

PAUL BARBARIN

1

I [of 2]-Digest-Retyped

December 23, 1959 Also present: Richard B. Allen, Paul R. Crawford, a lady

Interview recorded at PRC's home [at the time], 818 St. Peter Street, New Orleans.

Paul Adolph Barbarin [cf. PB reel I, January 28, 1960, p.k], the son of Isidore John Barbarin, was born on Barracks Street, corner of St. Claude; the birthdate to which he has become accustomed was May 5, 1901, although other dates have been mentioned. [See Louis Barbarin interview of June 22, 1960].

While still quite young, he lived on Urquhart Street, behind Perseverance Hall, which was on Villere Street; he could hear bands playing for Monday banquets at that hall; one Monday his mother told him Buddy Bolden was playing that day, and she remarked further that one day Bolden would "blow his brains out" on the horn, as he played too loud.

Music of his earliest memory was mostly rags, such as "African Pas", "Ophelia Rag", "Entertainers Rag", "Fewclothes", "Grace and Beauty", and "Maple Leaf Rag".

PB's paternal grandmother held many picnics for the family and friends at Lucien's Pavilion, at Milneburg, on Lake Pontchartrain; she also gave many parties at her home. People attending the picnics got there by riding the train, "Smoky Mary", which PB describes. On Sundays there would be bands playing at every camp at the lake; PB says Emiel Christian can verify that statement, as he played there many times. For musicians, Sundays were busiest at Milneburg; Mondays were also very good.

The busiest days for dance halls were Mondays; bands such as the Superior, the Imperial, the Olympia and the Eagle played at the various halls. Discussion of prices.

More whites than colored had picnics at Milneburg on Sunday, although there would be colored people having picnics there then; there was no mixing, but the two races sometimes rented adjacent camps. White and colored musicians didn't sit in with each other; PB explains that the bands would be "bucking" one another; there might be ten or fifteen bands playing in the area, each trying to outplay the others. Both races had some good bands; PB mentions Christian's Band, asking if it were

PAUL BARBARIAN  
I [of 2]-Digest-Retyped  
March 27, 1959  
Sic 23

2

Emile Christian's band; RBA says there several Christians, including Charlie and Frank. [See Frank Christian interview]. PB says Christian's Band also used to play at Elysian Fields and Royal (actually Dauphine, not Royal, at Luskitania Hall), and he would hear them when they played from the gallery of the place, to advertise the occasion. The place where the Christian Band played was next to the Fifth Precinct Polic Station, where PB was taken two times; the first time was after he had just finished playing a job with Chris Kelly, a house party on Urquhart between Marigny and Mandeville [streets]; there was an arguemnt among the bandx members about the division for the money, they were picked up by the police, taken to night court and fined; PB was unable to get out until the following morning because he didn't have enough money to pay his fine, when his father paid it; PB says the incarceration was for nothing he did. The other time he went was for nothing he did, too; he just got scared and hid when he saw some policemen approaching, and he surrendered to them when they approached his hiding place. PB mentions that the place was near a corner when boys, including himself and "Skater" Brown, gathered to beat sticks on the curb and whistle "ratty" songs. When he was about thirteen years old (prior to the incidents just related), he was arrested on the complaint of a woman who owned the house on whose steps he was beating, practicing drumming; the judge who heard his case had him drum for him, released him, gave him fifty cents and told him not to drum on those steps again.

PB talks about funerals; if a man belonged to several organizations which approved of music at funerals, he might have several bands playing at his funeral; PB remembers one funeral which had four bands playing. The Excelsior Brass Band and the Onward Brass Band were the best; the Onward was the better of the two, although not just because PB's father played in it; the Onward played more "ratty" music than the Excelsior. Funerals might be held any day of the week; Sunday was

probably the most popular day for funerals, as everyone would be off work and able to see the procession. Sunday funerals have been rare during the past few years, and according to RBA, undertakers don't like to work on Sunday; PB says undertakers don't like music with funerals, as those kinds of funerals require more time.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday were not particularly popular days of the week for occasions requiring music; lawn parties were usually held on Sunday; fish fries were usually held on Saturday; PB says a red lantern hung in front of a house indicated that a fish fry was in progress. Bands didn't work at fish fries; there might be a guitar player, but mostly the people made their own music by singing and clapping. (PB demonstrates.)

Christmas was not particularly busy for musicians; people had their minds on things other than dancing; there was much less celebration at New Year's Eve in the old time than there is now. There was much music at Mardi Gras time. PB says everyone masked on Carnival Day in the old times; he said people had more fun then. Describes Mardi Gras and music.

PB says the jazz played in the old times was different from the music which is played today on Bourbon Street; tempos today are very fast; people wouldn't dance to very fast music in the old times. RBA says PB told the truth about Bourbon Street in an interview with John Norris, of Coda magazine, and published in that magazine. RBA says PB has been squeezed out of [work on] Bourbon Street now; PB says, "I imagine so; I'm still going to live, I imagine; I'm making it; I'm going to eat and sleep, I imagine." PB and RBA agree that the musicians would like to be able to play slower tempos, more relaxed music, and that people should be allowed to enjoy music. . . . [Restricted]

PB says someone [Chris Barber?] asked him for the melody to [PB's composition,] "Don't Forget to Mess Around," but PB doesn't have it, nor does he have a recording of it; he asks RBA to save him a copy of Louis Armstrong's recording of the tune; he says some company (which RBA identifies as H[ot] J[azz] C[lub of] A[merica] reissued it, but Joe Glazer [sp?] [Armstrong's manager] protested, so the company quit issuing it.

PB played at a debutantes' dance last night; the band played with a good beat all night, not fast, the tempo required on Bourbon Street; the music was like that played in the old days. The band had no piano; they used banjo, bass, [drums], trombone, trumpet and clarinet. PB doesn't have trouble finding banjo players today; he sometimes uses Manuel Sayles, but usually he uses Fred Minor, who also sings a lot and is a good entertainer. . . . [Restrict tape] PB says he gets more money than "the average guy" on jobs.

PB says amplified guitar is just part of the change in the world, and in music; he likes jazz, rock and roll, progressive, and some commercial (i.e., popular) music; he doesn't like bebop. PB was with Armstrong until 1939; Lee Blair didn't play amplified guitar in that band, nor did Will Johnson; Johnson, now dead [check this?], usually played banjo anyway; Johnson was also in Luis Russell's band [which was the band taken over by Armstrong]. When PB returned to New Orleans in 1939, there were amplified guitars in bands here at the time. BP says Blair would have had an amplified guitar if they had existed earlier [check Eddie Durham discography].

Bands at Milneburg or in dance halls [etc.] lined up in this order: from the left (of a person facing the bandstand)--bass, guitar, clarinet, cornet, trombone, drums. Guitar was usual at the time, rather than banjo, which became popular later. PB didn't feel

PAUL BARBARIN  
Reel II [of 2]--Digest--retyped  
December 23, 1959

4-A

easy when a piano was added to the band; he was accustomed to playing with only guitar and bass in the rhythm section; piano players usually worked alone, as they

did in the District. Pianos were added to bands about 1915, or perhaps a bit earlier, PB was about sixteen years old when he began working in the District, with Manuel Perez at Rice's, [and there was a piano in the band?]; PB would substitute for Louis Cottrell, Sr. (he thought at first he substituted for Henry Martin, but recalls that Martin was working at Fewclothes); Louis Cottrell, Jr. (clarinetist) would convey the message that his father wanted PB to take his place for the night. PB had only one pair of long trousers, a gift, which he wore when playing the job. The piano on the job was located at the rear of the band; the pianist had his back to the other bandsmen; the cornet player sat directly in front of the pianist.

PB's first job, for which he was paid one dollar and twenty-five cents plus beer and sandwiches, was with Johnny Prudent's band; PB doesn't recall ever having played with a band without receiving payment. The Prudent job was for a political rally, held at the corner of Chartres and St. Roch [streets].

Drummers didn't play any [extended] breaks in the old days; they would play some two bar breaks sometimes. Mack Murray [sp?] played a lot of two bar breaks; he was a good drummer; he had a lot traps, such as: chain, whistles, ratchet. He had big bass drum, and a small snare drum had like a banjo. In later years, Joe René, brother of Kid Rena [sic], played waltzes on various types and sizes of bottles. Talk of tuned cow bells, woodblocks, temple blocks. Mack Murray had one particular tune during which he would take two bar break by dripping a wagon chain on his snare drum.

Cymbals were used only [with exceptions?] during the last, or going out, chorus. Woodblock was required for playing "High Society"; it was used during the clarinet solo. It was used at times also. PB wants an old-fashioned woodblock, which is narrower, smaller and more durable than present-day woodblocks; RBA says Raymond Burke might have one. (PB demonstrates the use of the crash cymbal on out choruses by scattling.)

Asked by RBA about the use of 6/8 rhythms at dances, PB says that when an organization gave a picnic at the Fair Ground there would be three bands; the Excelsior Brass Band or the Onward Brass Band played marches [including some], in 6/8 time, and waltzes, and were in the downstairs area; on the way upstairs, between the stairs, would be another band, perhaps John Robichaux or Manuel Perez; out in the field there was a honky tonk, where the Eagle Band always played; Frankie Duson was leader [and trombonist], Bob Lyons [played bass]; it was a blues and barrelhouse band; it was for the "ratty" people who danced "ratty". The area in the field was not sheltered at all. The three bands played different types of music, as they played for different types of people; the brass band played "dignified" music, the between-stairs band played popular rags and songs of the day, the field band played lowdown music. "...that Frankie Duson's band, they had a low band...." The first two bands might be changed, but the Eagle was always hired to play in the field; personnel: Duson [trombone]; Lyons [string bass]; [Lewis] "Chif" [Matthews], trumpet; [PB thinks] Louis Warnick [sp?], clarinet; Dandy Lewis (replaced Bob Lyons); Henry Zeno or Henry Martin, drums; Lorenzo Staulz, guitar. Staulz also sang dirty songs; one song he sang was later retitled "Mama's Baby Boy." [It's also called KMFA. RBA]

The first scat singing PB heard was Louis Armstrong [is recording], singing "Heebie Jeebies." He also heard scat singing in homes.

[James William] "Red Happy" [Bolton] lived around Saratoga Street the last PB knew of his residence in New Orleans; he was found dead in an alley in Cleveland; he never returned to New Orleans after he left. PB says "Red Happy" left a show, possibly Mack and Mack's in Chicago because he thought King Oliver, then working at the Plantation, would fire PB and take him into the band, but that wasn't the case. "Red Happy" joined the band of some fiddle player; during an argument, the fiddler

gave him a severe beating; the next thing PB heard was of "Red Happy's" death. PB says "Red Happy" was a bad boy; RBA says [Sidney] Bechet was a tough guy, too; PB says Bechet was quick-tempered.

Some of the great baritone horn players in brass bands were: Adolphe "Tata" Alexander, [Sr.,] George Hooker, Vic Gaspard, and Eddie Atkins; Alexander was about the best. Goot alto [horn] players were: Joe Payant, Pete Bocage, and PB's father [Isidore Barbarin]. Early good players of the tuba: Jackson [not Eddie], and Oke Gaspard; Eddie Jackson, of a later time, was a very good tuba player; he could be heard one mile away, although he was not a large man, being tall and thin. Not only was he loud, he was good. A good tuba player of today was with the Dukes of Dixieland; PRC suggests that it might have been Bill Porter; RBA suggests Lowell Miller (with Pete Fountain [on string bass] at the time); PRC further suggests Bernard Mallon. PB thinks it may have been Porter. PB says alto horn, baritone horn and E flat clarinet are important to brass bands; he says there is no accompaniment without them. PB says Adolphe "Tats" Alexander [,Jr.,] did play good alto, but he is . . . ill now. . . . [Restricted material] PB says [Walter] Pichon also played alto well. RBA mentions John Porter; PB says he was a good baritone and tuba player. He played with minstrel shows.

RBA says PB once told him his father was taught by Charles [Scior?].

(Bebé Matthews, Bill Matthews' brother, is mentioned; he worked with Manuel Perez.)

End of Reel II