

GEORGE MITCHELL  
Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype  
July 1, 1959

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Also present: William Russell.

George William Mitchell was born in Louisville, Kentucky, March 6, 1899, of a non-musical family. His earliest music remembered was of brass bands, parading on Sundays, playing straight marches; one brass band also played fairs, Chautauquas and dances. GM was reared in Louisville. His interest in playing music began when a next-door playmate let him blow his cornet; boy's father showed GM a scale; GM about 10 years old then. Went to Catholic school, which had a band; priest showed him more about cornet. Wilbur Winstead's interest in GM led him to let GM sit in rehearsals of Winstead's orchestra; GM was helped by the members of that group; he later joined it. One of the members, Robert Williams, trumpet [or cornet?], was very good. GM began reading music from the start; bands had regular orchestrations; later trio [piano, trumpet and drums] used sheet music, and GM learned to transpose, playing from piano sheet. GM's first cornet cost \$ 1.50. First paid job, he thinks, was with Winstead. Played with a brass band every summer, at fairs; band played popular numbers, plus regular brass band music. Band had some orchestra men, who entertained; also Lockwood Lewis, singer and entertainer [also a saxophonist. RBA]. Robert Williams would hire GM as substitute for himself in cabaret job, giving GM entry to those kinds of jobs. GM played at Louisville

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movie-vaudeville theater, [once called the] Dreamland. GM played with Rabbit's Foot Minstrels, and also another minstrel show; went on the road when about 17. Mark, a clarinetist, had the Rabbit's Foot band; a trumpet player named Mason was very good with that band. GM with minstrels about a year, or more; back to Louisville, working with dance bands. To Chicago about 1920; first job fell through; worked with Miller, in vaudeville, Grand Theater, at 31st and State, until he got with dance bands. Got jobs through John Wycliff [sp?] [Willie Hightower Reel?], also of Louisville; then with Wycliff at the Entertainer's, 35th near Indiana; Robert Williams also in band. Joe [King] Oliver very big then, working at Dreamland early part of night, then to Pekin, 27th and State, later; Royal Garden job was some weeks or months afterwards. Joe Oliver GM's favorite jazz trumpeter. New Orleans bands sounded different from any other area's bands; differences were in melody and rhythm. GM heard Freddy Keppard, and also Tommy Ladnier, who went with Fletcher Henderson, in New York. Louis Armstrong had great technique, but GM liked Oliver's ideas; Oliver famous for his mute work, especially with hand over Conn straight mute; used derby, too, but without other mute. Armstrong and Oliver different styles, but worked together so well; Oliver would play the idea for the next two-cornet break when he got to the first ending, and Armstrong would know what to

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expect, so that he ready to play the break, in harmony, with Oliver. GM says recordings do not do justice to Oliver. GM sat in with Oliver some, but says he was not quick to pick up the ideas; Oliver was going to use GM in his band, before Armstrong, but GM was in Milwaukee [for a year or two]; Oliver didn't know where he was, so he got Armstrong. In Milwaukee, GM played for dancing and ice-skating with Doc Holley, a chiropractor, who had a band at the Castle Ice Garden. GM also worked in Chicago at the Sunset, with Carroll Dickerson; other personnel included Henry Gordon, piano; Buster Bailey, clarinet; Rudy Jackson, sax; uncertain drummer--either Tubby Hall, Andrew Hillaire [sp?] or someone else. GM worked with Lil[lian Hardin Armstrong] at the Dreamland; an unidentified Joe [Walker?] played sax, and there was a trombone; Armstrong, working at the Vendome Theater, often sat in after his job was over; the year was probably 1926-27. Ollie Powell was singing at the Dreamland at the same time; he began drumming about that time, too; he was very good as a singer. WR says Powell made a record with Ladnier and Jimmie Noone. GM worked with Noone, too, at dances <sup>in after hour [joints?]</sup> GM worked with Charlie Cook's band at Harmon's Westside [Dreamland?]. Johnny St. Cyr and Noone were in the band, too; GM also worked with Cook at White City. GM took Freddy Keppard's place in Cook's band, at White City; Keppard had replaced GM at the Dreamland, and GM replaced him at White City.

End of Reel I

Also present: William Russell.

GM played with Charlie Cook for quite some time [Cook died a few months prior to this interview]. Freddy Keppard was a good and powerful trumpet player, but GM liked Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong better; Armstrong's technique was better, but GM liked Oliver's ideas more.

GM had never played with Jelly Roll Morton until the Victor Red Hot Peppers recordings; Morton called GM as a replacement in a band that was to do the recordings. WR says Morton told him, in Washington, D.C., that GM was greater than Armstrong; [Omer] Simeon was his favorite clarinetist. Morton wrote parts for the Peppers session [cf. Kid Ory reel?]; he <sup>permitted</sup> ~~told the~~ players to discard the parts once they got the idea of the tunes; Morton always wanted the players to put in their own ideas; GM says he always had to have music to read, so that he could get the idea of the pieces. The recordings were made in some hotel near the Drake Hotel. WR says Lee Collins, with Morton on Autograph, including "Fishtail Blues" [which became "Sidewalk Blues" in later recordings], says he was on some recordings with GM for Morton; GM says no; GM also says there was only one clarinet, Simeon, on the recordings he made with Morton, contrary to aural evidence [which may be deceiving, PRC. Or may not. Listen to "Sidewalk Blues"-RBA]. GM played a

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Harry B. Jay, Chicago-made cornet on the Morton recordings; he was working with Jimmie Noone at a cabaret when he bought it; Muggsy [Spanier] left a Jay for him to try one night, and he got himself one that week. There ensue casual references about Earl Hines, Pops Foster, Eddie Garland [GM liked his bass playing] and Bill Johnson.

WR asks about the recordings GM made with Lil Armstrong, [The New Orleans Bootblacks and the New Orleans Wanderers], with Ory, [Johnny] St. Cyr and Johnny Dodds--"Papa Dip", "Perdido Street Blues", "Gatemouth" and others. GM wasn't working with Lil at the time; the recordings were in 1926; GM never heard the recordings and barely remembers them!! GM also made some recordings with clarinetist Jimmy O'Bryant, with Ma Rainey. GM says when he made recordings he would just go and play [with perhaps some rehearsal], and that was all there was to it. The Red Hot Peppers had several rehearsals. GM worked with Bud Scott, guitar, several times--with Dave Peyton, at the Cafe de Paris [old Royal Garden], for instance--but he can't remember whether he recorded with Scott or not. GM worked with Johnny Lindsay, bassist on [some of] the Peppers recordings, on dance jobs [Lindsay also played trombone]. GM worked some with Roy Palmer; GM says Palmer could play well when he wanted to. GM says Andrew Hilaire was a fine drummer, good reader, had

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good rhythm; GM says Hilaire was from Louisiana, he thinks New Orleans. GM says the first time he ever saw a band "stomped off" was when he came to Chicago and saw Joe Oliver do it. GM says Jelly Roll Morton would indicate dynamic changes to the Red Hot Peppers as they rehearsed; Morton didn't bother the band too much, though, preferring to let them go their own way after they played the introductions; the number and occurrence of solos, ensembles, etc., was pre-set. GM says he got along with Morton; Morton liked to do a lot of kidding; GM never played with Morton other than for the recordings. GM doesn't remember any violins on Morton recordings; WR had referred to "Someday, Sweetheart". GM played mostly open horn with Morton; he tried using mutes some, on other occasions, but says he couldn't get the effect Oliver could, so he gave it up. GM's style was to stick pretty close to the melody; GM says he could never play very high, so he stayed in the middle range. GM didn't take any lessons in Chicago; he would practice from instruction books. GM says his range was not dependable; he might be able to play fairly high at the beginning of a job, but his lip wouldn't hold out all the way.

End of Reel II

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Also present: William Russell

GM talks about his embouchure difficulties, and about playing again.

Later in GM's music career [after Jelly Roll Morton], he worked at the Grand Terrace with [Earl] Hines's band, which at one time had trumpeters, Shirley Clay [and GM]; Bob Shoffner played trumpet with the band, too, but before GM joined. GM doesn't remember recording with Hines, for Brunswick. [Compare discographies]. He says he did record with Johnny Dodds, in sessions with Lil[lian Hardin Armstrong] and Kid Ory. [Issued as New Orleans Wanders and New Orleans Bootblacks. RBA] He played with Natty Dominique, probably at the Sunset [Cafe] and probably with the band of Carroll Dickerson, and at dances, but he doesn't recall having recorded with Dominique. GM remembers recording with <sup>J</sup>Mimmy O'Bryant; he says that perhaps Jimmy Blythe played piano on the date, [leading by WR] and he thinks Ma Rainey was the singer, but he doesn't remember any other personnel, or who the leader of the band was. [Compare discographies on this and other sessions]. After Morton, besides working with Hines and Dickerson (more than one period), GM worked quite a while with Charlie Cook (more than one time); about the last regularly-working band GM was with was Earl Hine's band. GM played a job now and then, afterward. He was a member of the W.P.A. brass band, directed by Norman Black, and with a [W.B.A.?] dance band led by Zilmer [check spelling] Randolph, composer of "Ol' Man Mose." WR says that about seven years ago he met Randolph, who lived next door to Mahalia Jackson in the 3700 block of Prairie, and that he was teaching; GM agrees with WR, saying he hasn't seen Randolph in several years.

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Also present: William Russell

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While in Louisville [Kentucky], GM helped a young band with rehearsals, etc., at the request of a female social worker; a friend of GM, Ralph Brown [Compare RB, reel           ?], had organized the band, but he had left town; GM says that when he was with Hines, somewhere in Pennsylvania, he saw several of the boys with bands; he mentions a trombonist then with Fletcher Henderson, but cannot remember his name [perhaps Jimmy Harrison, although Harrison was only one year younger than GM].

At the request of WR, GM says a young person interested in playing jazz should learn his instrument first, and how to read, before trying to play by ear. He says there is also a belief that reading can hinder one's improvising. It is repeated that Jelly Roll Morton wrote many of the parts his Red Hot Peppers used on their recordings, but that the players used the parts as guides, rather than play note-for-note.

GM doesn't remember when he changed from cornet to trumpet, but he did use cornet as late as his Hines tenure; he used a Harry B. Jay cornet for a long time, until it went bad.

GM says the Red Hot Peppers used several of the Melrose-published arrangements for guides on their recording sessions. WR remarks that many of the Peppers recordings have been re-issued recently, on [RCA] Victor [LPM 1649]. GM has none of these records.

End of Reel III