

WELLMAN BRAUD

I [copy of 3 reels], *Track 1*

March 31, 1958 Also present: William Russell, Richard B. Allen, Paul Crawford, Ralph Collins

Bluebird record being played ["Double Check Stomp," by Duke Ellington's Orchestra]: tune by Wellman Braud, arrangement done at the recording; string bass played by Wellman Braud; Cootie [Williams], trumpet solo; Johnny Hodges, alto sax solo; [Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, trombone solo].

WB explains how Nanton used a Harmon mute to obtain effect heard. The band, consisting of 7 pieces, sounds much larger. WB says Ellington's band of today is not as good as it was in past years, but it's still a good band; he speaks of a concert the band played [recently], saying that the band didn't use any music at all, that all the tunes were Ellington tunes, that there was no hesitancy in going from tune to tune, and that the bandsmen would know which tune to play simply by hearing Ellington's short piano introductions. WB praises [William] "Cat" Anderson, trumpet, and Harold Baker, trumpet. He says [Billy] Strayhorn and Johnny Hodges took a band to Florida this [past] winter. WB wrote only the one tune. Lawrence Brown and Otto [Hardwicke] wrote "Sophisticated Lady"; [Juan] Tizol wrote "Caravan." WB says [Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.] wrote "Mood Indigo"; WB played some jobs with Tio in New Orleans; WB was a "fiddle" player then. When he left New Orleans, he was a fiddle player; he took up trombone in Chicago, in 1916; when his lip went bad, he took up string bass. He explains that it was easy for him, as he had played guitar for a long time before that. He says he didn't play the music as written, but would use it for a guide, running chords [playing arpeggios] as they changed in the music. WB left New Orleans when he was 20 years old. He played with Freddy Keppard and the Creole Band, with [Lawrence] Duhé

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[same band], although not in New Orleans. He played a few jobs with [A.J.] Piron [in New Orleans]. WB says he was too young to play in the district. He then says that he did not play in the Georgia Minstrels Brass Band, a large group, but that [Alphonse] Picou, [Louis] "Papa" Tio and Bab Frank did.

Record, "Saturday Night Function," by Ellington, is played. WB says it was his first recording, had no drums on it, which is the reason he played so percussively; he says now that he knows what he is doing, he stresses tone. He explains some of his technique for power playing. He mentions Barney Bigard, Sidney Bechet and Johnny Hodges, saying they are the finest on clarinet [and sax], because they always fill in the holes; he says that after Bigard left Ellington, the band couldn't play "C Jam Blues," (among others) because Bigard figured so prominently in filling up the holes. He says Southern musicians had the most soul. WB says there was a fine New Orleans clarinetist (who died in Detroit) with Jean Goldkette and His Kittans; he also mentions [Alcide] "Yellow" Nunez and Tony Giardina as being fine clarinetists, and then says that Sidney Bechet was the greatest clarinetist. Speaking of 2 beat and 4 beat, WB says New Orleans drummers have been playing both for many years, and playing like some of the well-known drummers of the present--e.g., Buddy Rich of now plays like Henry Zeno of then; "Red Happy" [Bolton], drummer at the Lyric Theater was playing drum solos, like Gene Krupa, many years ago.

The record, "There'll Be Some Changes Made," by Kid Ory's band, is played; WB plays bass, Minor ["Ram"] Hall is on drums. WB says the bass style is founded on Steve Brown's style, but improved [by WB]. Also on the record is Lionel

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Reason, New Orleans pianist; RBA says he played intermission piano at the El Morocco [New Orleans nightclub] when the George Lewis band was there [late Forties or early Fifties]; Reason also played with and made recordings with King Oliver, in Oliver's late years. Steve Brown was WB's favorite bass player. WB says of himself, "I'm a nervous artist, you know what I mean...I like to hear something did the right way."

Where is talk of 2 beat and 4 beat, and of when the drums and/or bass plays, or should play, one of the other.

WB played guitar with the Piron orchestra, substituting for John Marrero, who would be playing with Freddy Keppard's Olympia Band at the moment; Marrero's father, Billy Marrero, was a fine bass player, as was [Henry] Kimball. Kimball, a specialist with the bow, played for years at the Lyric Theater, with John Robichaux; Jimmy Johnson, at one time with Buddy Bolden, was also a good bow man, but didn't use it as much as Kimball. WB talks about his pizzicato technique. He comments about the Good Time Jazz recordings by Ory, WB playing bass, quotes someone as saying the records are the best Ory ever made. WB has played sousaphone on some recordings with Ellington; he talks about meeting the tuba player of the Rochester Symphony Orchestra, in 1923, when WB had just come back from Europe, where he had been with Will Vodery's [ck sp]Plantation Orchestra, with a "burlesque" show, a Blackbirds revue starring Florence Mills. WB answers a question, saying there were no sousaphones being used in bands (other than upright tubas brass bands) in new Orleans when he lived here, and there were no banjos being used, either--just guitar. [End of reel]

When WB lived in New Orleans, at one time his home was on St. Phillip, between Roman and Derbigny. (Joe Darensbourg lived somewhere in the French Quarter, but WB didn't meet him until about 1932, in Seattle.) WB also lived at 1832 Laurel Street at one time. WB knew Zue Robertson, a fine trombonist, and a fine pianist; he was raised in the Garden District, on Third Street,

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between Liberty and Franklin [now Loyola]. Zue studied slide trombone with Batiste Delaney [DeLisle?]; Zue was Bolden's "ace" trombonist; he also worked with John Robichaux. ZR's mother was also a pianist. WB says Ory was the king of the valve trombonists, in and/or out of New Orleans.

WB says Claiborne Willians and his brother, Gil [sp] were pretty much good violinists, but most of the Negro violinists around New Orleans weren't much. WB played violin like Stuff Smith [did in later years] when he was about 12 years old.

Small talk about a visitor to WR's shop [Mel Grant, Pianist of Chicago]. WB says Duke Ellington turned out to be one of the best band pianists.

WB discusses ear training and tone production. WB didn't study music until he went to Chicago (where he took up trombone), or to read until then. He studied under Professor Jackson there. He played violin and guitar by the time he came to New Orleans, learning when he was about 12 years old. His father, who played trumpet in brass bands, was a rice farmer up-river.

WB's last name was originally spelled "Breaux"; he says there are several spellings of the name.

WB says he is the only bassist who had played [Lizst's?] second "Hungarian Rhapsody" in swingtime; he performed that feat in an Earl Carroll Vanities "Belle of the Nineties" with Mae West.

The first group of records Wb made with Ellington were "Saturday Night Function", "East St. Louis Toodle-oo", "Birmingham Breakdown" and "The Mooche". Wb's predecessor in the band was a fine tuba player, from Philadelphia; WB can't think of his name at the moment. The Victor recording of "The

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Mooche<sup>#</sup> is played; WB identifies the growl trumpet soloist as Cootie Williams, not Bubber Miley, and the alto sax soloist as Johnny Hodges. Williams was brought into the band to play the Miley style, but he developed his own distinctive growl style.

[End of Reel 2 ?]

WB moved to New Orleans when he was about 14 years old; he left when he was exactly 20.

"Bass" Edwards was the tuba player with Ellington, preceding WB.

"Jabbo" Smith made some records with Ellington, when the band switched [from Brunswick to Okeh?]; one title was "East St. Louis Toodle-oo". Lonnie Johnson, guitar, made several records with small groups from Ellington's band. [as well as with the full band. See discographies] Teddie Bunn was WB's favorite guitarist; he worked for WB a long time, at the Onyx Club, where WB had a combo <sup>[The Spirits of Nippon '35]</sup> in 1935.

WB doesn't remember the name of the accordianist, a Jewish boy, who played on the Ellington recordings (not the Victor-Bluebird session, but the other [Brunswick?] session) of "Accordian Joe" and "Double Check Stomp". Joe Garland, tenor sax, is mentioned, but he didn't play with Ellington; he was with Louis [Armstrong] at one time, and wrote "In The Mood". There were never 2 basses with Ellington when WB was with him; after WB left, Ellington had Albin Hayes [Hayes Alvis] and Billy Taylor on bass. WB didn't know [or doesn't recognize the name] Cornell Smelser, <sup>also</sup> also known as Joe Cornell, accordian player [listed as accordian on "Accordian Joe" and Double Check Stomp"].

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Babb Frank was an old-time piccolo player who worked with jazz bands; he played for about 2 years with the Creole Band, in Chicago, with WB, Roy Palmer, Greddy Keppard, Lil Armstrong and Tubby Hall. Frank had good control, fine tone and could improvise. Frank led his own Peerless Band in New Orleans; the clarinetist, Charlie McCurdy, played with that band a long time; McCurdy was also with ~~Robichaux~~ <sup>Robichaux</sup>. Frank left Chicago, where the Creole Band was playing at Jazzland, went to St. Louis for a while, and then to San Francisco, the place of his death; he died about 1925. He was the only piccolo player WB heard around New Orleans. Frank's style was sort of like that of an Eb clarinet. The first time WB heard the clarinet part of "High Society" was when [Alphonse] Picou played it; it was originally a flute part [actually, piccolo] written by Sousa [early band parts show the composer to have been Porter Steele].

The Superior Band was fine; it was led by Manuel Perez, and had John and Billy Marrero in it.

RBA mentions Ninny Coycault, brother of "Cripple Pill" Coycault; Ninny played with Sonny Clay in California, and was with the Superior at one time (RBA's information from Lawrence Marrero, son of Billy). He is unknown to Wb. The Olympia was the best band at the time, until Kid Ory and his band, from LaPlace [Louisiana] came to town, taking New Orleans "by storm". The Ory band was smoother and more polished than the New Orleans bands; Ory didn't read much then, but had good readers in the band. WB says that most of the bands, readers or not, picked up their tunes by ear, from various sources.

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WB mentions George Gershwin's "Loadin' Time" (from the Follies of 1929), and says that Gershwin got a lot of his tunes [and ideas] from the fields of the nation. WB, having mentioned "floating theaters", (i.e., showboats), says they were in New Orleans; the last time he ever saw one was in Charleston, South Carolina. WB played trombone with a medicine show, in a "bally-hoo" band; the band, of 12 pieces, could play anything, but most of the pieces were fast, to draw and hold the crowd's attention. <sup>[Track 2 begins here]</sup> WB talks about tempos [actually, he talks about <sup>[Rhythms]</sup> thuthms, or time signatures, such as 6/8, 2/4, etc.], saying that street bands used a lot of 6/8; he mentions "Sally Trombone", saying it was a favorite in the street because it had a lot of trombone work in it. WB says the best brass bands to come to New Orleans were those of Dejan [Alexander? Cf. Kid Thomas Reel?] (RBA thinks related to Harold Dejan, of New Orleans, alto sax player), <sup>-NO. Dejan Alexandre of St. John parish.</sup> from La Place, and Claiborne Williams [from Donaldsonville]. RBA mention~~s~~ Reserve, Louisiana; WB says [Edmond] Hall came from there, that Hall's father was [also] a clarinetist. Dejan's band read but could also improvise.

A recording, "Yellow Dog Blues" is played. Another recording, "Creole Love Call": on Victor is played; Adelaide Hall sings the wordless vocal obligato; <sup>(A)</sup> Rudy Jackson, of Chicago, plays the clarinet solo. WB denies that this was the first tune he ever cut with Ellington, says "East St. Louis Toodle-oo" was, that "Creole" was on the second date. A recording ["Camp Meeting Blues"] by King Oliver's band is played; [the theme is identical to that of "Creole

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Love Call"] RBA comments that it was recorded in 1923 [WB has no comment].

June Clark, trumpet player, is mentioned; he never recorded with WB.

"Birmingham Breakdown" was on his first date with Ellington. It was a Brunswick.

RBA mentions several recordings, including "Hop Head", "Down In Our Alley Blues", "Solil<sup>D</sup>guy", "New Orleans Lowdown" and "Song of the Cotton Field", made before WB joined Ellington in 1926; WB says Bass Edwards must have been on them. WB was with Ellington until some time in 1935. WB remembers making "Immigration Blues", but not "The Creeper".

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WB mentions "That's A-Plenty", by the Sidney Bechet-Muggsy Spanier Big Four, with WB and with Carmen Mastren on guitar; he says it's the best four-piece recording ever made.

PRC and WR discuss learning the bass.

More records are played, including Ory's "[At the] Jazz Band Ball". WB discusses the use of cymbal by the New Orleans drummers.

WB mentions a drummer who played at the Orpheum Theater [New Orleans]; he would break up the house with his solos [Paul DeDroit?]. WB says drums tags are not new, that the old-time bands used tags, too.

WB remembers [Clarence] "Little Dad" [Vincent], guitar and banjo player, with whom he worked in a small group, playing various places around the lake (Bucktown, West End, Spanish Fort, etc.). WB says Vincent was a good bass player, too. In the group were Eddie

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" 'Ti' Boy" Gilmore, bass, WB, mandolin, Alcide of unknown last name, clarinet, and "Papa Dad" (as WB called him), guitar. WB says Vincent's whole family was musical, that he had a brother who would stand on a box to play bass, and another brother played clarinet. CV and EG were playing together at the time WB left New Orleans.

[Ory's] recording of "Snag It" is played (WB on bass).

"Bass" Edwards played only tuba, not string bass, so researchers should have no trouble identifying WB on early Ellington records, as WB came into the band playing string bass.

[Ory's] "Shine" is played.

WB hasn't seen Alvin Alcorn [trumpet on the two Ory's] in six weeks; WR says Alcorn played at the Paddock [New Orleans night club] last week when George [Lewis], leader of the "relief" band, was out of town.

WB mentions Abbie Bruniew, drummer with Sharkey [Bonano] (until he dropped dead on the stand at Child's Paramount in New York), saying he was a good drummer. WB says the New Orleans drummer with "Red" Allen, <sup>EDDIE BOURNE? (SEE BRUYNINKY)</sup> in New York, is a fine drummer; no one remembers his name.

Among the loud, but polished musicians here when WB was young were Buddy Bolden, Manuel Percy, <sup>Esty, ind.]</sup> and Freddy Keppard, who could also play soft.

End of Reel I