

ERNEST MILTON
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
April 26, 1961

Also present: William Russell
Ralph Collins
Harold Dejan

(Interview recorded at [home of EM] 2030 St. Ann [Street, New Orleans])

Ernest P. Milton was born June 14, 1905, in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans. A younger sister played piano. EM has never played anything but drums; he was about nineteen years old when he began playing; he took no lessons. His favorite band in his younger years was the Excelsior Brass Band, led by Manuel Perez [Compare other interviews, e.g., Peter Bocage], EM thinks. No drummer inspired EM to take up drums, nor did he ever watch any one drummer in particular. EM liked the Olympia Band, a dance band led by [drummer] Arnold DePass. HD says "Big Ike" Robinson played trombone in that band, and that [Elmer] "Coo Coo" Talbert was the trumpet player; EM says Talbert was not playing trumpet during the time he was thinking about. WR says Freddy Keppard once played with the Olympia, and asks if there were also a Young Olympia; EM says there was an Old Olympia and a Young Olympia. EM agrees with WR that Ricard Alexis started out in the Young Olympia. Arnold DePass and bassist Billy Morand [i.e., Marrero] (father of Eddie Morand [i.e., Marrero]) had the Olympia Band together one time. Billy [Marrero] was playing during the time of [Albert] Glenny. WR says Billy [Marrero] was playing during the time of [Albert] Glenny. WR says Billy [Marrero] managed the Superior Band at one time. John Marrero [banjo], brother of Simon, played in the Young Olympia with his brother.

Talk of EM's first drum set; he says tom toms weren't used then [Compare other interviews], and no one had sock cymbals.

Soon after EM started playing, he formed his own band; other personnel: Albert Glenny [bass], Alphonse Picou [clarinet], Johnny Dave [banjo], Lawrence Toca [Martin, trumpet], "Gossoon" [Joseph Phillips (check spelling)],
to "Gossoon" RBB. Sp. 30, 1957
guitar. EM and Toca were the youngest in the band, the others being old

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musicians. EM once had a band in which [Adolphe] "Tats" [Alexander, Jr.,
clarinet and/or saxophone] and Paul Dominguez, violin, played; others in
the band: Albert Glenny, Billie [Pierce], Toca, "Big Ike" Robinson
[trombone]. EM, HD and Willie Darensbourg (violin, from Baton Rouge,
a cousin of banjo player Caffrey Darensbourg) had a band at Milneburg.
Most of EM's work was around Buras, Burwood, Venice and that downriver area;
he played there nearly every Saturday. He worked a long time at Moreau's,
in the Little Woods section, near Milneburg. EM's long stay around
Milneburg was around 1928 or 1929. HD says there wasn't much going on
at Milneburg during the Depression. EM says HD came with him after Eddie
Johnson had left the EM band. HD says he was at Milneburg before Johnson
was there; he played in a band with Willie Darensbourg, Louis Gallaud,
piano, and Bill [?]. HD and Darensbourg later joined EM. Hickman
played at the [Paradise?] which was next door [to Moreau's?]. HD says there
was an amusement park at Milneburg when he began going out there in the
early Twenties. The Japanese Tea Garden was next to where HD played; the
train stopped [terminated] at the Tea Garden. The train service was dis-
continued before HD began driving out there in a Model T Ford [probably in
the early Twenties, or before?]. The roads were so bad that only a Ford
could go there; a good car couldn't make it! The Lincoln Beach area was
nothing but shells then.

EM had several bands after the Milneburg period; Buddy Petit played
second trumpet in one of them; Petit, who died July 4 [1931?], was in
EM's band at the time, and was supposed to make a band trip the day he died.
[Compare Sammy Penn?, reel ?] Toca was the first trumpet player.

"Trap", a "Jewmaker" [i.e., Jamaican], substituted for Petit on the three-day trip; HD says "Trap" also played alto horn, and worked with [Paul] Chaligny.

EM worked casual jobs at most of the halls in the city. EM usually had his own band, as he had plenty of work then; he used to give work to "Kid" Rena and others. "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] was the last one [i.e., trumpet player?] to work with EM at Moreau's; others in that band then; Lawrence Marrero [banjo], and Eddie "Big Head" Johnson, saxophone, were working with EM at Moreau's when it closed. Willie O'Connell, now a [musicians/s] union representative in Biloxi, sometimes substituted on banjo for Marrero; Marrero and O'Connell alternated, one working four nights one week, three the next. O'Connell lived with Marrero at one time. The band at Moreau's worked longer hours some nights, shorter some nights; they received no overtime, but the hours balanced out pretty well, and the tips were good on the overtime nights.

There was at least one piano at the lake; Walter Decou played it at a place about one-half block from Moreau's; Charlie Love, trumpet and Red Dugas, drums, worked with him.

Buddy Petit did not play loud; he had a good tone; he was a better second trumpet man than he was a first; he played open and muted. EM never saw BP read music. Petit was different from Louis Armstrong; Armstrong had a rougher tone than Petit. Kid Rena was more on the order of Armstrong; most all the trumpet players, including Punch [Miller], had about the same sound, except Petit.

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EM played a couple of jobs with Chris Kelly, but left because he didn't like Kelly's ways. Kelly had his own style; he was one of the best blues trumpet players around. He used various mutes. Kelly and Ricard Alexis had a band together at one time; it was larger than the usual; Ricard led the band; he was playing trumpet at the time, and was considered very good.

"Wooden Joe" was the loudest trumpet player EM ever heard. His name came from his being so powerful. *[cf. W. J. Nicholas, reel ?]*

WR mentions that Kid Clayton worked at Little Woods ten years back; it was further along the lake than Mama Lou's. EM worked a long time at the Happy Landing, with George E. Parker, piano player.

Almost all the camps at the lake had bands on weekends; there were picnics and parties in the Lincoln Beach area. There was plenty of work for musicians.

Wooden Joe could read to some extent. [Special] arrangements weren't used by the smaller bands then. Orchestrations were used and gave difficulty.

EM didn't know the names of the places he played on Saturdays in the down-river area; he knew where to go, however. These places have no names, being identified by the owner's name. The people down there liked Dixieland jazz then; HD says they like it now, and EM agrees. The admission charge to dances would be two or three dollars [often?]. WR mentions the Orange Festival held there [in Buras?] every year and that Andy Anderson and a band went about a year ago. HD says he played there with [Willie] Pajaud, trumpet player; At some of the places downriver, the band plays straight through the job, usually working at least five hours; there are no special hours; the band plays until the man in charge says to stop. HD says there is always plenty to eat and drink at the dances in that area. End of Reel I.

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The old-fashioned wooden [bass drum] pedal wouldn't be fast enough to play the music of today; fast numbers were played when wooden pedals were used, but in a different manner. Drummers of today have to be faster with their feet, as they play four beats to the measure instead of less, as in the old days. EM says old Dixieland and new Dixieland are both Dixieland, but different. ~~EM says old Dixieland and new Dixieland are both Dixieland, but different.~~ EM says trumpet players like Sharkey Bonano play the old style Dixieland, and that older trumpet players were not as fast as the ones of today.

An old-time drummer EM liked, one he says was of the best, was [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.], who was working with [A. J.] Piron when EM heard him. Paul Barbarin was also good at that time. EM agrees with HD that Roy [Evans] and [Nolan] "Shine" [Williams] were good drummers, and says ["Red?] Happy" was also good, but that Cottrell was "the king of all of them, him because he knowed that [written] music. . . ." One of the best bass drummers in a street band was a little man named Jim [Mukes], who played with the Eureka [Brass Band] [See photograph in Louis Armstrong's Satchmo. (Below photograph of Anderson's)]. HD sees him over the river sometimes, although he is not playing anymore. HD's favorite [street] drummer, snare or bass, was [Ernest] "Nenesse" Trepagnier. Little Jim, the drummer, played only in brass bands, never in orchestras. EM played once or twice in parades, but he didn't like the walking. EM remembers playing a Carnival parade with Thomas Copeland; HD says it was for the Arabi Packing Company, where Copeland worked. Copeland led the band; he used to play string bass with the Olympia Band (led by Arnold [DePass]), the second Olympia; Copeland played upright tuba on parades. The

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job was Copeland's, but the real leader of the band was Maurice Durand. Tom ^{✓✓✓} [E. Willie?] Parker, a tall man who has died, was a good bass drummer; he played with them that Carnival; HD says he lived on St. Philip, in the same block as the Caldonia [Club]; he played only parades.

EM says the proprietor of a place [the new Luthjen's on Chartres, see below] where he was playing put a man out of the place for taking pictures of the customers; EM figures the boss didn't want pictures taken because some spouse might see his wife or her husband out with somebody else; HD says he sent the men, Barry [Martyn] and [^]Gr^ham [Russell (of Eureka Magazine)?] there to take pictures of EM, but that they should have confined their shots to the band.

Discussion of EM's drum hits. [kits?]

Vernon's place, on Louisiana Avenue, is mentioned; Melvin Lastie [cornet] is mentioned.

Compared to Piron, [Clarence] Desdunes and [John] R^hbichaux, Baul Dominguez wasn't in their class as a [reading? RBA] violinist; he was more of a jazz violin player, on the order of Willie Darensbourg [see Reel I]; Dominguez could read, but he was mostly a jazz violinist. [Alphonse] Picou and Johnny Dave were playing with EM when Dominguez worked with EM; they played at the Autocrat [Club] at the time. Picou was great to work with; he helped the whole band with their music, and also composed and arranged some numbers for the band; they had some numbers no other band had; one of them was "Get Busy Rag", which the band featured when they played on advertising jobs. Ike Robinson played trombone with the band then. WR is afraid Picou's [sheet] music has been lost to posterity. [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin's band tried to play four of Picou's numbers

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when they [with Picou] were working at the Paddock [Lounge], but they couldn't play them; EM says they were difficult. Kid Howard is mentioned. EM says Lawrence Toca [Martin] would probably still be able to play "Get Busy Rag;" Toca was playing trumpet in the band when they used the number. WR says George Lewis said Toca played something like Buddy Petit; EM agrees. Petit played second trumpet to Toca's first in EM's band for a long time. Toca is younger than EM. Petit couldn't get anyone to hire him (as he was unreliable), but EM had him come into his band. HD says, "That's just the way Papa Celestin did with me; when he got famous, he forgot I was living." EM worked with Celestin a while.

The pianist EM preferred working with was George E. Parker; HD says it was because Parker had a good left hand.

The saxophone player EM preferred playing with was Paul Barnes; HD says he was a "humdinger", and played plenty of horn in his time. Theodore Purnell was all right, but EM preferred Barnes's style.

George Lewis worked with EM a while, before Lewis had a band. "Big Eye Louis" [Nelson] worked with EM a while, too.

The Luthjens who operate the place where EM plays now are related to the Luthjens who operated the place that burned; the present Luthjen's is located at Marigny and Chartres [streets]. [Reginald] Koeller is playing trumpet with EM at Luthjen's. Earl Wiggins plays piano, and Rene Mercadel is on saxophone. EM went to work at Luthjen's May 27, 1960. WR says the old place burned about a year ago, around New Year's [beginning of 1960]; the old lady [Luthjen matriarch] was an invalid; she and her son were burned to death in the fire. EM worked a short time there with Emile Barnes.

HD says that when trombone players are mentioned, not many people say anything about Jack Carey; EM worked with him at Shrewsbury; he says Carey was a pretty good trombone player. HD says Carey would sometimes have several jobs in one night; he would play a few numbers at each place, making the rounds for appearance. In the band with Carey and EM were Lawrence [Toca] and Emile Riley [banjo]; the band was trombone, drums, trumpet and banjo. When HD was small, he heard Carey play on advertising jobs. Carey lived in Shrewsbury, which is in Jefferson Parish; he has been dead a long time. WR says [Manuel] Manetta knew Carey when he lived on Louisiana Avenue; HD knew him from that time. EM says that in Shrewsbury, Carey had bought the house in which he lived; it was about three doors from the Owls Club.

HD mentions "Bama", who is also from Shrewsbury, says EM; Bama played drums, but now plays trumpet.

The late Gus Green, an old bass player, worked with EM.

[Louis] "Shots" [Madison] is mentioned.

"Zoot", who was killed, worked with the Golden Leaf Band. HD says [WR?] has a picture of the Golden Leaf from August Lanoix, who was playing bass in the band at the time. EM says Lanoix took the band after "Zoot" was in it. HD says "Ti Boy" Remy was playing trumpet in the band [with Lanoix?]. EM was thirteen or fourteen years old when his cousin was playing bass with the Golden Leaf; when the cousin died, Gus Green bought his bass. The cousin was called "Doogy." "Cat Fish Mouth Jessie" [Jackson? RBA] played banjo in the band. Sidney Vigne, who also got killed, was playing clarinet; HD says Vigne was a good clarinet player; EM agrees. "Doogy" was the manager of the band; his real name was George Davis; Davis died of a heart attack while delivering groceries on a truck.

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Patron Robert Mikell of CSU Fresno
had brother CAL MIKELL who
played trumpet 7/30/91 - cc

Willie Webber, who was a slater, played trumpet; WR says Baby Brousse [Broussard], the piano player, some relation of Webber, mentioned him. EM mentions [Hal Mikell?], who used to play trumpet.

EM says [Albert] Glenn, who worked with him for years, was the best bass player he worked with. Glenn always used his bow [On every job rather than on each tune? RBA]. EM says Cleo, now dead, got the idea for using the bow from Glenn; HD says Cleo was with him when he first went to New York [playing on the S. S. Dixie?]. HD says Chester [Zardis] used a bow, and an old bass player who had the Maple Leaf Band ["Oak" [check spelling] Gaspard? RBA] did, too; the bass player lived downtown, near Glenn, somewhere near Pauger [Street]; Paul Barbarin played with him a while; Alex Bigard worked with him a while; HD thinks [Abbie] "Chinee Bebe" [Foster] worked with him a while. EM has been trying to convince the men in his band that "Chinee Bebe" is not dead, although they say he has been dead seven years; RC says "Chinee" was playing with Punch Miller that afternoon. HD thought Shelley [Lemelle?] was dead, but EM says he is alive and lives on St. Anthony and Rampart.

End of Reel II