

MINOR "RAM" HALL
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
September 2, 1958

Also present: William Russell

Minor Hall got his name, "Ram", in New Orleans, from Kid Ory, who first called him ["Rarin' to Go"--"Ram to Go" ?], because MH was always anxious [and perhaps premature] to begin playing each piece; MH first played with Ory at St. Katherine's Hall, sitting in and then substituting for the regular drummer, Henry Martin (MH also sounded quite a bit like Martin) several times when Martin could not be present. MH says he really got his start from his brother, Fred "Tubby" Hall, who was two years older than MH, but was also called "Baby"; Tubby gave MH a pair of sticks, with which he practiced drumming, using steps, etc., for practice surfaces. MH was born March 2, 1897, in Sellies [sic--MH pronounces "Sellers" --Check spelling], Louisiana, which is eighteen miles up-river from New Orleans--MH says it is across from Hahnville [sic], and on the opposite side of the river from La Place, where Ory came from [some error here, either MH's or Rand-McNally's]. (WR comments that Wellman Braud came from the other side [west] of the river, too, from St. James Parish, and MH says Mutt Carey was from Hahnville.) MH was brought by his parents to New Orleans when he was about three years old. MH's father, Joseph Hall, was also a drummer, who played in brass bands in the country [and in town?]. Tubby Hall, working for a dentist at the time, could not go on a job to Plaquemines Parish (from where Charlie Love and Clarence Williams came, says WR, and MH says Zeb [Lener] came from there, also) [Thinking of the town Plaquemines. WR], with [Phil] "Pill" Coycault, so he sent MH, still in short pants, to play; MH had to borrow a pair of long pants. Coycault played clarinet and guitar. MH did well, and after that Coycault would hire him instead of Tubby. Tubby was born in 1895; he was called "Tubby" (after he was called "Baby") because he was so fat (he was called "Big Tubby" and MH was called "Little Tubby").

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MH's first job was with a trio in which Arthur Campbell played piano and Sidney Bechet played [clarinet]; it was at a second-story nightclub run by [Guidroz?] and Allen. Around that time, Tubby, Eddie "Montudi" Garland, "Sugar Johnny" Smith and others went to Chicago to play at the Deluxe Cafe, operated by Shaw, at 35th and State; MH thinks Lawrence Duhe, also with the band, was the leader. ^[Compare Louis Hopper's interview] MH's older brother, not a musician, also went to Chicago, where he got a job in the stockyards; he then sent for MH and the parents; when they arrived, he got a job for MH at the stockyards, but it was not to MH's liking, so he made his entrance and exit to the job in the same few minutes. MH says his brothers got drafted (World War I), and he took Tubby's place with the band at the Deluxe; Garland had been replaced by Wellman Braud, so that the band then consisted of Braud, MH, Smith, Duhe, Roy Palmer and Lil Hardin (later LH Armstrong). MH had played a few jobs in Chicago before this. Smith, dying of tuberculosis, was replaced by Mutt Carey when the band [went to or] was at the Dreamland (operated by Bill Bottoms), and Johnny Dodds had come in on clarinet, replacing Duhe. [Check this. Compare Jazzman, King Joe Oliver]. Carey, wanting to take a short vacation in New Orleans, got Joe Oliver, who had come to Chicago with a Mary Mack [Mack's Merry Makers?] show, to replace him; by the time Carey returned to Chicago, Oliver had taken over the band [Check]. They continued at the Dreamland for quite a while, and then took an additional job; when they finished at evening at the Dreamland, at one in the morning, they would play at the after-hours place, the Pekin Cafe. Tony Jackson was playing intermission piano there. After a while, the Pekin was closed because of some trouble (gangsters shooting at each other-- MH first saw Al Capone at the Pekin); Oliver got in touch [got work?] with

the people at the Royal Garden (later known as the Lincoln Garden). Kid Ory, in Oakland, California, got the band a job in San Francisco, at the [Pergola] Dance Hall, on Market Street; Davy Jones (still living in Los Angeles) was added on saxophone, to make eight pieces. [Jimmy Palao was also in the band on violin]. "Maybe the people didn't go for 'Dixieland' so good in a dance hall, like they did, so Oliver wanted lay off one man", but instead of releasing Jones [the last to join], he released Palao; MH, who had grown up with Palao, objected, so Oliver got rid of him, too, replacing him with Baby Dodds. A union hearing was held, where it was decided that Oliver had acted in error by firing MH and bringing Dodds into town without their permission; Oliver had to pay MH's fare back to Chicago, plus about a month's pay, plus about a three hundred dollar fine for importing Dodds. MH returned to Chicago, where he went to work with Jimmie Noone's little band, at The Nest (later the Apex Club), which was across the street from the Sunset Cafe, where Tubby was working with Carroll Dickerson's big band; others in Noone's band were Earl Hines [piano, Joe Poston [alto saxophone] and (MH thinks) Johnny [St Cyr, banjo?] Because of romantic difficulties, MH accepted an offer from Ory, then in Los Angeles at a taxi dance hall; the drummer in Ory's band had two jobs at the time, so MH was to replace him, but when he got to Los Angeles, the situation had changed and a majority of the band members voted to retain the same drummer. MH decided to stay in California anyway, and Ory and Mutt Carey left the band; the three [with others] formed another band and went to work in San Pedro [California]; MH has worked with Ory ever since that time. The first taxi dance hall was on Third Street, right off Main Street; they [Ory, Carey, MH] later worked at another one, the Red Mill, operated by Jack Goldberg. The band became well-known and began playing in

night clubs; the personnel of "the real band" [quotes from MH] were Bud Scott, Carey, Eddie Garland, MH, Ory, and [MH thinks Fred Washington (for a while) and others?]. MH agrees with WR that the year was around 1922. MH has played with Ory ever since, until 1957. Around the time of World War II, when music business was bad, Ory had a chicken farm, Carey was a porter on the {railroad} and MH played with a 5-piece band at Strip City, Pico at Western [in L.A.], with Wendall Allen; then MH was drafted again (as he had been in WW I), age forty-four, sent to Fresno [California], where he stayed about one year; he got out of the Army because of his age and because he got a defense job with Douglas [Aircraft], at Santa Monica, where he worked about two years, until just before the war ended. He organized a six-piece band at the Douglas plant, playing twice a week for entertainment there. Finding out that he could leave his defense job, he accepted a job with Ory (encouraged to get back in the music business by Barney Bigard) to play at a place in Hollywood called The Jade; when he quit at Douglas, he told his supervisor (who wanted to keep him on, because he was a good worker) he was going to join the Merchant Marine; the supervisor came to the club about a week later, and MH told him the Merchant Marine would not accept him, so he had begun playing music again for a living. The band remained at The Jade for quite some time. The reason Zutty Singleton played drums with the Ory band on the Orson Welles radio programs [1944] was that MH was working at Douglas at the time; MH got back in the band when it worked [i.e., broadcast] for Standard Oil Company. Zutty was replaced because he and Ory had differences of opinion about tempos.

MH was about two and one-half years old when his family moved to New Orleans; he remembers music in New Orleans from about the time he became large enough to play music. His three ambitions when he began playing were to play a funeral, a Mardi Gras parade and play for a picnic [i.e., play a boat excursion and picnic] which Ory did frequently. WR says the reason Ory gave for replacing Henry Martin, on drums, with Joe Lindsay [followed by or following MH?] was that Martin had decided to take up guitar. MH didn't know a lot of the [later] musicians, like Joe Lindsay, and didn't know George Lewis until Lewis came to California [early Fifties?]; MH mentions that Ory used Steve Lewis's piano some in New Orleans.

MH saysaTubby Hall came to California with a show, the Charleston Review (he thinks); Natty Dominique was also in the band, a large one; MH went back home [probably returning to Chicago--See end of Reel II] then; he went back four times, finally settling in California permanently. MH's and Tubby's styles were somewhat different; WR says Baby Dodds admired Tubby's press roll; MH says Tubby had a fast foot, could play a show with his foot. MH says Ory always liked good rhythm, not caring about fancy stuff, and MH gives him [Tubby or Ory?] credit for having taught him about drumming. MH describes the first drum set he had, one Tubby gave him, a "make-up" set, and comments about various other technical aspects of early-day drumming equipment. MH's favorite drummer was Chick Webb, and he liked some drummer [Peggy Harding or Hardworth?] with the Tennessee Ten. MH remembers [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.], drummer with John Robichaux at the Lyric Theater; MH liked Henry Zeno, who worked mostly in night clubs in the District, with Oliver at one time there; WR says, MH agrees, that Zeno also worked uptown, in the Eagle Band with Frankie Duson. When MH lived in New Orleans, it was at 4431 Freret Street. A first cousin of MH, the old-time music teacher, Jim Humphrey, owned the place;

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[Continuing a discussion of some of his cousins, Jim Humphrey, and some of his grandsons]...Percy Humphrey [grandson] plays trumpet and is leader of the Eureka Brass Band; Percy was a drummer in the beginning. Earl Humphrey, once a trombonist, now lives in Virginia and plays bass [at the present, 1964, Earl lives in New Orleans, and has played trombone again]. MH played for about two weeks with Willie Humphrey [the younger], who was in California; MH thinks he was discharged from the Navy there.

Of the old-time, good drummers, MH remembers Walter Brundy, Henry Zeno and [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.], but not[Mack Murray--McMurray?] or Dee Dee Chandler. MH heard and saw Buddy Bolden once, at Lincoln Park, when MH was quite young. MH didn't play much in New Orleans--only with Ory, with a band than played down the country ["Pill" Coycault--see Reel I], and the trio with Arthur Campbell and Sidney Bechet--and doesn't remember much about the New Orleans musicians of that time, and he left New Orleans in 1918. MH refutes the story attributed by WR that Bechet was older than he said he was; MH says he and Bechet were only two or four months apart in age, and MH was born in 1897, as Bechet had said he himself was. MH comments, saying that the first time he saw Louis Armstrong was when Armstrong was in a parade when he was playing in the [Waifs's] Home Band, and that the next time he saw him was in Chicago, when he joined Oliver.

MH didn't hear any brass bands in the country, because he was too young, and he never went back; the brass bands he heard [in New Orleans] were the Excelsior, the Tuxedo (of Papa Celestin) and various "pick-up" bands, which played for Mardi Gras; MH himself was never a member of any organized brass band, but played in pick-up bands for Mardi Gras and for some funerals; he played snare drum in them. He never worked with his brother, Tubby Hall. MR

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also worked with Mutt Carey's [jazz] band, which was once hired to play at balls the Elks had in several towns, from Los Angeles, all the way to Chicago; the Carey band also played in the brass band for parades for the Elks [with Tubby?].

MH didn't have any lessons on drums, except that Tubby showed him how to hold the sticks; MH learned to read (a little) in Chicago, when Jimmy Bertrand, then working in the State Theater, 35th and State, in the band under the direction of Ed Bailey (now living in Los Angeles), offered to teach him how to read if he would teach Bertrand some of his New Orleans style. Tubby Hall took lessons, and learned how to read pretty well. Tubby went to Chicago in the latter part of 1917, MH surmises, because he himself went a few months later, in 1918 before Kid Oliver; MH says Tubby [didn't?] go as a musician, but joined the band at the Deluxe Cafe in Chicago. Ed Garland told MH that he went to Chicago in 1912, but MH thinks Garland went a little later than that. Tubby didn't have a trade, only doing office work when he was not working as a musician; MH says the New Orleans downtown Creoles were the ones who had trades such as cigar making--Manuel Perez and Omer Simeon's father being two such (the elder Simeon went to Chicago to work his trade). MH learned to speak a little Creole; his father's side had Creoles in it. He was not any relation to Edmond Hall or to Rene Hall. [Tubby Hall?] left New Orleans to play with a "doctor" of some sort, not returning to playing Dixieland until later. MH says that when Tubby went to Chicago, there were three New Orleans bands there--"Tig" Chambers, with Ernest Kelly playing trombone, some Creole trumpet player [Manuel Perez?] (not Freddy Keppard, who was earlier, the first New Orleans band to go to Chicago), [and the Deluxe Cafe Band?]. MH says that Dixieland didn't make a hit until the Original Dixieland Jazz Band went to New York and recorded "Livery Stable Blues." MH says he played with Nick LaRocca a few times in New Orleans;

LaRocca's uncle had a grocery store at the corner nearest MH's home, and MH played a few little jobs with LaRocca [and others of the ODJB?] [Compare Nick LaRocca, reel? ?]. MH says Freddy Keppard had a band [earlier] than the ODJB, but that people [in the North] just weren't paying much attention to Dixieland music until the ODJB made the records. MH was not with Ory on the Sunshine label records, made for the Spikes Brothers, 1921]; Alton Redd was the drummer. [Is he confused here? Redd preceded him in Ory's revival band?] Redd is also on the copy records made for *Doctor Exner*. MH's first records, with Ory, were for Decca, then for Columbia, then for Good Time Jazz. WR mentions that Dink Johnson, brother of Bill Johnson, played on the Sunshine records; MH played a few times with Dink, in Santa Barbara, where Dink lived. Most of MH's work was with Mutt Carey and with Ory, especially Ory; MH did work with Wendall Allen at the place now known as Strip City, and was there when he was drafted during World War II. MH says Ory is older than Mutt Carey; MH says a party was held for Ory about two years ago, and Ory, who claims seventy-one, was seventy-one then, so Ory is about seventy-three. Mutt was one or two years younger. MH first played with Mutt in New Orleans, with Ory's band; MH says he thought Mutt was the greatest trumpet player in the world, along with Joe Johnson. MH tells of Ory's band meeting and beating Joe Oliver's on the street when they were both advertising. MH says Ory didn't play fast, but he had a swing [he communicated to the band] that the people just went crazy about. MH tells about going on a boat to picnics for colored people; the band played going to the picnic grounds [several miles along the river, perhaps], at the picnic, but not coming back, when many were asleep. MH enjoyed playing at the lake for various occasions, too. MH used to go to the Baptist church, but has

become a Catholic since living in California. According to WR, Bud Scott and Mutt Carey told him the music they heard in church when they were growing up had a very good beat, and they thought Bolden might have got some of his ideas from the churches; MH says they did have a good beat, but he didn't hear much anything but organ music. MH tells about walking, saying that they [the drummers and bass players had to walk in the early days of jazz in New Orleans, that they were not allowed on the street cars [except when they had permission from City Hall? Perhaps this was later]; he says Ed Garland, who drove a barrel [carrying] wagon, would take his own bass to a job beforehand, but that he would have to walk and carry it home from the job.

MH met Bud Scott in California, for the first time (Scott had played quite a lot with John Robichaux in New Orleans), when Scott joined Ory. MH says that at one time the Ory band had one of the best rhythm sections--Bud Scott, Buster Wilson, Ed Garland and MH. WR agrees, adding that it was the best he ever heard. Ory's reputation was built not so much on playing, but on the rhythm of the band. The band played soft, except for the "out" choruses. Ory was very particular about his band and their rhythm.

MH says that the New Orleans drummers almost always play four-beat rhythm, and have done so since he was a child; he says the people who started the two-beat style were the Lu Watters band, in San Francisco. [!!!!RBA] Ory used to play four even on blues; MH says they called that "rocking time."

MH talks about drums, saying that he keeps his "sharp" by not releasing the tension on the heads after he had finished playing (learned from [Louis Cottrell [\$.r.]) (except in extreme temperature changes). MH tunes his drums to the piano. MH says his style has changed some by necessity, so that he can

get work, but he uses the same basic rhythm. MH tells about his and Joe Darensbourg's getting the Firehouse Five plus Two started; they used to go to the home of Ward Kimball [trombonist and leader of group] in San Gabriel, California, for Sunday afternoon jam sessions; Johnny Lucas, the crippled trumpet player, was with them--MH remembers him because he gave MH an old-style Chinese cymbal--After a while, the Firehouse group became an organized band.

MH uses medium-weight sticks; he uses brushes sometimes, too. MH says he can play almost as softly with sticks as he can with brushes; he uses a form of press roll, which he calls a "drag roll."

WR and MH discuss an article about MH's becoming ill on a tour in Europe; he returned to the United States to recover before rejoining the group, and was replaced first by a German drummer, and then by Walter Bishop [father of modern pianist, W.B., Jr.]. (MH and WR had mentioned an article about the death of Tubby Hall, and MH says he thinks [the article?] was in 1936). MH says the two drummers didn't get along so well with Ory (not that they were not good) because Ory has very definite ideas about the rhythm he wants; MH says most drummers don't get along with Ory for the same reason, but it doesn't bother him any.

MH has not been to New Orleans since he left for Chicago in 1918; the closest he has been is Houston, Texas.

Tubby went back, with Louis Armstrong's band, in 1931 (MH says that Armstrong got that band up himself [apparently referring to Armstrong's succession to the leadership of organized bands in previous and subsequent years]).