

ALEX BIGARD
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Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins,
Richard B. Allen.

The interviewee's full name is Alexander Louis [sp?] Bigard, Jr. His nickname is Alex [not Alec.] He was born in the Creole section of New Orleans, September 25, 1899, at 1726 N. Villere Street; he now resides at 2724 St. Peter Street, where the interview takes place. His father once played trumpet [when young], but did not "follow it;" his brother, Barney Bigard, is the well-known clarinetist; his cousin, the trumpeter Natty Dominique, lives in Chicago; another cousin was Professor [A. J.] Piron, and an uncle, Emile L. Bigard, younger than AB's father, was a violinist; none of the rest of his family played music. Emile Bigard worked in a band at the West End Bungalow; the the members of the group were E. Bigard, violin, Walter Decou, piano, Bill Matthews, drums, Joe Howard, trumpet, and "Big Eye" Louis Nelson [Delisle] on clarinet. AB doesn't know who his uncle studied with; E. Bigard died about 26 years ago [1934]. E. Bigard and Sidney Desvignes also had a band at one time; later AB and E. Bigard worked together in the Sidney Desvignes band. E. Bigard also worked with the bands of King Oliver, Mutt Carey and Kid Ory. WR says Manuel Manetta says he used to play with E. Bigard, and AB confirms this.

AB's first instrument was drums; he took lessons from old man Louis Cottrell [Senior], who played with [A. J.] Piron's orchestra.

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WR asks if AB remembers how he got his first set of drums. AB says yes, and then says his first job was at Tom Anderson's cabaret, with the Duconge brothers: Adolph [sp?], piano (later killed in an automobile accident); Pete, clarinet; Albert, trumpet. AB says his first bass drum was the same size as the one he now has, 14" X 28", and that the set was by Ludwig, same as now. WR quotes AB as saying that the tone of the bass drum is good, better than most others, and AB says it is wonderful. RBA says AB seems to be able to play "melody" on his drums. AB says he is an old-time drummer, and the way he was taught enables him to play the way he does; he says he prefers the old-time way of playing to the modern. WR asks the comparative ages of AB and his brother, Barney; AB says Barney is 6 years younger than he, ~~himself~~. RBA asks the comparative ages of AB and Natty Dominique; AB says Dominique is 6 or 7 years older; WR says Dominique will be 66 August 2. RBA asks if the Duconge band had bass and trombone; AB says no. RBA asks about the neighborhood of Anderson's cabaret; AB says it was night clubs. WR asks where Anderson's was; AB says it was on Rampart, between Canal and Iberville, and the other Anderson's, called The Annex, was in the tenderloin district, on Basin at Iberville.

WR asks how AB got interested in drums; AB says he used to beat on plates with forks, and that his father would make him quit because of the noise. AB's father told him he would not get him drums, that

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drums were too noisy and too much to carry, so he got him a clarinet. AB was supposed to take lessons from Lorenzo Tio [Jr.?], but he would hide his clarinet under the steps of his house and go take lessons on drums from Cottrell. RC asks how AB took lessons from Cottrell, if AB played on Cottrell's drums; AB says no, he had a [practice] pad, with light sticks. AB studied the Carl Fischer drum method book. AB says Cottrell told him he "had a pretty good idea." Cottrell was strict. AB got along well, and Cottrell would sometimes have AB substitute for him in the Piron orchestra at Tranchina's, West End; Cottrell would get reports from Piron about AB's progress, which was "wonderful", according to AB. In Piron's orchestra [besides Cottrell, drums] at that time were Peter Bocage, trumpet and xylophone; Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], clarinet; Louis Warnecke, alto sax; Steve Lewis, piano [and Piron, violin]. Added later were Bocage's brothers, Charlie Bocage, banjo and Henry Bocage, bass. WR asks about AB's lessons with Cottrell; AB says Cottrell stressed time keeping, and AB illustrates. WR says he has heard that Cottrell once worked at Werlein's, in the repair department; AB says that all he knows is that he was told Cottrell gave lessons there. WR says he heard that Cottrell would inspect every drum which came into Werlein's; AB agrees. AB says Cottrell had a set of folding drums, that the entire set of drums would fold [telescope] and fit into a flat case. AB answers RBA,

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saying he has never regretted taking drums instead of clarinet; he says he does not mind carrying his drums. The transportation situation is easier now; in the old times, drummers had to get a permit from [New Orleans] Public Service [Inc.] to carry their drums on the street cars; if they did not have the permit, the conductors would not allow them to get on the cars. AB worked with the Excelsior [brass band], he thinks, before the depression [1929]; he worked with them also at the Fairgrounds, when the dance band of Kid Rena would be working upstairs [club house?] at the same place. AB also played dance work at that time, working with the Maple Leaf orchestra, lead [or managed? RBA] by Octave Gaspard, bassist. AB is asked to name the personnel of the Excelsior Brass Band, and to name the leader; he says [George] "Na Na" [sp?] Moret, a trumpet player, was leader (Moret was called Na Na; he was an old man; he was very strict about band matters.), and other trumpets were Peter Bocage and Hypolyte Charles [cf. their interviews]; Buddy Johnson was one of the trombonists; Albert Jiles, Sr. (father of presently-active drummer, Albert Jiles, Jr., who is also a nephew of Clay Jiles, another old-time drummer) was the bass drummer. The Excelsior was 12-15 players. AB played snare drum and cymbal with the Excelsior. He explains that he had a 14-inch [approximate] Chinese cymbal bolted to his snare drum, and would play the symbal especially for the "out" chorus, striking the snare drum and the cymbal simulta--

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neously; AB says the bass drum had a small cymbal mounted on it, in the manner of parade drums today which he hit with another cymbal, but the one on the snare was the principal cymbal. AB says there was a beat in the older days in which the drummer in a dance band, on the "out" chorus, would play cymbal and snare drum at the same time, striking them double forte simultaneously on each beat, instead of playing one on the beat and the other on the after beat; AB says it is a good beat, but the younger players don't understand it; he says the audience always gives him a big hand after he plays that beat. RC asks AB if there is any distinctive thing he does in a brass band which would identify his playing to the exclusion of all other drummers; AB says he plays a roll [press roll] in the "regular [legitimate] way," but there are a lot of drummers who play a "snatch roll," the name coming from the manner of pulling the sticks to oneself while executing the roll, which produces the same effect as a press roll. WR asks AB to further describe his present drum set and traps, and to tell about sets and traps he has used in the past. AB says the first foot pedal for bass drum he ever used was the old overhead foot pedal [which was attached to the upper part of the rim of the drum and struck the drum head from above, rather than from the floor, as modern pedals operate; Archive has one in collection], which had a lamb-skin covered beater, as now; AB says he didn't have much trouble with overhead pedals, nor

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with floor pedals, and that they both work well. AB says old-time drummers didn't have [floor] tom toms; they did have small [Chinese] tom toms, but most drummers would get a tom tom effect by playing on the bass drum head with the butt end of the snare sticks. RC asks about cymbals; AB says there was a cymbal attached to the rim of the bass drum, and that a metal attachment on the overhead pedal would strike the cymbal at the same time the beater struck the bass drum; AB also had a big Chinese cymbal, but only one, and no Turkish cymbals. AB also had a wood block and four tuned cowbells.

WR asks AB to name some of the first good drummers he ever heard, other than Louis Cottrell [Sr.]; AB says Red Happy [Bolton], who played at the Lyric Theater, and [Abbey] "Bebe Chinee" [Foster], who played with the Tuxedo Brass Band, were the best. AB says he was playing next to the Lyric Theater, at the Black and Tan, a cabaret, and that various musicians would come sit in occasionally. In the Black and Tan band were Shots [Madison], trumpet; Manuel Manetta, alto sax; Henry Martin, a drummer, but who played banjo in the band; Udell [Wilson] of St. Louis, pianist; AB, drums. AB says that Red Happy came in one night, sat in, played a "run" on the bass drum that AB admired; when AB, who was young, got back at the drums, he made the same "run;" Red Happy said [jokingly] that AB was stealing his stuff, that he made it as well as Red Happy himself. Red Happy later sat in

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again, and became so angry that the crowd had applauded AB for playing the run that he unintentionally made a hole in the head of AB's bass drum. Red Happy said he would never show any of his stuff off for AB, but AB says he was all right, that everyone got along fine.

End of Reel I

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins, Richard B. Allen.

WR asks about the band at the Lyric Theater. AB says it played for the shows--vaudeville--, playing mostly jazz; the band read whatever numbers came with the show, but they also played their fake numbers like the average musician does [meaning non-readers?]. Members of the band, other than John Robichaux, the leader, on violin, were Andrew Kimball, trumpet; Margaret Kimball (his wife), piano; Johnny Lindsay, trombone; "Red Happy" [Bolton], drums; ["Big Eye"] Louis Nelson, clarinet. AB says the band was really good, and that Robichaux was the man who really led it; AB says he himself played with Robichaux for about five years, just before Robichaux' death. AB says Robichaux would have rehearsals, and then on the next job, perhaps the next night, he would bring different music, not what had been rehearsed; when the musicians protested, Robichaux would say, "What! You call yourself musicians?" The band played only in the pit at the theater, never on stage as an act or part of an act. Answering WR's question, AB says the Lyric Theater would hold about 1500 people; he played there. The Lyric was for colored only. Bessie Smith and Mamie Smith sang there. AB says the Lyric was torn down before the Depression [1929]. RBA asks if AB ever played for a "midnight ramble." AB says he did, and explains that a midnight ramble was a get-together after the regular, and began about midnight [the rambles were held in the

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theater]. AB says the band also used to do a lot of playing for late dances at the La Lousiane [restaurant], that Robichaux got all that [kind of] work. [See Article on Geo. McCullum, The Second Line (April?) 1964.] RBA says that Harrison Barnes told him about playing late dances at the La Lousiane; AB says Barnes played with them there, but he did not play with the band at the theater. Also in the band when AB was its drummer were Robichaux, leader and violin; Willie Pajaud, trumpet; Mercedes Gorman [Fields], piano; [Henry] Kimball, [the elder], bass; Willie Santiago, banjo; Charlie McCurdy, clarinet and tenor sax (and sometimes Sam Dutrey [the elder], on the same instruments, as McCurdy's substitute). RC asks how Dutrey was, and AB says he was good on both instruments.

WR says that when he lived in Chicago, he would often see AB's brother, Barney Bigard; when the Louis Armstrong band would come to town, WR and Natty Dominique would go to visit Barney. WR says that Barney told him he studied clarinet with [Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.]; WR says Barney used [a "double embouchure"] both lips on the mouthpiece, and wonders if Tio taught him to do that; WR asks AB if he can tell anything about Tio. AB says that Barney learned clarinet from [Louis] "Papa" Tio, Lorenzo's grandfather; AB says that Papa Tio told Barney he could not teach him anything else, to go to Lorenzo, who would teach him more; when Lorenzo heard Barney, he told him that he could

not teach him anything else, either. WR asks if Barney played sax more than clarinet down here; AB says he played C-melody sax. AB then tells of Barney and jobs; he says Barney would have a job from which he would be fired because some old-timer, a star, would come beat him out of it because Barney couldn't execute [in this instance, execute means play by ear] well. Barney would go home and cry, but when his grandmother, called "Mama" by the grandsons because their mother had died in childbirth, told him he should quit, he said no, he was going to learn. Barney lost a lot of jobs; then he got in a band led by Arnold Metoyer, at Tom Anderson's; others in the band were [Paul] "'Ti' Boy" Barbarin, drums; Albert Nicholas, clarinet and sax and Udell [Wilson] piano. Barney told Metoyer he guessed he'd be out of a job soon, and told him why. Metoyer said they would work out something. Barney, a good reader, agreed to teach Nicholas, a poor reader but a good faker, how to read; Nicholas was to teach Barney to fake. AB, working at the West End Bungalow then, complained about the noise the two made while practicing during the day, when he slept, but they persevered and AB says Barney and Nicholas became the best sax team in New Orleans. B.B. was getting great on clarinet. Sidney Desvignes wanted them to join his band on the steamer Capitol, but they went to join King Oliver in Chicago, traveling with Paul Barbarin, who had been asked by Oliver to get him some musicians. Barney was

with Oliver a long time, and then was hired by Duke Ellington; Barney became famous with Ellington. Years later, when the Ellington band was in New Orleans, Barney told some of his early, forcible replacements, among them Big Eye Louis and [Alphonse] Picou, that he had given Ellington two weeks' notice, that Ellington needed a clarinet, and that they should try out, but they told Barney they wouldn't even attempt to try to replace him.

WR asks AB about violinists. AB says he thinks his uncle, [Emile Bigard] was a better violinist than [A. J.] Piron, but that Piron had the "name" with the public. WR asks how Robichaux was as a violinist; AB says he was not much, that his talent was in leading the band and arranging [leading by interviewer here] for it; AB says he was an excellent director and musician, but he couldn't play very well, not having a good tone or being able to execute very fast. He did write arrangements. WR asks if violinists in old-time "Dixieland" bands played only lead, or if they played variations, "hot," etc. AB says they did [very much contradiction with some other interviews regarding the role of the violin in "Dixieland" and "ragtime"--RBA]. AB then says that most bands today are not playing "Dixieland," that they are playing "jazz," and "Dixieland" should not be played fast and that it is a two-beat music, not four-beat, as most music is played now. RBA asks when the use of four beats to the measure became usual; AB

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says it was long ago, but that the old-timers played four-beat only on the out chorus [cf. Young Tuxedo Brass Band. Atlantic LP], not all the way through, as is demanded today. AB is asked about any differences in "ragtime" and "Dixieland;" he says [illustrating by patting his foot quite rapidly] ragtime is fast, and four-beat [!!! RBA]; [patting slowly] he says Dixieland is slower, and two-beat with a chance for everyone to make his part right. AB further illustrates by scatting "Tiger Rag" in two tempos; he says a person can play at the faster tempo, but it won't sound good. RBA asks about a band AB played with, the Ducogne¹ band; AB says the band played from music and by ear, that the arrangements were regular orchestrations [stocks], that they were a "Dixieland" band. Arrangements were read through first, then they "go for themselves." RC asks AB's definition of jazz; AB says jazz is fast. WR asks when the word, "jazz," was first used around New Orleans; AB says he thinks it was after World War I.

WR asks the age of Emile Bigard when he died; AB says 49 years old. WR asks who he studied with; AB says he thinks it was probably [Paul] Chaligny. WR asks about the first band Emile ever played with; AB says he [Emile] was playing at the West End Bungalow, then he and Sidney Desvignes formed their own band; Emile later worked with Kid Ory, [including] Mutt Carey and King Oliver, and AB says those are

the only bands he knows Emile worked with. WR asks about Barney's grandmother [and AB's?]; AB says she died three years ago [1957] at the age of 96. WR asks where Barney is, saying that when WR and Manuel Manetta were there [1959] they looked for him in Los Angeles, but couldn't find him; WR asks if he has opened the chicken farm he planned. AB says he doesn't know [about the chickens], but Barney is back with Louis Armstrong, and on the road, because AB hasn't had a letter from him in a month and a half. WR mentions that Armstrong won't come to play in New Orleans anymore [because of various segregation laws]; WR asks when Barney was last in New Orleans, and AB says about three years ago, the last time Armstrong brought his band here. RC asks if AB has played with Barney recently; AB says no. Then he says he was the one to get Barney his start; Barney was not playing with anyone, and AB got him in Omer Bernard's band, which rehearsed near the St. Bernard market. Then Barney played a while with AB in the Maple Leaf Band. Bernard was a trumpet player, and Adolph Rudiger [sp?] was the drummer in the band; AB doesn't remember who else was in it.

RBA asks AB where he played after leaving the Ducongé brothers band. AB says Pete Ducongé is in Europe, Albert Ducongé is a policeman in St. Louis and Adolph Ducongé was killed in an automobile accident. RBA asks who AB joined after leaving that band; RBA suggests it

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was Buddy Petit, and AB agrees. RC asks how long AB played with Petit; AB says three years. In the band besides Petit on cornet and AB on drums were George Washington, trombone; Buddy Manaday, banjo; Chester Zardis, bass; [phil] "Pills" Coycault, clarinet. AB says Petit was so popular he could take nine jobs for one night, although he couldn't play but one of them; when the people at one of the jobs would discover that Petit was not there, they would go to the job he was actually playing. AB says Petit was a hard worker, and a hard drinker. AB says Petit was good, for what he played [meaning in his own style]. AB says Petit's band was noted for playing Scott Joplin's numbers, using the arrangements of the "Red Book [of Rags]," although AB never saw the music on any of the jobs, and he says none of Petit's men, including Petit, could read. At the time AB played with him, Petit lived on Derbigny between St. Anthony and Pauger [streets]. BP had the biggest "reputation" around New Orleans. AB says another trumpet player who had a big reputation (even bigger than Louis Armstrong's, at the time) was Kid Rena; Rena never gained much fame outside New Orleans because he would not leave town; AB says King Oliver wanted Rena to come to Chicago [to play with him, as Armstrong did?]. Rena was called "Little Turk." AB says that during that time wagons with bands on them would be out advertising dances, and there might be several out at the same time; when one [or the other] of the bands

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would hear that "Little Turk" was around the corner, they would go the other way, not wanting to have to compete with his band. RC asks was drum equipment AB used when on the advertising trucks; AB says regular equipment: Overhead drum pedal, bass drum, snare drum with stand, small tom tom attached to the bass drum, cymbal and wood block. AB put his equipment at the first [front] of the wagon.

End of Reel II

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins, Richard B. Allen.

WR asks if the drummer [on an advertising wagon] would be at the front [of the wagon body]; AB says he would. AB answers WR by saying that the bass player and the trombonist would be at the back, the tailgate.

WR says Sammy Penn, drummer who once played with Buddy Petit [AB also played with Petit], told him that Petit, in his late years, moved across the lake [Pontchartrain, to Mandeville-Covington area]; AB says Petit did move, because of his health, and that he died over there, of tuberculosis. WR says Penn gave him the impression that Petit's family also moved there, but WR was not sure just what he meant by family; AB says he does not know about the family, and answers another of WR's questions by saying that Joe Petit, Buddy's step-father, did not ever live across the lake. AB says he played with Petit across the lake, but in Bogalusa [and possibly other places], and just one-night jobs, not steady. RBA asks if Buddy Petit would play through a whole number without rest; AB says he would, that he was strong. AB says he "wasn't quite loud," but good. AB says Kid Rena was another strong man, that he would take two choruses instead of one, and play above the staff. AB says he would play "High Society" above the staff. AB says Rena worked with him until Rena quit [to finally die] playing; they played at the Brown Derby on

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Canal Street; RBA says he heard the band there, that he was either in the Navy or on vacation; RBA says [Andrew] Morgan and Black Benny Turner were there, and that he, RBA, later saw "Big Eye" [Louis Nelson] at Luthjen's. AB says Rena was sick then; RBA says he could still play good last choruses, though. RBA asks AB if he has ever heard Rena's records [recorded c. 1941, issued originally on Delta, since re-issued on Riverside]; AB has not; RBA says Rena played low and middle register on the records, sticking to the melody. AB says Rena was tough; when he was in his prime, the other bands on advertising wagons would steer clear of "Little Turk," as Rena was also called; they didn't want to get into any "bucking" contests with him. RC asks if AB would try to beat the other band's drummer, or play some of his licks back at him, in bucking contests; AB says he would not try to imitate him, not believing in that, except when he started he would practice things he would hear played by drummers he considered better than himself; he says he would just try to help his band sound better than the other band. AB says he himself was a "tough" drummer in his day, and that he can still play, and can go back any place he has worked and get a job.

RC asks if AB went directly to Kid Rena's band from Buddy Petit; AB says no, that he went with Sidney Desvignes, for about two years. Members of the Desvignes band then were Buddy Johnson, trombone;

Sidney Desvignes, trumpet; AB's uncle [Emile Bigard], violin; Willie Santiago, banjo; Sidney Vigne, clarinet; [Henry] Kimball [the elder], bass. That band played only in New Orleans [and near vicinity, no doubt]; AB says the band he played with that traveled a bit was the Maple Leaf Band. WR asks if AB ever worked on an excursion boat; AB says he worked on the Capitol, with the Maple Leaf Band. RBA asks what kind of band Desvignes had; AB says it was an orchestra, a reading group. He says he had drum parts; he says he has played with all kinds of bands, reading and non-reading, that he has played with the best musicians.

WR asks about AB's lessons with Louis Cottrell [Sr.]; AB took lessons twice a week, paid \$.50 per lesson, and was expected to practice two hours a day. RC asks how long AB studied with Cottrell; AB says two years. AB used a drum practice pad (like a little drum) for lessons and practice; he says Cottrell didn't want him to use a regular drum until about nine months after he began lessons. Cottrell emphasized rolls; AB says many drummers around New Orleans today do not know how to play rolls. Answering RC's question, AB says Cottrell did not give him any wrist exercises, that that came with the rolls. AB answers other questions, saying that when he bought his first drum, he bought an entire set [bass drum, snare drum, cymbal, etc.], that Cottrell did not show him how to use the foot pedal, but pointed out

to him how to play orchestral parts which called for special effects [cymbal crashes, etc.]. AB says Cottrell would demonstrate everything he wanted learned first, then watch what the student did. Then the student would get his method book out. AB explains to RC that Cottrell was strict in that he would keep a student on one particular assignment until the student had learned it, in addition to new lessons in the method book every teaching period [so that the student had to keep up with the work, or become swamped]. AB says he also learned a lot from Professor Manuel Manetta; AB played here in the Maple Leaf Band with him. AB says he himself resigned from the Maple Leaf to go to Havana, Cuba (working his way there on a United Fruit Lines ship), to take a job playing in a band for Annette Keller, but when he arrived, a band from New York had already been hired, so he had to come back. Louis Barbarin had played in AB's place during the Cuba trip; AB says Barbarin hated to see him come back, because he was making so much money with the band. AB says the band worked every night, having sometimes two jobs in one day. Manetta had decided to go to Opelousas [Louisiana] to teach [direct?] a band there, the Martel [sp?] band; Manetta asked AB to go, too, to play drums, and AB went, wanting to take a vacation. AB and Manetta stayed in Opelousas three months, were successful, and decided to come back to New Orleans. Martal's band was a reading band, a family band; AB, answering a question, says

the band played the same things and in the same way as New Orleans bands. WR asks if the band Martels were the same ones with whom Joe Darensbourg, the clarinetist, was associated; RC explains that Darensbourg married a daughter of some musical Martels from Opelousas. AB says he thinks so. RBA asks the names of the band members; AB says a son, David Martel, played trombone; a daughter, Hillary [sp?], played banjo; Chester played bass; the father played violin; Manetta played sax and AB played drums. There was another son, who played trumpet, but AB doesn't remember his name. AB says the band played every night, in small country towns around Opelousas, like Ville Platte. RC asks AB to tell some specific things that Manetta taught him; AB doesn't really remember, except that Manetta would show him how especially tough parts in the music would go. RC asks if Manetta was the leader; AB says he was, that he would "stomp off." WR asks if the violin player was usually the leader; AB says he was, but Manetta was asked to be leader, because, AB says, he thinks the other band members did not know about the New Orleans tempos.

WR asks again about AB's uncle, Emile Bigard, saying that Bunk Johnson told WR about going to Emile's house to rehearse some Sunday afternoons. AB asked Emile's trade, says he was a cigar maker, who had a "buckeye" shop, so called because of the six or seven cigar rollers he employed in the shop at the back of his home. The house

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was at 1726 N. Villere, is still in the possession of the family, but is up for sale now. WR says Bunk told Barney [Bigard], whom he saw in San Francisco about 1945, that Barney would not remember him, but he remembered Barney from those old days, rehearsing at his uncle's house when Barney was a small child; WR says Bunk told Barney more about Barney's family than Barney had ever known. AB answers a question, saying he didn't sit in in that band, because he was too young to be playing at the time. AB agrees that the rehearsal was for no organized band; the men who did not have jobs that particular day, would just get together and rehearse. AB says he remembers the rehearsals; he says he remembers admiring the way one of the drummers, Henry Martin, then of the Kid Ory band, played, and saying to himself that when he got to be a big man, he would play the way Martin did. AB says that later, when he played with the Maple Leaf Band, Martin was playing with Bob Lyons; AB, not working, would go to see Lyons, and would tell him he was not working. Lyons would tell him to come play with him, and he would fire Martin. AB says that in the old times the way a leader fired a man was to tell him not to come to the job that night, that he had another man; AB says there was no two-week notice, one-week notice, or any notice. AB says he was playing with the Maple Leaf; the band worked three nights a week, (Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday) at the Sans Souci hall, on Howard [now LaSalle]. They

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wore tuxedos. One evening, as AB was taking a bath, Oke Gaspard, manager of the Maple Leaf, came to his house; he told AB the band had decided to get another drummer, Paul "'Ti' Boy" Barbarin, who had just come back to town. AB told Gaspard he should have told him the night before (when they worked together), that he could have had a job with Bob Lyons that same night. AB says the reason they decided to switch drummers was that Manuel Perez, then playing cornet with the Maple Leaf, had come back from Chicago [date?] shortly before, and had told the band that there was a good drummer back in town; AB says he had told them that what they should do was to get that good drummer, but Perez wouldn't tell AB the drummer's name. Three or four days after AB was fired, he saw Gaspard, who lived then on Marais between St. Anthony and Annette; Gaspard invited him into a bar for a drink, and then told him the band wanted him back, that Barbarin did not play the style they preferred. There was a demand for "Little Chinee," a name applied to AB at the time. AB said if he came back he would begin that very night; Gaspard agreed. AB says Barberin lived on St. Claude between St. Anthony and Annette, which was in sight from where the bar was; Gaspard told AB to come with him while he told Barbarin he was fired, but AB, saying that Barbarin hadn't come with Gaspard to tell him, AB, he was fired, so he wasn't going. Gaspard told Barbarin. AB says that Barbarin, when Gaspard told him they were getting AB back, said he

knew that the night before, that he could see they were not satisfied; he told Gaspard not to try to hire him anymore. AB says he played with the Maple Leaf until it broke up. RBA asks when Dave Ogden played with the Maple Leaf; AB says he doesn't remember Ogden's being with that band.

WR asks if there was any difference between the uptown bands and the downtown bands, and suggests that the uptown musicians did more "faking;" AB agrees that there was more faking, saying the downtown men were "higher-class musicians." He says the bands played pretty much the same styles, however, and sounded pretty much the same; he says that Wesley Dimes, a trumpet player from Baton Rouge, who played in the Maple Leaf, played the same as the New Orleans musicians. AB goes on to say that a lot of the uptown musicians couldn't read, or at least, couldn't read very well, and that most of the downtown musicians had been brought up reading. He says that in the old times some jobs required the playing of schottisches, polkas and mazurkas, and that men who didn't read couldn't play them. He says that leaders from uptown seldom hired musicians from downtown. WR comments that Bob Lyons [from uptown] liked AB's drumming; AB says he could always get work with Lyons, and with the Maple Leaf, no matter who was playing drums with either at the time. WR asks if AB remembers other uptown bands, such as that of Frankie Duson, and asks what they played like. AB remembers

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Duson, and Kid Punch [Miller], and says they had bands which played anything, anywhere [derogatory?]. WR asks what kind of jobs Lyons got; AB says he had plenty of fraternity dates, that the people were crazy about him. RBA asks the personnel of Lyons' band. AB says Lyons was on bass; at first, Ricard [Alexis] played trumpet, but then Wesley Dimes played; Freddie "Bu Bu" played trombone; Lorenzo Staulz, banjo; Manuel Manetta played some dates with Lyons, on piano; Ernest Kelly also played trombone with Lyons at one time. The personnel changed often. WR and RC ask AB if Lyons was the one who put on a little act with his bass, swinging it around and "riding" it [a la horse]; AB says he did some, just like all the rest of the bass players. RBA asks about Charlie Ducongè. The reel ends.

End of Reel III

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins, Richard B. Allen.

RBA asks if one of the Ducongè brothers played with Bob Lyons; AB says that the trumpet player, Albert [check sp] Ducongè, played with Lyons.

Answering WR's question, AB says he heard King Oliver playing for a colored dance at the Economy Hall; AB says Oliver also played at National Park, Third [Street] and South Claiborne [Avenue], and that some of the Oliver jobs there were for dances and some baseball games were held there. AB says that "how-you-call-it," [i.e.,] Kid Ory and Mutt Carey played at National Park every Sunday. WR says Punch [Miller] has said he himself played at National Park, and RBA says Jack Carey played there [probably as leader of the band Punch was in]; AB agrees that both of these played there.

RBA asks the names of the bands [leaders] that AB's brother [Barney] played with in New Orleans; AB says Barney played mostly for jitney dances at Spanish Fort, with Amos White, and that he played in a lot of other small bands before he began playing with Arnold Metoyer. WR asks when Barney began studying music; AB says he was 8 years old; he continues, saying that [Louis] "Papa" Tio, Barney's teacher, would not let Barney take any instrument in his mouth until he was about 15 years old; He had to learn to read and sing [solfege] music until then. He was 17 years old when he left New Orleans. His first in-

strument was a C-melody saxophone; he later took up clarinet. AB says the clarinet Barney first had was not the one their father got for AB; the father sold that one [a good many years before Barney began playing]. Barney's real and full name is Albany Leon Bigard; AB called him "Barney" around their home [when they were youngsters].

RC asks AB if he played with Kid Rena, and when; AB says he played with Rena at the Cadillac Club, on St. Claude, until that club closed. AB says Rena's brother [Joe Rena] had joined the church by then, and had quit playing music. AB says Rena had another drummer, Nathan, at the time, and that he, AB, had quit playing about a year before joining Rena, because he was making so much money (\$25-30 a day) in his business (gambling) (WR says [Joseph] "Fan" Bourgeau had the same kind of business.) that he didn't have time to do anything else. Rena talked to AB, asking him to play in his band; AB told Rena he hadn't played in a year, that he doubted that he could even make a roll; Rena said he wouldn't have forgotten something that he had learned. AB agreed to play a few nights with Rena, to see how it worked out. He stayed on a while, but decided to quit [apparently still running his other business, and doing so well that he wanted to devote full-time to it]. Rena asked him to stay, and Rena then told the owner of the Cadillac, Papa Cutchey [sp?], about AB's wanting to leave. Cutchey told AB he couldn't quit, that he just wouldn't let

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him quit; AB remained on the job until Cutchey got out of the business, the ownership being assumed first by a brother of Cutchey and then by someone not of the family. AB [and Rena] went to work at the Brown Derby after the Cadillac job ended.

WR asks AB if he ever played with Chris Kelly; AB says he did, for three or four years.

RBA asks what bands AB played with after leaving Sidney Desvignes; AB says he played with Bob Lyons, then with the Maple Leaf Band. The Maple Leaf Band played a dance at the Bungalow one night; the proprietor, Albert Dubois [sp?], called AB in the back room and asked him if he wanted to work there every night. AB, asking about the pay, was told that the salary (\$24.50 per week) was not much, but the tips (\$75-100 per week) were. AB says that was good money in those before depression days. Bill Matthews, the drummer with the house band, and Dubois had had "some kind of words." AB left his name and address with Dubois, who told the leader, Walter Decou, to go see AB, that he wanted him to play drums in the band. AB went to work at the Bungalow, staying about five years, and making "nice money." Besides AB on drums, Walter Decou played piano, Willie Pajaud [played trumpet] and Sam Durtrey, Sr. [played clarinet] in the band there. WR asks if Lizzie Miles was singing there at the same time; AB says Lizzie sang out that way [lake front], but at another place and before he began working there.

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RBA asks the names of the personnel of the Maple Leaf Band. AB says the original Maple Leaf had Hypolite Charles, trumpet; Camilla Todd, piano; Victor Gaspard, trombone; Octave Gaspard, bass; Willie Bontemps, banjo; Sidney Vigne, clarinet; AB, drums. There is some discussion about Vigne and Desvignes; AB says he said Big Eye Louis [Nelson] played clarinet with Sidney Desvignes [when AB was with Desvignes]. [See Reel III].

RC asks AB to name the members of Chris Kelly's band when AB played drums with Kelly; AB says Milé Barnes, clarinet; Lawrence Marrero, banjo; (his brother) Eddie Marrero, bass; Sunny Henry, trombone; Kelly, trumpet; AB, drums. AB answers RBA's question about Henry, saying he fit into Kelly's band fine, that he could "fake." RC asks if Kelly featured the blues; AB says he was known as "The Blues King." RC asks if blues was all the band played; AB says they played anything, but blues was the feature. RC asks if blues is hard to play on drums; AB says a child can play blues, and there is talk about what a drummer can do--such as always playing 2 beats to the measure on bass drum, and playing the snare drum as you will, rolls, etc.

RBA asks AB if he made any records in the earlier years; AB says the first record he made was with Kid Clayton [issued on Folkways];

AB says there was no contact with people who produced records then, with people who went around recording [various] different bands.

WR asks if any one, singer or band member, ever sang with Chris Kelly's band; AB says some of the band members might sing occasionally, whenever they felt like singing. He says that he himself never did any singing, not being "a songster," but that he would cheer the band on with shouts, now and then, when he would feel good; he says that is part of being a drummer [or a jazz musician], that one has to cheer the band on once in a while, to keep up the spirit. RC asks if AB considers the cheering-up process a most important part of being a drummer, but the topic becomes an illustration by AB of how a drummer should play the blues. RC asks if a drummer should use his traps [wood block, tom tom, etc.] when playing blues, rather than just the snare drum, but AB says the more snare a drummer uses in blues, the better, that the traps don't fit into the blues. AB scats and pats to demonstrate.

RC asks what made the Chris Kelly band so good on the blues; AB says Kelly was the only person who could play "Careless Love" to suit the people; he says Kelly used a plunger to produce a "wa-wa" making his trumpet sound as though he were talking through it. WR asks if Kelly sounded anything like Joe Oliver on blues; AB says he did. Kelly's band played other kinds of numbers, but they features blues. Kelly was not technically limited, but he did not often play multi-note

phrases. AB answers WR's question, saying that the Kelly band did not use printed arrangements, using only "head" arrangements. RC asks if Kelly's band, like Buddy Petit's, had played any of the Scott Joplin numbers; AB says Kelly's band did, but there was really only one band--not orchestra-- which played the Joplin rags, and that was Kid Rena's. AB says when it came to playing "the real orchestra Scott Joplin numbers," Sidney Desvignes' band, the Maple Leaf Band, the Tuxedo Band and [A. J.] Piron's band were the best around New Orleans. AB agrees with RC that the other bands would play some of the Joplin numbers, but the real orchestras were Papa Celestin's [Tuxedo], Desvignes', the Maple Leaf Band and John Robichaux' band, the four best bands around here. AB says Bob Lyons' band was good, but not in comparison to those just mentioned. WR asks AB how Celestin was as a trumpet player; AB says Celestin was a good trumpet player, but he was never a jazz man. WR asks who the other trumpet player in Celestin's band was at the time AB is talking of; AB says Celestin had "Shots" Madison some of the time, and Ricard Alexis some of the time, as second trumpet players, but that the band usually consisted of only seven players.

RC asks if Chris Kelly's band ever played dance music like quadrilles and mazurkas; AB says the band did not, that it was a jazz band, that only the orchestras played those dances. AB says the Kelly band could play waltzes, but did not play any of the older dance

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styles. RC asks if AB went out of the city with Kelly's band; AB says they went to places like Bogalusa and over the lake, or something like that, but they didn't go far. Answering RC, AB says he did not play with Kelly until Kelly's death; next AB played at the Black and Tan, a cabaret next to the Lyric Theater. In the band, besides AB on drums, were Shots Madison, trumpet; Manuel Manetta [sax?]; Henry Martin, banjo; Udell Wilson, piano.

RBA asks where the Maple Leaf Band went when they traveled; AB says they played some in Mandeville and Madison[ville], Louisiana, across the lake. RBA asks where they went when they played on the steamer; AB says they didn't go up the river, just went on [short] excursions. There were two bands on the steamer, the Maple Leaf and Fate Marable's, when there were excursions, such as for picnics. AB says the manager of the Maple Leaf had been asked that the band make the regular trips to St. Louis on the steamer, Capitol, but the Maple Leaf had so much work booked that they couldn't take the job. RBA asks what kind of band Marable had at that time; AB says it was a good band, an orchestra; Zutty Singleton was playing drums in it then. WR asks AB if he remembers hearing Baby Dodds; AB says he heard Dodds, the drummer, and says his brother, Johnny Dodds, played clarinet; AB says he was a kid when he first heard Baby Dodds. AB answers RBA, saying he never played with Johnny Dodds. RBA asks who were in

Marable's band at the time; AB says Singleton on drums, and [Pops] Foster on bass, but it was a big band, and he can't remember any of the others.

RC asks AB about his drums, commenting on the fact that there are light bulbs in the bass drum, and asking if they are there only for effect, or for some other reason; AB says [the heat of] the lamps, of which there are six in the bass drum, help control the effect of high humidity on the drum heads. He explains, saying that his teacher, [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.], told him never to tighten or loosen his drum heads once he had adjusted the tension on them to his liking. He says he has had his bass drum for 18 or 19 years, and has never broken a head on it or his snare. RBA says Dave Bailey says he has never broken a drum head, either. The lamps can be turned on when high humidity has loosened the heads, driving out the excess moisture and tightening the heads to the desired tension without resorting to mechanically tightening the heads. There are six bulbs, of various colors, in AB's bass drum; they are connected to a flasher device [such as used on Christmas trees]. There is also a bulb inside AB's snare drum; the snare is by Ludwig, is about 14 inches in diameter, and has a shell about 6 inches high. AB says his bass drum is tuned to "B", on the bass fiddle, and that his snare drum is tuned to "C" [on what?]. His snare has a strainer attachment for loosening so

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that tom tom effect can be obtained [this is a rather standard part
of a snare drum, contrary to WR's statement--PRC].

End of Reel IV

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins, Richard B. Allen.

WR and AB are looking at AB's cymbals, WR commenting about various sizes, types, etc. AB says Barney [Bigard] sent him a sock cymbal one time, and that someone stole all of his cymbals, including the sock, when he left them at the American Legion Hall on Royal [and Conti], after playing a job there; he never did get any of them back. WR asks AB if the old-timers had sock cymbals; AB says they didn't even know what a sock cymbal was then. WR comments that AB has a seven-inch woodblock and one cowbell, about five inches. RBA asks AB how often he works; AB says sometimes twice a week, sometimes only once a week, but business has been slow since Carnival. AB says he can't sit high when playing drums, that he just uses an ordinary chair with a pillow on it. AB gets the action for his bass drum pedal from his ankle, not from his hip. When he is tired, he uses a single beat to rest his leg. WR asks where the drums marched in parades in the old days; AB says they were in the rear of the band. WR says the Eureka [Brass Band] has the trumpets in the rear, and the drums are in the middle. [See photos.] AB says he thinks having the drums in the middle is better, because the drummers can get the vibrations from all the instruments and can keep the time better. WR says all the bands except the Eureka use the old way of having the drums in the rear. WR says Natty Dominique told him that marching bandmen once were taught to start

marching by stepping out on the right foot first; WR says that the Army taught to step out on the left foot first. AB says he was taught left first, and if a person steps out on his right foot first, he will make a wrong step. AB says it is the same in playing drum rolls, that the drummer should always start his roll from the left hand; he says the method books teach this. AB uses his right foot for bass drum beating which is usual for right handed drummers, and uses his left foot for sock cymbal. He says he had a hard time at first, when he began using a sock cymbal, but he thinks it is wonderful now, because it helps "to balance the time," because when the sock is playing on the after-beat and the bass drum is on the beat, the cymbal holds the beat from getting any faster. AB says he uses the sock all the time, except if the piece is very fast, like "Tiger Rag." Then he doesn't use it, because of the rapidity of the piece. He says fast pieces require the use of the snare drum [that the bass drum is only used to play on the first beat, instead of the first and third beats, which AB calls playing "double beats"]. RC asks AB if he has any advice for children who might take up drums. AB says for aspiring drummers to learn their music; to learn the effect of music, instead of playing something they don't know what they are playing [more or less as is]; a drummer should not copy someone else's playing, but should have his own ideas. AB says a lot of people think that anyone can play music.

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He says his grandmother used to say that not everyone who carries a drum is a drummer, and not everyone who carries a horn is a trumpet player. AB says a person might be featured on one number, but after that he would be nowhere [if he were not a real musician]. AB says he had a band at the [Haydel's] Melody Inn, including Harold Dejan, sax; [John] "Smitty" Smith, piano; Lionel Ferbos, trumpet; AB, drums. RBA asks if George Guesnon [electric-guitar] wasn't playing there, too, but AB says he started the job, but some argument with the manager led to AB's getting a pianist. AB says they were playing one night when a local rock-and-roll personality, Mr. Boo, or Freddy Boo, came in with his own drummer. The place was called Haydel's [Melody Inn]. Mr. Boo and drummer asked if they might play a number; they were given permission. Mr. Boo, a pianist, and his drummer played one of their rock-and-roll numbers, and were applauded. Then a woman asked for a Dixieland number, which they could not play. When AB and his pianist came back in, Mr. Boo told AB to take over, that they couldn't play that type music; AB, who says his band plays a little of everything, told Mr. Boo that he called himself a musician, so he should be able to play any type of music. AB says to make a hit a band needs a singer, and a guitar player who is a clown. AB goes on to say that "Fats" Domino, the famous rock-and-roller, can play in only two keys; he says there is only one good musician in Domino's

band, the guitarist. WR and AB agree that Domino has something the public wants, and that he has made a million dollars.

WR asks about the old-fashioned overhead foot pedals, asking if the cymbal beater attachment hit the cymbal everytime the bass drum was struck; AB says that was true. WR asks if bass drum and cymbal in parade bands were ever struck simultaneously in the old days; he says that the cymbal is usually hit on the after-beat now. AB agrees, and says the instruments were struck simultaneously in the old days, usually all the time. RC asks the pronunciation of Sans Souci. RC has heard it pronounced usually as though it were spelled Sans Sou. WR asks if AB learned French when he was growing up; AB says he can speak French a little; he says most of his family spoke in French in the old days. AB went to public schools; he is a Catholic. AB says his grandmother couldn't speak anything but French. that she couldn't understand English.

AB adds, as a last thought, that the one thing about being a good drummer is that the drummer must have a good conception of time, that without that conception, the drummer is "nowhere." "Time waits for no one."

End of Reel V

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Alex. Louis Bizard
(Interviewee)

Bill Russell
(For the New Orleans Jazz Archives)