

RUDY MAZZARI
Reel I--Summary--Retyped
November 6, 1959

Others Present: 1
Richard B. Allen

This interview was made in Seminar Room 2, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University. The full name of the interviewee is Rudolfo Mario Guiseppe Mazzari, and he was born at 314 E. 33rd Street, New York City on March 25, 1917. He remembers being shuttled around a lot, because his father was always on the road with an opera company. When he was four or five years old, he remembers living on Bleeker Street in Greenwich Village, in company with his sister, Elsa, and his brother, Frddy; the father had sent to Italy for his mother to take care of her grandchildren, and she was mistress of the house. Rudy had a hard time learning English until he went to one of the city public schools. When he was about seven years old, his father decided that the children should get good educations, so he sent them to Europe. Elsa and Freddy returned to the U. S. in two or three years, but Rudy remained in Italy, where they all had gone, for ten years, studying music, for the most part, and studying architecture for a short time at the beginning of his stay; he says he didn't do so well in architecture because he was always getting into trouble with the other students, and he was finally kicked out of the school. One day Rudy's father brought home a bass fiddle and said, "This is it for you," and Rudy says it has been it for him ever since. His father was a trumpet player, and was stage bandmaster for the Chicago Opera Company. Rudy came back to the U. S. when World War II broke out; at the time he was within two years of having a degree from a school in Venice. He came back to Chicago, where

his family lived then, and stayed about a year. He played in Grant Park summer concerts, and got acquainted with playing in a dance band, which he had not had occasion to do in Italy. He played week-end jobs around Chicago--Polish and Italian weddings, etc. Then he went to Decatur, Illinois, where he had gotten a job in a hotel for the summer; the band was a combination dinner and dance band. He learned a lot on the job, and says he developed a "real swinging beat." The band became so good that summer that they were asked to stay, but Rudy had already written a contract to join the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. He remained with the Indianapolis Symphony for about nine years. He did not sign a contract for the forthcoming year [number ten?], and when he was in musicians' union headquarters in New York [during the off-season], he was approached by a man who liked him because he played bass and spoke Italian. The man offered him a job with the New Orleans Symphony, under the direction of Massimo Freccia. Rudy wanted to make a change, so he signed up right then and came to New Orleans. He says he was here the first year Freccia was the conductor, and says it was probably 1948 [Polk's Directory of 1947 lists Freccia as being conductor of the New Orleans orchestra.].

Rudy says he heard jazz in New Orleans; in fact, one of the reasons he "was lured" here was that he wanted to hear jazz. He was very impressed by what he heard, and then he got to play jazz. He says that at first it was difficult for him, but he began to get the feel of it, "that two-beat, you know." Before

long he was playing on week-ends, with "pick up at the last minute" bands gathered through the union. He says there were always interesting musicians in them; once he played in a band with Irving Fazola and he says that scared him, because he knew Fazola was a great jazzman and he considered himself a greenhorn. Rudy also got to play all the musical productions which came to the Civic Theater, which is where he first met Fazola, who was also in the band. Fazola invited Rudy to have a beer during an intermission, and there displayed his ability as a trencherman by consuming three dozen raw oysters chased by much beer. Rudy says perhaps he ate and drank in such large quantity because he played Albert system clarinet, which may have consumed more energy [than the Boehm] because the fingering is more difficult. Mr. Allen says the bore of an Albert is larger, etc., and may produce a greater thirst. Rudy knew Fazola only about a year before Fazola died. He worked in several bands with Fazola. Rudy says Fazola was so popular that club owners would beg him to come in their clubs to play a few numbers; he would go to as many as he could and play perhaps two or three numbers in each place. Rudy was invited to go with him, and he says he learned a lot about music and about Fazola on those trips. Fazola's personality and musicianship always made any band livelier and the music better; no matter how tired sounding a band might be, the men in the band played better when Fazola sat in with them. There were flowers from all over the country and from famous musicians at Fazola's funeral, which was attended by

many people. Rudy says he got to meet the New Orleans people and get the feel of what New Orleans and jazz are by knowing Fazola and going around with him. Rudy says that various accents and expressions, plus many intangible things, help make up what he considers New Orleans. The food is also a part of New Orleans, and is another reason he was glad to be here.

When Rudy was record librarian for radio station WDSU he became acquainted with Sharkey [Bonano], who often came to the station to make tape recordings for Capitol records; Rudy says he learned a lot from this acquaintance, and also learned just from being record librarian.

One day Frank Assunto [leader of the Dukes of Dixieland] was scheduled to make a tape recording for servicemen overseas, and all the band showed up at the station except the bass player. The bandsmen decided he must have gone to see some Western movies, to which he was addicted, and had forgotten about the recording date. Pete Lauderman, who was musical director at the station, suggested the band use Rudy, as he played bass and was on hand. Assunto accepted the suggestion, and Rudy recorded with the band; he says the experience made him feel great.

Mr. Allen asks if Rudy considers anyone in Sharkey's band outstanding, and Rudy replies that to him "the whole thing was just one outstanding body." Rudy says Sharkey was making trips to play at the Palmer House in Chicago at that time, and wonders if he is still doing that; Mr. Allen does not know. Rudy says he always

looked forward to Sharkey's coming to record at WDSU.

Rudy had heard of Negro bands, but had never heard one until one day Pete Lauderman told him that Papa Celestin was coming to the station to record. "Sure enough, in comes this venerable old man, man, I never forget, and in comes these other cats and they sit down there and they start going, and that was a real wonderful experience."

Rudy says that he saw a funeral [with music] for the first time in 1959. He enjoyed the music. He says he had heard Mr. Allen and other people talk about funerals, so for a long time had wanted to go to one. The first one he went to was at the Elks Hall (ex-Bulls Hall) at 8th and Danneel streets. He says there were artists there making sketches, and people taking photographs, and that he enjoyed it very much. "The dirges they play are undescrivable." He says one has to see one of the funerals to realize just what they are and how they look, that articles in magazines, etc., just cannot describe them. The second funeral he attended was in Algiers, where he walked all day in the hot, scorching sun but he went all the way. Mr. Allen says that he never notices the sun until the music stops, and then he is exhausted. Rudy says he now tries to persuade his friends to go to one of the funerals, and that when he goes back to Italy he is going to try to describe a funeral to the Italians. In answer to Mr. Allen's question, Rudy says one meets all kinds of people along a funeral parade route. "Sometimes it's just a lady who lives in the neighborhood, and she's

luggin her child along with her, you know--like little Sammy [S. B. Charters, V], I remember that time in Algiers, we lugged him, we took turns in carrying him." He says that when he meets the musicians they always make him feel "like the greatest person in the world."

Rudy says that he heard that [Mario] Finazzi used to play Dixieland tuba before he joined the New Orleans Symphony, that he never got to hear him play that way; when Rudy joined the orchestra, he met Finazzi [Finazzi played and recorded with Tony Parenti in the 1920's.] Rudy hasn't heard any tubas with dance bands down here, but he has heard the ones with the brass bands.

Once Rudy was on his way from New York to New Orleans. He had been invited to stop at the home of a friend in Mississippi. He and the friend were invited to supper at the home of "a very old, Southeren Missisgippi family." As the meal progressed, the conversation turned to Italy and the customs of the Italian people. The lady of the house was doing most of the questioning, and after Rudy had finished his descriptions she said, "Well, we Christians don't do things that way." Rudy was shaken, and didn't know what to say.

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Reel II--Summary--Retyped
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Richard B. Allen

Fabian Sevitsky, conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra at the time Rudy was a member, was known as "Beany" because he came from Boston. He and Rudy didn't care for each other, mutually. He was "a strict, old-country Russian type," and for some reason made Rudy's nine year tenure miserable. He had a grudge against something, and took his grudge out on people, making it tough for a lot of good musicians. He is now teaching at the University of Miami [Florida.] He married into a lot of money. As a conductor he never was much. He was a bass player originally, but someone told him he should be a conductor, so what with being married to Maria Koussevitsky, related to Serge Koussevitsky, the conductor of the Boston Symphony, and having pull and money he became the conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony. Rudy was in Chicago at the musicians' union hall when he saw a notice that the Indianapolis was holding auditions for various instruments, bass violin being one. Rudy went to the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, where the auditions were being held. He noticed that the musicians who had just had their auditions came out looking pale and shaken. Then Rudy went in and auditioned. Sevitsky said, "What is your name?" Rudy told him. Sevitsky said, "How old are you?" Rudy told him he was nineteen. Sevitsky said, "You are sure?" After Rudy played a few things for him, Sevitsky told him to sit down, and then he asked, "How you would like to play in my orchestra?" Rudy said he would like it fine. Sevitsky

said all right, it paid \$35 a week, 20 week season. "But you must practice; if you don't practice, it's too bad." Rudy did practice, and when the season began he went to Indianapolis to begin rehearsals. Sevitsky was tough, and seemed to dwell on small things in the music, and to make each player perform individually, wasting time, etc. After a while, the orchestra members "got his number." Having been a bass player, he was particularly tough on the bass players. He decided he would teach the bass players himself, and they would go once a week to a conservatory and line up and Sevitsky would give them a lesson. Everytime Rudy was to perform at the lessons, Sevitsky would tell him he was flat, or sharp, and to go home and practice. He wouldn't let Rudy play as many as two notes at the lessons. One day it was Rudy's turn to play and he said, "Well, how do you want it today, Doctor, flat or sharp." Rudy was fired for that remark. (He said that he has several witnesses to the fact that he originated the joke.) He went through the summer wondering when he was going to get a job. The union in Indianapolis decided that Sevitsky could not bring in a bassist from out of town, inasmuch as Rudy was a member of the Indianapolis local and was available for work. Sevitsky had to comply, so he gave Rudy another audition. Sevitsky had begun to hold auditions in a dark theater, so that the performer could not see where the listener was; the performer was on the stage, all alone, with all available lights trained on him. The manager of the orchestra informed Rudy that Sevitsky would let him join again, but because he was playing so badly,

he must practice; the members of the orchestra said he was playing very well. After several years, Rudy decided he must make a change, and he wound up in New Orleans [see Reel I, 11/6/59.]

Jascha Heifetz used to appear with the Indianapolis Orchestra every year. One year he was scheduled to perform the Beethoven violin concerto. Sevitsky always had to rehearse the orchestra first. When the orchestra would arrive at some prominent bass passages, Sevitsky would tell them they were playing too loud; he finally got them cut down to a whisper. When Heifetz came to rehearse with the orchestra, he played a few bars and stopped. He spoke to Sevitsky, who argued with him, and the argument apparently was about the basses, because Heifetz asked for more bass. After several more stops and requests for more bass, Sevitsky said, "Well, all right, we play it the way you want to. After all, it is your concerto." Heifetz said, "Yes, and Beethoven wrote it."

Rudy played under the baton of Leopold Stokowski when he made the famous walk-out scene at the New Orleans Municipal Auditorium. He came during Mardi Gras season, and the large side of the Auditorium was booked for a Mardi Gras ball, while the symphony was to play in the small side. While the orchestra was playing Manuel de Falla's "El Amor Brujo" they kept hearing sounds from the dance band on the other side. Stokowski apparently didn't like the competition [Maybe it was a pretty bad band, too. PRC], because he walked off the stand in protest, an episode which made headlines. Rudy liked him as a conductor, because he "phrased" just as the

the music should go---he was not just a timekeeper.

Rudy says that Massimo Freccia, who came to New Orleans the same year as Rudy, was a good musician and nice man, but he had difficulty expressing himself in English, and, consequently, was frustrated. Rudy played one year under Alexander Hilsberg, who had been concertmaster with the Philadelphia Orchestra, one year, but after that season was called in only as an extra player. Rudy says he got along fine with Hilsberg, who was one conductor who didn't pick on him. Hilsberg would say at the beginning of the season, that he would find out who had been practicing during the summer. Rudy doesn't know that conductors can really tell if someone has not kept up his practice, but that he thinks that a lot of the time when they pick on someone, they themselves are lost or confused, and they have to find someone to take it out on, to cover their own incompetence. Rudy says there are many conductors who are not what they should be, and that an orchestra can tell if a conductor is phony or not, especially if the individual musician knows that he is playing his part as it should be played. Rudy says the finest conductor he ever worked under was Arthur Rodzinski, who appeared as guest conductor of the New Orleans Symphony at the time; Rudy thinks he may have played under him in Indianapolis, too. Of all the conductors, whether he has played under them or not, Rudy thinks the best of them is Ernest Ansermet, conductor of L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande [sp.?]; he makes his opinion from hearing recordings of that orchestra. His favorite conductor

for opera is Alberto [Arredi ?].

Rudy worked in orchestras which sometimes presented famous soloists, such as Joseph Szigetti, Zino Francescotti and others. He mentions Nathan Milstein as being not only a fine violinist but a very nice person. Milstein would always talk to everyone, and always showed up early for rehearsals, and would invariably sit in the second violins section and read their part. Once in Indianapolis, he was playing in the second violin section and he made a wrong entrance. Sevitsky roared, "Who did that?" Milstein raised his bow as the orchestra laughed.

Walter Herbert was conductor of the opera company in New Orleans for many years, and was practically business manager, too. He managed the opera company when it had hardly any money, and because of his thrift, Rudy says he is the one responsible for there being an opera company here today. He was also a very good conductor.

Hector Fontana [Sr.], originally from Milan, Italy, was stranded here when he was on tour probably with an Italian opera company, and he has been here ever since. He was a trombonist, but he wound up as orchestra manager at the old Saenger Theater, and later became personnel manager of the symphony orchestra here. Fontana booked [the orchestra for] all the musicals that appeared at the Civic Theater, and hired Rudy to play everytime. Rudy says he got \$150 to \$175 for 9 or 10 shows. Since Fontana died, someone else books the jobs like that, and Rudy no longer gets any of them.

Politics, he says. Fontana was a very un-assuming person, affable [section deleted from copy tape as being irrelevant and obscent], who did a good job as personnel manager, especially since he was able to keep both management and labor satisfied. Rudy says that he enjoyed talking with Fontana, and that they conversed in Italian. He goes on to explain that there are many dialects in Italy, and he says that most Italians cannot understand another dialect, but that all Italians understand "pure" Italian.

Paul Cazaubon was an old-time New Orleans drummer who was playing with Bill Hall [owner of Hall Drum Co., N. O.]. who was the section leader, in the percussion section of the New Orleans Symphony when Rudy joined that group. Cazaubon was a quiet, easy-going man who was born and reared in New Orleans.

About a year before Rudy left New Orleans [left the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra?] a cellist named Cliff [Rickter?] presented to the suthorities of Xavier University the idea that a seried of Sunday afternnon concerts of chanber music would be successful. The series was presented, and was such a success that every concert was packed. Rudy likens chamber music to jazz in that each performer has a role for which he alone is responsible, that only one man is alloted to play each line of the music. Rudy says that the number of men on the stage at Xavier at one time varied, that the usual number was fourteen, and most of them were members of the symphony orchestra.

Rudy worked many years with the New Orleans Summer Pops

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orchestra which rehearsed and held its concerts in Beauregard
[Old Congo] Square. The rehearsals were held during the morning,
and the orchestra was not sheltered from the sun. Rudy says he
enjoyed playing the pops very much and the attendance was very
good, too.

END OF REEL II

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Mr. Allen says that one night he was at the Apex Apartments listening to a rehearsal of Emile Barnes' band. Barnes asked for some more of "that blood" [referring to port wine], and when the band played numbers such as "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "High Society" the whole building was literally rocking. Ralston Crawford, the artist and photographer, was also there. Mr. Allen then tells of Brother's [Percy Randolph's] description, or listing of the various types of wines.

There follows a discussion of playing the bass pizzicato. Rudy maintains that players who do not take advantage of legitimate "position" playing are playing bass the hard way, that a musician who knows how to play properly can do so with ease and can play all the runs and other figures as needed. He says that more and more legitimately trained bassists are going into the jazz field, and cites as an example of success in any field of music the local bassist, Bob Ciccarelli [at that time a member of the symphony orchestra, who has played with Joe Burton and with Pete Fountain].

Then the talk turns to the number of strings on a bass, and Rudy says that the fourth string, the lowest [pitched E] was added only about 50 years ago. Giovanni Bottezini, a famous bassist, used a bass which had only the three upper strings. Modern compositions have demanded that lower pitches be available. A man in Germany invented a machine that fits over the low E string on the bass; by pushing a succession of levers, the bassist is able to play down to low C, a major 3rd lower than without the machine.

Richard Strauss, among others, has written bass parts going as far down as that low C. Back to pizzicato playing, Rudy says the best way to hold the right hand [for picking] is to anchor the thumb on the fingerboard and use the index finger and middle finger alternately; this technique allows for great agility. He is glad that he learned legitimately and then got into jazz. He then describes "slap" bass. Rudy says that now bassists are using the bow more, especially when taking a chorus. He says he used to be laughed at when he took bowed choruses, years ago, that he was accused of imitating Slam Stewart, when really he was only bowing his own chorus. He says that he uses the German style of bowing, but that the French style has advantages, too.

Rudy has not played, except in a few jam sessions, since he left the symphony, about three years ago. He plans to resume playing when he goes back to Italy, which will be as soon as his boat comes in [He intended the phrase in its literal sense, as he was waiting for a particular ship. PRC]. He says he intends to play a lot more in Italy, as there is more going on there, as far as the arts are concerned. He says that the Italian people are also very interested in Dixieland, and that although they do not sound like the music in this country, at least they are interested and are trying to play it. He says he thinks he'll probably be playing some Dixieland, too, and may be able to help some of the Italian groups with what little he has learned in New Orleans. He says that he received letters from Italy telling him how glad

the Italians were to have Louis Armstrong over there [1959], and how much they enjoyed Armstrong's music. Rudy mentions an article he read in an Italian publication which stated that its author was against jazz, and it mentioned the sax player, Shelley Manne, a letter in rebuttal asked how the writer could criticize jazz when he didn't know what he was talking about, inasmuch as Manne was a drummer. Rudy says this shows that there is much interest in jazz in Italy. Mr. Allen asks if Rudy has noticed any Italian influence on jazz; Rudy replies that he doesn't really know. Mr. Allen then says that Wingy Manone "swings out" on "O Sole Mio" and that Morty Korb [sp.?] plays a bowed bass solo of the theme of the Sextet from "Lucia" in Kid Ory's Columbia recording, "Blues for Jimmy." Mr. Allen says it is obvious that a lot of jazzmen have listened to opera, mentioning Sidney Bechet as one who has listened, and that many Italian operas had their U. S. premier in New Orleans at the old French Opera House.

In response to Mr. Allen's question, Rudy says he thinks that New Orleans style jazz as played in brass bands will be perpetuated, that the use of marching jazz bands will continue. He adds that jazz had been pushed into the background by rock and roll, but as soon as rock and roll subsides (and it will, according to Sir Thomas Beecham, says Rudy), jazz will be back where it should be.