands of the receiver. I went on over there and he wasn't there. I spoke to his brother. His brother said "Well, go ahead." We agreed on a 10 per cent of the take, that is, of the recordings that was made, whatever would accrue to the recordings made by the Dixieland Jazz Band. That was agreed on. I recorded the number, and after I recorded it I got one fifty dollar check and one rotten one. Hold the machinery--a minute, will you.

[Allen:] OK. Go right ahead.

[Crawford:] This is from "Handy Brothers Music Company, Inc., Pace and Handy Music Co., New York, New York, August, 1921, Mr. D. James LaRocca: The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, 147 St. James Place, Atlantic City, N. J. Dear Mr. LaRocca: We are in receipt of yours of the second, addressed to W. C. Handy, which we had forwarded the same to him. We wish to call your attention to the fact that he is out of the city ever since the 16th day of May and it looks as though he will not return till the last of this month. He has his

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organization with him and he is very busy. If you do not hear from him immediately, do not think that your work is not appreciated. I must to say that it is a wonderful record and I think that it will be the biggest seller of its kind. When you return to the city we will be pleased to have you call in to see us at any time. In the meantime, wish to call your attention to the fact that I am sending some orchestrations of your late numbers which I trust that you will make very good use of same. Especially, 'I Like You Because You Have Such Loving Ways----' "

[Allen:] Want me to read it?

[Crawford:] Yeah, what is that about?

[Allen:] "Aunt Hagar's----"

[LaRocca:] "Children's Blues."

[Allen:] Wait a minute, "Especially 'I Like You Because You Have Such Loving Ways' and 'Aunt Hagar's Children Blues,' which are our plug numbers." Finish it, Rolly.

[Crawford, continues reading:] "Give my kindest regards to Mr. Russel Robinson if he is still with you. With best wishes, we beg to remain, very truly yours, Handy Bros. Music Company, Inc. P.S. If you have a photograph of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, one that I could use for a title cover of 'St. Louis Blues,' [I] would like very much for you to rush same to me so that I could use this for our next issue."

[Allen:] And that's signed Charles Handy?

[Allen:]

[LaRocca:] There's the check. <sup>^</sup>He's the president, Charles E. Handy; W. C. Handy Secretary-Treasurer.

[Crawford:] And here's a check for fifty dollars from the Solvent Savings Bank

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and Trust Co.

[Allen:] [Looks?] like he didn't have sufficient funds.

[LaRocca:] No, he went into the hands of the receiver. I never bothered him then because I was making three hundred to three hundred fifty dollars a week. It's been said I never did nothing for the colored man, but this will show you what I did for the colored man. And many other colored men that were to follow.

[Allen:] Well, this is a Memphis bank, and it's signed Charles Handy.

[LaRocca:] That's correct, that's where they kept the account. They originally were from Memphis, Tennessee. Was called Pace and Handy, the original firm. Now this negro recorded after Ralph Peer. I think this man runs the Southern Music Co. today, if I'm not mistaken. After our big success on Broadway at Reisenweber's, January the fifteenth, which we opened there, and which the sensation we created was something that they had never heard of in fifty years on Broadway, the Columbia Co. [Okeh?], trying to get somebody to compete with us, sent this Ralph Peer to New Orleans, where they recorded every white band, every colored band. He found none playing the same idioms or the same music that we played. That's when he went to Memphis, Tennessee, and Handy was, had the reputation of having the greatest colored band in the United States at this time. He traveled all over extensively, this colored man here, with his orchestra. I think I played in the last record, one of his records, on tape, I played you one of his records, and you can see what he played.

Now it's said that the negroes came before us, I also contradict that. They came on March the sixth the great Creole Band, if they took the trouble to look up the New York papers. Maybe you have 'em at Tulane University there.

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You'll see that I'm telling the truth, and these communistic writers are lying about this jazz business. They were a failure. They stayed there two weeks. Now this was one of the greatest negro bands that they had in New Orleans. Their last act would appear around December the twenty-seven in Variety.

You'll ask me how I remember those things. Well, when a man's goaded as much as I have been, don't take long for him to remember these things. If you've been crucified by a bunch of crumbs, not men, parasites. I wouldn't call them men, because if they were men, they would have come and talked to me and seen what I had to offer--then write what they want about me. But today they tell me I played ragtime. And only in these records you'll find pristine roots of jazz. They say we weren't the creators of this music. They said many other things about us. They ridicule us. I've been often talked upon like I was a thief. Somewhere that one book had that--I think Charles Edward Smith in a book he wrote, he says, yes, that LaRocca says that the people was astounded at the small amount [number of] the musicians--they could get so much music out of it. He meant in a different way, that I had taken other people's music. Well, I have proof that the negro didn't play this music in a previous tape that you've taken from me. If anyone's honest and wants to study them things they'll see where the negro got their material.

[Allen:] Now, Mr. LaRocca, I want to tell you that we've made some tapes Saturday night of Raymond Burke; he used to work with you, you remember?

[LaRocca:] He didn't work with me.

[Allen:] He didn't work with you?

[LaRocca:] No. He played with me once or twice [With Wynn's band. Wynn was a drummer.]

[Allen:] Yes?

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[LaRocca:] I know Larry Burke--you know who Larry Burke is? He's Jules Cassard's nephew.

[Allen:] Yes, and he has some very nice things to say about you, and talked about your playing, so you'll be happy to know that other people are backing your story up. If you go to the musicians, and some of them will, and Raymond is one of them who'll back you up.

[LaRocca:] Well, Sharkey might because Sharkey got up and Sharkey lost his place in the Jazz Club by telling the people I was the one who brought this music around the world. Sharkey was pulled off a program for the same thing. Now Sharkey was a boy about eight, nine years old when I was a musician playing music. Sharkey wasn't playing music. Harry Shields wasn't playing music.

[Tony] Parenti wasn't playing music, Georgie Brunis, that they play [on the radio?]-but they got their mouth open big as an alligator trying to get some credit that is not due them, and I didn't think it was fair. They say I never give people credit. I have given people credit. I have give Armstrong credit. I have give Bix Beiderbecke his due credit--he tried to strike a new style. And I'll show you where he got his style. [Scats.] I'll reverse that. I can't think of it now what he uses in his thing because off hand you get mixed up. It'll come to me after, and many of the licks that Bix made I showed him. He came to me as a schoolboy. When he was seventeen years of age, he ran away from home. His people ran a phonograph store. At that time there was only one jazz band he liked. [He] come to see what we looked like, and he come and he asked the doorman could he get in. They looked at him. He was too old, [young?], and he said my daddy plays in the band. He didn't know me; I didn't know him. So he came on up there and he say, "Mr. LaRocca," just like he know me, and I



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had to get him off the floor. I said, "Sit back here, son." I thought he was a boy from New Orleans. I let him sit back there. That night I seen he didn't have a place to go, well, I used to go out most every night, and I had a room doing nothing [until?] I'd come there. "You got a place to sleep?" He says, "No." I brought him to my place and he'd play my cornet all day, play on the cornet, asked me to show him different things which I did. I kept him there a week. And the boys in the band told me, said, "Nick, you doing the wrong thing, you're harboring a minor, you're liable to get in trouble. You understand, you better send that kid back home." So I got him, put him on the train, paid my own money for it, sent him back to Davenport where he lived. [In] 1923 he comes again. This time he plays pretty, he's playing good cornet. He sit in. I let him sit in the band and he played, he played all my numbers, the only numbers he styled himself on. He don't have a place to stay now, but he meets a buddy about his own age or half. They had Lawrence [Shields, who] had quit the band, and this fellow Jimmy Lytell had went and formed the Memphis Five, which was a Brooklyn organization, and I had taken on this Artie Seaberg. Artie Seaberg was about Bix's age and they bum together, but I had [to] feed him every day. They was a restaurant called Demmy's [?] Restaurant; he could go in there any time he wanted and get food and I paid the tab for him. He stayed there about three-four weeks. Then this boy loan him the money to go back home. I have letters right here that you can see.

[Allen:] Now I know, you or I, we don't want to take credit away from Bix for what he had, but I-----

[LaRocca:] Bix was a great man!

[Allen:] Yes.

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[LaRocca:] Bix was a great man!

[Allen:] But also I'd like to ask you what are some of the tunes Bix recorded that you remember, and could you tell me some of the sources? [Bix recorded thirteen tunes with the Wolverines in 1924. Six were recorded previously by the ODJB. Later he recorded at least eight tunes which had been recorded by the ODJB.]

[LaRocca:] Well he made "Toddlin' Blues." Many of the Dixieland numbers that he did, like the rest of 'em did, took another tune or rehashed a Dixieland number, and he called it his own. All the musicians began to get the idea, and the closest that I seen came to it was the Bob Crosby bunch. They take my "Fidgety Feet" and they called it "South Rampart Street Blues,"--ah, "South Rampart Street Parade." Now I betcha you could play compared both of 'em together with the only, with the exception of the first part and that last part, the march--you know that break, the march part they put in--because I played [scats trio of "Fidgety Feet."] And they play the countermelody to that, and you listen to them records you'll know where they style it. Now they were the only ones that I know that was getting close to what I used to do in a big scale. They took this "Maryland" [rootoo, etc.] but they were nuts, because that had no part of "Maryland" should a been with its own harmony. But they added a tune [?] themselves that Leo Feist made money on it. And they got nothing, ya understand what I mean? I don't know who created that part. That's a different tune.

[Allen:] Well, what did they call it?

[LaRocca:] They called that "Maryland." Their mistake was that.

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[Allen:] Yes?

[LaRocca:] You understand this number? [Sings "Maryland, My Maryland."]

[Allen:] I see.

[LaRocca:] And then the clarinet would go [scats]. Y'understand?

[Allen:] And Feist issued this as what?

[LaRocca:] Correct. "Maryland."

[Allen:] He did?

[LaRocca:] A new arrangement on "Maryland." They got exactly nothing because they didn't use this [pointing to his head]. This is a separate tune. Anyone-- listen, you take the "Tiger Rag" [Scats, then sings "Yes, We Have No Bananas." Scats again.] And many tunes fit into that. I don't say they got it. But like I got ideas of these men--certainly I was not the only one. [Sings, "Jada, Jada, Jada, jing, jing, jing."] It all comes from the same kind of stuff. These tunes came after.

[Allen:] Well, what about the bands in the late 1910's and the early '20's?

[LaRocca:] Well, they all played ragtime.

[Allen:] After they heard your music?

[LaRocca:] Well, wait a minute. In 1910?

[Allen:] 1910's, in the late 1910's, you know 1918.

[LaRocca:] Well, now the bands, they played regular popular tunes. And I never heard any numbers that was improvised or worked on. If they played a chorus of different tunes they may have add lil bit flourishes to 'em with their own. I don't say they didn't do that; but they were playing ragtime. I played ragtime. The rhythm wasn't changed until I hit Chicago. Now this [is] gonna to be a strange thing, and this is why they say the miracle couldn't happen. It was a

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dance team called [thinks awhile]--wait a minute--the Castles. And the Castles was bringing out a new dance like a straight dance--like a walk. Now ragtime music would fit it, but I noticed the general public, it was hard for them with the methods of the music we were playing--that jumping music--so I decided to play in march time, slow down, making a fox trot out of it, fast, making a fast march. Instead of the four beats [that] was customary they was playing around New Orleans, we made two beats and a syncopated beat. That's what give it the driving qualities. Now the musicians that came up from New Orleans they still were playing ragtime. Many of them followed us up to Chicago. I'll name you many of the bands. Brown came back the second time, he was still a failure. They had Johnny Fischer's band; he's still a failure. Nuroth's band; he was still a failure.

[Allen:] Who was that?

[LaRocca:] Nuroth, Freddie Nuroth [Neuroth?].

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Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: <sup>e</sup>Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen

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alternative  
spellings  
Deutschman(n)



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[Allen:] Go right ahead.

[LaRocca:] There was Didi Stevens, Ragbaby Stevens, and the Berenson brothers.

[Allen:] What were their names?

[LaRocca:] "Doc" Berenson and Benny Berenson, I don't know "Doc"'s name.

[Allen:] Well, that's good enough.

[LaRocca:] He stayed up in Chicago and he taught music. Now most of these guys outside of one or two of 'em, were note readers. And a note reader couldn't play even good ragtime like the boys in New Orleans played--they played it a little bit different than a note reader played it, but that didn't stop 'em from coming to Chicago. They came, but no band drew the crowd.

When we went to Schiller Café, to the Schiller Café, well, let's pass that, we want, well, let me start. We went to the Schiller Café; it was here after the first few set of dances I seen the people didn't like the music. They like, they liked it, it was a little different, but it didn't pep 'em up. I began to say "Well, we're gonna take the railroad tracks and walk home." That's a hard long walk (a thousand miles) back to New Orleans. And I began to watch their feet move. Now maybe they'll dispute me on this: I was one of the best dancers that they ever had in New Orleans, and I coulda give anybody competition on any kind of dance, whether it was the shimmy, whether it was fancy dancing, or the tango, or any other dance. This is takin' a lot of territory. But if many of the boys around New Orleans will tell you they've seen me dance, and wherever I went they put a spotlight on me, and I knew dance rhythm. And I watch what these people were trying to do. You couldn't spin around and make those spins round with this tat-ta-ta-ta-ta kind of music. You'd have to have smooth music. That was the beginning of jazz music. In the following week or two weeks, the

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people began calling this music [?], more jazz, more jazz. Little by little we caught on and made a big hit, and only a certain amount of people could come in there; they had firemen out there and a policeman, and if four people got ran out of the place, four people could come in.

Now they was many position open for the fellows from New Orleans but they starved to death. Can I tell you what happened to some of 'em?

[Allen:] Surely.

[LaRocca:] Well, there was Eddie Roland came up there. He came up there with Tom Brown on the second try.

[Allen:] Can you give the instruments the people----

[LaRocca:] He played clarinet. Well, Eddie Roland, after two weeks, they were thrown out of a job and they was put in jail for no visible means of support. They was only one person he knew, and that was me. Because I happened to be the oldest musician of the bunch that ever went out and played up around out of town. And I hada pay his way out of jail--it was twenty-five dollars--put him on the train and send him back to New Orleans. I have never received one penny from him. He's dead now, up to this day, went into the locksmith business somewhere down here in Natchez Alley, or somewhere, and he made good at this business. I don't know whether he kept his music up any more. Now, many other boys, they came to me for handouts. And I'd help 'em out. Try to get 'em jobs, and do everything that I could for these New Orleans guys. They couldn't seem to catch the rhythm that we had changed. They thought they played better than me. I was supposed to be the lousiest cornet player in New Orleans. If you hear 'em talk they'll tell you about Vega. They'll tell you about Manuel Mello [?]. They'll tell you about Johnnie Lala. They'll tell you about Joe Lala. They'll tell you

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about everybody, but they ain't going to tell you nothing about Nick LaRocca. They'll tell you about Richie Brunies. You can look up their records and see what they did for this music, where they went, and how far they went.

Because of my originality, putting different things in, they thought it didn't belong in the music, that I--I didn't know what I was doing. What I added to the music pleased the people; and they like it. And whenever I played for an audience, I didn't play to the musicians, I played to the audience because they were the paying customers. That's psychology. And I prided myself on trying to be a good business man in that way. If the tune was too ratty, had too much to it, I'd tone it down, give 'em a little more melody, so they could understand it. But after we'd get there three or four weeks, and they heard me play the same tune, then I'd cut it up and they'd like it. Now they have already had a christening of what I was playing and now they know what I play. But you could not play to a green audience these harsh numbers that they had no melody just made out of arrangements like. They wouldn't understand that music. A musician would. They'd didn't.

Now many of the boys from New Orleans couldn't come in the place where we played cause they had to sit at a table, they had no money, and they couldn't style themselves on any music. When <sup>four</sup> the ~~the~~ weeks was up at the Schiller we ask for more money. Well, Stein was in the band, and so was Nunez at that time. Nunez played more of a melody clarinet and I was 'bout to get rid of him and put [in] Shields who had played with me in my early days around New Orleans. Now Shields and I played together all the time around New Orleans.

So when we left the Schiller they taken an injunction against us. It was a Jewish man, Sam Rothschilds. Now the ow-- -- Sammy Hare was the owner and he

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was Jew too, but he said, "This Jew is not going to take advantage of you poor kids." He says, "I'm going to send you to my lawyer," he says, "and I'll give you work in my place although I don't have a band there, but I'll put you to work until you fellows gets set." I says, "All right Mr. Rothschild." He sent us to the lawyer that they had. Sam had already taken injunction to keep us from working. So I went to the lawyer and explained the case, and we didn't have the copy of the contract. The case came up the next day because it was an emergency, this lawyer had prevailed upon a lawyer [judge?] to hear our case, see what I had to say. So the lawyer instructed me what to say. And here was words this man told me, "Your Honor, we throw ourself on the mercy of the court. We're not allowed to work. We have no way of earning a livelihood and we may become a public charge on the City of Chicago." Well, the judge asked Sam Hare's lawyer--Sam Hare did not appear in court, the lawyer was there to represent him--he had twenty more weeks contract at \$25 a week. We couldn't live on that; room rent was \$12 a week. I was married, and I hadda send money home. Didn't have no money to send home. How was we to live? We'd a starved to death. So when the lawyer got up there, the judge looked at the contract and says it don't specify no hours in there, he says till closing time. "Now what is closing time?" he asked me. And I said, "We work from eight o'clock sometimes to five o'clock the next morning." The judge looked at him and said, "I thought slavery times was over. Case dismissed. You boys go get yourself another job. Good luck to you. au revoir."

We went over to work for Mr. Rothschild. I'm going ahead of my story. Stein did not want to come with the band. He stayed there at the Schiller Café at \$25 a week. When I used to get on the floor and dance over there, and pick



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up about \$10-\$20, we would have to split it with the entertainment [that] was there. They had three girls--two girls singers, a man singer and a piano player. Now whatever they collected they kept for themselves, and we were forced to split with them. I thought that was an unfair division because the people was giving it to the band and not to them. Well, that was one of our complaints. The next complaint, we didn't have enough money to live on, even with these collections because room rent was so high in Chicago, and eats was high. We were maintaining two homes. So Mr. Rothschild give us the job. So we use a Chicago drummer there by the name of Earl Carter. Now this is one of the changes again in the band. The first band, I forgot to tell you the name of the first band. When we went to Chicago we had no name for the band. Five names was put in a hat and Stein's name came out. It was called Stein's Dixie Band. Later when the people start calling our music jazz, Harry James billed us as a jazz band. At the <sup>Del Abbe</sup> B<sup>+</sup>labbe [spelling?] Café we didn't decide on any name at all. We worked there four weeks--two weeks with Earl Carter, until Sbarbaro came up from New Orleans.

[Allen:] What was his name again? Carter?

[LaRocca:] Earl Carter, a Chicago drummer. He filled in for two weeks. Then Sbarbaro comes up and takes his place. This man know that that's all the way that we use him for two weeks, and we did do pretty good at the <sup>Del Abbe</sup> B<sup>+</sup>labbe. Then Harry James buys an interest in the Casino Gardens and with the Ackenbauer [spelling?] and Reeves and approaches us and offers us \$75 a week to play in the Casino Gardens. We went and played at the Casino Gardens--that was <sup>[at]</sup> ~~Kenzie~~ [?] <sup>Kinzie</sup> and Clark. <sup>[Streets]</sup> In that band was Sbarbaro, Nunez was still with us, had Edwards, Ragas and myself. Well, this man, uh, on the clarinet, he liked to drink, mix



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with the people. And you can't go anyway doing that: mixing with the patrons of the place, and drinking with 'em--sitting at the table. And everytime we'd want him would put you in the mind of [remind you of] some bordello, da-da. You'd have to give 'em a signal for him to come and play. So I got mad at him, and I had heard from Shields, and I had sent Shields money to come to Chicago. Then I give this man his two weeks notice. That was about the second or third week that--uh--that we played at the Schiller Café. We started there around, coulda been in August, somewhere in August, I'm not sure of the exact date cause we finished over at the Schiller Café was May, June, I mean March, April, and May.

Del Abbe

And in June we work at the ~~F~~ Tabbe. It could been July. We worked there till the last, the latter part of December, with Shields. Now this is the band that got the name Original Dixieland Jazz Band because prior to that we had no billing. We were billed at this place as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band by Harry James. Cards were given out. There may have been notices in the paper, I don't know.

Now they had many musicians who went and played at this place, that we left at the Schiller. All of 'em had failed.

None of 'em made a success. The crowd followed us, and it was here that Jolson and all the theatrical people would come in to hear this music. Jolson induced Max Hart, then a theatrical agent, to take us to New York on a tryout--two weeks tryout. We spoke it over amongst the boys and we all agreed, what we got to lose? We may stay all our lives and we ain't going to git no further. Unless you make it to Broadway, and make a hit, you ain't nobody. So, we taken the chance.

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We arrived in New York around January 7. We had no tuxedos, no photographs. The agent put the money out for us to come up there and we laid around New York [at Baletta's] for about eight days, getting photographs made, having tuxedos fitted to us. And then we were ready to open at Reisenweber's. And it was a new room that opened on the 15th. I'm not sure whether it's the right day or the 17th, but we had already played at the Paradise Room, for sample, you know what I mean? And we played the Coconut Grove to see how the music would go. When we opened up the 400 Room, the people got in there and they beat on their plates. They did everything they could. We opened up with the "Tiger Rag." Well, they'd been used to hearing violins and other soft instruments and we blasted it out. Was a big crowd in there. So some of them began, "Take them farmers back home." Send right 'em right back where they belong." Our agent happen to be there. He asked Mr. Schultz to get up and make an announcement. Mr. Schultz happened to know a couple of young couples there. He say, "Get up and try to dance to their music." He says, "You know this music is not for listeners. It's for dancing." So they got up and danced. First one couple, then two couples, then the whole thing was crowded. That night, that morning, we didn't get off until five o'clock. From then on we were a sensation. And uh, we crowded the place every night, weekdays as well as Saturdays and Sundays. Was no different. All the great actors come there--Carlyle Blackwell [ ? ], Charlie Chaplin, the Jay Goulds, Franklin Simons. Men from the United States Treasury used to bring in twenty-dollar, brand-new bills off the press, and we used to collect in our sugar can as high as a \$150 to \$200 per night. We went there for about--it was \$700, I believe, or \$750 and after the four weeks was up ~~(END OF REEL)~~ we got \$1,200 a week. Now for five men getting \$1,200 a week, and having all these

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bullfrogs crowing down here about jazz, they musta been either tending to their knitting or they didn't have the stuff. It ain't that they didn't try, because they came, like I told you before, March the sixth came the Creole Band. Red Brown reorganized his band, he came. Johnny Fischer came. The Detroit [Dedroit] Boys came. And all of 'em went back to New Orleans with their tail between their legs and their ears hanging down.

[Allen:] Who is Red Brown? Now tell us about-- --

[LaRocca:] Tom Brown.

[Allen:] Tom Brown?

[LaRocca:] That's what they called him--Red Brown. That's what I know him by. He came back. He may have went to Chicago, and they broke up--went with other bands. We was still packing 'em in.

It's a funny thing that the northern men who began copying their music from the Dixieland Jazz Band was to make good. You had Ted Lewis, I don't say he played good jazz, I don't say he ever played jazz, but they were trying to copy. You had Earl Fuller, you had Ross Gorman, you had Vince[nt] Lopez, the Memphis Five, the Indian Five, all people from the north. You had the Dorsey brothers with their Clambake Seven, and their jazz band in 1919. That's what they first played, jazz. The Memphis Five, they played. They copied from the records of the Dixieland Jazz Band. And if any one wants to go listen to their recordings of the early records, all of 'em copied. Now as well as I had talents of changing things around, I believe these other men who followed us musta had a certain gift of talent that they could take these licks and make 'em sound a little different; but now when it comes down to rhythm, no one has ever improved on it, or no one has ever been able to get away from the rhythm. They may have changed the licks, but they never have changed that rhythm that was started by the Dixieland Jazz Band.

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There was thousands of places who was crying for this kind of music. That the New Orleans boys was a staying in the background is beyond me. Only with the coming of the jazz clubs that they needed a few Judas Iscariots to lie for them so they could turn around and give credit to the negro race for something that they didn't have nothing to do [with] in the beginning. And the records that I show you bored--, will bear that out. Because if it is said that these negroes went before us, or Brown went before us and he played the same rhythm that I played and the same music that I played, then to them would have been the glory. You woulda never heard of Nick LaRocca, or either of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. This day, you would have heard of them. But they made no impression, and I say their music was no different than the music that was played by the other men from the North or the South or the West or anywhere else. It only was in one band, and that was in the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. That takes a lot of ground, but let them prove to me where they worked--any place that they worked that they made a success. It's easy to have a handbill printed. It's easy to make up your own stories and have people print it, but it's not easy to have 'em put in paper, what you did, in the newspapers. That's what I go by. I don't go by hearsay; I don't go by what's printed by these jazz clubs, or these jazz critics; I go by what is proof, like in a--when you went to a court, a court don't take hearsay, and they don't take printed handbills or made-up handbills. After 30 years these men are beginning to find out. They dig up corpse and different things to find where this music come from. They'll look back on the recordings.

Now no one stopped these men from making records. The Creole Band said they

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could a made a record. Well, they may call me a liar, but if Mr. King is still living in the Victor Company will verify what I tell you if they made a record and it was not commercial, it was never was put out; it was scrapped. The same way that the Columbia Company did, when the [y] recorded us. They was beyond the comparing, comprehension, they beat hammers, they did all kind of noise, they wouldn't give us a chance to record, and they ran us out the office; we recorded for Columbia first before we went to Victor. The[n] Victor come to us after we were a tremendous hit on Broadway where we crowded the people in at every flo--and Reisenweber was packed with people. And we were billed on the outside, owing to the length o' the name, Original Dixieland Jazz Band. They put just "Creators Of Jazz" on electric sign and it stayed there for for three years--for three winters, not three years. We played in '17, '18, and a part of '19, a feat that has been unequalled by any musical organization or act to this day.

I believe I told you the change, about Nunez being changed to Shields. Now that's second change in the band. After Reisenweber's, in conjunction with Reisenweber's we played shows around New York, which you'll find [in] notices in the Tulane files, I forgot to tell you we played shows in Chicago, with a fellow named Johnny Fogarty while we were at the Casino Gardens. You'll find that in the Tulane files, too. That was the first introduction of jazz into theatres. [Allen:] Could you--I hate to interrupt you again--but as you go along could you give me the details on the records you made? I'd like to hear about that. What you did for Columbia, and how that happened--the different tunes.

[LaRocca:] Well, on the Columbia--

[Allen:] And all that--

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[LaRocca:] Max Hart fixed a date for us to go up there, up there and make a record. Now this place was located at 60[th] and Broadway; it was only a block away from Reisenweber's. We went up there one morning to record, and they told us to play over the piece. When they did that they were all putting their hands to their ears. Some was in the back hitting on hammers, making noises; they didn't care to put us in the right position. And they taken two lousy records [tunes], and they paid us \$250 for nothing. For the "Indiana" and "Dark Town Strutter's Ball" we recorded for them. It was in January, about the 27th or 28th. But after our great--shall I tell you again? We were run out, we were actually run out the place.

[Allen:] Yes.

[LaRocca:] They didn't give us chance to even get our instruments; they give us the check and out we went, and they was booing us, beating on hammers and laughing at us. The music was beyond their comprehension. They didn't take the time to even give us a break to make a good record.

After the tremendous success that we had created at Reisenweber's, the Victor Company approached us. They were more [pause] patient--they had more patience with us. They set us up in the hardest way of playing that I've ever played in my life. We played into an eight-inch horn, that is the diameter outside the horn. The horn coulda been about three-foot long, and it was eight inches in diameter, and out of that came a little horn about four inches in diameter, where Larry was to play, and I stood back about twenty to twenty-five feet. The drums was alongside me. He was not supposed to use the bass drum because he would break up the wax, or the matrix--dig holes in it and ruin it. All he would play was in between like--you know--like the licks in between. He



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could do that, and he played mostly on the kettle drums and on the wood blocks and bells. Now this is the hardest way in the world of playing music, of having musicians separated, because when musicians are put together like they record today, you can feel one another--you can almost know what the other man's gonna do by the feel. I don't know, it's a certain feeling you get when you playing music, you can feel the other man's actions and reactions to what you're gonna do. Me standing twenty to twenty-five feet. Edwards was about fifteen feet from the horn, and Larry stood 'bout four feet from this little horn, and the piano was facin' me direct under the horn. Now they had a white light--a white light was would burn and I--when they change, you supposed to watch the light up there, the red light would come on, then each man was to count mentally two, and we started. It's beyond me how we ever started together. I don't know, but it looks like God was with us because we always started together. I was in the back of them. They could hear me but I couldn't hear them. Now they was no way of me a throwing in an extra lick here or there, because if I did and I missed out, that matrix was ruined and the whole thing was ruined. It's not like the rubber lip men play today. They play a chorus, and other man takes the chorus. I'm not criticizing their playing, but these rubber lip men couldn't even play these recordings that we played in the position that we played in. They play with electric process. He can play as slow and easy as he wants, and in the booth this man raises the volume up to make it equal to the other. There were no raising the volume here. You had to cut or be cut with down the Dixieland Jazz Band, and I believe that's what gave us the edge on all them: because there were no time that I'd ever have to take down on any record. When it went twelve hours, I could still hold that horn to my mouth and play it. Now this might be bragging, but I

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have did it many times. Till for dances, topple over [Till the dancers toppled over] I'd stay there and play, one after the other until the managers make them stop, and that's the kind a clientele we had at Reisenweber's. They were all rich people, and they liked it. They went for it. We brought it out of the Casino Gardens, which was a sort of dive you may as well say.

[Allen:] Excuse me for interrupting you, but how many matrixes--how many times would you cut a tune. I'll put it that way since I can't pronounce anything this morning.

[LaRocca:] Well, we played a test record over once, see what I mean, a test. And [we'd go over?] that, then we'd start on a real matrix. We may make two, three, sometimes four. But not more than three or four of each tune. And we made as high as sometimes three tunes in a set, and that's actually almost a night's playing right there.

[Allen:] And did Columbia issue those records? That's another question.

[LaRocca:] They didn't issue them till May--till "The Livery Stable Blues" became a national hit. It was all over the world, even down in Honolulu and all where American forces went they were carried it overseas by the American troops which we entertained over a million men. I had passes to every port, in every hospital in New York, and we entertained the soldiers and sailors. I played on the bill with Caruso. I played on the bills with Jolson. I played on bills with Eddie Cantor. In fact Eddie Cantor used to work downstairs in the Kiddy Review for Gus Edwards. I played with witha--what this Red Hot Mama, what's her name?

[Allen:] Sophie Tucker.

[LaRocca:] No. Ya, I played two times under-with the same boss with her, but

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not with her. I played once at Reisenweber's in 1919 when she was supposed to come in the 400 Room and they put her in the Paradise and left her [unintelligible] stayed there till our time to go to England, see? Those people were good to us because we made business for 'em. We made fortune for them. They never got a cover charge before until the Dixieland Jazz Band would get a dollar a <sup>couple</sup> ~~times~~. They paid nothing to us. [ We earned it ?], we earned money for them, they didn't pay anything for us. They made money--made a fortune on us. You had to pay a cover and have a card to come in there. In other words you was a member of the 400 Club, that's was [to] exclude the riffraff and the cheap customers out. Because they had--[ ?] the more popular this music was getting, the more riffraff was coming to get in on it. So they formed a club. You'd have to have a card to get in. You'll see that in the files recorded there anda--Where was I? Well Mae West---

[Allen:] She was one of them?

[LaRocca:] I played on bills--sure I got 'em right in there. When you go to them thing you'll say [see?] I played with Eva Le Gallienne. She came here. She's not from New Orleans. They give her a great big spill in the paper. I'm a poor little dago boy on the other side of the tracks; I was headlined on the same bills with her and they didn't even know me; they didn't know who I was. Came back here in 1925, nobody even noticed me. I never looked for notoriety; I never looked for nothing; I never looked for credit for nothing; I never went anywhere. I came here a sick man, and I had a nervous breakdown, and I came here for my health. I had made a lot of money. I came here almost with \$100,000. The other boys didn't have that much because they used to go spend their's with women--run around here and there and spend it, and I'd saved mine, because coming

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from a poor family, and knowing it was only one opportunity in my life to make it, I was to make this one opportunity--the old adage say, opportunity only knocks once, and I made the best of it, and I have--

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## NICK LAROCCA INTERVIEWS

May 26, 1958: Reel III

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: <sup>2</sup>Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Bartholomew  
(Buddy) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen; Ralston  
Crawford.



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[LaRocca:] Well, I'm skippin' again. I'd like to tell ya when Ragas died, or before when Ragas was sick, that we had trouble getting a piano player to play the rhythm. We first had Billy Hollander who had heard us for two years and in a orchestra in the next room from where we played at Reisenweber's. He sat in there 'bout four days until we had Harry Shields come up who was a brother--

["Buddy" LaRocca:] Eddie Shields.

[LaRocca:] Of Larry Shields.

["Buddy" LaRocca:] Eddie, Eddie Shields.

[LaRocca:] Eddie Shields, Eddie Shields.

[Allen:] Now, Harry's a clarinet player.

[LaRocca:] Yeah, I made a mistake. Eddie Shields. He was older than Harry, and he came on up there, and he couldn't fit into the rhythm. We kept him two weeks to make enough money to go back home. We tried out every song plugger. We were to go to London, England. I had already sign the contract with the Morris Agency to go to London and open at the Joy Bells Theatre and out of a clear sky after trying about--had Sidney Lansfield sit in the band. Today he's a big movie executive now. You know I'm not going to say this because that man could sue me, but he played with me two weeks and he couldn't make the grade, Sidney Lansfield! He's out in Hollywood somewhere, he's a big movie magnate today. And a--

[Allen:] Well, I hate to ask this; this is embarrassing to him, I know. What did you require of a piano player that he couldn't--?

[LaRocca:] They could not play the rhythm.

[Allen:] I see.

[LaRocca:] They couldn't get the rhythm. As simple as you'd think it was, not

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even Al Bernard, who was the greatest piano player on the American stage, he couldn't fit with us. He disrupted the band. Each one of 'em, they played a different kind of rhythm than we played. It was not only till the records come out till these fellows began to decipher and know what our success was from the rhythm.

[Allen:] But, did your piano play just--uh--straight chords, or one and two--?

[LaRocca:] Played chords--

[Allen:] Or did he go like this?

[LaRocca:] And he played bass and contramelody. Were able to fill in; in other words he'd hafta know the rhythm first, play the chords then; and he played bass too, you see with his bass hand; in the other one he played contra-melodies. No melody.

[Allen:] Yes.

[LaRocca:] All contramelodies and harmonies and that's what he was to play, and I couldn't get these fellows, all they played bird music on top of the piano, bird music to the top [laughter].

[Allen:] I know what you mean.

[LaRocca:] There was no foundation to 'em; they disrupt the band. Now, along comes Robinson. He comes to the hotel (I was staying at that time at the Ponchartrain Hotel, now called the Wilson Hotel--they may have change the name again). That was in the back of Reisenweber's. He [J. Russel Robinson] heard that--from going around music publishers, he heard we needed a piano player. And I says, "Yeah," I says, "can you fill it?" He says, "I think I kin. Me and my brother was going around picture shows as an added attraction. Playing

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in the picture shows along with your records. I played the piano, my brother played the drums, and they used to think we was a whole band." We [He?] had a great big phonograph, a great big horn on it, and that's how he learned the tunes. I went over to at Reisenweber's early afternoon with him and I heard him play. He played better than anybody that I've ever heard play before. I says, "All right, you want the job?" He says, "yeah." Well, he filled in for Ragas on two theatre jobs. We had a jobs that we had, one was in Brooklyn, one was in New York, and we leave for London, England. When we got to London, England,---

[Allen:] I'm sorry, I didn't get anything about the trombone player there,--  
 [LaRocca:] Hold on! Wait a minute! Yes, Edwards was drafted around in the middle-- --almost in [the] fall. We came to New Orleans to get a trombone player. Emil [Christian] played cornet. He had been with several bands up to Chicago, and they were unsuccessful. He came back to New Orleans to play, and when we came back here to look for a trombone player, Sbarbaro met Emil and told him--asked him--if he knew a good trombone player. "Well, how about giving me a chance?" Emil had start to change to the trombone. He says, "All right." We went to Shields's house. Shields lives [ ? ] which is now a colored neighborhood today--that's 3rd and Willow. We sat down in there with a phonograph record; played along with this man here, which is Christian, until he learn all the parts that Edwards could play, and it was almost four weeks. Went back to Reisenweber's to resume our place. And you have [a] notice in there [of the] return of the Dixieland Jazz Band--coulda been somewhere in September, the sixth or seventh. That he played October the 8th, he played on

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the Winter Garden with us, the first time Emil played, first time any trombone player, played in the show. And he played a series of shows with us before we went off. That was the new trombone player. His parts was copied from Edwards' trombone part. Now, you don't have to believe me, but take the records that Emil played, take the records that Edwards played, and you'll see that he's copied the trombone parts of Edwards.

[Allen:] Did he make any records [ ? ] in this country, with you, Emil?

[LaRocca:] He made two records with us, "Satanic Blues" and "Lasses Candy," which was never put out by Victor. Those is the records he made before we went to London, England, and they never were released.

[Allen:] Thanks, now uh what about the Aeolian-Vocalion records? Who did you use on?--

[LaRocca:] Well, I'll tell ya--

[Allen:] Was that made before you went away?

[LaRocca:] That brings in another story. I'd better tell that story before I go too far.

[Allen:] Well, now [ ? ] we gettin' to London.

[LaRocca:] No.

[Allen:] Be ahead of our story, wouldn't we?

[LaRocca:] This should come before London. After the first Victor release, called "Livery Stable Blues," when we went to record this number at the Victor, we was told the name was suggestive and to change the name [to] "Barnyard Blues." We went over and had this thing taken down and Max Hart, who was the theatrical agent, had this number instead he copyrighted [of copyrighting?] it under my

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name, like it should have been, he copyrighted it under his own name, and he was the owner of the copyright. This man had we just been a flash in the pan, this man woulda been a millionaire today. So this is the case of the "Livery Stable Blues." Nunez who had played with me said he helped compose the tune. <sup>Frank Erdman</sup> [Urban?] who had give me the affair and the name, the original name, because I had no name for none of my tunes. I'd call em dirt, snotball, anything else, just like that--and each one they'd--"Play some of your dirt," they'd say to me, "Play some dirt." Well, that's what I'd play, understand? Some of these makeup tunes that I had. They had no name to 'em,--

[Allen:] "Tiger Rag" didn't have a name?

[LaRocca:] No, sir, outside of <sup>Hunyardi</sup> ~~Hanyatti~~.

[Allen:] And you ca----

[LaRocca:] And they didn't know it. They didn't even know I called it <sup>Hunyardi</sup> ~~Hanyatti~~. They didn't know it; they just say, "Play some dirt."

[Allen:] You mean the people or the band?

[LaRocca:] No, the band, the fellows in the band, "Let's play some of the dirt."

[Questionable material erased.]

[Crawford:] No, they don't think it's low.

[<sup>"Buddy"</sup> LaRocca:] I wouldn't put that in there.

[Crawford:] Every man has talked that way. You know. Only means he's talking straightforward. I think--

[Allen:] Wait a minute, I can't hear. No wonder. I got the--"Tiger Rag," we did go over "Tiger Rag" a little bit, but--

[LaRocca:] Well, here we go again. Much has been said about the "Tiger Rag."



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Alan Lomax discovered a man, well, called Jelly Roll Morton, a man who's never been honored or given credit for anything that he's done anything. Maybe he played good jazz, I don't know, but he would have to be after the Original Dixieland Jazz Band because I never heard him. I never heard him today, and they discovered this man, and he goes in the Archives of the United States Government, somewhere where they keep this folk music. They set him up two jugs of wine and sever--probably several needles that he could use, to get his story out right. I not only want to dispute him and all the rest of them on this "Tiger Rag." I'll tell you how this "Tiger Rag" came about. I was elementary. I don't know nothing. I was self-taught on the cornet. A man that's self taught only has a limited amount of material he can draw on. And then different ideas come to you; you tried to put 'em together. My inability to learn new music put me on my own, that I hadda make up my own music if I wanna to be different and have 'em play different tunes, or play the same tune all night. Well now, I'm going to take this "Tiger Rag" apart. The beginning of this "Tiger Rag" begins with an ending that I always made to my numbers. And this is it [scats]. Now if any one has any musical ears at all, they'll hear that in many of the endings that I made. Only this time to make "Tiger Rag" out of it, or a different number, I add just a few little notes [scat], then a little bit [scat]. I'll stop right there, and show you that [scat] is a piece of tango [scats tango] that's like the "Paloma" [sings "Paloma"] and that was meant when people bothered me too much and I didn't like 'em. I would blow that lil few notes at 'em and meant "get over dirty." Now that was added to the tune. Now we come to the other part [scat]. Remember that good. Now I'm gonna go over

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that again [sings "London Bridge Is Falling Down."] That is the stop time of "London Bridge." Now they needn't to dispute me on this thing; but I constructed this number, I should know where I got this music from. As I said in another tape early, I only knew the numbers of my childhood days, that was like "Ring Around the Rosy," "Here Comes the Boat around the Bend," and many other tunes which I incorporated in other tunes that were to follow. Now we come to the trio. It's nothing but the chord construction or vehicle of Sousa's march. It's "National Emblem March" by Sousa. If you take this, and you put the rhythms against this, you'll see that is nothing but the vehicle of this tune [sings march, "Oh, the Monkey" strain] and so on.

[End of Spool]

["Hold that Tiger," "Hold that Tiger," sings] right with the same rhythm. The only think I ever did to the music was change the rhythm. Take it out of the march that they played it in, and take it in a syncopated form. There was two beats syncopated. Now we come to the part, you know the old German bands when I was a child I spoke about that in my early days, that they used to go from corner to corner [ ?] up music. They had an alto, baritone, bass, and this [is] what they used to play ["Ach du lieber Augustin," he sings], and the alto [umpa pa, etc.]. Now if you took and elongated them notes part used as background by brass behind clarinet [does so], that's the same as what they're playing but played in a different way. Now the last part--I hate to tell you how it came about. My mother used to give us purgative, once in the spring and once in the fall. Now in order--

[Allen:] The name of the purgative?

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[LaRocca:] It was, it think it was <sup>Hunyardi Hunyardi</sup> ~~Han-yat-ti~~. ~~Han-yat-ti~~ water or something like that. And they had a red devil with a pitchfork on it. I remember that because we used to all run, we didn't want to take it. So I used to go in the back house and lock myself in. And in blowing on this horn, some of these sounds emanated from elsewhere. Is that putting it in good English?

[Allen:] Yes. It's very clear and it's not rude.

[LaRocca:] I don't want to be rude. That's where that idea come from. I had told Mr. Howard Jacobs that's where this tune was born, he in turn laughed at it, but I'm telling you the truth of the tune, where the tunes come in, my inability as a gifted musician. Only have a few little ideas about me to put to use to different parts and make a number.

["Buddy" LaRocca:] [Inaudible] "Tiger Rag" come from [inaudible]?

[LaRocca:] Howard Jacobs is a man who writes "Remoulade." He was sent by Newsweek people to find out if I was still living. The Newsweek people must have seen all this negro propoganda and writings, and they sent Howard Jacobs to find out if I was live. Howard Jacobs must have the letter in his possession yet, because he showed it to me, and that's how in "Remoulade," he wrote this story, "Jazz Prophet Without Honor in His Own Home Town," and I explained to him where this tune was composed. I was elementary, that's true. I had no learning of--oh--the cornet, but just like a faker or a gypsy would have to find how to make different things, and I was thrown on my own that I couldn't read music. I had to find new methods of making new tunes, and that's how these tunes come about, because every number had I can prove to you the source where it came from, and the idea how it was arrived at.

[Allen:] Whea. Whoa. OK, it's working now, go ahead.

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[LaRocca:] When our first record came out, or before our first record came out, it was called "Livery Stable Blues." Mr. King of the Victor Co. thought that the title's suggestive and asked us to change it to "Barnyard Blues." We had the name, or the title of the tune changed, and it was copyrighted. The man who had those numbers copyrighted was our manager, Max Hart. He copyrighted the number under his name, also the copyright owner was his name. This record was released and when the Victor Company put it out it was "Livery Stable Blues." Alcide Nunez who had been our first clarinetist in Chicago, he told this Roger Graham that was his tune. They had looked it up and they found that we didn't have the copyright on "Livery Stable Blues," so Bert Kelly, Roger Graham, Nunez, Lopez, the clarinet player of, the cornet player of Brown's band, went into the Sherman Hotel and they got some men to take this down in notation, and they published this tune, "Livery Stable Blues." I had taken an injunction against them and when we went to court the question wasn't on the "Livery Stable Blues." They said I rehashed this tune from the "More Power Blues," and the "More Power Blues" is supposed to be owned by [Ray] Lopez [Brown's cornetist]. Our lawyer didn't know I didn't know music, [and that] I couldn't explain how this thing came about. They said it was the chord--the same chord construction. But the lawyer didn't take in mind that this tune that they taken off the record was the "Livery Stable Blues," was the same tune I had played on the record, in comparison with the "Barnyard Blues." And they were bringing in another, a tune that they had no music to, and said it was the same tune. So the lawyer, the judge said that there so much lying in the case on both sides that he put the thing in public domain. There was nothing to the tune, and in your Tulane files you'll find this article of the judge's, the witnesses, and all. And they had

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the witnesses packed. Now when I play you the "Livery Stable Blues," and I'll play you this other tune, let any musician tell me that they're alike. Now there's one difference in 'em I want ya, I wanna explain it to you. The reason I call it the "Mournin' Blues," because when I got back to New York Mr. <sup>Burkan</sup> ~~Bercan~~ [spelling] wanted to take it to higher court because he said they were not talking on [the] merits of the "More Power Blues." They were talking about the merits of being similar to "Livery Stable Blues" which they had copied from the record, and my piece that I had played on the record. Certainly there must have been some comparisons, they said--he said--he said it was a miscarriage and a--and a thing. And he want me to take it to a higher court and he'd guarantee me he'd win, and I says how much would it cost, he says it would cost you about from \$350 to \$500 and I says, "Mr. <sup>Burkan</sup> ~~Bercan~~ [spelling], there ain't a soul can play that tune, I don't believe. I don't believe anyone will ever be able to play the tune, it's not worth it that much." He says, "Well, I'm taking the suit against the Victor and you won't put a nickel up." I says, "You do what you want." So he had me to sign the papers. We sued Victor for \$10,000. Because in those Tulane files you see the letters, where Victor had us to change this title to "Barnyard Blues," and we sued, Mr. <sup>Burkan</sup> ~~Bercan~~ [sp?] sued 'em, for \$10,000 and in one week they settled for \$2,500 [and] give us a contract for ten more numbers. Now, I'll play the "Livery Stable Blues" for you first. Wait, I ain't got [a] 78 [needle] on there.

[Allen:] OK, got the needle fixed and everything?

[Music of "Livery Stable Blues." LaRocca comments:] You'll notice, this is the first novelty record ever issued. This was a national hit, the first national hit. This record sold over a million copies in the first pressing. They



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couldn't get enough of these records made to supply the trade. And from this record you can find all the roots of jazz in there: the new rhythm; later come the laughing trombones, the crying saxophones and what not. This record pointed the way for all of 'em. [Music ends.]

This record I will now play you the piece that they had in question that we take from. Now this piece was copyrighted by me and I put Sbarbaro's name as the composer. Up to this time he had his name on none of 'em. Now this piece never belonged to me, but they put it on the altar and they said it was the same, and I'm going to prove to the public how, how, how wrong they were. Now if there's any man living that knows any thing about the "More Power Blues," which was playing in New Orleans ten years before I went to Chicago, they'll attest to this tune when they hear it. With the exception of the introduction and the runs, the runs were made purposely so whoever owned this tune could cry, to sound something like "The Livery Stable Blues." Now we wanted a, we got the royalties from the "Livery Stable Blues" from the Victor people, and we annexed a piece which I'm sorry to say that I didn't want, but Mr. <sup>Burkan</sup> ~~Borcan~~ [spelling?] told me go ahead, that's the only way we could show the court in error. Let the man come forward and claim this piece, then all that money that we have put out would have to be rescinded to us. Now here it is here. [Plays ODJB record of "Mournin' Blues," V1 18513, and comments:] Now this part was my own, adding to it. Had nothing to do with the "More Power Blues"----This is the "More Power Blues" and the ending didn't go like this. It go something like St.----"Memphis Blues." This was not into the thing, this I added to make they cry. Only this part you hear now is the "More Power Blues,"----that I know. When this tape is finished I'll give you the real ending how it went. These runs [trombone,

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cornet, clarinet] were added to the tune. [Music ends.] The ending of that tune [scats] was like the "Memphis Blues," so rather than get in trouble with Handy I changed the last part. Now that's the story of the "Livery Stable Blues." If I don't give this down to posterity, and they find out about it, they'll think that I've lied all the way through. And that's why I give you this for your tape.

I'd like to bring you up to the time that we went to London. After Robinson joined the band, we boarded the steamship.

[Allen:] Now could I interrupt again? These things are to me important to find out. Now, you made records for Victor and Columbia before you went?-----

[LaRocca:] Overseas, and Aeolian, too. It was at this time that we had friction with Victor that we went over to the Aeolian Company. And we didn't know the Aeolian had a different sound track. We thought that they played on any machine.

[Allen:] Yes.

[LaRocca:] And we went over there on a royalty basis that give us two cents o' royalty, like they give Caruso and them for the recordings. So we made several records for them, but when they found out, I think we had either "hill-and-dale" or the lateral cut, I couldn't tell ya cause I don't know about these things, but you couldn't play 'em on a regular phonograph; you hadda get an extension or something, and people wouldn't buy the records. Therefore, we--that's when we went back to Victor.

[Allen:] Well, I want to get clear who was in the band then--at that time when you made the records for Aeolian?

[LaRocca:] All the records that were made in New York, the Aeolian, and the

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Columbia, and the Victor was the original band intact: Sbarbaro, Shields, Ragas, and myself, and uh--and Edwards. That was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. All the masterpieces that had been made before Edwards was drafted into the army----

[Allen:] Now we can prove that by checking his army record then.

[LaRocca:] That's right, you can prove that from the army record. I told you we opened at--back in Reisenweber's around September the sixth, and we played up in there. Well, our contract expired around December the 18. We were held over, I think four weeks more until our sailing date, but in conjunction with shows we played around New York City. A coupla the jobs was played with Ragas, and the last two weeks was with Robinson; then, we sail for England. We arrived in England around April the 1st. We were to open in Joy Bells, and we got into, uh--at Liverpool. We rode the train into London and we got there about 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock at night. They had no accommodations for us to go [to]. We slept in the girls' dressing room on the long benches that night, until they procured rooms for us the next day. And the next day we had to go to police and register. From there we had to go out and get ration cards. And we were the only band that was allowed to come over there because they thought our kind of music would boost the moral[e] of the British people. We were ridiculed in that show, we opened on the fifth, we played one--one--one afternoon and one-----

End of Reel III  
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## NICK LAROCCA INTERVIEWS

May 26, 1958: Reel IV

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: <sup>g</sup>Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen

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[Allen:] Go right ahead. Now "You played the show"-----

[LaRocca:] We played the show. Before we played the show we rehearsed in the show. All the Englishmen laughed at us. The papers carried reports that we was a dog band. Some of 'em said we was yelpin' hounds, and they didn't describe our music with anything but it was no good. That's the critics in London. And you have a picture; it was taken back stage. And all them people sitting down are reporters. That afternoon on the fifth we opened in the show; we got a fair hand. But when the doughboys of the United States Army heard we were in town, because we had entertained everyone of 'em that passed through New York, they rushed that show. They crowded the show. That night when we played our numbers, look like the roof fell in. George ~~Robey~~ <sup>Robey</sup> who was the head man of the show along with Albert de ~~Corva~~ <sup>Courville's</sup> wife--she was the leading woman in the show--he gave Mr. auh, de ~~Corve~~ <sup>Courville</sup> an ultimatum. He says, "Either you take them out--the band--out the show--or I don't go on." Mr. de ~~Corva~~ <sup>Courville</sup> had to go out and buy a club to put us in. In the meantime, we worked two weeks in the ~~Palladium~~ <sup>Palladium</sup>, we worked one week up in the the north of England, and we came back and opened in the Six League Bond St. Club, in which the name, they later change to Dixie Club. To that contract you have there we made \$1,200 a week, and [Adie?] Powers asked them for [ ? ] every place we played extra than the place we was supposed to be. We were cleaning up almost \$2,000 then. The pound was worth [ \$ ] 4.82 or [ \$ ] 4.83. We stayed there and we finished the contract with him, and they had a clause [in there] if we stayed in England that he didn't have to pay our fare back.

In the meantime I signed contract with Mitchell and Booker--Rector's in

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Tottenham Court Road. Now we have in this band Robinson, still with us, Shields, Sbarbaro, Christian and myself. We go and open at Rectors, Tottenham Court Road. We made a tremendous success there! Wherever we went, we made a success! And then on that he bought a great big place which was an aeroplane factory back in Hammersmith <sup>(O.K.)</sup> [spelling]. He signed us up to a six-month contract with the stipulation that they put us into another place; and they go to work and remodel this place, called it Palais de Danse of Hammersmith, and they put us in Hammersmith's place. I'd say it was half a block like you--this way, and almost a square long, three hundred feet long, and about a hundred and fifty feet wide. Now we have no equipment to help us out. We blowed for playing our instruments. And we fill that hole--that hall.

After, wait--I jumped in. Robinson, while we was at Rector's, his wife became sick, and he had to return to the United States. He couldn't stand the weather, and here's where Billy Jones, an English pianist, gets into the Dixieland Jazz Band. Now heretofore I've only went to New Orleans for two different men. Now this is an Englishman who had heard these recordings, styled himself on the records, and he played opposite of us at Rector's. And I tried him out for the job, rehearsed it, and he did a good job. Because some of the records, some of the English-made records, he has played on 'em, and you'll be able to hear him, because if the Tulane gets the records made in England, Billy Jones will be on there, and you will hear his playing is just as good as any American man played, because he was styled on the records, and the rhythm. Now Jones and we played there six months and after that they give us almost another six months contract, and I didn't renew it no more because the



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pound was falling. It was down to \$4.42, and I didn't want to change the money into American money, and we decided to come back to the United States.

Christian came along with me. And uh--when we got back the war had stop; Edwards was demobilized out the Army and had a little band of his own. I don't know what he called this band, but they were--they weren't doing nothing; so, I asked Edwards, "Do you want your place in the band?" because whenever anybody was in the band, they stayed in the band, like when Edwards was at Reisenweber's, he was in the army; I gave him \$50 a week, out of the money that was collected out the collection box to help him out. When Ragas was sick, I did the same thing to her [Mrs. Ragas]. You'll see [many numbers that?] when he was in the army and Mrs. Ragas' husband had died, that they still derive royalty from my generosity of giving them a share and a cut in--on the records which followed, yet these people put me down as a thief. But when you read Mrs. Ragas's mail, you'll know different. I took care of them, all of them. I was the only man that knowed anything about business in the band. I come up the hard way. I only knew one thing: I had to make a success.

When we went to Palais de Danse we played a few sets there; we had fifty-eight hundred people on the opening night. So I start playing some English numbers that they knew over there, like uh--I can't think of the numbers now. It was Cole Porter's number, "I Never Realized" [scats]. Oh well, they liked that kind of stuff, and had many others like, ah, "Got My Captain Working for Me Now," and different popular tunes and every now and then I'd slap 'em one of these snotballs that I had. Y'understand? That's all I call 'em, but today they class me as a great composer. I had looked upon myself as nobody, just a man was a faker, put these things together. And I was before the rest of them,

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and they followed me. We played there, and we made a huge success. And you'll see in there where this man offered me jobs to come back; I had jobs for Paris, and I came back to New York, in 1920. I left the English piano player.

[Allen:] Can we stop now?

[LaRocca:] Yes.

End of Reel IV  
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