

LIZZIE MILES

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January 18, 1951 Also present: Richard B. Allen, Robert W. Greenwood

[George Lewis Band?]

This interview was recorded in the back room of the Mardi Gras Lounge, 333 Bourbon Street [, New Orleans, Louisiana].

LM was born March 31, 1895, on Bourbon [now Pauger. RBA] Street in New Orleans. Her mother sang in private while young; in later years, she sang Creole songs, etc., in public. LM's early musical instruction came from a Mrs. Atkins taught the children how to sing, and they would put on concerts in Mrs. Atkins' backyard on Sunday afternoons. LM says the concerts were well-attended, and that a while, there were many such concerts given, all over town. The best singers were in demand, and as their popularity increased, their wages increased. LM says she would get about 50 cents when she first started, but that the price gradually rose. She sang in Francs Amis Hall, L' Equite' Hall, Artisan Hall, Hopes Hall and other such places; also at Dixie Park and Lincoln Park, and in the Pythian Theater and the Pythian Temple. Then LM went on the road with her sister, Edna Benbow, and the sister's husband; Edna Benbow was what was then called a "coon shouter".

[LM began singing in public as a small child, when she was attending catechism classes. The concerts in the various halls were combination concerts and balls, so she worked with many bands and musicians, including Kid [i.e., King] Oliver, [Kid] Ory, [Alphonse] Picou, Manuel Perez, and Bunk Johnson. The concert part of the affairs would run about three hours, until around 11 PM; then the ball began, and lasted until 3 or 4 AM.]

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LM says she got the name, Lizzie Miles, from a motto which was made up for her because she was always smiling; the motto was "Miles of Smiles from Lizzie Miles". [about 1951, LM mentioned being a close friend of a Mr. Miles to RWG & RBA. RBA.] Her real name is Elizabeth Mary Landreaux, and her married name is Pajeaud; her husband and Willie Pajeaud [sic] [trumpeter] were first cousins.

The first singer LM made a regular effort to hear was Sophie Tucker, who then made her local appearances at the Palace Theater; the first song LM remembers Sophie Tucker singing was "That Mesmerising Mendelsshn Tune". LM's sister [Edna Benbow] had the ability to roll her eyes for one complete chorus while doing her singing act; LM was never able to do that; LM says Edna Benbow was a really good "coon shouter". LM says she and her sister were the only ones in their family who were musical, as far as she knows. [Her half-brothers were Herb Morand, trumpeter, and Morris Morand, drummer. RBA.]

ST0158] LM remembers some of the famous blues singers; she says she worked with Ma Rainey, that they played "day and date"-- [i.e., each worked in a different theater in the same town on the same date:]. LM heard Bessie Smith, Clara Smith, and Mamie Smith; she liked Mamie Smith's recording of "Crazy Blues", [OK 4169] the first blues record ever made popular; she says someone, perhaps Elvira Johnson, who was among the first of the Negro performers to go to Europe, claimed to have made an earlier blues recording, for Victor; but LM says, it was never made popular. [cf discography]

The first New Orleans blues singer and coon shouter who impressed LM was Tillie Johnson, wife of "Dad" James, a producer of shows and other entertainments.

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LM says Ann Cook was before her [LM's] time, although she met Ann Cook in later years, but never heard her sing.

LM's first job as a band singer in a cabaret was in New Orleans, at Bucktown, for Martin [the owner]; she was asked by a musician friend to go with him to the place; Manuel Manetta, leader of the band, asked her what she wanted to sing; she chose "Dardanella", and was hired for the job then. The band comprised: Manetta, piano; Kerry Fritz or Amos White (the latter now in California), cornet; banjo or guitar; drums; perhaps Zeb [Leneries?], clarinet. RBA says [Kid] Rena once played [cornet] with Manetta, but LM says Fritz was with him at the time. LM says she sang, as a guest, with Tony Jackson (pianist, also from New Orleans), at [Teenan?] Jones' place, the Elite Number one in Chicago; Jones gave her a rose, which she still has, and offered her a job, but she didn't want to work in a cabaret; so she didn't begin her cabaret career until she began working with Manetta. She made a lot of money in Bucktown; Storyville was "going full blast" then, and the people from there would come out to Bucktown after they finished their work.

LM next left New Orleans for Chicago; her second night in town, she went to the Dreamland, where King Oliver was playing; he asked her to sing, suggesting " [I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My] Sister Kate"; she agreed, but would not shimmy, so a ^d _λ midget who was selling cigarets in the place did the shimmy for her. LM was hired to sing with the Oliver band then. Some other members of the Oliver band then: Louis Armstrong, [second] cornet [to Oliver]; Lil Hardin, [before her marriage to Armstrong] piano; perhaps Baby Dodds, drums; and Eddie Garland, bass. When she quit at the Dreamland, she went to the

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Entertainers, a black-and-tan [i.e., mixed racially] place, to work with Freddy Keppard; the place was primarily for dancers, and some of them made it a point to irritate LM when she sang. So she quit and went to work at the Deluxe, with pianist Glover Compton, whose wife, Nettie Lewis, was also an entertainer. RBA says Compton is still in Chicago, that Ronnie [Soderberg] knows him. LM returned to New Orleans some time after World War I; she says that during World War I she was with the Jones Brothers and Wilson Circus; during the flu epidemic [of 1918?] she was stricken; she was ordered by her doctor (after her recovery) not to sing for at least a year; she says she didn't sing for about one and one-half years, and then she went to work in Bucktown with Manetta. (She had said that during the time of her sickness she was supposed to have joined Al G. Barnes Circus in California.)

LM returned to New Orleans only for a visit; she returned to Chicago, and was sent by Jerry Mills, a booking agent, to Springfield, Illinois, where she met a great pianist then just starting his career; unfortunately, she cannot remember his name. Returning to Chicago, she met Spencer Williams, composer of "Basin Street Blues". Then King Oliver asked her to go to New York to record; she did, and made tests for Columbia and Okeh. Then Jimmy McHugh, at the time a staff member of Mills music publishers, took her and a test pressing of "Dear Old Southland" to Victor to demonstrate her voice. Pianist [J.] Russell Robinson who, Lizzie Miles thinks, was from Memphis [cf JRR biographica], tried to get her the job as blues singer with the Blackbirds, but Perry Bradford, who had discovered Mamie Smith

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[and had her recorded], got the job for his protégé, Edith Wilson. LM went to work at Dash's Inn [sp?], a nightclub in New York; she was recommended for the job by Lucille Hegamin and her husband. (The husband, a band leader, took a band to Japan, where he got married, never to return to his homeland.) After Dash's Inn, LM worked at a cabaret called the Capital, a block-long affair on Lenox Avenue between (she thinks) 139th and 140th streets, where she remained about three years. LM was then offered a job in Paris, France, but she declined; "Bricktop" took the job, and began writing LM about how much money she was making. LM talked to the pianist in the band [at the Capital?], Danny Wilson (composer of a beautiful number, "With Someone Like You Around Me, How Could I Feel Blue?"), and saxophonist-violinist Ollie Leguerre [sp?], and they decided to go to Paris together. They obtained employment at a new place in Paris operated by Mrs. Regina Boucan [sp?]; the entertainment manager was an American, Louis Mitchell. The place was named for him, as was the Custom; it was Chez Mitchell; Florence and Palmer Jones worked at a place called "Chez Florence", and "Bricktop" was at the Chez Bricktop; all were French-owned. When Mitchell's drawing power proved poor, a Russian troupe were brought in. LM became known as "The Black Rose," or "La Rose Noir [e]" at that time; black satin roses were given to the customers. She had in her repertoire two numbers by Sidney Bechet; one, "Do That Thing", had the words "pork chop" in it, so it became known to the customers as "Pork Chop".

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RBA asks about LM's recordings of "Grievin' Mama Blues" and "Slow Up, Papa" for Okeh; he asks who played cornet and piano on them; LM doesn't know who they were. The [other] Okeh's were made with a white band, a reading group; the arrangements were by Bob Ricketts. [cf discographies.]

LM made quite a few records with pianist Clarence Johnson, of Chicago.

LM says she recorded "Haitian Blues" and "Black Man, (Be on Yo Way)" for Brunswick, with Russell Robinson on piano; LM also played Kazoo on "Haitian Blues". She says Spencer Williams wrote the tune.

"[My] Man O' War Blues" and "Electrician's Blues" were recorded for Victor; Leroy Smith's pianist [Hang Brooks] (Smith's hand was then at the Shuffle Inn) played on those recordings. "Done Throed My [or the] Key Away" [for Victor?] was with Jelly Roll Morton. [cf. discographies here.] Others LM recorded with Morton were "Don't Tell Me Nothin' 'Bout My Man" and "I Hate A Man Like You." Morton was the other voice on those recordings.

"A Diferent Kind O Man" and "You're Such a Cruel Papa [To Me]" were made for Columbia, with Clarence Williams, who wrote them. LM says King Oliver was probably the ~~cornet~~^{cornet}ist on those records, as she did make some recordings with him. Oliver was having a hard time then, as the New Yorkers resented the Westerners; LM thinks Oliver's band may have broken up then, to be taken over by Luis Russell. LM went to Atlantic City jobs a couple of times with Oliver; LM thinks Albert Nicholas [clarinet and alto sax], from New Orleans, was with Oliver at the time.

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[STO551] RBA mentions Lizzie Miles and her Creole Jazz Hounds, on Emerson, for whom she recorded "Four O'clock Blues" and "Aggravatin Papa"; LM doesn't remember any of the musicians on the records. RBA mentions Lizzie Miles and her Creole Stompers, who recorded for Vocalion; LM doesn't remember who the musicians were; she says she made the records in [19]39. RBA mentions (James?) Wiggins, who is listed as composer on "Keep Knockin, NO. 2". LM says Richard M. Jones was her connection with Melrose [publisers and a.& r. Men].

Pianists LM worked with: Clarence Johnson, Fats Waller, Willie "The Lion" Smith, [Harry] Brooks, Porter Grainger, Jelly Roll Morton, Donald Heyward [sp?], Russell Robinson, Clarence Williams, Glover Compton, Hutchinson (a West Indian not currently in the U.S.), Sam Wooding, Alex Hill. Joe Robichaux is mentioned. Her favorite piano accompanists were Fats Waller and Willie Smith. [cf. below] The best orchestra she even sang with, although she didn't record with them, was Charlie Taylor's Southernaires, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Reynolds [of that band?], wrote "I'm Confessin'", among other things. The band consisted of piano, violin, two cornets, trombone, two saxophones, banjo and drums [perhaps not two cornets--she says "two cornets, trombone, I mean two saxophones"--etc.]. LM says Duke Ellington and other leaders would come to hear that band when they themselves got off work.

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If LM could pick a band to sing with now, she would choose either Fats Waller or Earl Hines for her pianist; King Oliver or Freddy Keppard, cornet; clarinet, Sidney Bechet.

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The trombonist LM would like to have in a band to accompany her singing is Wilber DeParis, brother of [trumpeter] Sidney DeParis. RBA says Wilber DeParis and Danny Barker are now working together; LM says she has never heard Barker play guitar, although he roomed with her at one time; she likes the guitar playing of Lonnie Johnson. LM says that King Oliver's band was about the only one with which she ever sang that had a bass player, who was Eddie Gerland. LM didn't ever pay much attention to drummers, because they always had to "swing low." The instrument to which she paid particular attention was the piano. LM never worked with [pianist] Earl Hines, but she liked his style of playing.

When LM returned from Europe, she went to work at the Capital; then she went to the Nest Club; she lists the places she worked during that time: Dash's Inn, the Capital Palace and the Cotton Club at the same time. LM worked at the Cotton Club when it first opened, when Jack Johnson [ex-world's champion heavyweight boxer?] was working there; Johnson's appeal was less than expected, so the place closed for redecoration, re-opening with big shows and Armand Piron's band from New Orleans. LM says the owners of the Cotton Club wanted New Orleans Dixieland, but Piron "came up there playing Paul Whiteman, you know, all that high class, and they didn't want that, they wanted that real Dixieland, you know, see?" Piron, who had Steve Lewis [piano] and [Louis] Cottrell [Sr., drums] in his band, soon left the job.

After the Cotton Club, LM worked at the Nest Club, then at the [Bamville?], at the Strollers Club, at Dash Inn [so stated in earlier list], Herman's Inn.

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LM returned [from New York?] to New Orleans in 1938, when her mother became ill; LM couldn't get work singing, so she took a job as barmaid at Green's Bar on [North?] Rampart [Street], where she worked, off and on, for about three years. She was called "The Voice of Experience" because she would listen to the troubles of her patrons there. LM would sing with the recordings on the music box [i.e., coin-operated phonograph]; her favorite was Bob Crosby's recording of "Who's Sorry Now?". The patrons liked her singing, saying she should make recordings, and go into show business! Another recording she liked was "I'm Dancing with Tears in My Eyes". When LM left that job, she took another of the same kind in the Kitten Club, owned by Johnny [Robita?], on Rampart Street; she also sang with the phonograph there.

LM did not work as a barmaid all the time she was not singing professionally; she toyed with the idea of leaving New Orleans again to sing, but remained with her mother, whose illness continued. When she began singing at The Paddock [Lounge, Bourbon Street, New Orleans] in September, 1951 [in a conversation with RWG on May 15, 1968 (during my transcription of this interview), he said the date must have been September, 1950; LM began singing at The Paddock a few months after the George Lewis Band began working at El Morocco in about June, 1950--PRC], she was working with Snookum Russell, pianist; Alphonse Picou, then in California, [re.] joined the [Papa Celestin?] band at The Paddock later. LM remained at The Paddock eight weeks.

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LM says that when she was interviewed on "Poppa Stoppa's" [radio] program, Sid DaVilla, operator of the Mardi Gras Lounge, was also being interviewed; she asked him for an audition to sing in his club, soon to be opened; he agreed, but didn't call her. LM thinks she got on the program because of a letter she wrote to "Poppa Stoppa", in which she told him he should not sing, but should hire LM for that purpose. Joe Mares asked LM to be on the program; he then asked LM to appear with Tony Almerico at the Parisian Room; Mares later had her audition for Steve Valenti, operator of The Paddock, who hired her to begin singing there the day after the audition. When she left The Paddock, Mares advised LM to see DaVilla; she did, and is still on that job [at the time of this interview].

The costumes LM wears are dresses she bought for her mother in 1923 and thereabout; her shoes with the rhinestone heels came from Paris, where she bought them when working there (she returned from Paris in 1925).

[STO798] The first movie LM worked in was "The Stardust Ring," a movie about a circus, starring Bessie Love; LM was employed in a circus which was hired en toto for the movie; LM had a featured spot in which she sang and danced "Walkin' the Dog". Her next picture was with Hall Leroy and Mitzi Mayfair; she thinks it was their first picture; it was called "Tick Tack Toe" [sp?]; LM sang "Three Is A Crowd," and pretended to play the piano. The pianist from Guy Anselmu's Orchestra (who play for the movie) actually played

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LM made no more movies; the lights were too hard on her eyes, and she wasn't paid what she though she had contracted for. She made the movie around 1932-34; they were for Warner [Brothers?] Studio in Brooklyn, New York.

Clarence Williams [pianist and composer] had connections with all the recording companies; the two singers he worked with the most were Sara Martin and Eva Taylor, the latter being his wife. LM worked with Williams in Chicago at White City for the annual celebration of the Irish Celtic Association; LM says all the music publishers in Chicago were there to promote their songs; Williams took LM there to plug his number, "Royal Garden Blues." LM says Williams became so excited by the large audience that he began playing in the wrong key; LM sang in the key she had rehearsed, and Williams finally changed to her key, to the applause of the audience. [Lizzie Miles frequently had disagreements with pianists about keys. RBA] Williams was called "Cuz", as were many others, such as Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong.

LM made more money working at the Nest Club than anywhere else; Sam Wooding and Danny Wilson had bands there at one time or another. Wooding left the Nest to go to the Club Alabam, which was owned by a Frenchman, who took the band to Europe.

LM says she has never known many musicians by name, except piano players; she knew many of Duke Ellington's men because they frequented the Capital when she was working there. Some of them were drummer Sonny Greer, [Wellman] Braud, bassist from New Orleans, [clarinetist] Barney Bigard. LM had worked at affairs thrown by the "You, Him and I" Club, composed of three men, one of whom^{er} was

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one of whom was Bigard's father. LM also knew [saxist-arranger]
Benny Carter. RBA says he thinks [trumpeter] Don Albert [Dominique]
is related to Barney Bigard [see Don Albert interview]

End of Reel 11.