

GEORGE LEWIS
I [only]-Digest-Retyped
January 25, 1960

Also Present: William Russell,
Richard B. Allen, Harry Oster,
Mrs. Rita (Harry) Oster

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(Interview recorded at home of George Lewis, 3327 DeArmas Street, Algiers).

Talk of GL's home; he, with the help of others, including Lawrence Marrero and "Slow Drag" Pavageau, built a lot of it [if not all of the house].

GL thinks the reason his band always began an evening of playing at Mannie's Tavern with the tune, "All I Do the Whole Day Through Is Dream of You" is that it was the favorite of [trumpet player] [Elmer] Talbert. WR says Bunk [Johnson]'s band in New York always began the evening with "You Always Hurt the One You Love." GL says it was probably used because it was easy to warm up with.

GL says the practice of immediately repeating a number well-received at dance halls was an old custom, but now in disuse. A number might be repeated more than once. RBA says Kid Thomas rarely repeats a number more than once. GL comments on the lack of dancing today.

m The band at Manny's played a varied repertoire for the dances, including rumbas. RBA says John Casimir expressed amazement that the bands on Bourbon Street never played waltzes; GL says the music there has to be loud to attract attention. GL says that years ago they played a waltz, such as "Over the Waves", only as a waltz; they wouldn't play it as a fox trot as an encore, or as a later number. Waltz medleys were played.

RBA mentions the unusual tunes the GL band played when Talbert was their trumpet player; one was "Rosa [i.e., Rose?] Leaf Rag"; GL says the trumpet players he now has don't know the tunes, and

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that Percy [Humphrey] and [Kid] Howard know only part of "Rose Leaf Rag".

^{(100) c. 6 mins.} WR mentions "Victory Waltz"; ^{GL} FL says it's "Victory Walk", that some people don't pronounce it correctly. (He scats part of the melody.) He says the Eureka [Brass Band] plays it a lot. RBA says Joe Avery played it with the [Young] Tuxedo [Brass Band]. ^{GL} GL has played the tune with a lot of brass bands, including the Eureka and Eddie Jackson's brass band; GL says Jackson has been dead about seventeen or, eighteen years; RBA says he thinks Jackson was buried on April Fools Day [ie., April 1] [according to Red Clark], but he doesn't know what year.

RBA says he and Punch [Miller] visit [Clarence] "Little Dad" [Vincent], who is bedridden, rather deaf and quite sick. GL says he played with "Little Dad" a lot and that he never could hear very well; others in the band were Earl Humphrey [trombone], Buddy Petit [cornet] and Alex Scott [bass]. "Little Dad" had difficulty tuning his banjo because he was hard of hearing, but he could hear the beat.

In speaking of the personnel of GL's band at Manny's, GL says that [Herb] Morand replaced Talbert when Talbert died. When GL first began playing there, the band didn't have a trumpet player. RBA says he remembers hearing the band one New Year's Eve when there was no trombone in the band; GL says he didn't use trombone until later years, because there wasn't enough money to hire a trombonist until then. Sometimes friends of the band would put up enough money to hire Jim Robinson to play trombone,

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but, GL says, they hardly ever needed to hire a trombonist because a lot of young white musicians came to the place [to sit in]. Some of the young white musicians: George Girard [trumpet], Pete Fountain [clarinet], the Assunto brothers [Frank, trumpet, and Fred, trombone], Bill Shea [clarinet], Bob "Nooky" (i.e., Mielka), trombone. WR mentions a flood which ruined "Slow Drag's" Bass and a guitar; GL thinks it was in September, 1946, just after the band had returned from New York. RBA recalls that Lawrence "Toca" [Martin] played [trumpet] with the band a few nights; RBA says Percy [Humphrey] was playing trumpet when Ken [Colyer] came to town [Cf. KC's letters in the Melody Makers [date?] and in the ANOJ's files]; GL says both Talbert and Morand had died by that time; RBA says GL's trumpet players kept dying when the band was playing at the El Morocco [on Bourbon Street].

The GL band did spot jobs after playing at El Morocco according to GL. RBA says they returned to Manny's. Then they went to Trio's Lounge on Jefferson Davis [Parkway]; RBA says Huey and Harry Mayronne, who operated a record chop at [706] Bourbon Street put up [i.e., put up and collected] the money for "the thing" [the band's salary]. [See GL file for receipt]. Ken Colyer was in town then. ^[See Ken Colyer autobiography] RBA says Percy played there in the band sometimes. GL agrees that the time was early 1953; WR says it was the winter of 1952-53. RBA says Kid Howard played trumpet there sometimes, also, and that a lot of people sat in there, too. RBA mentions that he was studying trombone at the time, and that he remembers playing "Tiger Rag" with the band.

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GL played a few times with Punch Miller in the early [19]20's, substituting for Georgie Boyd; Eddie Morris [trombone] was a regular member of that band. GL says he himself played with practically every band in the city at one time or another. RBA says GL played with [Henry] "Red" Allen [Jr.]; GL agrees, and says he also played with Allen's father. The senior Allen had only a brass band, not a dance band.

GL was playing with Earl Humphrey's band when Lee Collins [trumpet] replaced Buddy Petit, who was fired because he drank so much. GL says he made recordings with Collins at Werlein's on Canal Street around that time, but doesn't remember much about the session because "we were all underneath the weather that day." Besides Collins and GL, some others in the band were: Irving Joseph (GL thinks), drums; "Tink" Batiste, who died many years ago, piano.

The Fritz family of Mandeville included many musicians: Isidore Fritz played clarinet; his father played bass; a brother played trombone. They were in a band [their own?] together; Klebert Cagnolatti, brother of Ernie Cagnolatti [trumpet], was the drummer; Bunk Johnson played trumpet with them at one time. GL says Isidore Fritz, who didn't read music, was the greatest [clarinetist] he ever heard anywhere.

Other musicians there [across the lake] were Leonard Parker, of Slidell, with whom GL played, Tommy Ladnier [trumpet], and Dan Moody; when GL played with Moody, Moody was playing trombone; when he quit playing trombone, he went back to bass violin.

GL says Valsang of the Black Eagles, the first little band

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GL played with, is still living in Mandeville, and that Andrew Anderson [trumpet], who was reared there, has seen him recently. Valsand doesn't play anymore.

RBA says Wilhemina Bart [piano] lives in Lacombe [Louisiana].

GL says the bands in that [over the lake] area played around the countryside, at least as far away as Meridian, Mississippi. The band he played with played many kinds of jobs, including meeting the various boats (e. g., Idle Hour, Hanover and Susquehanna) which came across the lake from Milneburg. The Camellia had quite a running shortly before this time. There were no brass bands over the lake.

GL went to the over-the-lake area because a doctor recommended the move for the sake of GL's oldest daughter, Mildred, who is now almost forty-one. GL began playing with the Fritz band after Isidore Fritz began playing with Buddy Petit's band; Fritz gave up playing sometime afterward to follow his family trade, brick masonry, full time, and was replaced by Edmond Hall. When Hall left, Fritz was asked to rejoin the Petit band, but as Petit was moving back to New Orleans, he refused; GL joined Petit's band, commuting to New Orleans for the jobs until he decided to move back to New Orleans.

Upon his return to New Orleans, he [water] worked with Billie and DeDe [Pierce], with George Henderson, and with "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas]. Some others in the "real old 'Wooden Joe's' band" were Johnny Prudence, bass; Buddy Luck, bass [?]; John Smith, banjo; Israel Gorman, saxophone; Ambrose [Powers], uncle to Lawrence Toca, trombone. GL also worked a while with Amos Riley in the

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12th Ward, and also with Theodore Harris, a trumpet player who also ran a cleaning and pressing business. This is not to be confused with Kid Harris.

GL began working with Billie and DeDe during the Depression at the Kingfish, which was on Decatur at Ursulines; he worked with them there for about two and one-half years, playing from eight until three in the morning for one dollar per night. When GL first joined the band, Burke Stevenson was playing trumpet, Billie [played piano], McGee played drums, and GL [played clarinet]; DeDe was working on Decatur Street between St. Philip and Dumaine, near DeLuca's Hardware; DeDe and Billie fell in love and got married; GL was the best man at their wedding; Billie had Stevenson replaced by DeDe, her new husband. The band had a succession of drummers after that; then "Smilin' Joe" [i.e., Pleasant Joseph] was added on four-string guitar, played ukelele style, as an entertainer. There were floor shows at the place then. Major [Edward] Bowes heard the group there and made them an offer to travel [to appear on his radio program? RBA], but they decided against it. Discussion of Decatur Street environment. GL worked at the place seven nights a week during the time he was there; the basic wage was one dollar per night, but they made a little extra by passing a kitty. GL was also working for the P. W. A. then; he got up at six a.m., caught a bus to work, returned home at two p.m. to sleep, then went to work at the Kingfish.

He began working on the riverfront [as a stevedore] about 1937, usually handling coffee, but sometimes, trucking cotton.

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There was not much singing by the men working on the riverfront; every man working there was "ornery...", because the work was hard." The men handling coffee sacks had a rhythm which they counted when hoisting the sacks; GL hurt his wrist, which still bothers him occasionally, by lifting too soon one time. GL weighed about 121 pounds when he did that work; after he was operated on for ulcerated stomach he began losing weight until he was down to 114 pounds; his weight remained there until later days, when his blood count got bad; his present weight is 104 pounds. The coffee sacks weighed 136 pounds.

GL worked at Luthjen's with Billie and DeDe Pierce a long time. "I put 'Big Eye Louis' [Nelson] there and I put Rogers, Ernest Rogers there." GL also worked with them [no doubt the Pierces] at the the Silver Star located at St. Claude and St. Bernard [avenues] for a long time; "but then, they were terrible people then, they were terrible." GL says DeDe would drink two or three cases of beer during a night. GL tells of working with the Pierces at Bunkie [Louisiana], and of the Pierces drinking habits there. Frankie Gibbs, a trombone player who was crippled, played in the band in Bunkie.

GL was around when DeDe made up "Eh, La Bas". GL says the older people say the song has been around a long time, before DeDe's version was extant. GL says that as far as he knows, the jazz version was created by DeDe. Joe ["Gossoon"] Phillips, son of "One-eyed Babe" [Phillips], played banjo in the Bunkie band. There was another member of the band, but GL can't remember who it was.

End of Reel I