

AUGUST LAURENT

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March 21, 1960      Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins

Paul Gaytoen, who was in California but is on his way to Chicago, sold August Laurent the house he now lives in [at 3800 Paris Avenue].

August Robert Laurent was born August 28, 1897, in the Seventh Ward of New Orleans, at Prieur and Lapeyrouse [streets]. Some musicians [all clarinetists] who lived within two blocks of him were "Big Eye Louis" [Nelson], [Alphonse] Picou, Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], and [Louis] Papa Tio. "Big Eye Louis" lived on Prieur between Lapeyrouse and Onzaga; AL lived on Prieur between Lapeyrouse and Laharpe; "Papa" Tio lived at Laharpe and Derbingy; Lorenzo Tio lived on Columbus between Prieur and Roman; Picou lived on Johnson near St. Bernard.

AL began studying violin, his first instrument, when he was nine years old; he didn't like it. When he was about twelve, he began taking piano with his sister [in company of, or from?]; he began playing jazz, so his family wouldn't let him touch the piano anymore. Giving up piano, AL began working with his father at his father's trade, which was roofing. Lorenzo Tio persuaded AL to take up clarinet; AL began studying with Tio, who taught him the fingering, plus the freak [i.e., alternate (AL demonstrates some of the freak, [i.e., alternate] fingerings Tio showed him)] fingerings; in six months, AL was playing. Tio would never get his clarinet fixed; he would plug holes if they [the keys concerned] didn't work, and use freak [i.e., alternate] fingerings; [A.J.] Piron persuaded Tio to get a new clarinet when they went to New York.

AL quit playing clarinet "out" [i.e., in public] about five years ago.

Lorenzo Tio's father and uncle (Louis "Papa" Tio) are mentioned. They played "up in town" [RBA ?], around the red light district. "Papa" was supposed to be the best clarinetist in New Orleans during his time; Lorenzo, Jr., who studied with him, was the best in his time. AL says the Tios could have been Mexican or French [See Louis Tio, Jr., interview]. Lorenzo, Jr., was only two or three years older than AL. Lorenzo, Jr., played mostly with [in the company of?] Peter Bocage; they were on one job together for thirty-five years, playing at Tranchina's, seven nights a week, [!!! RBA]

AL enjoyed playing; it was his recreation; he would work all day at his trade and play music much of the night, getting little sleep; some nights he would come in from playing and make arrangements for his band.

Talk of the methods AL used when studying with Tio, and later. Besides his sister and Tio, AL studied music with [Paul] Chaligny and with "Papa" Tio.

AL worked in a band with Charlie McCurdy, about two years before the latter's death. McCurdy played clarinet and alto [saxophone]; AL played clarinet and soprano [saxophone]; Wendall McNeal played violin; [ ?] Martin played trumpet; Helen Edwards played piano; Chris [Minor? Goldston@] played drums. The time was around 1921-23.

A picture showing, among others, AL and Dr. [Leonard] Bechet, was taken about 1935, in Dr. Bechet's home; a band was rehearsing there. Some of the band members shown in another picture: Picou; Shelley

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Lemelle, trumpet (who had replaced [for that night only?] DeDe Pierce, who was sick); Billie Pierce (wife of DeDe), piano; [Joseph] "Fan" Bourgeau, guitar; Bechet, trombone; Albert Francis, drums. AL shows a picture of himself playing at Bechet's; he was playing off to himself, as the band mentioned above was playing, too. A picture taken about 1927 is shown. [See photos in ANOJ.] AL tells of making some records on a home recorder (two sides, "St. Louis Blues" and "That's My Desire" [which had just come out]) about 1930; Willie Pajaud played trumpet on the records; AL left the records on his car seat while he visited a friend, and they were stolen; it was the only copy.

AL shows some of his copyrighted music. One piece is called "I Got A Woman Doing What You Used To Do;" another is "Only You."

Talk of "Papa" Tio and AL's lessons with him. Tio was very strict. Tio wouldn't take money for a lesson a student couldn't play; he would make the student stay away until he could play the particular lesson. Tio also taught some of the white musicians from the steamer Capitol. Tom Albert is mentioned.

Helen Edwards [mentioned previously] played the piano with [John] Robichaux at the Lyric [i.e. Lyrie] during its heyday; she died in California, in 1950, AL thinks. She was adept at transposition.

End of Reel I

Helen Edwards was so good that she could be sound asleep, snoring on the bandstand, and she would wake up in the middle of a number and begin playing. Sadie [Goodson], sister of Billie [Pierce], [both pianists] could do the same thing; Sadie played with AL longer than Billie did; Sadie was better than Billie; [because ?RBA] she could read, but Billie couldn't.

AL shows one of his uncopyrighted numbers, called "You Left Me On That Early Morning Train." He shows another composition "I Wadd And You Woo, Too," and "I've Got A Woman Doing What You Used To Do"; he wrote both words and music, and did the arrangements also. Several popular songs of some period are mentioned, including the Huey Long number, "Every Man A King." A number by George Guesnon, "Chica Mia," written about his daughter who had died, is shown; Guesnon, played with AL; AL says he himself was about the first in the city to play the number.

AL says he had the only three-piece band in the city which played all of "Copenhagen"; Sadie Goodson was on piano, Chris [Goldston?] on drums, and AL played clarinet. WR thinks Sadie may have been married at one time to drummer Abbey "Chinee Foster, who played with [Oscar] "Papa" Celestin. AL shows another of his compositions, called "Memory of You," which is a waltz. (AL gives names of more tunes from time to time) AL got the tune "Boost New Orleans" from a police corporal who also played sax; the policeman would come to listen and learn from AL, who was then playing at a place run by Bernard Michel [S ?], during bootlegging times. The policeman said he learned more from AL than he did from his teacher,

the orchestra director at the Orpheum Theater. WR says Jelly Roll Morton and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings are (i.e., Paul Mares and Leon Poppolo) listed as composers of "Milenburg Joys." "Song of New Orleans" is mentioned. Another uncopyrighted number by AL, "The Chinaman and Mabel," is shown; AL sings it. [Cf. Richard B. Allen University College course on New Orleans Jazz, Danny Barker, guest lecturer reel].

Charlie Love was the last trumpet player to use AL's trumpet book, from which he has been reading names of tunes. AL's last band had Willie Humphrey, the elder, on tenor sax and clarinet; they worked at the Happy Landing. Humphrey had a stroke about two weeks after the band quit playing at the Happy Landing; he had not been up since, although he is in a wheelchair now; Harrison [Verrett], brother-in-law of Fats Domino, was playing guitar with AL then (AL says Harrison showed Domino how to play the piano, and now [that Domino is so successful] Domino won't give him a job. [Cf. Harrison Verrett, reel]. A woman named Odette Davis, now dead, played piano with AL near the end of his career; she was very good. The last pianist AL had was George Decou, cousin of Walter Decou, who also played piano with AL at one time; George Decou is now dead. Louis [i.e., Albert?] Warner played trombone with AL before Doc [Leonard Becht] worked with him. AL says that at one time he had all work; [A.J.] Piron was loafing, and begging AL for work. AL gave Ricard Alexis a job in his band when no one else would hire him; Alexis would accept deposits on jobs from more than one person for the same night, so after a while no one called him. AL says that is the way that Buddy Petit lost the job

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in the Gold Room of the Roosevelt Hotel. Helen Edwards was his pianist at the Gold Room. Petit would take deposits from other jobs; he would go around to them, when he should have been at the Roosevelt. "Big Eye Louis" [Nelson] worked with AL; Big Eye Louis was playing C Clarinet at the time; he switched to B flat in late years about 1940. [Alphonse] Picou played alto [saxophone] and clarinet in AL's band, while AL played clarinet and soprano [saxophone]. Big Eye was better on C clarinet than on C flat. AL says some clarinetists used to carry four clarinets--A, B [flat], D, and E flat--for transposing various parts; the E flat was used mostly in brass bands. AL played some brass band jobs, but never walking, as he didn't like that; he was a letter carrier for eighteen months, until 1919, when he returned to his trade [roofing]. Big Eye Louis didn't read music, but played well like Fats Domino. Picou was a pretty good reader. AL mentions George Baquet, Ernest Trepagnier, a great drummer, and Lorenzo Tio [Jr.]; AL says George Baquet was the first clarinetist to play the clarinet solo in "High Society"; Baquet made the claim at a meeting also attended by Picou, popularly believed to be the composer or originator of the part; Baquet said he transposed a flute part for clarinet, as there was no clarinet part, and played it, the first to do so. [See orchestration of "High Society" in the Robichaux Sheet Music Collection] [Cf. Monte Hazel, reel IV, July 16, 1959, p. 59 for more on this orchestration. RBA].

AL mentions [Albert] Glenny, bass, who played with AL for years; AL mentions another great bassist, Joe Brown; AL mentions [cornetist] Manuel Pérez; all three lived near AL's home. George Fihle is mentioned.

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WR says C<sup>H</sup>arlie McCurdy is mentioned as the possible originator of the "High Society" solo; AL says he just knows the Baquet story and claim; [by Willie Pajand to walk Lewerki and RBA at a funeral. C McC was playing with John Robichaux and needed a part as he could not improvise. JR gave him the piccolo part. RBA] he thinks the solo was first played on a job in Philadelphia. The number and solo later came to New Orleans. AL knows for a fact that Picou didn't originate the number; AL knew Picou from AL's youth; they used to play duets together at the house of one of Picou's lady friends.

Talk of clarinets.

End of Reel II

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AL plays "The Rosary" on his clarinet. He used to play "opera and everything". AL says Willie [J.] Humphrey, now playing with Paul Barbarin, and [Manuel] "Fess" [Manetta] both wanted a Penzel-Muller clarinet he had, but he sold it to someone else. Manetta now has the <sup>BUFFET (BW 9/18/61)</sup> one George Baquet bought for Alfred Wilson, says WR. AL mentions [Harold] Peterson. AL noodles. Talk of reeds, embouchures. AL had a good lip when he was playing; he once played for three days and nights, playing for the boss at night and for Al Capone at picnics by the lake [at Milneburg] during the day; Capone supplied AL's boss with [bootleg] whiskey. George Guesnon played with AL during that time. AL played :9:00[P.M.] - 3[A?M.] at the one place for five-and-a-half years., working for Michel Bernard; the place was at Frenchman and Gentilly Road; Eddie Victor had the place before Bernard, who bought it from him; AL worked there for Victor, and was asked by Bernard to stay on, which he did. Capone had a trick of putting half-dollars on every key of the piano and telling the piano player he could have every one he didn't knock off when he played; the piano player was afraid to play, but AL told him to play, that Capone wouldn't worry about picking them up, and they would pick them up. AL plays some number he wrote. AL plays "Darktown Strutters Ball".

AL got his embouchure from Lorenzo Tio, Jr. AL describes it again, / PLAYS "VIBRATO"

Plays "Rose Room [not on copy tape]. AL likes Artie Shaw's number [recording?], "Rose Room". AL plays "You Call Everybody Darling".

Talk of vibrato.

Sam Dutrey, Sr., [clarinet] played with pianist Helen Edwards at one time; Dutrey was a great improviser, and could also read.

AL mentions [Nat] "King" Cole. AL plays "Too Young" [a tune associated with Cole because of his recording of it].

\* REPAIR MAN / VERGUNDY ST, NEAR FRENCHMAN.



AL has heard of Jimmie Noone and Johnny Dodds; the latter played with Joe ["King"] Oliver. When Johnny St. Cyr "came from playing with Louis" Armstrong, he went to work with AL [when he returned from Chicago?], playing guitar. AL says St. Cyr now lives in California.

AL never played with Manetta on jobs, just in someone's home, for fun. Manetta worked with Helen Edwards at the Sans Souci Hall, which was operated by old man Riley.

AL's favorite clarinetist was Lorenzo Tio, Jr., who was a good all-around clarinetist and musician; he played any kind of music. Tio was a member of the two largest brass bands; he played E flat clarinet on the street. Tio worked at Tranchina's at night; Steve Lewis was on piano; [A.J.] Piron played violin [and was leader]; [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.] was the drummer; his [?] nephew, Charlie [Bocage?], was on guitar; [Peter] Bocage was on trumpet; [Albert?] Warner was on trombone. [Cf. other interviews.].

A clarinetist AL likes now is Pete Fountain, who played on Charlie Welch's [i.e., Lawrence Welk] show, but is now on Bourbon Street.

End of Reel III

AL says [Irving] Fazola, who died, was a good clarinetist.

AL talks about his past ability to memorize music quickly.

AL plays his clarinet; one number is ["Someday (You'll Want Me to Want You)"]. \*  
AL sings it. He talks about the job at the Happy Landing.

Sidney Bechet grew up in the same neighborhood as AL; he was about four years older than AL. When Bechet left New Orleans, he didn't return for twenty years; AL picked him and his manager up at the airport when he returned. Bechet played clarinet when he started out; he picked up soprano sax in later years. He really started on a little six-hole, fifteen cent flute, which he learned to play so well that someone gave him a clarinet. He became so good on clarinet that when he was still in short pants Pete Lala hired him to play at his place at Iberville and Marais for one dollar a night. Bechet was composing numbers for a bottle of whiskey; he was selling the numbers for five dollars.

AL shows more of his compositions; one is "Acceptable Waltz". AL shows "Kinklets", which WR says comes from the Red Back Book; AL and Charlie Love used to play it. Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" and [Scott] Joplin's "The Entertainer" are mentioned. Another AL number is called "We Can't Agree". AL shows Sidney Bechet's last number, "Petite Fleur". WR says ~~RC~~ RC had to learn the number last summer when he was studying clarinet with [Manuel] "Fess" Manetta. On rainy days, AL would write [i.e., arrange] for his band all day, until late at night. George Lewis's mother [Alice Zeno] is mentioned.

Sidney Bechet and his brother, Dr. [Leonard] Bechet, had a falling out [~~wh~~when SB was a boy] because Sidney would do nothing but play clarinet; he tried to have Sidney put in the [Waifs] Home, but to no avail. AL says Louis Armstrong was put in \* which he calls "Until Tomorrow".

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the Home, and was given his first instrument by AL's cousin (not Peter Davis), Charlie Valteau (related to violinist [Ferdinand] Valteau). AL mentions another relation of his own, a great violinist named [Armajan?]. When AL was a boy, Sidney Bechet lived on Urquhart Street; then Bechet moved to Marais Street, to St. Bernard and Marais, then to St. Bernard, and Villere. AL says Bechet's brother [Leonard] was not proud of Sidney until AL picked Sidney up at the airport. [See above, this reel]. The years was during the [World] War [II]. AL mentions Maurice Durand; WR says he and Manetta saw him in California last year. AL was playing when the Durand and [Willie J.] Humphrey band was playing; they were at the Alamo and the Music Box. Pianist Dwight Newman had the job at the Music Box; his son, trumpeter Joe Newman, was in a class taught by AL's wife in public school; Joe Newman could play "High Society" on the trumpet just like it is played on the clarinet; he has been in New York a long time; Joe Newman was with Erskine Hawkins [at one time]. Albert Snaer [trumpet] was in that band, too.

Barney Bigard studied with Tio, Jr., also. AL helped Albert Nicholas learn to read music, so that he and Bigard, both then playing at Tom Anderson's, could leave and go to Chicago. Bigard didn't play very well when in New Orleans; AL says he was bashful.

A first cousin of AL is Albert Dominique, now known as Don Albert. WR mentions Natty Dominique, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ and Ferdinand Dominique.

AL was in Chicago when Charlie Valteau directed the one hundred and fifty piece orchestra at the Regal Theater.

Manuel Perez was the best old-time trumpet player; Perez outplayed Joe Oliver on an advertising job AL mentions. MP used a derby as a mute. AL mentions Kid Punch [Miller] and Guy Kelly; he says Perez was the best; he was a good reader.

Buddy Petit had "a good go" at one time; he lost it because he would take deposits on too many jobs, just like Ricard Alexis [see Reel III]. BP had a good band. Joe Oliver had a good band. Perez had a great band, playing at the Pythian Temple [Roof Garden]; Perez put his son in that band, on trumpet; the boy played, but never made good on it; he gave it up. [Eddie] Cherrie and Adolph ["Tats"] Alexander [Jr.] were playing clarinet and sax in Perez's band; [Henry ?] Martin was playing guitar; Cie [Frazier] was on drums.

AL mentions Bill Matthews and Tom Albert.

When AL was starting in music, a good trumbonist was the man with the Imperial Brass Band; Louis [i.e., Albert?] Warner was good; although he didn't read, Manuel [i.e., William?] Ridgley was a good improviser. AL has heard of Zue Robertson, but doesn't know anything about him. Vic Gaspard was good; he was with the Tanchina [Piron?] band all those thirty-five years [see Reel I]; [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.], with that band, was a great timekeeper.

Pianist "Little Willie" played in AL's band for a long time; he could play in any key, although he never had any music lessons. Odette Davis [Cf. Mr. and Mrs. A.C. Synigal, reel ?] Helen Edwards,<sup>and</sup> Sadie [Goodson] were good pianists; Emma Barrett, who was married to Ricard Alexis, was good, and is still playing; Walter Decou was good. Steve [Lewis] was good. The above were leading pianists for jazz here in the old days. AL says [Joseph] "Fan" [Bourgeau] plays piano, too, but just chords, as he never could pick up the melody. AL says he himself learned to play melody when he worked three-piece jobs; he had to know the melodies. AL plays "Copenhagen". Discussion of vibrato.

End of Reel IV