

NICK LAROCCA
Reel I
May 21, 1958

This is the voice of Dominick James LaRocca, better known as Nick LaRocca, leader and manager of the world's first jazz band, known as the creators of jazz. I'll tell you about my early life in music and contact [with music]. I was born in 1889 in the city of New Orleans. My father's name was Giaroloma LaRocca, who was a trumpet player like myself. My mother is Victoria ^{Denena} ~~Denena~~ [?], and out of that marriage came six children. I'll give you them in order. Rosario was the oldest, Antonia was my sister was second, Maria was third, Bartholomew was fourth, I mean Dominick, Nick, that is me, was the fourth child, Bartholomew was the fifth child, and Leonard was the sixth child. In my early life, the Italians, or Germans and many people, they used to have birthday parties and different functions around the city. My father played in many bands about the city. And all he could get was free [i. e., he was not paid]. He taught my sisters how to play, he taught my older brother how to play, and when it came to my turn I was to become a doctor. He didn't want no music for me, but I played music. In my early contact with music was out where my father would play like Spanish Fort or either at West End. And sometimes when he wasn't playing he would take me out to White City and listen to the music, or we'd go to the parks and listen to music, or go on the river and listen to music, cause that was the main part of my father's trade. He was a shoe-merchant. He sold shoes to these sailors and repaired 'em, and he spoke four different languages. My father lived, he first opened his place at Washington Avenue and St. Thomas. He had a little shoe store and a shoemaking place to repair them. And he made new shoes also. On a Sunday when we weren't working or my father wasn't working he'd bring us out---out along the river which was the poor people's promenade. At that time they had no steamboats or steamships, they had steamboats but no steamships, ocean going that I seen. And the wharfs was open affair, it was poor

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people's promenade. Well, they had barks or boats that came from [the] Portuguese. And each one of these boats had a band on it or sometimes little accordion or piccolo or bass violin, or a violin. The Italians were the same. They had clarinet or piccolo with this accordion. It was little bitty octagon shape accordion that they played. Then on Sunday the Germans--I'm going ahead of my story--the Germans had all brass instruments. They had cornet, alto, baritone, and tuba, and they used the bass drum. And these men would go around the parts of the front part of the city playing on the street corners accepting gratuities from the people with a hat. That was some of my musical education.

The more my father taken me to these places the more I was determined to play music. At the age of nine years old--I remember just as well as I am here today--I don't say that I have a better memory than anybody else, but we were going into war with Spain, and they were just stringing the telephone wires, and telegraph wires on St. Thomas St. passing the street. They were putting up wires, telegraph wires. My uncle Anthony ^{Denena} ~~Denina~~ had volunteered for the war to go to Spain and my mother, Dad and all was crying. So I had stole his cornet and went down to the block and try to learn this cornet. At first I couldn't make no sounds out of it. I couldn't understand it, the way he would play and play so easy with it. First thing I know I was blowing a note, another one, then we got I got to playing bugle calls. Then we kids would go around the neighborhood way off from the house and some would have washboilers, tin pans, and any old refused kitchen utensil that they didn't use. Some had broomsticks, simulating soldiers, and they had the American flag, a little bitty piece of American flag, that they had, 'cause everybody had flags then and they had a flag and put it on a stick and they carried it, and "Down with Spain," and we'd

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go on all over the streets. We played the bugle call, that's all I knew. I later taken this cornet and I began to find other notes, what the keys was for. I took a piece of paper and the simple tunes that I knew like the children would sing [Mr. LaRocca sings] Here goes a boat around the bend, goodbye my lover, goodbye, loaded down with Chinamen, goodbye my lover, goodbye, Bye baby . . . Such tunes like that and [sings again] Oh, Uncle John ["Butcher Boy?"], da, da, da, da, da, dad, etc. Or "I seen Washington cross the Delaware." Many tunes that children would sing around the corner, "Ring around the Rosie," and the "London Bridge is Falling Down." Those were the first tunes I committed to paper. I took a piece of paper and I'd blow a note, I put the name of the tune on the top, and I'd mark whatever valve correspond with the tone that I had in my in my ear. On to this paper. And in about six months I was playing a few tunes. I played "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey?" I played "Who's That Knocking," not "Knocking at the Door," some tune that--boom, boom, you can't, some tune that I can't remember the correct name, but at least I think it had something to do with "Bill Bailey!" "Won't You Come over to My House," that was the one of 'em.

[Allen:] Did you ever know a song about "Barnacle Bill, the Sailor?"

[LaRocca:] No, sir, I didn't know "Barnacle Bill, the Sailor." At that time, I never knew "Barnacle Bill, the Sailor." If it existed, I have never known it, but there were many tunes like people would sing. Then came around a hand organ and he'd grind out three tunes for a nickel. The older boys and girls and the young kids would try to follow the bigger ones. And all the people sat on the corners, they didn't go riding automobiles and carriages. The streets were made of mud and a couple of streets were cobblestones, and the electric lights

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then was set up on a great big high iron frames and they stuck way in the air. And they were made of carbon lights, carbon lights. I seen the first electric car. I seen when the Jackson line was put in, and I seen when the first mule car went out. And I was here through all of that, and I was here when they played the lancers, the schottische, quadrilles, and every dance that there was, but there was no jazz, and I was here during the ragtime rhythm era.

Now let me go back now to my music. I played with this instrument. Then we moved to Magazine around 1900 on Magazine and St. Andrew, 2022 Magazine Street. I--my father moved over there and opened a larger shoe store. It was here where I used to go in the back house and practice. And nobody could get in. The neighbors used to throw bricks at me, rotten fruit, stale bread, anything they could find and throw, and the more they threw at me, the louder I would play. [It's a few?] and I never had played with any other boy outside of along side of phonograph record. Trying to play against the phonograph record. Well, my father died when I was about fifteen and a half years old, and Mrs. [M] Young who was a very talented musician and owned a jewelry store and they had a son by the name of Henry who was an expert violinist. I'd say I'd put him against anyone at this time. He had learned music in the right way. So they asked my mother, said, "Why don't you let him come over the lake with Henry and be good company for him? They'll be able to play music over there." So when I went on over there with him, I only knew a few tunes, and they played by music. Well, I start faking around with the best I kin, could. Mrs. Young used to like what I played. So after we'd play one or two chorus she'd holler "Breakdown." I never knew what "Breakdown" was. "Breakdown," that is to discard

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the music and play whatever melodies you could fit in there. That was the beginning of my musical training which I was to put to use in later years.

After Mrs. Young went to the city, Henry and I formed the first band and we were in Long Beach, Mississippi. And here is some of the boys who played with me. Stop the [-----].

[Allen:] All right, go right ahead.

[LaRocca:] First boys I ever played with was Henry Young, violin, Joe Giuffre, guitar, Joe the Barber, this man's name I do not know, he was a barber, he played bass, and Nick LaRocca, cornet, this was the first group of boys that I ever had played with. This was in Long Beach, Mississippi. We played for dances, and different other affairs around Long Beach, Henderson's Point, Biloxi, Back Bay, and many other places along the Gulf Coast. Coming back to New Orleans that winter I joined another outfit, where I played with Joe Tujague [spells T-U-J-A-G-U-E], who played guitar. John Tujague played bass, "Foncy" Price played violin, Henry Young also played violin, Nick LaRocca, cornet. This group played in the Irish Channel. Well, by this time my name had been known that I was a free musician, I don't say I was good, but they knew they could get me for free. And here's another group of fellers I played with, this is back o' town along the negro section was Buzz Harvey, bass, Henry Young, violin, Jimmie Ruth, who was a stepbrother to Larry Shields. He played guitar. Nick LaRocca cornet. I played with another group, downtown, Susu Raymes, guitar, Willie Guitar, bass, Harry Nunes (whether this boy is related to Alcide Nunez or not I don't know) but I played with this bunch in the downtown section.

[Allen:] Well, what instruments did they play? I didn't get that.

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[LaRocca:] You didn't get it? Well, I'll tell you. Susu Raymos played guitar, Willie Guitar played bass, Harry Nunez played violin, and I played the cornet, ^{down} We played in the downtown section, that is way below Elysian Fields Avenue. Now this is in 1902, '03, and '04 and '05, no, I went ahead of my statement. 1903, '04, and '05, and maybe '06. The uptown band I played with a boy named George Geefer, bass; Jule ^{Tarranto} Terranti, guitar; Freddie ^{Englart} Englund, this boy sells ice cream around the streets today, violin; and Nick LaRocca. This group and all the above groups was called "No beer, no music," and when the refreshments ran out, they all disappeared, one by one. In 1918 [1908?] I formed my own band, adding brass and clarinet. I was thinking I would get lots of jobs, although I received a few people [who] knew me, wanted me to play for nothing as I had done before. *X* It was here that I started taking outside jobs. I accepted jobs with Bill Gallaty, that's a downtown group; Dominick Barocca was a back o' town group; Joe Ellerbush^c was an Irish Channel group. In between times I played the picture shows, I followed shows I hired myself out to play mood music. And it was here that I start putting these pieces together, and havin' some one take 'em down in notation. The original manuscripts I still have today, and I have documents to prove, not only from letters, but from affidavits.

[At Mr. LaRocca's request, Mr. Urguhart read the following document:] "Affadavit. State of Louisiana, Parish of Orleans. Before me David L. Herman, the undersigned authority a Notary Public duly qualified and commissioned in and for the Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana, personally came and appeared Mrs. Alice Kiern, a female person, over the age of majority and full well known unto me, Notary Public, who first being duly sworn, disclosed and said as follows: That deponent was well

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acquainted with and has personally known for more than twenty-five years one
 X Dominick J. LaRocca who resides in the city of New Orleans, State of Louisiana,
 that deponent is an organist by profession and during the period of time from
 X 1914 to 1916 set down on paper various compositions originated by the said
 X Dominick J. LaRocca, among which compositions was the number presently known
 as "Tiger Rag," that the said Dominick J. LaRocca originated and played the
 aforementioned numbers by ear, not knowing the reading and writing of music and
 would either play on his cornet or hum the mentioned numbers to deponent; that
 X on the occasion when the said Dominick J. LaRocca first played "Tiger Rag" to
 deponent it was the first time that deponent had ever heard same, and thereupon
 reduced same to writing; that deponent has always considered the aforementioned
 X Dominick J. LaRocca as the composer and originator of the song, presently known
 as and entitled "Tiger Rag." Signed, Mrs. Alice Kiern, Sworn to and subscribed
 to before me this twelfth day of June, 1940, David L. Herman, Notary Public."

[LaRocca:] Now you want to ask me about the man that played in Bill Gallaty's
 band? This man could have been around my age if he was living today, maybe a
 year or two older than me. He may be the father of some of these Gallaty boys
 playing around today. That I don't know because I have never met any of these
 boys. But they played in the downtown section, Bill Gallaty was the leader or
 the manager of the band, and he played valve trombone. They had a boy by the
 name of Tots, I don't know his right name, played drums, Bull Winkler played the
 X bass violin, and a fella by the name of Palisshay^{Pallachais} played clarinet and I played
 the cornet. I followed a boy in there by the name of Deighman; or something
 like on that order who played with him prior to me coming into his band, that is

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I took odd jobs with him, I wasn't a regular member of any band because in played on the picture shows. During 1912, '14, or '13 I played on the picture shows. I played on the J. S. excursion boat, I was hired there as extra man and I played the "St. Louis Blues," then known to me as "Jego Blues," without the middle strain in it. And I had played blues similar to that before I ever heard the "St. Louis Blues."

In my early training at school, at the closing exercise they had a number they called "The Holy City." Well I had learned this number and during the-- Mr. Socolla was the man who taught us how to go through our little parts in the play--and the whole group was singing it. I was in the back singing, and I was making ^{contra-melody} ~~scat-singing~~ on this tune, and he called me out in front and says I want you to sing this. And I got out there and I had stage fright, and I couldn't sing a thing, I couldn't remember what I did, but he thought I did something great that it would sound good if I would come out in the front and do it. Now that's, that chord construction is not from Africa. That is, the chord construction shortened is the chord construction of all the blues. I'll give you an idea of how it goes and let the negroes or let these white, excuse me I was going to say something that's very bad and I just want to correct myself, these white men that know so much about this music tear it to pieces. [Sings "Hosanna," scat singing humming "Hosanna, in the Highest."] Now I'll cut this short because if I played this amongst where I was I was disgracing the school and the Holy Scripture that I thought. I played this piece [scat sings variations and so on, sings again, around the same musical theme]. Then comes the other blues that I played and everyone of them will fit that chord, and not

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one of 'em isn't--came from Africa like they say this blue chord construction came from. It was camouflaged like I did all my numbers. When I played a tune if I played the melody, and when we come down to what we call the "breakdown" because of the fingering become too difficult to me on the cornet, I couldn't play that melody and find it in the same place, not being a very versatile musician, I had to fake whatever I could come to my ear, that I knowed would come easy with my fingers. Because a faker, he has his fingers and his mind that coordinates. Now any other tunes that I composed are the same way, the last part of the "Tiger Rag" is nothing but John Philip Sousa's March. [sings a march and "Hold That Tiger."]. Where did I get that suggestion? Take the last part of the thing which is too much for me in the fingering and I says, "aw the hell with, the devil with it"--I made--plew on the horn I began to say, well that's good, a faker that you don't know how to play. I made [growls scats, "Hold That Tiger" part.] That's not negro music, that's white man's music. Then they criticize me, but I have it here in the records where I got it. Now we'll take the "Fidgety Feet." [scat sings introduction, about four bars through trombone gliss.] Well, what would that remind you of?

[Allen:] You tell us.

[LaRocca:] These men wouldn't know, but I'm the man who composed it--I know. In my early days when I'd hear the drums, go da, da [gives roll off of brass band] that is that the rhythm of that introduction. Now we come to the other part, is the "Georgia," taken from the chord construction of the "Georgia Camp Town Meeting Meetin' Ball" [sings this song], and so on. Now if you'll listen good to this here which is a different, different rhythm [scat sings "Fidgety Feet."] It's the same old tune but broken down like when I used to go to the different

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theaters and see these fellas in jigtime. That was simulating, that's where the idea got that from. Used to--da run--play a tune and--stop time, in other words; they used to do that in the old vaudeville acts. Now that is the same con [stutters], but the only last part that is different is my own. [Sings trio.] I may have heard that somewhere, and like a faker, it came to my mind, the theme, I don't know where I heard it, or I may have composed it, I don't know, but being a faker, and don't let anyone else tell you, you can hear a thing today, it may not come to your mind, one year, six years, four months, three months, first thing you know you'll be practicing it and your fingers 'll fall into that what you heard. You don't know where you've got it. But you know when you're playing it, it's coming from your body. You putting it out, not the other man that you heard this thing from, now it's your interpretation. Just like ah great band leaders, they have [ever many men?] like in opera. They have men that lead and each man lends his distinctive style or soul to it. In our band they had only one Dixieland Jazz band, there was no name bands, white or negro, before it. They all came after. They say they did, but I proved different. When we opened at Reisenweber's on January the fifteenth, we were in New York before then because we had to have photographs in tuxedos before we could open at a first class cafe, not suits. We was coming out of a dive and going into one of the most fastidious and the largest place in New York. We were the greatest sensation that ever hit Broadway in fifty years. When we arrived there, Broadway was black with negro musicians, ragtimers. After our sensation created and they found that we came from New Orleans they sent agents down here to get bands. The first band that came to New York. Whoever's listening to me I ask you for fairness to look up the papers, not go by Marshall Stearn's

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lip service, or Dr. Seuchon's lip service, but look up these things that I tell you, and you will know that they have told untruths about this Dixieland Jazz Band. They came, the agents came to New Orleans and secured the service of the Original Creole Band then called Ragtime, they played at Club Dolordina at 50th and Broadway. They opened there on March the sixth. You read the New York papers, March the sixth and seventh of 1917. They worked for the man called Clifford Webb or Jack Webb and his partner, a dancing act. They also played for the patrons of that place, for dancing music. They were unsuccessful. They played ragtime music. They were out in less than two weeks. They went into ^{Pantages} Pantages time [a vaudeville circuit]. If you look up in December of the Variety you will find that they have an advertisement in there and they call themselves the Seven Kings of Ragtime, Bill Johnson, manager, and they have an agent there, I can't remember the agent's, Dick Symonns Agency. Mr. Urquhart, I want you read into this tape what Variety, March the tenth, 1917, had to say in regards to this music at this time, this supposed to be great creole band, negro band from New Orleans, which was the first negro band to come to New York, was playing. All right, Mr. Urquhart, read it.

[Urquhart reads:] "Music is becoming more and more potent and prominent among the cabaret attractions. Gingery [spring?] music is what the dancers want and it often is looked for by those who do not dance. A group of men the other evening, each knowing only too well all the cabarets of New York, decided the best restaurant orchestras in the city are Rector's, Healy's, and the Tokito. These orchestras get nearer to legitimate jazz stuff than any of the others. The genuine jazz bands at Reisenweber's, however, notwithstanding the sober opinion of it, appear to be drawing business there. Late in the morning the jazzers go to work and the dancers hit the floor to remain there until they topple over, if

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the band keeps on playing. It leaves no question but what they like to dance to that kind of music, and it is a kind. If the dancers see someone they knew at the tables, it's common to hear, "Oh, boy", as they roll their eyes while floating past, and the "Oh, boy," expression probably describes the jazz band music better than anything else could."

[LaRocca:] Now, if these negroes was so great and they said they came to New York before me, or any other bands that came there, they never was noticed and their music couldn't have been any different than they were playing anywhere else in the world, but they noticed the Dixieland Jazz Band. We stood out, we made history. [We played record?] We're not only the pioneers, but this record, that we left for posterity, a way of playing that has never been improved on to this day. The way we played was in fugue form. Any record that you pick up - - - .

[Reel I, con't.] I know nothin' about music, I'm just an ignorant scholar of music, but I went to too many operas, opera places where I could hear good music, and I see how they played background contra-melody and different melodies against one another. I learned it at the French Opera when I worked down there handling lights when I just a mere boy. I could see one person singing one tune and another one singing against it, whether it was contra-melody or not, but that impressed me much, and in later years when I incorporated that, what we had was nothing but conversation of instruments. You take "The Livery Stable Blues," for instance, I say to the clarinet da de da da da, Clarinet answer me, toodleedete. If you listen to them three of them distinct melodies. Take the trombone apart and you'll have a melody, take the clarinet, you'll have a melody, take the cornet, you'll have a melody, and they're three distinct melodies working together.

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That is why they have never found out how nobody else could ever play the way we played because they didn't have the idea or the scheme. Are you finished?

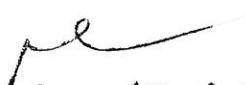
[Allen:] Just about-----we're going to run it off.

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NICK LAROCCA INTERVIEWS

May 21, 1958: Reel II

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices:  Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Bartholomew
(Buddy) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen; Kenneth
Trist Urquhart

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[Nick LaRocca:] In 1918 the New Orleans paper and the Times-Picayune DISOWNED us. They say that we were not from New Orleans. I'll ask Mr. Urquhart to read this "Jass and Jassism," which is an editorial that appeared in the New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 20, 1918. Mr. Urquhart, would you please read that?

[Urquhart reads:] "Jass and Jassism. Why is the jass music, and, therefore, the jass band? As well ask why is the dime novel or grease-dripping doughnut? All the manifestations are a low streak in man's tastes that has not yet come out in civilization's wash. Indeed, one might go farther, and say that jass music is the indecent story syncopated and counterpointed. Like the improper anecdote, also, in its youth, it was listened to blushing behind closed doors and drawn curtains, but like all vice, it grew bolder until it dared decent surroundings, and was tolerated because of its oddity.

"We usually think of people as either musical or nonmusical, as if there were a simple line separating two great classes. The fact is, however, that there are many mansions in the house of the muses. There is, first, the great assembly hall of ^{the} melody--where most of us take our seats at some time in our lives---but a lesser number pass on to inner sanctuaries of harmony, where the melodic sequence, the 'tune' as it most frequently is called, has infinitely less interest than the blending of notes into chords, so [that]the combining of wavelengths will give new aesthetic sensations. This inner core of harmony is where nearly all the truly great music is enjoyed.

"In the house there is, however, another apartment, properly speaking, down in the basement, a kind of servants' hall of rhythm. It is there we hear the hum of the Indian dance, the throb of the Oriental tambourines and kettle drums, the clatter of the clogs, the click [slavic?] of heels, the thumpty-tumpty of the ~~the~~

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of the negro banjo, and, in fact, the native dances of a world. Although commonly associated with melody, and less often with harmony, also, rhythm is not necessarily music, and he who loves to keep time to the pulse of the orchestral performance by patting his foot upon the theater floor is not necessarily a music lover. The ultramodernists in composition go so far as to pronounce taboo upon rhythm, and even omit the perpendicular lines on their bars of written music, so that the risk of a monotonous pulsation is done away with.

"Prominently, in the basement hall of rhythm, is found rag-time, and of these most devoted to cult of the displaced accent, there has developed a brotherhood of those who, devoid of harmonic and even of melodic instinct, love to fairly wallow in noise. On certain natures sound loud and meaningless has an exciting, almost an intoxicating effect, like crude colors and strong perfumes, the height of flesh or the ^{sadic} ~~sadistic~~ pleasure in blood. To such as these the jass music is a delight, and a dance to the unstable bray of the sackbut gives a sensual delight more intense and quite different from the languor of the Viennese waltz or the refined sentiment and respectful emotion of eighteenth century minuet.

"In the matter of the jass, New Orleans is particularly interested, since it has been widely suggested that this particular form of musical vice had its birth in this city--that it came, in fact, from doubtful surroundings in our slums. We do not recognize the honor of parenthood, but [with such a story in circulation, it behooves us to be last] to accept the atrocity in polite society, and where it has crept in we should make it a point of civic honor to suppress it. Its musical value is nil, and its possibilities of harm are great."

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[LaRocca:] Well, you can see from there what the people knew at this time about jazz music. They got a lot of people with lip service willing to talk about it, but they weren't here to defend this music. Only Nick LaRocca was here, and know about this music. Here's some answers to that same article. Will you please read this into that thing?

[Urquhart reads from the New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 23, 1918:] "Jass and Jassism," New Orleans, June 20, 1918. To the Editor of the Times-Picayune: After carefully reading your interesting editorial, 'Jass and Jassism' it seems to me to display profound shallowness. I am no defender of jass, but I think you should recognize it for what it is---a style of playing. Compare it to the dime novel if you will, but not to the 'grease-dripping doughnut,' which is as aesthetic a tidbit as any highbrowed chef can concoct.

"Jass may better be compared to the daring style in skirts, which are departures from what was proper a few years ago, and sometimes displays things not beautiful. ~~Jazz~~^{Jazz}, a departure from the proper in music, may display things not beautiful; it revels in close harmony and noise. As many classic compositions are full of close harmony and noise also, these things should not condemn jass.

"You hint that rhythm can almost be dispensed with, the blending of notes into chords so that combining wavelengths give new aesthetic sensations being sufficient to produce a beautiful musical structure. As easily daub colors carelessly on canvas and produce beautiful pictures.

"Without structure and pulsation there is no life; human throbbing is necessary even in the classical, otherwise there is no appeal to emotion, and without emotion it becomes nothing. Classical music carries constant appeal to

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the emotions by means of the throbbing and noise you ascribe to jass.

"Jass music may call to the sensual in some people, but I prefer to consider it merely the same appeal that makes men want to march, or dance. Like wine, it quickens the pulse; no one will say the effect is the same in everyone. Even so, it is an effect the masters of music have striven for, though you whitewash it by calling it refined sentiment and languor of a Viennese waltz."

[Signed] "FAIR PLAY."

[LaRocca:] From this you can see how well known this music was in New Orleans. Well, I'll tell you one thing. It didn't even exist in New Orleans at this time. No one played it in New Orleans. They had no jazz bands in New Orleans. Mr. Urquhart, would you read that second letter?

[Urquhart reads from the New Orleans Times-Picayune, July 2, 1918:] "Ragtime, Jass, and Operatic Music!! New Orleans, La., June 29, 1918. To the Editor of the Times-Picayune: Oh ho! so our good friend, 'V.B.D.' is amused. So are we. Yes, operatic music is an educated taste. Jass hasn't even got educating qualities in it.

"To admire classical music does not indicate one is extremely intelligent; it only indicates you've got some brains. But--it does take extreme intelligence and study to appreciate operatic music.

"Yes, ignoramuses and giants may acquire tastes, but music has come down through the civilized centuries as something more than an acquired taste, and we don't study, inherit, work on, or compose "tastes," but we do with art.

"Thomas Jefferson and Bob Taylor may have been fine fiddlers, but there's a

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heap of difference between fiddlers and violinists.

"The difference between melody and harmony. Is there any? Can there be any melody without harmony. And isn't all harmony melody? Signed. M.C."

[Allen:] All right. Start over for us.

[Piano music played---starts over.]

[Allen:] All right. Start over now. It's started, it's ready. Oh, that was fine. What was the name of that by the way?

[LaRocca:] I don't know the name of it. It's just some chords that came to my mind and I like 'em and it stuck with me.

[Allen:] I see.

[More piano, demonstrating relationship of "National Emblem" and "Tiger Rag."]

[LaRocca:] And so on. That's how I got my tunes, understand? I'd take the chord construction and work in these tunes and fiddle around until I have a melody of my own. Many of the times I'd take the cornet, three, four o'clock in the morning, when I got off a job. A theme would hit in my mind say, like "Skeleton Jangle." I'd go to the park in my youth, and I heard a tune played [scat sings tune]. And that's a piece of opera. Now if I could play the "Skeleton Jangle" for you in there later, you will notice that the chord construction with the exception of one change is the same tune. But it's a different melody and it's worked different, it's a different arrangement on it. But the idea come from opera. And most all my pieces come from American music--no negro music--the music that my forefathers brought to this country. Now I'll go on further: the instruments the music the colored men use are European. The

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things that our forefathers brought here, their method of dress, their mannerism, and their culture are white people's culture. But the New Orleans Jazz Club recently put on a program ["Wide, Wide World," TV show] out on this boat [The President], and on this boat was the lowest down thing I could ever have heard. They had Lizzie Miles singing on the boat which I know in my day no negroes sang or played on this boat. And they had negroes and whites which was against the custom of the South. You may think that I'm prejudiced against the negro, but I'm not. I feel as much for him as I feel for myself or any white person, but I don't believe in giving the negro credit for something that he didn't do. Because I was a carpenter and I taught many of them their trades, and if you care I'll go to different houses and pick 'em out for you. And let them negroes tell you where I taught them their trades. I wasn't against the negroes. They were human beings like me. The only thing I had in my mind was against mixing. Now this brings in segregation. People think that I'm hard, but if God meant him to be white, or meant any other people to be different, he would have made us all one color. He wouldn't have variety of birds, horses, and animals. This is plain common sense talking. I'm not an educated man, but this can't work. What they're trying to force down the South and that's what Marshall Stearns' letter has did. If you read his letter, he admits to me in a letter that the reason why he elaborated on the liars was because I didn't give the colored man a break. Now, how was I to give the colored man a break? Not having associated with him, not knowing colored men, not having played music with 'em, how was I to give these colored man a break? I couldn't even give myself a break; I had to make that break. Let's go back to this Times-Picayune to find out cause I

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got this tape all messed up, I'm way ahead of my story here.

[Allen:] That's all right, we'll change it around, don't worry.

[LaRocca:] And have you read something what other people have to say about jazz in New Orleans. If these people in New Orleans were on the spot and they say this music was a different music, who are these people, these northern carpetbaggers to come and say that the negro played this music when he didn't play it, because if it existed in New Orleans I'm certain these people here would have known about it. Go ahead and read, Mr. Urquhart.

[Urquhart reads from the New Orleans Times-Picayune, July 2, 1918:] "'Ragtime, Jass, and Operatic Music,' New Orleans, Louisiana, June 29, 1918. To the Editor of the Times-Picayune: My respects to U.B.D. in today's paper in his letter on 'Ragtime, Jass, and Operatic Music.' He hits the nail on the head. Whenever a person desires to pretend to more culture and refinement than his neighbor, he takes a fling at whatever the mass of folks enjoy, be it ragtime, jass, Douglas Fairbanks, comic supplements, popular novels, or even doughnuts. On account of the name, many folk, who get their ideas from a second hand story, have pretended to be too cultured to enjoy 'ragtime.' I understand several masters of music have used syncopation in their admittedly classical creations. There is nothing in the rules of harmony, or the set standards of classical music to condemn 'ragtime' that possesses merit and individuality, and is not merely a loud thumping in broken time of some trashy popular tune.

"One eminent authority on harmony and counterpoint gives to a certain New York composer credit for absolute correctness in his compositions; this composer has a national reputation of years' standing, and has composed many 'ragtime' compositions.

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"If the effect of this so-called classical music is so uplifting, Germany would be as aesthetic and elevated a country as one could find. They have been nurtured and coddled on the most approved musical mush, and succeeded in peddling their culture to the rest of the world, and I invite you to find any real culture in them. They had no 'ragtime' or 'jass' to degrade them, but when the time came, the thin veneer of culture and polish cracked and peeled, and showed the same old brute beneath.

"Let us be as intellectual as possible, but this 'I-am-holier-than-thou' attitude makes me wonder what's wrong."

"ENCORE"

[LaRocca:] This is another one here; just take your time with it.

[Allen:] All right, we'll stop the machine.

[Urquhart reads from New Orleans Times-Picayune, July 4, 1918:] "'Jass' and 'Ragtime.' New Orleans, July 2, 1918. To the Editor of the Times-Picayune: Who said 'ragtime?' It is a mighty poor defense to try to bring an innocent stranger in the fray. 'Ragtime' and 'jassism' are two different things, and the argument is about 'jassism.'

"Who said opera?"

"From 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home' to our days we could name thousands of 'ragtimes' which have delighted the nation. We love 'ragtimes' when they are a marvel of harmonic simplicity. If one does not perceive unharmonious sounds how can he judge bad music? (signed) Gaston Crespin."

This is the last paragraph quoted from a letter dated New Orleans, July 2, 1918. [This letter in "Letters to Editors" column under heading "'Ragtime' and 'Jass,' New Orleans, July 2, 1918. To the Editor of the Times-Picayune," issue of July 4, 1918.] "Life would be a dull proposition if it were not for music. Best adapted to make pleasant our hours of recreation is ragtime music, with its

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sparkling, pulsating rhythm that wins every listener. The same can be said of jazz music. It has come to stay. It is marvelously syncopated, alive with color, passion, savage rhythm, successfully turning the mind from contemplation and repose. The invigorating music of a good jazz band inspires and that, in part, accounts for its success. (signed) W.T.N."

[LaRocca:] Well, the great masters tried to move the people, but they didn't do it. It took the Original Dixieland Jazz Band to move the people. I'd like you to read this Victor circular, like this part right here, and given 'em the date, you'll see it right on the bottom of the circular.

[Urquhart reads:] "March the seventh, 1917. 'Dixieland Jazz Band, One-Step,' Original Dixieland Jazz Band; 'Livery Stable Blues,' Fox trot, Original Dixieland Jazz Band [Description of record, tunes, tempo and performers]."

[LaRocca:] "The jazz music----"

[Urquhart:] "The jazz music is the very latest thing in the development of music. It has sufficient power and penetration to inject new life into a mummy and will keep ordinary human dancers on their feet till breakfast time. 'Livery Stable Blues' in particular we recommend because, on the principle that like cures like, this particular variety will be a positive cure for the common or garden kind of blues."

[LaRocca:] This is a Victor circular statement that it's a new kind of music. In my clipping here, you will find ^{Francis White} ~~and the following words~~ describing a new rhythm, not four beats but given as two beats. All music prior to that ragtime had four beats and it was made of a jumpy rhythm and it went something like [demonstrates dā de dā de, etc.] That was the rhythm, and that's the same rhythm that I'm going to show you that this negro band that came eight years

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after us has, that is Joe Oliver's first recordings. Will you stop it?

[Allen:] Surely.

[Allen:] It's ready now, go ahead.

[LaRocca:] I want to play for history a Bennett record I think it's "The Canal Street Blues," by King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. It's a electrical process record, I don't know what date it came out, but the number is 5133, on the opposite side 11384. Called "The Canal Street Blues." It could be about eight years, because to my recollection in 1924 there was no electric processing, it would have to come in between '25 and '26. Maybe I'm wrong, but I know it can't be before '24, because I was still in New York. I want you to hear this record and the rhythm of this great Creole band with Joe Oliver. [Plays record.] I want you listen to the clarinet in particular and the background rhythm that they using and I'll tell you where it comes from. [What Mr. LaRocca has to say about rhythm in the number is lost in the music. Scat sings along with banjo accompaniment.] That is a stop that I have made on records played eight years before that. They used that as a rhythm background. That clarinet part is contained in the "St. Louis Blues" almost note for note. [Scat singing.] Now here's my stuff. [Scat.]

[Buddy LaRocca:] That's the Dixieland stop.

[LaRocca:] That shows that they had heard the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. When they put that stop behind it. The clarinet part---I want to pull this record apart for you, right now. I'm gonna show you these negroes copies us. [Plays the part for the clarinet.] You heard that part there? ~~(Scat.)~~ Where's the "Livery Stable Blues?"

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[Buddy:] You got it over there, I think. Look here, right here. "Livery Stable Blues."

[LaRocca:] Now I want you to listen to this, my cornet part. [Plays section of record. Scats.] You heard it. Now-had these niggers or negroes came to New York. Before they heard the Dixieland band record they would have been thrown on their ears, not shoved out the door, but thrown out bodily. Now I'm going to go to this part where he makes his clarinet solo; you will notice that the banjo simulates a saxophone slap-tonguing. They must have heard this "St. Louis Blues" record because it's almost identically like it. [Record plays] ~~100*~~ You hear the banjo simulating slap-tongue on a saxophone? Now that rhythm they play is Dixieland step. The last ending of the Dixieland recording. Well, let's get to the clarinet part. Let me see if I can find it now, I'll have to pick up this foolish thing in there. [Vocal by Al Bernard. Music. LaRocca's comments on music are hard to hear.] This is the "St. Louis Blues" now, and you'll hear what the negro plays. It's in this record. There's the slap-tonguing. These records were made six years before the negroes recorded theirs. Now there's the part. Every negro band that ever went, that Louis Armstrong and all of them, they'd holler higher, higher, higher. They got it out the Dixieland record. Now, you don't mean to tell me, we just come from London, England, and we could have heard the negroes playing in New Orleans. That's impossible. They heard this record. There it is. [Scats.] That's the rhythm they use. [Imitates it with tchunk, tchunk, etc.] They leave out the last note. [More tchunk, tchunk.] That's how ignorant the negroes were. And you have many white crumbs that's ignorant too.

[Buddy:] You shouldn't get excited now.

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[LaRocca:] Here's Louis's record. He called this "Sweet Little Papa." Louis Armstrong. It's an Okeh Record, recorded by Process, am I right, there, Mr. Urquhart?

[Urquhart:] Yes, that is correct.

[LaRocca:] That's correct. Onto this tune I'll show you that they have used the vehicle of the "Ostrich Walk" which is the styling of Louis Armstrong's playing, "Ostrich Walk." [Music, scattling of "Ostrich Walk," and comments, which are unintelligible with music playing.] I'm not talking anything against Louie Armstrong because he was one of the most outstanding of the colored musicians. That didn't make him--it didn't make the other negroes great.

[Scats.]

End of Reel II
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NICK LAROGGA INTERVIEWS

May 21, 1958: Reel III

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Bartholomew
(Buddy) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen; Kenneth
Trist Urquhart

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[Allen:] It's okay, go ahead, put it on.

[LaRocca:] You ain't ready.

[Allen:] It's ready. The machine's warmed up.

[LaRocca:] This is Armstrong in his early days. [Music, begins at Ory solo, scat singing some of "Ostrich Walk" until piano solo.] He then plays something else. [Scat with trombone solo in "Sweet Little Papa," Ok. 8379, Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five (June 23, 1926). Comments unintelligible.] You understand? [Plays "Lazy Daddy" by ODJB, VI 18564.]

[Allen:] Where did that come from now?

[LaRocca:] "All Night Long." [Sings] "It's All Night Long," and so forth. It did not fit in that record. The idea came from it, "All Night Long." See, I was, a man had a faker could camouflage a tune. Take a piece and get right off it. Now it's not all the tune that I taken. From different little parts of different things. Some of that, because of the way the music was going, I could add to it. But the original theme comes from "All Night Long." From "All Night Long"---"It's All Night Long." The rest of the tune---.

[Allen:] That's too bad. [As jazz recording repeats itself, i. e., skips back.] That's the best we could do.

[LaRocca:] That's all right. Stop the machine, please.

[Allen:] All right. I've got it.

[Music. LaRocca comments during "Ostrich Walk" by ODJB:] This is the same chord construction as Armstrong uses on the previous record. That I played there. On his "Big Fat [Ma and] Skinny Pa." Was that it?

[Allen:] Let's see. I think it's the other side. It was "Sweet Little Papa," wasn't it?

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[LaRocca:] Stop the machine. [LaRocca scats with "Sweet Little Papa."] "Sweet Little Papa." That was the same as "Ostrich Walk." [Plays "Ostrich Walk" by ODJB Vi 18457 (March 18, 1918) with comments:] This is the only part they don't have.

[Allen and Urquhart comments unintelligible.]

[LaRocca:] I guess you've noticed stop time in both records? This record was played probably ten years or twelve years before Armstrong's was played. I'll let you know how far the colored man has carried playing the "Tiger Rag." This is [on] Dixieland Jubilee [label] by Kid Ory. This is only about a year old. Between this and the one that I play, that was played almost forty-two years ago, forty-one years ago, you'll see the difference. [Plays "Tiger Rag" by Ory with comments:] That's what these white men call good music. Some of these prophets that go back in Africa live over there and find out about the negro greats over there. [Trumpet solo.] This man is copying Louie Armstrong. That's Armstrong's style he's copied. It'll show how people imitate down to the other [during ensemble]. It's pitiful. Do you hear 'em talking about the great Kid Ory? I shouldn't criticize this record because I get royalties off it. But it is only to bring to the public after forty-one years [that] the negro has never invented anything new. Take Armstrong away from 'em, and they'll go back to Africa. Now I'll now play you a record by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, "Tiger Rag," released in 1918. [Music with some scat and comments:] Now when this record was made it was made into an eight-inch horn, almost forty-one years [ago]. Listen to the ending of this stop [at end of record]. This is the rhythm the early negro bands used for their--[record over]. Did you hear [Scats]? The most conditions that many musicians couldn't even play today. The cornet stood

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about twenty to twenty-five feet from the horn, the trombone was fifteen feet, the clarinet had a separate little horn that coming out this eight-inch horn to about a four-inch bell. And he stood right near the piano. The piano faced me--right under the horn. The drums stood along side me, and when the red light would they'd have a white light burning. And when the redlight come on, we was to all count two, and it's a miracle how we came in together. I'll never know. Maybe God was with us. I don't know, but you can see the difference. They have never improved on this playing, and I'll wager the last remaining years I've got, they ain't five men can play as good with all the electrical process, with all the improvements that they have and electrical recording, or any way they want to take it. These critics say we play ragtime, but this is pristine jazz. Because all the roots are contained in two recordings, I'll play you the "Livery Stable Blues" which is the counterpart that takes up all the other licks that has ever been made up to this day, are in these recordings. Hold it.

["Buddy" LaRocca says something.]

[LaRocca:] Go ahead someone, Sh, sh. [Music, and few comments after the neighing sounds in the record.] This is what I learnt when I was at "Livery Stable Blues," ODJB, Vi 18255, school. We used sing a little song "Chickie Ma, Graney Crow, What Time Is It?" One of the boys used to holler [crows]. That's where I got the idea from.

[Music continues, "Livery Stable Blues," by ODJB, Vi 18255.]

[LaRocca:] That was the first novelty record ever issued by any phonograph. Later came the cry--laughing trombone, the crying saxophones, and whatnot. But this record led the, pointed the way for other musicians to copy from.

[Allen:] O. K. Whenever you're ready.

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[LaRocca:] Talents scouts was sent to New Orleans to find bands that could play our type of music. They recorded every white and every colored band. That can be attested by the living people who have work in the phonograph places on Canal St. [such as Werlein's] cause they're several people that have express ideas on this thing. And they couldn't find no jazz bands in New Orleans. So they went to W.--went to Memphis, Tennessee, and they selected W. C. Handy who was to become the father of jazz and the creator of the blues and who could neither play blues or jazz. I let you hear his recording and then you judge for yourself. This is Handy's record. [Music. Stops music.] Excuse me, I forgot to read the number in there, would you do that, Mr. Urquhart?

[Urquhart:] You want the number of the record?

[LaRocca:] The record and the title.

[Urquhart:] "The Hooking Cow Blues," played by Handy's Orchestra, No. 82420.

[LaRocca:] Tell 'em the tit--the numb--Columbia.

[Urquhart:] Columbia.

[LaRocca:] Recording?

[Urquhart:] Recording, 77371.

[LaRocca:] Good. Now, we'll play this record the Father of the Blues, whose given so much space in the paper of which I had in my clippings all this stuff and one time he said he had the first Original Dixieland Jazz Band, this negro, until I had him corrected, and put back in place. Into my files, you'll find that paper. When you look through 'em, you serious scholar, look through that material and you'll come up where this negro was even trying to take the Dixieland Jazz Band name. [Music, "Hooking Cow Blues".] It's kinda tame for a colored man's band.

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[Allen:] Are these fellows playing by ear, or are they reading from music—can you tell?

[LaRocca:] I could not tell; I wasn't there and I wouldn't say something that I don't know.

[Allen:] What does it sound like?

[LaRocca:] It don't sound like anything. Conventional music, that's what it sound like, but I want you to know that they were impressed with the Dixieland Band because they come up one year after. Listen to them now with the "Hooking Cow." They heard the rooster crow and the donkey bray. So they come out with their novelty. This band was imported to New York to compete against us on the Victor. They were a flop. They went into the hands of the receiver. That's where I got their bogus check. You'll find that in my clippings almost. When I played the "St. Louis Blues" for you, Listen to that [cow imitation]. Got the "Hooking Cow"? That will only go to show you that the negro was copying. In his own little way he thought he could do better because being as the negro had the ascendancy in the ragtime music that his music was gonna come out better than ours. [End of music.]

[LaRocca:] That is why he failed cause he couldn't even play ragtime and he couldn't play jazz. Stop the machine.

[Allen:] Here we go.

[LaRocca:] This is a Columbia record, "I Haven't Gotten No Time To Have the Blues," by the Louisiana Five, 82775. They call themselves a jazz orchestra. There you'll hear the great Alcide Nunez play. [Music] That was the great Anton Lada's Louisiana Five. One of the Judas Iscariots who lied all through this yearbook [Esquire, 1945]. That I had played with him in 1914. I never

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even knew the man. They came to New York in about the latter part of '18 or the beginning of '19. That's when I met Anton Lada.

[Allen:] Where were these people from on this record?

[LaRocca:] Well, to tell the truth, Yellow was from here. Whether Lada was from here or not, I don't know. I didn't know him. Because they's many people came to New York that I didn't know. They had a band there. After the Creole band, the next band to come to New York City [was the] LaCoste Harmony Quintet. They open at the "Golden Glades." Their stay was about four weeks. The pianist went with Gladys Murray in Vaudeville. They never were heard again. This was a white group. I'd never known these boys. Then came Tom Brown with his reorganized band to New York City, where they tried out at Reisenweber's and the management walked out while they were playing. That night they tried at Healy's and were run out after the first night. Before they finished the first night Brown's band disbanded and never tried again. Then came Johnny Fischer and his Ragtime Group. They failed to secure employment and went back to New Orleans. That was in 1917 and '18.

[Allen:] Where did you get that information? Is that from a book there?

[Music stops.]

[LaRocca:] Where I get that information?

[Allen:] That you just read.

[LaRocca:] How I happen to be there? I know when they were there.

[Allen:] Oh, you made a note?

[LaRocca:] Yeah, yeah, you see.

[Allen:] That's your information?

[LaRocca:] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Look, you see here. They say this nigger band

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left here in 1912. They God damn liar. Because if you look up the places that I tell you--. Here's what I tell you, cap. Read what I tell you--tell 'em. I don't tell 'em, [no lie?].

[Allen:] I see, that's all right.

[LaRocca:] If you don't find 'em there, don't come back here any more. Just brand me a damn liar, but [what] I'm telling you is the truth.

[Allen:] Well, who are these LaCoste people, are they from New Orleans?

[LaRocca:] I don't know, but I happen to know, they were in the paper, and you know how I know it? I got all those down in notes, every man that came there, every band went bad, what they did and what they didn't do. But I shoulda cut the clippings out. I only made notations of these things on paper and I printed it down on a piece of paper for future reference. Then in case anything came up which I didn't expect--which it did--now, I have the proof. I don't know why I did it, but they always called me a junk man. I've saved things since--.

End of Reel III
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