

LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY

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Reel I, Track I

May 29, 1958

Also present: William Russell

Name is Eurreal Wilford Montgomery, born April 18, 1906, in Kentwood, Louisiana which is 83 miles north of New Orleans on the Illinois Central. LBM's great uncle, his father's uncle, had a band. His name was Gunzie [sp?] Montgomery and his band was called the Big Four our of New Orleans, Louisiana. He played practically every instrument in the band. The band was a "regular serenade band, dance band." LBM heard them when he was around four or five years old. LBM's father played cbrnet and his mother played accordion; his brothers and sisters played piano. There were ten children in all, five boys and five girls. The older borthr played cornet and LBM used ot play bass tuba. His first instrument, the piano, he taught himself to play. He says he was "practically" the first one in the family to learn how to play piano. He was the sixth child, with two brothers and three sisters older than he. Nearly all the family sang in the nearby church, the Temple Chapel Baptist Churchh, so this was the first music he remembered hearing as a child.

LBM ran away from home when he was eleven years old and went to Hammond, Louisiana, Ponchatoula, Louisiana, and Holden, Louisiana. At Holden he held down a job playing piano and got ten dollars a week, room and board. LBM had started playing when he was around five years old. He played any type of music, e. g., playing tunes like ["Mickey"?], commercial and blues too. LBM started singing at age twelve. The first recording of singers that he remembers hearing were Edith Wilson and Mamie Smith. Mamie Smith had a light voice, a keen voice. He heard Ma Rainey and in later years worked a couple of shows with her, one at the Grand Theater in Chicago on 31st Street and State.

LBM was in New Orleans when he was seven or eight years old. He heard Buddy Petit, the Silver Leaf Band (a dance band), Chris Kelly, [Wooden Joe]

LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY  
Reel I, Track I  
May 29, 1958

2

Kid Nicholls [Nicholas]. He played in New Orleans when he was seventeen and eighteen years old with Sam Morgan and Kid Clayton. LBM toured and played locally with Clarence Desdumes Band. In New Orleans they played at the Pelican and the Astoria.

Clarence Desdumes played violin; Raymond Brown, trombone; Harry Fairconnetue, banjo; Oliver Alcorn, sax; George McCullum, replaced by Alvin Alcorn, trumpet; Shine [Williams], drums; [Henry] Pops Kimball, tuba; Herald Dejan, sax; Lucien Johnson, sax. It was a fourteen-piece band. It was around 1928 when LBM was in this band. Soon after LBM joined the band they toured in Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Michigan, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and South Dakota. LBM says that he knew mostly all of the old time musicians in New Orleans, such as Steve Lewis, Walter "Fats" Pichon, Red [~~Cailliou~~ or ~~Calliou~~ or Cayou?], Udell Wilson, Poree Nolan, Little Willie, Little Dooky, and Little Sammy. They all played ragtime, blues and jazz. Doesn't remember Manuel Manetta. Just a few bands used piano at that time. Steve Lewis was playing with Piron and Fate Marable had a band on the boat, steamer CAPITOL. Marable was a good pianist, but Udell Wilson was at the time one of the best in New Orleans (though his home was in Kansas City). Steve Lewis played kind of on the order of Jelly Roll Morton. LBM heard JRM in Chicago. LBM says that one of the greatest piano players he ever "looked at" was Cooney Vaughn of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Two other fine musicians there were Blind Jug and Gus Perryman.

The bands in New Orleans played jazz. Buddy Petit was one of the greatest jazz trumpet players, along with Kid Rena, Lee Collins, and Louis Armstrong (who had left town[sic]).

Most of the jazz brass bands were heard on Carnival. LBM played tuba in some few parades in Jackson and other cities, but not in New Orleans. LBM

LITTLE BROTHER MONTGOMERY  
Reel I, Track I  
May 29, 1958

3

says that the bands he heard in other places in the south were good. There was a particularly good band in Bogalusa, the Rhythm Aces. LBM introduced a couple of the guys in the band to the founder of the band. Two personnel of the band were Willie [Estrin?] and Hanson Severe.

The first records LBM made were with Irene Scruggs, or Chocolate Brown as she was also called, from St. Louis. Irene Scruggs has a daughter who is a showgirl in Europe named Baby Scruggs. The records he made with IS were made for ~~Paraxxmonk~~ Paramount. Art Labler [sp?] was with Paramount then. The recording was made in Grafton, Wisconsin. The first records that LBM made under his own name were also for Paramount in Grafton, Wisconsin in 1929. The numbers were "No Special Rider Blues" and Vicksburg Blues."

The next companies for whom he recorded were Vocalion, Melotone and Brunswick. He did "Louisiana Blues" for Vocalion. He made a lot of numbers with Irene Scruggs, including "St. Louis Woman Blues," "Borrowed Love," "Got to Get Mine in Front," "Good Meat Grinder." <sup>250</sup> LBM had been playing "Vicksburg Blues" ever since 1923. He started playing it around Farriday, Louisiana, Natchez, Mississippi, and Talulah, Louisiana. Some people tried to make "Forty-Four Blues" out of it so LBM just changed the name of it because he and two other people had made it up, Friday and Delco Robert. LBM played in Vicksburg at the Princess Theater; at 1014 Washington Street, Sack Lewis' <sup>(or Jack?)</sup> nightclub, the Steamboat Exchange, Fitzhugh's, Bell's Cafe, and a lot of places. LBM stayed in Vicksburg for a couple of years. He played at Henderson's Royal Garden at Farriday, Louisiana. Up in that part of the country they mostly had string bands. Bud Scott from Natchez had the best band up there. It was not the same Bud Scott that went to Chicago with Kid Ory. This particular BS played mandolin and he was a wonderful singer. ~~xxx~~ He had a lot of good musicians, but they played string instruments. Some personnel of his band included Mark Hawkins, [Forrest?] Hawkins, ~~xxx~~ Bubba Perk and Walter [ ?].

Reel I, Track I

May 29, 1958

They all played mandolins, guitars, etc.

LBM was in Natchez for a while.

Mostly the people who got jobs in barrelhouses, or honky tonks, were piano players and later on they would hire a drummer. Singers dropped in all the time. In the barrelhouses a piano player would usually play from 9:00 p.m. or so on Saturday nights until Sunday morning. During the week they played from about seven till ten or ten thirty. They closed early so people could get to work. LBM worked in lumber camps and logging camps. He lived and played there. He got twenty-five dollars a week room and board.

He played for Curtis Coleman and "Gold Mine" in the same camp [at different times] in Mississippi. In Bush, Louisiana (below Bogalusa), he played in a camp for Tom Paine. They had music practically every night. There were plenty of women around the camps, and most of them loved to dance.

There were little shacks which they moved on flatcars when they finished logging in one area. Sometimes LBM would go to another camp, sometimes to another town, such as Bogalusa. He also played around Jackson, Mississippi, Meridian, Hattiesburg, Natchez, Vicksburg, ~~Tallulah~~ and Tallulah and Ferriday in Louisiana.

Lee Collins and Edmond Hall used to be around Hattiesburg; they were there with Cooney Vaughn [who?]. They had a band which would go to Birmingham, Mobile, etc. LBM played Biloxi, Pass Christian, Gulfport; he used to live in Gulfport, on Thirtieth Avenue. He had a drummer with him, not a full band. He played He played "across the branch they called it," at Curtis Coleman's place. They had three or four different places there; Johnny Harper had one; Milton had one.

LBM never did care too much for working on minstrel shows, but he had a lot of friends who worked on them. He remembers the Georgia Smart Set, Silas Green, The Georgia Minstrels, Rabbit Foot. [Johnny Lee?] Davis was on the Rabbit Foot.

He was called "Sweet Papa Snowball."

They headquartered in Port Gibson, Mississippi. [Holcamp?] had charge of the Georgia Smart Set. LBM organized a band out of some of the boys from the show "when the show went bum:" Doc Parmley, Luke Parmley [Cf. file for spelling?] (two brothers), from the Georgia Smart Set. Most of those shows go to their headquarters someplace in the winter, Most of their appearances were one-night stands.

LBM heard practically all the singers who traveled: Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith, Ida Cox, Ma Rainey, Butterbeans and Susie. At the Lyric Theatre he saw Ethel Waters..."you used to see all of those." The Lyric was located on Iberville and Burgundy Streets, in New Orleans.

LBM's favorite blues singer was Bessie Smith. WR questions LBM about Blind Lemon Jefferson. LBM heard him, but didn't care for his style; he always broke his time [i. e., sang out of meter]. Back in those days, Lonnie Johnson was the blues singer [masculine] he liked. He was tops at the time.

LBM's favorite piano player was <sup>Cooney</sup> ~~Cody~~ Vaughn, the best he ever heard.

The style of piano they played in the South for dancing was called boogie woogie in Chicago, but they didn't call it that in the South, they called it "Dud Low Joe." Unless you played "a mighty good beat slow blues," you had to play that way for people to dance in the barrelhouses.

LBM met Cow Cow Davenport around 1928 or 1929 in Chicago, at the old [Angelus?] Building, at 35th and Wabash [avenue]. WR returns to subject of whether LBM heard that boogie bass down South. LBM says, "We were playing that way before ever it came out on records. We were playing all those kind of basses down there." Most youngsters learning how to paly would play that style, because it wasn't complicated, and they didn't have to stretch their hands. You could just play with two or three notes. LBM has been playing it ever since he was around eight or

years old.

LBM used to enjoy working by himself rather than with a band, but now he is getting used to playing with bands. "It is coming kind of natural to me to play with bands." He would stay with bands six or eight months, then leave them for three or four months. He has played with a lot of different bands, but never did care to make it his career. He has "owned" a band, has had pretty good outfits.

WR asks about ragtime. LBM never did know "Maple Leaf Rag" well enough to recollect it now, but the first rag he remembers learning was "Twelfth Street Rag," when he was youngster around eight or nine years old.

WR asks about a solo LBM plays frequently, "Mule Face Blues." LBM says he learned it from an orchestration; it was a band number. They had it in several bands LBM worked with. It was ~~xxx~~ hard for the musicians to play. "Every band that got hold of it didn't care about fooling with it." So he took it upon himself to learn the whole thing by himself, It's King Oliver's number; he wrote it, made a record of it. Today it would not be too much for the musicians to play, as they are better readers.

LBM plays his own style. He used to listen to Earl Hines, whom he considers one of the greatest jazz piano players with a band today. LBM listened to him, had ideas from him, but mostly plays like himself, can't play like anybody else since he has been playing so long.

LBM doesn't care so much for playing the blues. At times he likes to play them, and then again he doesn't like to even hear them, He would rather play other pieces.

End of Track 1 on original tape.

Doc and Edmund "Luke" Parmley [sp?] are still in Jackson, Mississippi, Doc was a mighty good trumpet player. His brother, Luke, played bass tuba. Also one of the world's greatest show drummers, Joe White, was around Jackson; LBM thinks he is still there. He played all around, including New Orleans. [Cf. Jelly Roll Morton, Library of Congress interviews.] Luke has a cafe now at Oakland and Mill Streets. LBM spells that last name "P-A-R-M-I-L-E-Y."

WR asks about musicians in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. LBM thinks they are all dead. Emile Thomas was there, but he died not long ago. Most of the ones from Bogalusa have left. [Sabadie Wa-odd (phonetic spelling)?] was a pretty good piano player, but he lives in Pass Christian now, LBM thinks. Martin Davis was a pretty good piano player. He lives in Hattiesburg. Some are in California.

WR asks about musicians around Baton Rouge. LBM knew a few people around Baton Rouge. One of the good bands from Baton Rouge was Toot Johnson's. Guy Kelly was from Baton Rouge. He also remembers Johnny Handy, a clarinet player, who used to be around Baton Rouge, played with Toot Johnson, although LBM thinks his home was around Pass Christian or Gulfport somewhere. [Cf. John Handy interviews.] LBM thinks Johnny Handy is still around New Orleans. WR confirms that he plays in the street bands in parades.

LBM is good friends with Joe Robichaux, who WR says is going to be up here [Chicago] in two weeks. Another good friend is George Lewis. George Guesnon is his buddy, worked all over with him in his traveling band. Al Wynn, a good trombonist, is another one he knows. Also Lee Collins.

They have a lot of good musicians around Chicago too: Paul King [or Kane?], [Louis "Bill"? RBA.], Ogletree, Raymond Walters. His blues singer and guitar player, Big Bill Broonzy, is sick and he plans to go see him soon. WR plans to go see him too, probably Sunday. Some discussion of how sick Big Bill is follows, and whether he is allowed to have a visitor. LBM thinks Big Bill

can't talk much, but he will talk, and "I keeps him laughing all the time."

Lee Collins is sick too.

When LBM was a little boy, a great piano player in New Orleans was named Ford. Another one who palyed in Bogalusa was called Charlie Mahorner. He was a great blues player. "No Leg" Kenny, whose leg was off up to his knee, played around Oakdale, Louisiana and De Quincy. He got around all right, played good piano. David Lee Johnson was another good piano player, lived in Beaumont [Texas] if he's not dead. Peg Top was a great piano player.

Around Chicago they had a lot of good blues players too: "45," Clarence Ammons, Jimmy Yancey, Chicago Bill, Cow Cow Davenport, Cripple Clarence Lofton, who died a year ago, Jerome Carrington, who was great at the time, Earl "Fatha" Hines, who had to be great, and Teddy Wilson who was around for a while and was great.

Henry Palmer, who wrote "I Found a New Baby" and Henry Shayne, who wrote "Mr. Freddie's Blues" are still around.

WR is trying to take a photograph of LBM, complaining about lack of good photographic equipment.

End of interview.