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DANNY BARKER
NEA Jazz Master (1991)

Interviewee:	Danny Barker (December 13, 1909 – March 13, 1994)
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Note: Expletives have been deleted from this Web version of the transcript, and are marked thus: [expletive deleted]. An unaltered transcript is available for use by researchers at the Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Barker: [coughs violently] Good introduction. Louisiana altitude. Whatever.

White: The climate, huh?

Barker: Yeah, the climate get to you.

White: I know very well who you are, but would you like to state for us your full name and . . .

Barker: Whole name is Daniel Barker.

White: Middle name?

Barker: Sometimes. Most times, not. Moses. Daniel Moses Barker.

White: Can you tell us when and where you were born?

Barker: Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the French Quarter, 1027 Chartres Street, January 13, 1909.

White: Could you tell me a little about your parents? Were they from New Orleans?

Barker: Yes. Parents were from New Orleans.

White: What occupation did your father have?

Barker: My father was a drayman, that is, he was a delivery man for a wine company. New Orleans is a French town. They're very fond of wine. Most of the restaurants have big displays of various sorts of European wines. He worked for a special concern that delivered these wines to grocery stores and the many fine restaurants they had here. He sat on this . . . they called it . . . I can't think of the name. You're going way back, see. I have to refresh my memory . . . on a . . . It wasn't a truck. It was sort of a wagon. They called it a float. It was a flat bottom. There was about a one-foot edge around the sides. It could hold about 10 or 12 large wine barrels. That goes into what is called the barrelhouse. They had joints here which were bars where people frequented, the men folks and the lady folks, and they'd have these huge barrels, about six feet tall. Huge barrels, and the smaller barrels. You brought the wine there, and it was emptied into these large barrels. One barrel had sherry and one had claret. One had . . . Name some of the common wines. . . Port. Sherry. Claret. Italian. Et cetera.

White: Burgundy?

Barker: Burgundy, that's right. He was in that business of delivery.

White: Do you know when your father was born?

Barker: Father was born? I can't pinpoint that date. He was 20 when I was born.

White: What was his name?

Barker: Moses Barker. Pet name was Sweetie.

White: How did he get that name, pet name?

Barker: Pet names. They give youngsters names according to the mother's feelings. She would call him "my little sweetie baby," "my little honey child," little cute names. That's a common thing in the South, especially in New Orleans. They gave you a nickname [first] time they look at you. Old folks [? (inaudible)] and you bring the little infant around, innocent child and bring him around, and the old folks look at you, say, "Hold

him up. Let me see her" or "Let me see him." Then they pin a nickname on you. "That's little Egg Head." "Why you call my child Egg Head?" "He got a Egg Head." "That's little Cokey." "Why you call my child little Coke?" "Because he's got a cocoanut head." They pin a nickname on you right . . . If you look in obituaries of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* you will see, when they list all the people that have passed away, they always put that nickname there, because some people in your life never knew your real name. They knew you by your nickname. That kind of clear?

White: Yes. And your mother?

Barker: My mother was named Rose. She was of the Barbarin family. It was a huge family, Barbarins. My mother had, what?, four sisters and . . . four brothers and four sisters . . . four brothers and five sisters.

White: The Barbarin family is one of the most popular names in New Orleans music with names like Paul and Louis and Isidore. How is your mother related to them?

Barker: That's her brothers you call. Paul's a brother. Willie's a brother. Lucien's a brother. Paul, Willie, Lucien, and Louis. They all played music, because my whole family . . . We were encouraged to play music, because it added to the poor folk's moneybag. It added a little money more to the . . . You played as a extra to your regular job, whatever you . . . was your profession or your trade. Mostly your trade. By playing music, you added on weekends or anytime, you added to the moneybags in the family.

White: So it was an honor to be a musician.

Barker: It was a honor because you were celebrated. Every . . . all kids wants to be celebrated. He wants to be noticed when he walk the street. That's why they nickname kids after movie stars and football stars. Give them some kind of identification that he's somebody. So that is that.

She had four brothers and four sisters [Barker repeats this, sounding unsure].

White: Did your mother get into music? Was she . . .

Barker: No. My mother didn't get into music. None of the girls went into music. We had cousins into music. Talented. One especially was a superstar way back then. Her name was Esther Bigeou. You heard of her?

White: Oh yes. I've seen those beautiful pictures of her. Nice looking. What did she do, Esther Bigeou?

Barker: She was a singer. Sang creole songs. There's some records out available. Her and Lizzie Miles were rivals here.

White: Lizzie Miles?

Barker: Esther Bigeou was from the seventh ward, and Lizzie Miles was from the sixth ward. They had many concerts they played, as their fans would come like two prizefighters are going to fight. Same idea. Lizzie brought her gang, and Esther brought her gang. Singing. They wore beautiful gowns, because their mothers were seamstresses, involved with seamstress. They had a big group of beautiful gowns that they carried with them. People came there to see. They might change between two performances, like a miniature fashion show, an artistic show of talent. That's Esther Bigeou.

White: Where were some of the places that Esther Bigeou would perform and sing?

Barker: All over. Church affairs. All the churches, they had halls, most of them, and did things, charitable things for the church, to help the church. On saint days, they'd have parties. St. Joseph Day, they would have parties. Christmas eve, Christmas day, they would have parties. There was a abundance of places that they could perform, because it's . . . New Orleans is a conglomerate of many varieties of racial strains of people. There's Hindus here. There's Turks here. There's Italians here. There's Spanish people here. Black people here. All sorts of white people here. Everybody celebrates their holidays. I think they celebrate more holidays in New Orleans than any place I've ever been. You have a Decoration Day and you also have a All Saints Day. That's two days dedicated to the dead. So New Orleans is the place where a performer could play. Outdoors in the summer they have gazebos out in parks where they have a classical group or a military group playing martial music, celebrating the 4th of July and Labor Day and those days. Ain't no end to the places in New Orleans where you will find music. They even celebrate the dog's birthday. We got a dog, Fido. Say, "We have Fido. Bake a cake for Fido. Bake a . . ." You ever heard of a pork chop cake?

White: No.

Barker: Put a pork chop on top of a cake. That's for Fido. [laughter] You get a laugh?

White: That's pretty good.

Barker: All right. Keep 'em laughing.

White: That's pretty good. So you must have heard in New Orleans, music before you learned how to talk or walk, huh?

Barker: Oh yes. That's interesting, because in New Orleans there were . . . most of the halls were . . . a dozen or more big halls. Economy Hall. Cooperators Hall. A new hall, which was Charity Hall. Perseverance Hall. That's downtown. That's a church now. That's not the one in Armstrong Park. Perseverance Hall. The old Funky Butt Hall. There was two halls in the ninth ward. All of them had names, significant names. The ?Kitty Hall, the Francs Amis Hall, the Jeunes Amis Hall. Those were the creole halls. About a dozen of them. There was the Longshoreman's Hall. There was the Screwman's Hall. The Masonic Hall. The Pythian Temple. Every level of society had their hall, so they were together.

People knew how to get together in those days. People were more conscious of being together, belonged to productive, active groups, all levels of society. And they had the racial . . . the racial strata was all over the place amongst the white and the blacks. That's the thing that people divide themselves. You're a native of New Orleans, but you're Irish American. Let you know they're Irish American. That's St. Patrick's Day. *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling.* Then there's Italian Day. St. Joseph's Day, when they're singing *Carry On.* [Barker sings a phrase of melody]. I don't know the rest of that. I have to have a Italian here to sing that for you. When you sang those songs, everybody got at attention, because it was dear to the heart. Irish songs, Italian songs, Greek songs. The Greeks, they phased out. They stay to themselves. They don't know what they want to be, if they're half Italian or Greek or what or who's who. They just cool it.

White: German?

Barker: German Hall is there too. The Germans, I'm not too familiar with them, because they're sort of secretive. They always want to be behind closed doors. You don't know what the Germans are doing.

White: What about in black society? What types of halls did you . . .

Barker: I called the names for you. In the sixth ward there was the Economy Hall, the Globe Hall, the Cooperators Hall. All of them had significant names. They had the Veterans Hall, which was next to Emile Labats Undertaking Parlor on St. Philip Street. It was a small hall. These was the veterans of the civil war. They had their hall. A nice little hall. It's there, and they tore it down, and they built a library, like that, attached to Charbonier . . . Labats Undertaking Parlor.

White: This was a black hall, the veterans?

Barker: Black hall. All these black halls we're speaking of now. In the seventh ward you had the . . . below Esplanade Street, you had the Jeunes Amis Hall. That was the great educator who gave so much money to the city. His picture used to be there. I don't know what happened to the picture. What's his name? Had this plantation. Had all this money.

White: It wasn't Touro Macdonald [? (spelling)]?

Barker: You're getting close. Anyhow . . . It's a shame I can't think of . . . It's what happens at 83 years old. Jeunes Amis. The Francs Amis was a hall on Robertson Street, next block from my house. Jeunes Amis. Around the corner was the Perseverance Hall. Two blocks away was the New Hall. See, I'm surrounded by halls.

They had a thing what they called banquets here. We called it banquet [Barker gives a French pronunciation, "bahn-kay."] Each of these halls or members of the society . . . Sometime there were three or four societies. Benevolent societies. Before they had life insurance companies, they had benevolent societies. After the Civil War, and the slaves were all turned loose, the blacks who were free were organized, so they assisted the less fortunate brothers and sisters into forming life insurance companies, and they called them benevolent associations. If you go into old cemetaries, you'll see all these benevolent society tombs. All the members are dead. Some of them have 12, 14, 8, 10 vaults where they buried their members. They looked out for one another. You don't have that today no more.

So we had all these halls. Uptown there was the Olympia Hall. I'm not too familiar uptown with all the halls. There were many halls up there. Somebody should do some research on all those halls, because if you weren't welcome in this society, you told them where to go and what to kiss, and you went over and joined some other people and formed your own society.

White: Was there a lot of rivalries between these different . . .

Barker: There was rivalries. Everybody was proud of themselves. We got people that wants to be isolated from other people and they're particular about who they associate with. Like in our case they had many reasons why they didn't want to associate with you. A little comedy comes in there. Maybe your lip's too fat. Maybe your hair is too curly or your hair is too kinky. We have about a hundred different colors we're involved with. Light brown. All them different browns. Everybody wants to be with that color thing. So if you wasn't welcome in this society, you got together with people of your identification that you all look like one another, could be cousins or brothers. Lots of times you were cousins and brothers and sisters, but you didn't know it. A lot of finagling went on in those days. You go home, and you tell your mother you're going to see a girl, say "Who that girl's name? You cannot go see that girl no more, because that's your sister." "How do you mean that's my sister?" "Don't ask the questions. Shhhh. Keep it quiet. That is your sister. You cannot go with that girl. You wouldn't want to marry your sister, would you?"

White: Sounds pretty involved.

Barker: Yeah. All that goes with life. I'm involved with lots. That's why I like to throw in these little situations, to let people know that everything that looks like roses ain't roses. It could be a lily.

White: In your family, coming up in your house, did you . . . which languages did you speak?

Barker: My grandmother spoke French. My grandfather spoke French. They also spoke Creole, that is, a broken French. In the country they had another French, was called Cajun [Barker pronounces it "ki-jeune."] Different varieties of French. There was, say, bread in different . . . about five different ways of saying bread or of saying meat, saying vegetable, saying potatoes, different varieties of the broken-off language of the French. The French once controlled this area, and naturally they spoke French here.

White: So you spoke French in the house?

Barker: I heard it, but we weren't encouraged. No-one would say, "[?]Venez ici. Allez." It means, "Get out of here." "[?]Venez ici." "Come on." So you know that, eh? "[?(inaudible)] quoi." Can you imagine that? You know all them things, but you weren't encouraged. Can you imagine a little hip black cat going around the streets speaking French? So that's a part of that scene.

White: What type of music did you hear?

Barker: You hear music, all kinds of music, all day. You heard all kinds of people passing by singing. They had these machon [? (spelling)] ladies that was selling things. They have a basket on their head, and they wouldn't hold the basket. It would be the blackberry lady or the strawberry lady or the pie lady. People sell all kinds of bartering to make some money to survive. Old ladies used to sell . . . I can't think of them things. Calas. You know what a cala is? Cala is a rice cake. It had rice and flour, and it looks like a round doughnut, like a brown biscuit. They stand by the church. Each church you see these old women standing there with a basket. Have on 'em slave clothes. Big skirts. They're from way back there. These are old people, see. I'm a little boy, four, five years old, and I see these old ladies standing up there, and I'd go and look. One particular at Chartres [Street] and [? (inaudible)] I'd look at her, because I was mystified by her, because the lady was jet black, but she had blue eyes, and I couldn't understand that the least bit. They had a nickname for her. I can't think of the nickname. The lady with the blue eyes. I'd go and stand and look at her, and she would look at me, and I wouldn't say a word. She would shake her head. "Pauvre. Pauvre petit." You know what that means?

White: Poor little thing.

Barker: We got away from the subject.

White: No, that's fine. That gives me a good idea of some of the things that you saw when you were coming up, that you remember. So people like this lady used to sing. What about the music like your relatives played or music in the streets?

Barker: Oh, my uncle was beating them drums around the house all day.

White: Practicing?

Barker: Beating. Yeah, they'd be beating. Paul [Barbarin], he was the oldest. Paul would be beating. He was doing . . . After I joined Cab Calloway's band, and Cozy Cole would stay in the dressing room all day, practicing ratamacues, flamamadiddles, flama-ramadiddles, all them kind of drum movements, and I'd look at him. Everybody [? (inaudible)]. I heard my uncle. I had four uncles. All of them played drums. They was doing that [expletive deleted]. But doing it with a feeling, not just a military thing like Cozy was doing. Cozy had a rubber pad in the room, you know, the drum pad, and beat that thing all day after he'd get off. I never saw him go out and have dinner. He stayed in the dressing room. I think that must have killed him, because you don't play a show all day and you get off the show and you go in the dressing room and rehearse that hour and a half you have off. When is he going to eat? [? (inaudible)] Maybe he's taking some kind of pills that was a dinner. A after-dinner pill and before-dinner pill or something.

So that wasn't nothing new to me, because I had these two great drummers, my two uncles. Louis . . . and Lucien [Barbarin] was great. He was a great drummer too. He had more showmanship than Paul Barbarin.

White: Did Lucien . . . Louis and Paul were very famous and well-known. Did Lucien ever record or did he stay in New Orleans?

Barker: No. None of them recorded. He didn't record. Only one or two bands recorded here. That was Sam Morgan that came through, and somebody else. I think Sharkey [Bonano]. That's all. Maybe Louis Dumaine.

White: Louis Dumaine and Cel . . .

Barker: Here [in New Orleans]. I'm talking about recording here.

White: . . . and [Oscar] Celestin did a couple of numbers.

Barker: Here?

White: Yes. And Jones-Collins in the late '20s. Just a few.

Barker: But [Armand] Piron done his thing in New York. Studio.

White: New York, mostly. When did you first hear . . .

Barker: So I'm hearing this music all the time. My grandfather works for Emile Labat Undertaking Parlor, and he worked for Blandin, and he was a coachman. You see, before they had taxi cabs, and you're going to take your old lady out, you call up Labat or one of them undertakers, and they sent a buggy there to get you. They have a funeral buggy that would take you to the opera or wherever you was going if you had money or you made money. They picked up your old lady . . . picked up you, and you went by and picked up your girlfriend. A young man picked up his girlfriend, and you're in this carriage, and the carriage is open. Sometimes people want a closed carriage. You went to the opera. The drayman sat on the wagon. Went to sleep 'til you come out. Saw a two-hour show or three-hour performance, according to how long you hired this wagon . . . this buggy they called it. That was it. That was before they had taxi cabs. When the taxi cabs come, they came in, that eliminated all of this, because the cabs didn't have to stay there. You specify a time, and they come back and get you. There's nowhere for the horse to go, nowhere but just stay there and wait. My grandfather worked on that. He'd come home and relate all the people he saw, all the diplomats and who was at this affair, most of the political affairs and musical affairs and big weddings, big anniversary celebrations. You heard all that when you went home. I'm a little kid. I'm four or five years old. I'm hearing all this.

And there was discipline in the house, where you listen. They tell you, "Do you hear what he's saying? Listen good now you." They tell you. You listen to what they're telling the older boys. Stay out of trouble and don't go into this, because it was so easy. When you're poor and you ain't got nothing and you're scuffling to make it, but you live a peaceful, good life, but they're always warning the boys and the girls not to get in trouble. Don't listen to what strangers tell you. They went through all that.

White: How many sisters and brothers did you have?

Barker: No sisters, no brothers. I've got a brother somewhere, but he ain't supposed to be my brother. I went to school with him. Sort of looked like me. But my great aunt told me, she said, "That's your brother." I said to myself, he doesn't know me. I don't know him. You don't like to mention that. If I started to ask him, tell him we was brothers, I thought we would have a fight, because his daddy come around there and want to kill me. Make me prove. So you keep your mouth closed.

White: Do you know if he's living today?

Barker: No. I never checked out on him. Last I saw him in Chicago. We played the Sherman Hotel, and he was one of the waiters in the Sherman Hotel. We played there for seven years, seven seasons, seven New Years' Eves. We'd open there with Cab's band on a New Year's Eve, and we'd play there for a month, [? (inaudible)] in Chicago. We'd be broadcasting. Then we went to Milwaukee, and you played there a week. You went to Bay . . . Green Bay Packers. Where that team's at? Can't think of the name of the town.

White: It's not in Green Bay, Wisconsin?

Barker: I think it is. We'd play there, and we'd come back and play the Regal [Theater, also in Chicago]. That's uptown, for the colored people, on the South Side, for a week. Next week you go downtown and you play at the Chicago Theater or the Oriental, and you play a week there for whites. From there, you go from there to maybe Cleveland. You go to Cleveland, or you go to Des Moines, Iowa, and you play the Midwest for about a month. Then you go west. Minneapolis. Go to the West Coast. Sometimes you didn't go to the West Coast. What was the question you asked me behind this?

White: I was asking about your family and your brother, but what I really wanted to find out a little bit about . . . You said your grandfather was a coachman for a funeral home, so was that a way that you were exposed to hearing a lot of music around . . .

Barker: My grandfather used to take a mellophone horn, the alto horn, and he walked the alley toward his home.

White: Isidore Barbarin?

Barker: Isidore Barbarin. And he walked at home, and we listened. He used to play a little melody or something, and he's watching. He's pacing hisself, because you can get rusty. You get out of the pace, you get out of the pace of the rhythm that you're playing, because them bands march at a certain tempo and a certain pace, and that's what he practiced.

White: So he played in . . .

Barker: He played in the greatest of brass bands, the Onward Brass Band. The mighty Onward. That band was Freddie Keppard, Manuel Perez. What you going to do with that, huh?

White: Some great names.

Barker: Yeah. Manny Perez or [Vic] Gaspard, trombone. [Tom "Oke"] Gaspard's brother.

White: Was Baquet in that band?

Barker: Earlier. Before my time. Baquet was in that band. All them greats had been through that band. Papa Celestin. What's his name? Bad man. Great trumpet player. His name phased out, because he was very unpopular, because he had a temper. King Oliver played in that band. Bunk Johnson played in that band. Before that Alcibiades Jeanjacque, he played in that band. He was a virtuoso trumpet player. Cornet player. Played in the circuses. He was supposed to go with Ringling Bros. in Ringling Bros.'s band, but they weren't ready for racial mixture then. All them people was in that band.

I saw my grandfather marching. He would . . . They had what you call . . . Each one of those societies had what you call a commissary, a woman or a man. They would bring . . . Instead of buying stamps to mail out, they didn't have time. You'd die. Sometimes they don't keep your body but one day or two days before they had the embalming and all that business. They'd bury you in a hour, you see. The commissary would bring the notices out and knock on your door and give you this notice. Lucille Brown died, passed away. They plan, the undertakers say they plan to bury her such and such a date, we're going to have funeral service for her, we expect you there . . . That's what the notice said. Fine print, nice. If you don't, you will be fined 50 cents, if you don't attend. So that's how you got the word. You see them commissaries be passing them lists, you know he was . . . some of those guys belonged to three and four societies. That was a business, like. He got so much out of that 50 cents to deliver the notice, the bereavement notice. He would tell you. They ask you, "How's Emile Jackson?" I say, "Doctors say he ain't here for long," because tuberculosis was prevalent in this town. For some reason a lot of people died with TB. And there was yellow fever. It would spring up, but it wouldn't spread. They learned how to vaccinate people to stop that, because that would kill whole blocks of people, that yellow fever. You heard about the yellow fever?

White: Yeah, the epidemic.

Barker: There should be a study done on that. You see the people pass, bringing these notices. Everybody down there belonged to some benevolent society. Sometimes whole families. The women in the family belonged to the Ladies of Veterans . . . Ladies of Venus Star. If you go in a tomb, you see the names of all the benevolent societies. Jerry Brock gave me a list of societies, over a hundred. Not all of them got involved with this procedure. Some of them were well off, better, and more intimate, maybe interrelated. A bunch of families got together. When you saw these people delivering these notices, you asked them, "Who died?" They tell you, so and so. "We've been expecting the guy to die. He suffered a long time." A real sentimental speech, how they're going to bury him with music, it was so sad. His family . . . "I don't know if his family wants music. Maybe they do. If they don't . . ." They have music. They have a lot. And you see another one, and he's delivering notices. You ask him, "Oh, yeah, they're going to put him away in style." That's why they're waiting til Saturday, so that people be off from work. That's where

you have them big second lines, on Saturday. That was that procedure. You had all them societies. I told you some of them halls, like the Jeunes Amis, where they have like three or four other societies would meet there, but you never hear about them. People want to be exclusive. They don't want to mingle with nobody else. Everybody else is dogs. "I don't want to be with them people."

White: Were they people that had money?

Barker: They don't have to have money. They're just proud. Don't want to associate. Poor as a church mouse. That's poor. You can't get no poorer than a church mouse, because there ain't nothing to eat in a church. But they had this attitude. Wanted to look down on . . . fierce expression. You say, "Good evening." They don't even answer you, because they don't want your good evening. You learn . . . I learned that first. I'll tell you a good evening. You pass a bunch of people sitting on the stoops, and respect . . . well the people telling you all the time to respect the people. When you pass through, "Good evening." It don't seem right to pass people, don't say, "Good evening." That is a Southern custom. Sometime you get a grunt. They give you a little grunt, like a whore would do. "I don't want you." It means, "I don't want your 'good evening.' What is he talking about, 'good evening'?" When you never pass there, you never say 'good evening' to those people no more.

Or you tip your hat. Old folks, you pass, and you don't tip your hat, "What you got a bird under your hat?" they'd tell you. It means if you raise your hat, you're going to lose the bird. Them old people, they're teaching you manners, you understand. How to survive in this world. You don't say, "Good evening." Be respectable, in other words. The South is great for that, all that "Good evening. Good morning. How's your family? How's Rosie? How's the baby?" Ten minutes they ask you about the family.

White: A lot of those values also went into the music. You talked about the Onward Brass Band. Tell me about that group, some of the better musicians in this city. At the time when you first saw them, were they reading or playing jazz, improvising?

Barker: Oh yeah. They had a bag, put around your neck. It was a chart bag. It had the music on cards. You go to [? (inaudible)], you get the arrangement, and there was a card on a thick piece of paper. You had this bag on the side. You pull out [? (inaudible)] and put it on your lyre on your horn. You read as you went along, but the great mans, like Arnold, after they learned them, they didn't need that bag. Some of them just carried it anyhow. You went by . . . If you're going to play in a parade, you go by, or a funeral, you go by who's house you're taking his place, and get his bag. Throw it over your shoulder, so when they call a number, you wouldn't have no problem, coppin' out.

White: What were the funerals like? What kind of music did they play and what was the funeral ceremony?

Barker: They play those dirges. *Flee as a Bird, What a Friend We Have in Jesus,* if it was solemn. Some people didn't want no inspired, in fact they didn't play no spirited music until they turned the body loose. That's what they call the turning loose. You know what that is.

White: Yeah, but what is that, when they turn the body loose?

Barker: Well they turn the body . . . the music is going no further . . . the membership is going no further. Only special members who want to go. Somebody be following a funeral with a horse and wagon, before automobiles was prevalent, or today, a son would be carrying a . . . he's gonna go to see his best friend buried, out to the old cemetary, or . . . The St. Louis Cemetary has funerals every day. [? (inaudible)] cemetary there. So you went on all the way. You knew the people who died, you didn't belong . . . be a member of the family, but you went and paid your respect. You went to see them put him in the tomb.

White: So cutting the body loose, or turning it loose, is what?

Barker: "Goodbye." Everybody that passes, say, "Goodbye, Willie. Goodbye. You're going to heaven." So, that was the thing. You see them do that now.

White: Right. To the hearse. What happens after they cut the body loose, with the music?

Barker: What happens . . . In olden days they would wait until the band, the second line, all the people wait until the funeral cartage is gone about their business and they go far enough that they don't hear what's happening. But they know what's going to happen. Time to get out the distance, and some of the leaders would say, "They can't hear this. Strike up the band." *Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You.* What? Some of them other . . .

White: *Didn't He Ramble.*

Barker: "Didn't he ramble? He rambled so . . ." That's fun, because the very theory of this was, he's going to heaven. Every black person, they're going to heaven, because they caught hell already. You dig? Everybody say, you can't catch no more hell than you caught on this earth. There'd be a ex-slave and all that business, and Depression and all that, so he's going to glory. The Bible tell you, "Suffer and come unto me." That's one of the big statements in the Bible. "Suffer. Suffer little children, and come unto me." So you suffer. You put that a advantage, so when you're born in this world with a color the day you . . . you got a little difficulty. Everybody going to watch and see who you are, if you ain't one of us. You have to go through this racial thing. It's all over. In Brazil. Anywhere we're at, they got a problem. I don't know. They could be the most sweetest

person in the world, they can drop the hype on you. The Smithsonian. They will drop a hype on you. [laughter] You go to the Smithsonian office, and you might see one or two of us there, way over in the corner. I shouldn't say that about this great organization. [laughter] You learning something over there? What's his name? You learning something?

[recording engineer:] Yeah. I'm listening.

Barker: I'm always telling the truth. I'm not lying.

White: After they would cut the body loose and they would play the up-tempo numbers like . . .

Barker: Not never . . . not up-tempo. Just spirited.

White: Spirited?

Barker: You wouldn't say up-tempo. Bombastic. A lot of . . . more noise than there would be when the body was there.

White: About what tempo would they play?

Barker: Ain't no, ain't nobody in no hurry. Ain't nobody in no tempo. Just a laid back, funky beat, so everybody can get down.

White: How would that sound?

Barker: Raunchy. [Barker sings a melody.] On the bass drum Black Benny or Ernest Trepagnier. Great bass drum beaters. They be hitting that drum, and them figures in the snare drums and the rim shots. They don't do that no more. See the rhythm section would be there right in the middle of the band, see? They be cutting loose there, in the second line. It was something different, something exciting. You're free. The man is gone. He lived a full life, and he's dead and he's gone, and his troubles is over. Let's have a joyous noise unto the Lord.

White: So you're celebrating this?

Barker: That's what it was, a celebration. You caught hell, man. You caught hell, so you're going to glory. The Bible don't say you catch hell. Why other people don't catch hell like you catch hell?

White: In the bands, they were improvising, jazzing up?

Barker: That's what it was. They put that bag of arrangements they had in a case, that thing they hang on the side of them, that cachet case, like a messenger, like a . . . What's them people in the old West, used to ride, ride them horses? Pony Express. They used to have a bag like that.

White: Saddle bags. The bag with the mail.

Barker: That's the same idea what they had in the brass band. And they would swing out. They got a big joy after that one or two hours of solemn sadness, screaming and hollaring, "Joe's gone. We ain't gonna see him no more," and all that business. Here's a refreshing thing. Everybody got a smile on their face. It was nice to see that Sam Brown died in the bed. He didn't die in a wreck or die in the ocean. He wasn't drowned. The casket was open. You could see him, how he was well cared of until he died. That's a highly sentimental thing. That's his last appearance on the face of the earth. Your understand? How you evaluate him. He wasn't shot. He wasn't killed. He was a family man. He didn't hang in bars wasting his money, or he didn't . . . He got all his kids, and all his kids are crying. They're all grown. Now they can take care of their self. He's a man in his seventies or sixties, and that was it. It's nice to see him put away in style. A lot of funerals you see, they wouldn't never open the casket, because the body was too disfigured or chopped up or whatever. So you had all them cases, all the time, at all levels of societies. You had it with the rich whites, with the well-to-do blacks. You don't know how you're going out of this world. Do you understand?

White: Let me ask you this: did they have jazz funerals for whites when you were coming up?

Barker: No, they never . . . They had military funerals for whites. If he was a general in the army, or he was a navy man, or he belonged to one these artillery . . . They had a whole lot of artillery, batallion societies that they kept going all the time. Different branches of service. The brigade. They did something. They honored . . . they was fighting the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling . . . All that . . . So they have a nice sweet military funeral. The navy or the marine band or the army band would come from out of town, and they blow the taps. It's sweet. I followed one once. I thought they was going to kick him up after they played that . . . [expletive deleted]. They packed their horns and didn't say nothing to nobody. Got in their automobiles and went on about their business. Me and a bunch of other youngsters, we're looking, waiting to see if they, when the band's going to swing out. That band, they didn't know how to swing out.

White: You mentioned a lot of legendary people in the brass band: Manny Perez. Black Benny, who Louis Armstrong talks about. Jelly Roll [Morton] talks about him. Who were some of the people you saw that had eventually come to have big names, because I imagine you saw a lot of these people before they left New Orleans for good, before the late teens.

Barker: Red Allen. Guy Kelly. I didn't see Jimmie Noone, because he left around 1917, 1918, '19, '20, and I wasn't old enough to realize what I was looking at, knew who these people were. But I knew of them, that they went away. I heard of the Baquet family. I heard of Sidney Bechet. He was a legend. He went when he was around 16 years old. He started traveling with carnival shows and minstrel shows. He was such a phenomenon at that time. People had never heard nobody blow a horn like that. He was a frustrated trumpet player. Couldn't master that trumpet the way he wanted, so he got that clarinet. and he was a master of that. Big Eye [Louis Nelson], they all of them put their horns down and listen to him when he come.

White: Sidney Bechet.

Barker: Yeah, he come on the bandstand. "Hello fellows." Everybody idolized him. It's like you're looking at God, man, hear that little bastard come with that horn. Let him play. They had never heard nobody play like that. Nobody played the clarinet like that. He was frustrated. He still had a small, shrillish tone. He wanted something with a bigger tone. So he got the soprano saxophone, which was as close as he could get to the trumpet. He wanted to be the leader. He had a hell of a career, but he had a whole lot of ups and downs, because this country never appreciated, didn't know too much about him, and he didn't record here. Only one record you had, you always heard, so in the later years, in the '40s, he started recording, that you never heard of. You heard of him, but if you had a record, like [Frankie] Trumbauer and Bix [Biederbecke] and them people, they had records, in '27. They made those records. The record, you could learn something from a record. That's why Freddie Keppard say he didn't want to record.

White: Those things that Sidney Bechet recorded with Clarence Williams in '23 . . .

Barker: It was Clarence Williams. It wasn't Sidney Bechet. It was mostly, they were accompanying singers. That's what Clarence Williams was great for. All these dozens of singers that the companies would get him to record with them, because he's from the South, he knew how to record, and he was, other than that, he was a businessman. Clarence Williams would get to those people and they would listen to what he said, because he had a foresight and he was a brilliant man, and he was a great composer. He wrote some great music. And he stole a whole lot of music. Louis Armstrong wrote *I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate.* Armand Piron taken that.

White: You saw a lot of people here, musicians . . .

Barker: Sure. You see them when they leave town. They come to visit, and you don't know who they are. [? (inaudible)], "Oh, what you say? Man, when you get in town?" Sugar Johnny. I saw him once. Great trumpet player, but you never hear nothing, because he didn't record. Ain't got nobody to pull for him. I think he made a few records.

White: I'm not sure. I'll have to check.

Barker: Johnny Dodds, man?

White: Sugar Johnny. I'll have to check and see. I'm working on a Dodds thing right now.

Barker: Dodds was in Chicago. He was the first one in Chicago to keep the New Orleans tradition other than King Oliver and Louis Armstrong. There were other musicians, like Charlie Elgar and Hypolite Charles . . . no, not Hypolite. Was head of the Chicago union. Him and his wife played piano. Can't think of their names.

White: Did you see people like . . . and hear King Oliver and them perform before they went up to Chicago?

Barker: Yeah, second line with my uncles.

White: In the parade?

Barker: That's right. See King Oliver. In those days we'd have maybe six or seven guys following right within hearing distance, not to disrupt the second line, to listen to King Oliver blow, wait until he play his chorus, and he'd blow it at them. "Hey Joe, put that riff in there." Him and Kid Rena, he had his followers, and Buddy Petit had more followers than anybody.

White: Why was that?

Barker: The whole seventh ward would be listening to Buddy. He played them dimished chords. They had never heard nothing like that. Playing *Indian Sau Wau* [or *Indian Sagua*]. You know *Indian Sau Wau*?

White: Yeah.

Barker: How that go?

White: Let's see. [White tries to sing it.] Let's see. It had a minor thing in it. I know. I know it. I heard . . . Bunk Johnson I think recorded it.

Barker: That was one of Buddy's things.

White: Bunk played it. I think Punch [Miller] and George Lewis or somebody recorded it.

Barker: Kid Howard.

White: Maybe it was Kid Howard. Yeah. I really liked that. I want to start playing that.

Barker: It was dimished chords, and Buddy Petit run changes all on top of changes. [Barker sings a melody of that ilk.] He'd do all that, and they would [? (inaudible)] whoever was there [? (inaudible)], because they say he had fidgeties of the fingers. I heard [? (inaudible)] tell somebody, "a fidgety of the fingers." Say, "His fingers is . . ." "Man, practice." They thought it was, everybody, Wooden Joe [Nicholas] was pressing on one valve at a time. Here come Buddy Petit, making triplets.

White: Who was considered the best trumpet player in New Orleans?

Barker: It was Buddy Petit. I'll tell you that. I never heard Bunk at his heights, but I don't think Bunk . . . My uncle Paul said Bunk was the greatest, but I think maybe Bud had taken some of the . . . younger than Bunk. Maybe he had something he snatched from Bunk, because Bunk disappeared around 1918, 1919.

White: Yeah, I think it was the teens.

Barker: Yeah, he disappeared. You know why?

White: Why?

Barker: Them Jefferson City Buzzards. He blew them up on a Mardi Gras day. He forgot the dates, but took the deposit, and they paraded without a band. They swore that if they caught him, they would put him in a sack and throw him in the Mississippi River, and the word got back to him. Bunk split. He went to New Iberia. He had a friend out there, that band out there. What's his name?

White: The guy you mentioned had a band, but I don't know if he came out later. Hypolite Charles? He was out there.

Barker: Hypolite Charles was out there?

White: And some of the . . .

Barker: The one that got killed.

White: . . . Evan Thomas.

Barker: Yeah. Bunk went out there to play with his band. Bunk was supposed to be there the night when he got killed. That's all hearsay.

White: Right, and his horn got smashed, and he stopped playing, because he couldn't get another horn.

Barker: Who?

White: Bunk. The story goes that the guy came after he stabbed . . .

Barker: Evan?

White: . . . Evan Thomas. I think his name was something like John Gibley, or something like that, and he came back . . .

Barker: Looking for Bunk.

White: . . . with a gun and stuff, and he smashed . . . All the musicians ran. Jumped out the window, and he smashed all the instruments. Bunk's trumpet was on the chair or something, and it got smashed up.

Let me ask you this, Mr. Barker. You . . . Who were some of the better that you heard in New Orleans before you, before the '20s, before you were a kid? Like some of the better clarinet players and trombone players.

Barker: There was a gang of them. Adolphe Alexander played the [expletive deleted] out the clarinet, but he never was featured. Hell of a musician. There was Alexander's family. He had two brothers. One played drums. One played piano. The old man played baritone horn with my grandfather in the Onward Brass Band. There was Chris Kelly, a great trumpet player. It was funky. Had a following. A lot of people liked his music. At night he played a funky blues, nine different blues in nine different tempos. He played yard parties. There were a whole lot of yard parties, and he played at the little funky halls like Preservation Hall and New Hall. That's all in the seventh ward. Each one of these benevolent societies, getting back to that, used to have the annual banquet, "bahn-kay," banquet. They had potato salad and a chicken and a gumbo. Good cooks in the kitchen. They'd have the dinner. After the dinner in the hall, they'd move all the tables and all that [expletive deleted]. Then the band would strike up, and they'd let the members in with invitations. If they had excess food, you were obliged to go to the table and get what they had. That's where you heard them bands. That's why kids could advance, because they could hear Kid Rena in the daytime. Sam Morgan in daytime. Ricard Alexis was a hell of a trumpet player before they broke his jaw in a fight.

White: Did he end up playing bass?

Barker: That's right. Was a hell of trumpet player. He and Rena were buddies from kids. All them people were friends. Come out the seventh ward. There was Wooden Joe [Nicholas]. He could play. Of that time, see, but time marches on. Wooden Joe. Then there was Manny Perez. There was Milford Piron. I seen him a couple of times, but he phased out.

White: What did he play?

Barker: Played trumpet. [Armand] Piron's brother. He phased out. He got one of those mustaches like Custer. Confederate. Big circle round. Liou Lejeune [? (spelling)] could play. A youngster. Could play with many people. Duleo [? (spelling)], Joe [Duleo]. He could play. Little Lawrence Toca could play. Man, it's all kinds of musicians. A whole slew of them could play and then pass for white. They jumped the fence, and there ain't no way to see them. I played theater and looked down in the pit, seen a guy do this at me. It was Elliot Taylor at the Chicago Theater. You ever heard of Elliot Taylor?

White: No.

Barker: Was a hell of a young clarinet player. He looked like Valto [? (spelling)]. You know Valto?

White: Yes.

Barker: He looked just like Valto. Everytime I see Valto, I think of Elliot Taylor.

White: Did you know his father that was a musician?

Barker: Who?

White: Paul Valto, Sr.

Barker: I heard of him.

White: His father was a musician. He gave me an old picture. It's got Willie Humphrey when he was about 17 in it. They're playing in a yard. I'm not sure what his father played. It was either trumpet or violin, something like that. Valto.

How did you . . . When you came up as a kid, what kind of life did you have? Where did you go to school?

Barker: I went to Medard school. I went to private school from kindergarten . . . not kindergarten . . . from first grade through the second grade.

White: What was the name of that school.

Barker: It was a private school. Nelson Medard school. There's a public school named after him back here. He had a private school at Burgundy and Barracks [streets]. I ever told you about that?

White: No.

Barker: Burgundy and Barracks. They send exceptional kids there, extra talent. They send some kids who are imbeciles, who had a bad understanding. They had some kids who were really insane. People brought them there. They sent special kids to learn Spanish, to learn French, and just, in other words, to learn English. They had this little school there in the building. You'll see the building. You know where that playground is at Barracks?

White: Yeah.

Barker: That first house there, going uptown?

White: Um-hm.

Barker: That the first house [? (inaudible)]. That front room was his school. Had about, what?, 60 students in there.

[Following a break, the recording resumes in mid-sentence.]

Barker: . . . be tangled up in whatever they had. It wasn't too scientific. Mr. Medard would straighten them up. People come there, he's busy all the time. Come there with lawsuit problems. They came to Mr. Medard to get some advice. He had two sons who taught. They come out of college. They had two daughters. I went to school with Emile Labat. You remember Emile Labat?

White: Oh yeah.

Barker: I went to school with . . . He was in the school. George Guesnon was in the school.

White: George Guesnon, the banjo player?

Barker: Yeah. Frog's two brothers. They were in the school. Quite a few people I later knew were in the school. It was very unpopular for the educated black people in those days, so when you went to school in the morning, first day, he told you, Mr. Medard sat

you down and told you, “When you leave here this afternoon, I want you to go straight to your residence.” He used words I had never heard. He’d say, like, “your residence.” I didn’t know what the hell he’s talking . . . resident. I know my house. Huh? “Your residence.” Residence. Say, where the hell is that? Residence. Is it a dog house or something special? [laughter] He said, “I want you to go straight home, but if you don’t, I will know, and I don’t want you to wait for nobody. Don’t wait for your friend. You go straight home, because I’m going to find out, and if I find, I’m going to take this rattan, and I’m going to teach you better.” The rattan was a stick. See the size of that leg on that little table there? It was a bamboo reed thing. It was full-bodied. It didn’t have no center to it. You could bend it and tie it like a rope. He had one. See that bucket there? He had about 15 of them in that bucket. When you was wrong, you did something in the school, and he’d tell you, “You’re not supposed to . . . You come here to study, not to talk.” He give you this lecture. “I want you to keep your head in these books and listen to the directions that I give you, so you will learn as you will become educated.” I didn’t know what the hell “educated” means. [laughter]

You learned the lesson. Then he would call out somebody. He’d call you and he’d bring you around there. He had a desk. See how high is that desk? Maybe it was a little higher than this thing here. They have a dispatch desk in businesses in the back where they ship off things, a shipper’s desk. He sat up on his high stool, and he could look over everybody over their head. He was high enough to see who’s talking. He told you, “Don’t talk.” Said, “You don’t open your mouth.” He called up Emile Labat or George Guesnon, one of them, for talking, because they couldn’t keep their mouth closed. Start talking, when you call up their brother, Emile Labat’s sister . . . pretty girl. She’s still living. She married a [Sh . . . ? (inaudible)]. They got that undertaking parlor on St. Philip Street. She started crying. Later on I was to find she cried quite a few times, because Mr. Medard would whip her brother’s backside. Emile Labat was about what? 12 years old. Mr. Medard, when he call you, you go to him. You go to him crying. You go to him, and go . . . pardon me . . . he’d bend you over. Put your head between his legs like that, see? He’d take that rattan, zhaaaat, zhaaaat, zhaaaat, and every time doing that Emile Labat’s sister would scream, “Ow, ow, ow.” Beat him across the behind. Turn him loose. “Get back in your seat, you brat.” He called him a brat. I didn’t know what the hell that was. What’s a brat? I’m seeing this thing. He bust his behind and set him down, and she cried. Myrtle.

If a girl did something . . . There’s girls in the class. Smart chicks. If a girl was in the class, he would send them to his wife. His wife wore a big skirt that dragged the ground. They’d be back there cooking, because you got a meal there for a nickel. Red beans and rice. Small piece of pickled pork on it. Little hot meal. Don’t have to bring no lunch there, if you want. They give you a little piece of pudding. It’s enough to hold you ’til evening. He didn’t want you to get overfat. He explained. “Let’s talk about vitamins,” and the food, all the mechanisms of the body, of the food, and what you eat, and how much vitamins. We’d . . . I didn’t know what the man was talking about, and I stayed there almost two years.

White: Two years? Two years in that school? Where did you go after that?

Barker: Went to Marigny School.

White: Where was that located?

Barker: On Marigny Street. Marigny between [North] Villere [Street] and [North] Robertson [Street]. There's a little project-like building up in there now.

White: You were in there through what? Sixth?

Barker: 'Til the first grade. Oh, Marigny?

White: Yes.

Barker: I went all the way to ninth grade. I have a little experience there.

So he called George Guesnon. Beat his behind. George Guesnon couldn't keep his mouth closed. But me, I closed my mouth after I saw that whipping. Cut my lips with my teeth. Make sure I wouldn't talk. He sent the girls to his wife, and says, "You don't want to understand and keep your mouth closed. Now you go to my wife, and tell her to do her duty." And the girl goes, says, "Mr. Medard said for you to do your duty." Wife take them in there, and she had some of them rattans too. She'd raise up them girls' dress and put their head between her legs, underneath that big sheet, and smother their ass and bust them across their ass. You'd hear them screaming. It was a muffled scream, because they was under that skirt. I happened to see that one day. [laughter] I asked to go to the toilet. Inquisitive. I heard this squealing, and I went to peep. I got my behind bust for peeping. They saw me. [laughter] So that was a part of that scene.

He taught Spanish and French.

White: So you studied both of those.

Barker: I had a little French. I heard a little Spanish, because when he was talking to them other kids, he'd give them a test, ask them a question, examination through the book. Read me from so-and-so, and they would read, so you listen to that, and you're young. You absorb that too.

White: As part of your environment coming up, you also, in addition to the brass bands and stuff, and hearing music in the streets, vendors, and your relatives at home playing, did you hear other things that they talk about in New Orleans music on the streets, like club parades?

Barker: You saw parades all the time. It was advertisements. A guy open a new grocery store, he'd get a brass band to parade. You hear this big brass band coming, you think it's a gang of people, they ain't nothing but a gang of people. It's about seven guys screaming and blowing, and a big bass drum, a grand marshall, a midget, a middle-sized guy, or a giant, with a streamer on and a big high hat on his head. People would hollar that song, "I love a parade." People run out to see the parade. When it gets there, they're disappointed, because there ain't no parade. They're just people carrying a big sign, one holding the back pole, and saying "Bargain at Smith's Butcher Shop." "Bargain at Vincent Domingo's" or whatever his name is. Grocery store, put on a sale. So you heard that music all the time.

Then you heard these guys, these peddlers. Some of them had beautiful voices, and they could sing what they had. Sing a sad song, or say something foolish.

White: Like what?

Barker: Say anything foolish. "Hey, mademoiselle, come vier, come vieu, vier." How you say, "Come see"?

White: Venez ici?

Barker: Yeah, "Venez ici." "Come see Sam and me." All kinds of [expletive deleted]. Then you had the junk man. He had them bells he would ring. Them cowbells they used to put on a cow's neck. Everybody had a song. This was music all the time. They had these guys pushing them organs on wheels. You seen that?

White: Yeah.

Barker: Organ. Looked like a piano.

White: So music was like a part of life in New Orleans.

Barker: That's right. Every day there was something out there for you to see. The junk man, he had a story. The milkman, he didn't say nothing. The ice man, he had a story. He'd tell you, selling ice. But it was always something in the street. When the city woke up, they had all this [expletive deleted] going on. Oh. I shouldn't say that on . . . That's the jazz . . . So what?

White: How did you first get into music?

Barker: How did I get into music? I was destined. They'd be telling you, "What'cha going to play? When you gonna . . ." Looking at you all the time. Old folks start to say,

"When you going to play something? What'cha want to play?" Say, "I'm going to play the drums." "Aw, they got enough drummers in this band . . . in this family. They got Lucien, Willie, Paul, Louis. That's enough drums. You got Joe over there. You got Sam over. Enough drummers." Say, "All right. Maybr I play clarinet?" "That would be nice of you. Be [? (inaudible)]. We need a clarinet player in the family." That's the way they discussed it, which. So they're waiting to see what you're going to be.

White: So they encouraged you to . . .

Barker: That's what you . . . you're celebrated. It was proud of you if you was a member of the family. See that's . . . people see, people pass, say, "That's Manny Perez's wife. That's Manny Perez's daughter. That's Manny Perez's sister. That's Kid Rena's cousin." Everybody wants to be identified with somebody of importance, because you didn't get no publicity in the paper. Some people live off of publicity. But here's a chance, if you had a relative.

White: What was your first instrument?

Barker: First instrument? I fooled around with the drums. They let me play the drums. I can play a little drums. But the drums, I discussed that from the start. It's too much [expletive deleted] to haul around. Cymbals, and putting this . . . All drummers had a helper. So my uncle Paul said, "I want you to take the clarinet up." He had me going. He owned one. He had a clarinet. He let me blow it. Showed me how to blow it, wet my lips and all that. It was all right, but next day my lip feeling all funny. I wasn't for that [expletive deleted].

White: How long did you play clarinet?

Barker: Didn't play. I just took some lessons. I took lessons from Barney Bigard.

White: How long did you take lessons?

Barker: About three or four months. He actually wouldn't [? (inaudible)], because I didn't . . . I was young. My mind wasn't deeply on that instrument.

White: About how old were you?

Barker: I was about 14, 15. But I wasn't . . . yeah, between 14 and 15. But I wasn't interested like I should have been, over enthused, because I had . . . I could have been a baker. Stepdaddy would take me with him and show me how to become a baker. That's how you learned. You didn't go to school. Somebody in the neighborhood or the vicinity would take you on. When you come up, they start you by wrapping bread. First thing they show you.

White: In your autobiography, you talk about the Boozan Kings. Tell me a little about . . .

Barker: It's a hustle. The word "boozan" means a good time. Boozan and booza, or baza.

White: Baza. What is baza?

Barker: Baza's a good time.

White: I hear that all the time.

Barker: Or a fight. Baza. What they call that thing where the arabs have their marketplace? Got a word similar to that. Ba what? Where they sell things at. [Bazaar] Anyhow, I used to see kids go around and hustle. They used to go in the French quarter and make little make-shift drums. Save the tops on a lard can and make two cymbals.

White: Like Kokomo Joe?

Barker: Yeah. That's it. He's one of the last of that. He's my age. He was out there with us, the Boozan Kings. They was from the sixth ward. Him and Joe Torre [? (spelling)]. His mother had this famous sporting house. Joe Torre, he was a dancer and he was a performer. He was a little old man when he was a kid. Act like a old man. You saw them, and they was making money, and people was talking to them. Other people would talk to you when you played. They played some kind of, something to make, anything to make money, they would stop and talk to you. Ask you a person's private business. So I went through that b.s.

The ukulele craze came on. This was 19 . . . 22. Yeah. '21 or '22. Ukulele craze came running. I'm looking around. I see this little kid in the neighborhood named Herman, Herman Ennison [? (spelling)], and there was another one who was a teacher. Can't think. His name will come to me. His daddy was a mailman. He was well-to-do. He played the ukulele. Played it beautiful. I'm listening to him playing ukulele. I saw my aunt had a ukulele, a banjo-uke. And she's laying around the house. She wasn't doing nothing. When she had bought it, because ukuleles was the craze in that period of time. So, something told me to say, ask her if she want to sell it. I seen Herman playing it, about my age, a couple of blocks from me. And this little boy around the corner, he was playing one in the evening. So I said, I looked, watched him, and I said, [? (inaudible)] you are, moving your fingers, pressing down. So I asked her would she want to sell her ukulele. She said, "Yeah, I'll sell it." I said, "What you pay for it?" Said, "I paid $12 for it." It was pretty good. Things wasn't that expensive like they are today. Said, "I'll sell it to you for $8." I said, "I ain't got 8." She said, "You'll have to pay me once a week. Give

me 50 cents a week or half, a quarter a week." I said, "O.k.," so I gave her a dollar, I think, and I owed her the rest, and I brought it to her, 'til I finished paying.

I went around to . . . The boy's named Ashton Murray. He's been dead about ten years now. Ashton, maybe not that long. He was a high-class boy, or kid. Sophisticated, nice. I went around to him, and he tuned it up for me and showed me a few chords, *Ain't Gonna* [? (inaudible)]. I learned that. I was enthused. Then it went out of tune, and I was in trouble. So I go back, and he tuned it up again. I guess his mother and father got tired of me knocking on the door, asked me to tune up. So a old musician told me, said, "You got to listen at the sounds in relation to one another." That's what he said. "Then you'll be able to do that, tune your instrument up." So I did what he said. Next thing you know, I was playing and I was singing. I was still watching them two, and I become quite accomplished. I figured I could be [? (inaudible)], putting some monkey shine on that thing. That's how I started with the ukulele.

White: So you had a banjo-uke first.

Barker: Yeah. That's how I started with the music business. Joe Presser's son, 'round the corner, who was my good friend, he could blow a kazoo. He was interested in Kid Rena. He knew Kid Rena's riffs. He knew Buddy Petit's riffs, Chris Kelly's riffs. He had that kind of mind. He was destined to become a musician, but he never was. He come around, we standing on the corner, he start playing this . . . I start playing the ukulele *Ain't Gonna Rain No More* and et cetera, and he fell in, and he starts singing while I was playing. So I start singing too. We sing a duet, and people are liking it, drawing a crowd, because people want any kind of entertainment here. They'll pay for it. So the people in the block heard us, and said, "Tell them boys to come down and play some music. We'll give them something to drink, and we got a lot of cake and stuff here. Have some fun." So we went down there, me and Joe, and Russell was with us, when we got inside. Russell asked for two forks. The woman gave him two forks, and he started playing. He followed our key, because I couldn't play but in one key. Me and Joe, and they was dancing and playing the blues. I guess there was, lot of the sounds was wrong, but people didn't care what it was. They say, "I like having a band."

White: What kind of stuff did y'all play? What songs?

Barker: *Careless Love.* Played *What Will Become of Joe.* Tunes that was popular of that time. We never done *The Saints. The Saints* didn't get popular 'til later. That was considered religious. You didn't fool with that.

That's it. I'm playing the music, so they start hiring us for parties. So Russell got a set of drums. Made a set of drums out of a washboard . . . two washboards, one on each side, because there were always washboards on the garbage cans. He could take his drums, zzzzzhhhhh, make a rachet sound on the drum. Had a big old lard can. Remember them

big lard cans? Made him two cymbals. It was like a little band. People singing with you. Everybody singing. I'm always trying to get them tunes that make people laugh. That was it. We was in business.

From then on . . . from the beginning. That was amateur, because as soon as you accept some money, that means you're a pro.

You want some coffee or something?

White: Yeah, we can take a little . . .

You mentioned you got started with The Boozan Kings. Did you ever have banjo or guitar lessons?

Barker: Yeah, I've taken guitar lessons . . . wouldn't say it was lessons, from George Augustin, who was supposed to be a good banjo player. I took some lessons from him, every Sunday for about a summer. Got the basics, but I was getting the basics of playing by ear, because none of them, rarely any of them knew anything about no music. Maybe Charlie Bocage or John Marrerro or [Narvin] Kimball. Kimball was a youngster then too. So you just learned enough to play and watched those guys. They had a limited number of jazz tunes they played, the jazz repertoire. Just very few bands brought in a new innovative tune. Kid Rena was the one who when I heard him would bring out a new tune, a popular tune, but jazz wasn't as complicated as singing. You go and play it, you learn a dozen songs and you was in business. You was a pro. You did more posing, like you meant maybe you was playing, than what you was playing. There were a lot of these guys [laughter], sit up and hold the instrument and play it like it was very important what they was doing, and there wasn't nothing coming out of the banjo. That was a big shuck instrument, in other words. Because they didn't expect much of you, because you was in the rhythm section, and they wanted three horns and three rhythm, and they wanted you to give them a straight beat. You hear like, in George Lewis's band, or Lawrence Marrerro, he played just a straight beat.

White: Make 4/4.

Barker: That was it. That was the body of the band. No piano. They had no piano in them bands. So you went along with that. As you went along, you learned some solos, like Kimball did, some solos and playing the banjo behind his head. People had never seen that. That come out of the minstrel shows. He became the talk of the town. But he was studious, and he advanced. He was a great man, no nonsense from him at all. He don't even laugh at jokes. [laughter]

White: That's true. I just came off of three weeks with him on the road.

Barker: Yeah. Stays all to hisself.

White: Pretty much. Pretty serious.

Barker: No nonsense. I know him real well, like I wanted to call him some time to talk. I didn't know what to talk to him about, so I just don't . . . Let's forget about it.

White: So you were playing, but you were mainly playing by ear. You weren't reading music.

Barker: No. Nobody was reading, unless Piron and band, Robichaux, and they was playing, reading music. They put the music up there, because they could remember that limited repertoire they had. They put the music up there just to make sure. There was reading bands. Piron's band, Sidney Desvignes's band, Robichaux's band, Papa Celestin's band, and a few other bands that just played old ancient orchestrated arrangements.

White: What were some of those songs? You mentioned *Careless Love.*

Barker: *What Will Become of Joe?, My Baby's Loving Arms, I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles.* We have to get a repertoire. Dig up Robichaux's or Piron's discography. *Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate, Mamacita, Robert E. Lee.* They played them plantation songs and riverboat songs, but the music business wasn't aggressive in putting out new music then. The market was limited, because in those days they sold piano copies. You went and if a new song came out and they heard it on the way to . . . it wasn't no talkies then . . . on a place they heard if somebody was in vaudeville and they came through on the Orpheum circuit and sang one of them songs. They had a whole lot of vaudevillians who were singers, who were put on a circuit by the record companies, just so that they could introduce their songs into every town they went to.

White: Did you see any of those type singers here, vaudeville singers?

Barker: Yeah, I used to go to Orpheum Theater. Went to the Orpheum and went to the Pitt.

White: Lyric?

Barker: Went to the Lyric Theater. They were mostly blues and old love ballads, and there was a whole lot of cabaret songs they sang, which were risque.

White: Double-entendre.

Barker: Yeah, all that goes with it. That was a big thing in those times, double-entendre. You're supposed to read between the lines. If you don't be too rash or too bombastic, people will accept it. They had burlesque shows that done nothing but that type of material. Every town had its burlesque show, every big town, other than the sanctimonious states that was strict on them kind of laws, but they got people in the world who wants to hear that type of material. They go out for a good time. They want to laugh at themselves and laugh at the world. That's why you have clowns on the stage, you have people playing drunkards' parts, play fallen women by the wayside, and all that. That's life. But today they got very sanctimonious. But the French people were outspoken with that. They had lesbian's clubs. They have [? (inaudible)] clubs and all kinds of . . . whatever it was, you went there if you liked that kind of stuff. But United States always try to hide what rap singers are singing. Well they'd go to a nightclub and they would hear that same type of thing. Shock. Shock treatment. Got a girl. She's kind of cool and she's too calculating. You want to break her spirit down. You bring her to one of them joints. Show her it's just fallacies.

White: Did you see some of the better-known people that played, like Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey?

Barker: They all came to the Lyric Theater.

White: Yeah. So you saw them?

Barker: Came to the Lyric Theater and played there a week, and they went to Lafayette and played. They went to Baton Rouge and played. They went to Pensacola and played. Mobile and played. And they come back. They didn't come back to the Lyric. They came to that little theater on South Rampart Street. I can't think of the name of it. They came there, and they did a week, two weeks, and jumped from there to Baton Rouge. From Baton Rouge they went to Shreveport or Alexandria. From that on they work their way over to Texas. Go to Houston, Dallas, and all them towns in Texas. Galveston. And you playing all that kind of weird [expletive deleted].

White: What was the next step for you in music after the Boozan Kings?

Barker: You're around there. You see bands, so you're going to decide whether you're going to play music for a living or you're going to cop out and do it pasttime. But it's kind of rough playing, always was playing music for a living in New Orleans, because there's so many musicians and so many clubs. And then the juke box came in, and that killed off a lot of work. Man don't need you only if he got Louis Armstrong on the juke box.

White: What was your next musical group after the Boozan Kings?

Barker: I left that as kids. I started playing professional, rehearsing with different musicians around town. Little small musicians, but I'm listening to bigtimers and watching what they're doing. Everywhere Kid Rena played, sometimes Buddy Petit, Sam Morgan, I went by and watched the banjo player all night.

White: Who were some of those banjo players that you listened to?

Barker: Johnny Dave [Davis] was with Sam Morgan.

White: Johnny Dave you were listening to?

Barker: Johnny Dave. Son Thomas was with Kid Rena. MacLean, Richard MacLean, great banjo player. George Guesnon. John Marrerro. Lawrence Marrerro. Caffrey Darensbourg was working the Alley Club downtown, and he . . . I'd go to the club, and he'd see me out front by the bar. I was on long pants then, and he'd say, "Want to play a little while for me, man? Lay something on." I'd say, "Yeah." So I'd go back. The band relished me, because I think I had a little more spark than he had. Then I was trying to impress them too. Playing. Trying to jazz up the band. That's what I do now. I put that figure-eight stroke on them bands. I rigamarolle like I did on that record, and that spices up the bands.

White: You call that a figure-eight stroke? How do you . . . where did that come from? Is that your . . .

Barker: It's a eight. See? That's what that is called. Figure-eight stroke.

White: So that makes all those rhythms that you play.

Barker: Rigamarolle. That's the rhythm. There's the one rhythm. You generate. You throw a car in another shift. You're going at ten-mile. You jump. You're in the same position, but you generate the music.

White: Did you develop that?

Barker: No, I seen different bands do that around here. Caffrey Darensbourg. Seen him do that with Manny Perez's band. You can spark the whole, you can pull the whole band, not by the tempo, but you can give it a whole lift as a feeling if you jazz that rhythm up. Banjo players could do that, because they didn't have pianos in the band.

White: I noticed you did just that thing on my favorite recording of *Summertime* by Sidney Bechet. It's one that you played. You were on the record. Do you remember that recording?

Barker: No.

White: You recorded *Summertime* and some other things. It's on a record called *The Genius of Sidney Bechet.*

Barker: I'm on that?

White: Yeah.

Barker: How it sound?

White: It sounds great, and I think what set the background and the foundation for what Bechet was playing was the way you played those rhythms, and I could hear you doing that in there.

Barker: That's why it was the thing. Bechet understood that. He understand that brought back memories to him. I know that because I see . . . what I done, when I start playing, I look to see his expression [? (inaudible)], but he felt pleased. He didn't give me credit, said "This is great" or nothing, because he was like that. He don't give you credit for [expletive deleted].

White: But you could tell that he is very relaxed and comfortable.

Barker: Relaxed. It gives the band a whole new lift. It's just like juicing up a band. I know that. Guitar players and banjo players don't know that, because they ain't from New Orleans and they never played in that kind of band. Jazz bands have always been loose. You could take a chance with the drummer. Having played a little drums, I know that. The drummer can kick up a band or he can't. Herlin [Riley]'s a master of that. Shannon [Powell] too, if you'll notice. See how he's kicking that band, how they hit that bass drum with that foot. "Let's get out of there," it means. "Let's go. I got a race track." Then you simmer down, but you keep that rhythm going over here. You kick it again. That's how Herlin cut that boy off. I felt sorry for him. What's his name?

White: Who's that?

Barker: Elvin Jones.

White: Oh yeah.

Barker: Hear them on the stage?

White: At the Louis Armstrong concert that we did with Wynton Marsalis.

Barker: Washed him out. He wanted to do that modern, that bebop thing that they're doing. It didn't fit with this kind of music. He tried to get it in there, but he couldn't get it. Herlin was goosing that bass drum and watching him out of the corner of his eye, make believe he didn't know what he was doing. Cut that boy's head up. He'll never forget that. Bet every time he sees Herlin, he going to start smiling.

White: Herlin Riley.

Barker: He didn't know Herlin. Herlin know that, because Herlin come up with his uncles [Thad Jones and Hank Jones], and he know what he was doing. That's the example I'm telling you about how that goes. A banjo picker lift up a band, if you didn't get in a monotonous thing, which I try to eliminate. I try to conform with the harmony, chord structure. There's so much about this New Orleans music that people away from here don't know. They want to put down New Orleans, and they don't know [expletive deleted] about New Orleans.

White: Why do you think there's such a putting down and people not understanding New Orleans music? Do you think it's gotten a bad rap as far as the image of it, or what?

Barker: It ain't no bad rap. They can't play it. That's what it is. They can't play *Savoy Blues.* You don't hear no trumpet players copying Louis's . . . some of this [expletive deleted]. They copy some of his riffs, but they don't have the breath and the wind to hear, to play *When You're Smiling* like he played it. Take his time and place them notes. That calls for great pressure. You see Louis Armstrong's chest. It's just [expletive deleted] wide. He simmers down to a normal size, but when he get up here . . . I was thinking about that riverboat out there. I was on there last month, and how nice it is on top of the riverboat while the calliope . . . Louis used to go up there and practice every day.

White: On top of . . . ?

Barker: The steamer Capitol.

White: Oh, the Capitol.

Barker: All them boats got them tops to them. Put that organ and that calliope up there. That [expletive deleted] shakes the boat if you have it down there, and it'll wreck the boat. You got to put that on top. If you put it between the crack and the pipes and all that, the vibration . . . You understand? If it's got a wood hull. So that is . . . I'm looking around, and that's where it is.

I seen Caffrey Darensbourg do that. Kimball could do that, throw the stroke in there, and it'd lift the whole band, lighten it, because people weren't mad at the banjo. But today, you go on a job, they see a banjo, everybody try to get as far as they can from here. I

watch them, how they do that. Maybe give you a false-ass smile, but they don't like it. Everybody wants to be modern. But a real jazz band had a banjo. A good banjo player and a good bass player and a good drummer, you can't beat that sound. That's why our music was so great.

White: So you learned early on the importance of rhythm in New Orleans jazz.

Barker: That's what it is. That's what you be: a rhythm guitar. You don't have to play solos. You can play rhythm with Sidney Bechet playing. You still . . . what you see, if that's what it is, you can see that I'm not in his way. I'm not forcing nothing on him. Just giving him a smooth bed to float on. That's what jazz is all about. That's what these people away from here don't know nothing about. They never will get it. They've got another thing. They didn't know how to swing 'til Louis Armstrong start swinging that instrument. Now everybody's Dizzy Gillespie this, Buck Clayton this, and Roy Eldridge that. [Expletive deleted]. Them people couldn't play [expletive deleted] if it wasn't for Louis.

White: Why do you think in New Orleans people knew how to swing and in other places they didn't? Why do you think in New Orleans they could swing so much in music . . .

Barker: There was a whole lot of parties. Whole lot of parties, and woman was free and shaking with her man or making another woman mad by shaking with her man, or shaking with her man arouse him. There's motive behind all that wiggling and twisting.

What was your question?

White: Why did people swing in New Orleans?

Barker: They want to swing. They go . . . They're swinging everywhere, like I told you. I gave you the description of the send off. He going to glory. Let him go. After that, let's kick him up. They have been pleasant. They have been sweet and nice and going about their business with the family. After the family's gone . . . The family knows what's going to happen, but you respect the family. But [Harold] Dejan['s band] have a tendency today that they'll even hit that when the family's there. They take too much liberty. They lose the real spirit of the procession, but they couldn't care less. I told them when Paul died. I told Dejan, said, "You wait 'til you all get away from here." I told him, I sent word, say, "Tell him not to play that band swinging all the way up to the church," because they had Paul laid out in the church at Lapeyrouse [Street] and St. Bernard Avenue. Know that church there?

White: Lapeyrouse and St. Bernard?

Barker: St. Bernard and [North] Derbigny [Street]. You know that church there?

White: I know the one. I don't know the name of it.

Barker: All right. That church. He was laid out in there. They were surprised how they laid him out in the church. Well his grandmother gave the first dollar to the priest that opened that church. Came to the neighborhood and said they need a church here. "Would you all help me? I'm going to start picking up money to build a church." They gave him some money, because they were Catholic. He kept on begging and begging and begging. He would tell them each time how much money he had and show them the bank account. So he said you got to go one more year and have enough money to put the down payment on the church. That's what happened. All that's in the record book. Paul's aunt, she . . . that was her grandmother put that first money in there. She knew about that, and she used to talk about that all the time. When she was going to church it was a white church for a while. She'd go and sit in the back of the white people. Sit on the same floor with them.

This jazz business is something else.

White: So you came up learning . . . How old were you when you played with the Boozan Kings?

Barker: I was 13, 14, 15. It went on about two years. 15 or 16. 'Til I got hip to money to be made in this thing.

White: Money?

Barker: That's right.

White: Then you started playing with other bands. Did you ever play with a lot of older musicians here, like your uncles and people like that.

Barker: My uncles, they were young like me. They're just about 8, 10 years older than me. I played with some ancient musicians, like Old Man George Glenny. Big Eye Louis Nelson, I played with him. He was crazy about me. He liked me, because I was dressed up all the time. He said, "You're on the right track with your big papas. You're on the right track, kid. You keep neat. People call in town." I said, "Thank you Mr. Louis." Big Eye, I played with him. Played with so many other musicians that phased out. Can't think of his name. Was a piano player. Wiggins. You know Wiggins?

White: No.

Barker: Wiggins. A great piano player. Played with him. And I played with Lee Collins and them. That's where I graduate to big time. I joined Lee Collins and David Jones's band. I taken [Emmanuel] Sayles's place. They had scanned banjo players around there.

That's why they called me to the rehearsal they had. Lee Collins look at me. I had on these $20 [? (inaudible)] shoes [? (inaudible)]. Later on he said, "You know why I hired you?" He said, "You wasn't playing much banjo. I hired you because you had on them pretty shoes. I used to like to look at them shoes, and I knew you'd amount to something some day." That's why he hired me in the band. I went in the band and that's where I heard some [expletive deleted]. Me, Roy . . . now who the hell was on bass?

White: With Lee Collins?

Barker: Jones and Collins Astoria Stompers.

White: Lee Collins played trumpet. David Jones played drums?

Barker: David Jones was a great saxophone player.

White: Ok. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But he also . . . Didn't he teach music and play . . .

Barker: He probably did.

White: . . . a lot of instruments. That's right. Good saxophone player. Who else was in that band?

Barker: Roy Evans on banjo. That's all . . . Roy Evans on guitar. Who's on there on bass? Can't think. Theodore, David Jones were the reed section.

White: Theodore Purnell?

Barker: Yeah. Lee Collins on trumpet. Roy Evans on bass [*sic*: guitar]. I was on banjo. Joe Robichaux was on piano. I forget who was on bass.

White: What kind of places did you all play?

Barker: We had a steady gig, weekends on the Astoria Ballroom at Rampart and Gravier [streets].

White: Astoria Ballroom on Rampart and Gravier. Was that . . .

Barker: [? (inaudible)] the Pelican Ballroom.

White: The Pelican?

Barker: Yeah, and Astoria was across the street.

White: The Astoria was across the street from the Pelican?

Barker: That's right. They had one for uptown people, the Pelican. Downtown people was at Astoria. All the pimps and the whores used to come in the after[noon] . . . Good food in there. Good quick lunch. Sandwiches. Oyster sandwiches. All creole concoctions. It was a great experience, because I got a little recognition.

White: Met a lot of people that would come . . .

Barker: Yeah. People come to see David Jones. Come to see Lee Collins. Lee Collins had had a battle with Kid Rena. Blew Kid Rena off, so that meant he was the king around here for a while.

White: Who came along after . . . you mentioned people that outblew each other. That was a popular thing, to see who was the best player on the different instruments?

Barker: Yeah. It acknowledges stars. He had been somewhere. David Jones, that man had been with the Missourians, had been to New York. David Jones had been on a riverboat and could have stayed on there as long as he wanted. He was a teacher. He was a magnificent musician. He was on a riverboat with Louis Armstrong. In fact he played them exercises, diminished exercises. There's so many things he did on . . . Louis Armstrong would be rehearsing on top of the boat, and David Jones be down on the bottom of the boat, and you could hear both of them. David Jones be blowing out the portholes. [? (inaudible)] blowing changes. He used to . . . He couldn't tell Louis nothing, because Louis didn't want nobody to tell him nothing after a while, but David Jones used to do things on the horn that would mess his mind up. Make the back 10ths and back 11ths. So much what they do with the horn, I don't . . . because he played this mellophone, which is the same fingering, different tonality, I guess. He was a bitch.

White: You knew Louis Armstrong back then?

Barker: No I didn't know him. You didn't see Louis much.

White: No? Had he gone out of New Orleans then, Armstrong?

Barker: Yeah. He left New Orleans like '20, '21, and I'm speaking of '26, '27.

White: Yeah. So a lot of musicians left New Orleans.

Barker: Yeah, they'd gone.

White: Including your uncle Paul.

Barker: Paul went to New York with Luis Russell after King Oliver's band broke up. Red Allen went on a boat with Fate Marable. Made two trips, two or three trips. Musicians leaving town and going all the time. You heard . . . you never saw Jelly Roll [Morton], but you heard of him. You never see Clarence [Williams], but you heard of him. All people that were doing good, they show you examples. They would tell you. Spencer Williams writing all them things, *Bourbon Street,* recognized songwriter. *Mahogany Hall Stomp* and it was recorded with Louis's stuff. Louis was recording his stuff. Clarence Williams wrote *Careless Love.* Not *Careless Love. If I could be with you one hour tonight.* Maybe not that. Something else. All that. You hear about people who were successful away. You also heard about who was in jail away, and all that. Yeah, if you was in the know. You had a lot to think about. And to get away, because they was always wanting you to go somewhere you could better your condition, because your ambitions was twarted here if you was in New Orleans, no matter what you did. If you had a paint job, you was in trouble as of today.

White: Is that why a lot of musicians left New Orleans, because they could make more money and conditions were a little bit better away?

Barker: That's why they left. Sure. More money. Make more money. Treated better.

White: Some people say that all of the good musicians left, and the ones that stayed were not. Do you believe that? When did you . . .

Barker: No, no. A lot of them stayed there because their wives didn't want them to go, and the wives didn't want to go nowhere. But there's some stayed here. They didn't want to take a chance, and they had others had jobs here. Just like you see . . . What's that boy's name? He used to play trumpet with the Olympia. He busy in the building trades. He work for the roads people, building homes and houses. Fournier? Is that his name? Trumpet player.

White: I know who you're talking about. I don't know his name.

Barker: Fouché.

White: Oh, Fouché. Edmund Fouché.

Barker: See, what needs for him to go anywhere? He's getting carpenter's prices in the day time. If he want to play, he play at night. Or he don't want to play, he don't play. Because Baptiste going to rob him, so he don't . . .

White: Were you encouraged to leave New Orleans at an early age?

Barker: Oh, yeah. My uncle . . . The Depression set in 1929. The Depression set, and there was no work here. People don't have no [? (inaudible)] ain't no work. So he wrote down here. He's my godfather, and he's interested in me, because he know I had ambition. He said, "Why don't you come up to New York?" I said, "New York? I heard of going to Chicago. I don't heard nobody leaving here going to New York." But Piron went up there. And the rest of them who went to Chicago to better their condition, went to New York, because New York was a step with more opportunities for you. Down here nobody imagine opening up a publishing company. Clarence Williams and them had that kind of ambition. They knew the inner workings of recordings and royalties and all that. We didn't know nothing about royalties here. We didn't know [expletive deleted] here. You get away from here, you see that people got a claim to get credit in movies and credit on songwritings and song copies. It's a whole new ball game. So he say, "Come up here." He said, "As long as I got a place, you got a place, so come on up. You'll get something to work, because you're ambitious." That's what he told me. He says, "I'll send you a ticket." I said "O.k." Said, "We just have been married a year, and I want some money our furnitures." Said, "What we going to do?" My mother said, "I'll take it. You manage to pay the furnitures if you don't want it. Furniture's real old." That's how I got a ticket and I went to New York. In three months I sent for her.

White: So you were married. How old were you when you got married?

Barker: I was 17.

White: How old was she?

Barker: I was 19. She was 16. Big for her age.

White: How did you all get together.

Barker: We met, one of them things, like families. They're searching . . . undercurrent . . . they're searching out a nice girl in the neighborhood who would make a nice wife for you. That happen to you?

White: Oh, yeah. That happens.

Barker: Said it's a nice girl, come from . . . that business . . . she comes from a nice family. So that went along with that. They said, "I want you a little girl to meet." Louis Barbarin's wife, Marie Philip, Louis used to go to hang with her sister, Maria's sister, and they came to visit her on a Sunday, and she's fine, so they say, "Got a young man I want you to meet." "Daniel," they said. "Oh yeah, Daniel be nice for her." The parents, the way they talk. They pick for you. So they send for me next Sunday or a couple of Sundays later. I went and I seen this fine girl they tell me they want me to meet. "Your

gal, meet her. Yes." That's how that started. I courted her three years. 17 - 18, 18 - 19, 19 - 20.

White: Were you doing any kind of work then other than music?

Barker: First job was cleaning lumber. Taking nails out of lumber. Worked for a Frenchman who used to abolish buildings and sell that second-hand lumber because it was valuable. It wasn't rotten. It just was good lumber. Good, dry lumber. Then I got a job in a grocery store.

My mother told me, said, if you had a argument with the school teacher . . . I had a argument with a girl and she . . . I cussed her out. Put that racial [expletive deleted] on me, and I cussed her. She's a mulatto child. She went and told the principal that I insulted her. So the teacher told me that I wasn't at Marigny School. I was in Joseph A. Cray School. I'm supposed to act like a gentleman, not like a heathen or one of them kind of words she said. "I want to go get your mother and bring her back. You don't come back 'til you bring her." So I said, "O.k, I'll tell my mother." I left, and I never went back. My mother told me, "You don't have to go back to school there."

White: So you didn't go back to school there?

Barker: No, I just went and got this job, man, on the grocery store. On a Monday you could go there, them grocery stores where they had delivery boys, and if the delivery boys don't show up on Monday, they come late, and you be there, then it'd be a war for the job. I got $5.50 a week . . . a job. That was all right for a kid. I worked there a year or so, a couple of years maybe, maybe a year.

White: Where did you work? Which store?

Barker: Store was Senais [? (spelling)] and Soloman. There's this church . . . school on the corner, on the side of it, on Orleans and . . . can't think of that street. I worked there. I was a delivery boy. Saw some hell of a sights back then. Worked there 'til I started playing full time, and then I got the job with Willie Pajeaud, on El Alamo, at Burgundy and Canal [streets]. Upstairs over the Woolworth, there was a hall up there, El Alamo. It was a dime a dance.

[recording engineer:] We need to stop so I can change the tape. This is Dannie Barker interview, tape two.

White: You were telling me that you joined Willie Pajeaud's band, and you played at a place on Canal Street above where the Woolworth's is.

Barker: El Alamo. A dime a dance. Worked there two years with him. 1927. No, not that long. A year and a half, 'til 1928. Then I fooled around with Lee Collins for a year, for around about, that went a year, '29, and then things is real rough. No work and et cetera. I played in little joints all around. I learned to be a musician, trying to be a musician, which was hard. Everybody had day jobs or they work in the building trades. Whole families was plasterers and bricklayers. Whole families was cigarmakers. Other family was this. Music was a secondary thing. When you tried to play music full time by yourself, there wasn't none of them kind of gigs. So my uncle Paul came down and said, "What you doing?" I said, "I'm trying to keep this roof over my head and every. . ." He said, "I'm going to see what happens. Maybe you'll come to New York." He went back to New York, and he told me, "Come on up to New York." I said, "What am I going to do up there." He said, "You'll find something to do." I had a little band that played for him, a pick-up band, when he came to the house, and he said, "You play as much as that cat in the band we got." Luis Russell's band. Was a banjo there.

In three years the banjos was buried and they put out the guitar. Everybody got mad with the banjo. Before they didn't, because the banjo used to lift the band. Guitar couldn't do that, put them different sounds. It's a subtle thing, a thumb thing. They came from a crash, pulling thing, hitting thing, to a subtle, bouncing thing which is the guitar. The best example of that you got was Johnny St. Cyr and the Hot Five records and later on with Count Basie's band, Freddie Guy, or Freddie Green.

White: Green.

Barker: You got that from that, that rhythm section. Bennie Moten got that [expletive deleted] from King Oliver's band. If you hear some of the King Oliver records, *Canal Street Blues* with Armstrong and Oliver, and you listen to Count Basie's band, you'll hear the same thing there which was done ten years earlier or maybe 15 years earlier.

White: So they got the influence from New Orleans.

Barker: That's right, because they was . . . You see, people began to dance to a subtle sort of thing, not a blasting thing, but a bouncing. A heartbeat in the music. That's what King Oliver had in his music with Baby Dodds and Bill Johnson. They had that old New Orleans funky sound. So that's what you got. Later on, that's what musicians all over the country tried to imitate, tried to get that sound. Basie had it, because he's not a explosive piano player. He plays subtle piano, and he . . . honky tonk and a barrelhouse attitude, so you got that in the music. You can't get that unless you have a barrelhouse attitude. You can't play it.

White: A lot of people think that New Orleans music is real loud and real fast, which is not true.

Barker: No, no.

White: But for dancing and the way the music goes, it's really more subtle than people think. That's one of . . .

Barker: Them bands never sweat and all that huffing and puffing. They never done all that. Kid Rena opened his shirt like [sound of buttons popping], sit on stage back of that horn, never went in the high register of the horn. Just played pretty music. And he was [? (inaudible)] for that. Nobody dictated to him, and nobody [? (inaudible)] to try to get away from him, trumpet players, because he played so sweet. He played a melody which I'll never forget this tune, "I'm looking at the world through rose colored glasses, everything is rosy." [Barker sings the melody] You don't get winded. A man'll get on the floor and dance with a woman if it ain't too exciting, because he can . . . their hearts can be beating together, and their foots shoving, and knees hitting against one another, and belly buttons hitting next to one another. That's what music is all about. A dance.

White: We were talking about playing music in New Orleans and New Orleans jazz as being laid back and subtle and not really, not loud and raucous as people sometimes think.

Barker: That's where the dixieland come in. Show business on the stage. You can't do that on the stage. It's dull on the stage. So you put on a stripey shirt and a straw hat and you blast out. That's show business. But authentic New Orleans jazz is poor people in a nightclub, in a cabaret, a man with some money in his pocket and a beautiful woman, and he wants to get up on the floor. He wants to dance with her, and he don't want to be on the dance floor getting out of breath when he's dancing to it. He wants to talk to her while he's dancing. He wants to squeeze her, et cetera, things that a man would do, that a woman wants a man to do. He's close to her, and their bodies and hearts beat together, and the vibrations of the limbs and the muscles in coordination. Got that? Is that the right statement for that? That's a kind of description. So there's no need of all this fast, out of tempo music. You do that on a stage. When you don't have the quality of getting down and being gutbucket, you go into hilarity. They put on a show. It's a different type of show. That's the difference about this thing. These people wouldn't have had no monkey shine when you're in a cabaret with a woman. You don't want to see nobody with no striped coats on and straw [? (inaudible)] on their head. You want some cat sitting in a corner with a derby stooped over his head. You barely can see his eyes, blowing that horn the way he feels. The lights are down low. If you notice a lot of clubs you pass, black and white clubs, you don't see no gang of bright lights in there. Some clubs, you look and you barely can see the people inside.

White: It's almost dark.

Barker: That's the setup, they call that. That's to put you in the mood. Bright lights scare you off. But if you're in there with a woman right next to you, hand might slip and pat her on the thigh or something. All that goes with the lovemaking.

We got away from the subject. I'm sorry I interrupted you.

White: You played a lot of dances with Kid . . . with . . .

Barker: Not too many with nobody. Here and there. But you're doing something. But you're seeing. You're going to a lot of things you're not playing.

White: Willie Pajeaud.

Barker: So you're looking. Willie Pajeaud had a knack of playing dancing schools or getting a steady job. Then he was in the Eureka band, he was sometime Olympia band. It was full time if you hustle hard. You hustle hard in the day to get these day parades and funerals and all that. Almost come to blows if you didn't get one. "Who got it?" Say, "It was a little make-up band got that parade for Sunday." Aw, man, their hearts broken. My grandfather almost cried sometime when they found out the Onward band was underpriced by a flip-flop band or one of them things. You're hearing all that, but you're still fascinated by the music, because you're running entertainment all the time. That's the story behind that business. So you keep on. Once you're hooked into it, you keep on, because you hear of success. There's always something shining better in somebody else's yard. You're looking forward to it, maybe anticipating for something great. You got faith in something, almost a religious faith in this music business. Trying to carry on, like me. Right now I'm still playing. I'm 83. People 83 years old sitting in wheel chairs, man. You have to wheel them around. They can't catch their breath. But something about this music, it keeps you going. Now you, you're just beginning . . . the poor element of the people who is involved in this music begin to make some money. You can take a Cadillac, what? . . . Elvis Presley, look at the money he made. He was a poor little country boy. Real small city boy. Look what he blossomed into.

Like a Fats Domino, still eating chitlings and sweet potatoes. That's all he thinks about. He wakes up and dreams about he's got a big pork roast in front of him. That's why he gets the best pork roasts. [? (inaudible)] he'll eat six dozen fried oysters and faint and fall out and get indigestion. [laughter] Eat them. Eat two watermelons. Everything he buy, he buys in twos and threes. Don't give nothing to charity. You don't see him at all. He don't get out in the open where people can beg him for stuff, like them freeloaders. He used to do that before, when he first got famous.

White: Charities?

Barker: Go by Mullees [? (spelling)] and stand up there let everybody order drinks on you. Somebody pull his coat, say, "Don't go in there no more." Now you can talk about the man, but all of that goes with music.

White: In New Orleans, before you left town, it was really hard, no matter . . . even if you had a big name among the musicians and more popular, it was hard to really make it.

Barker: It was falling apart. The Depression had set in. One of the worst depressions this country ever seen. It hit the South earlier than it hit other parts of the country, because the big factories, they keep the big business and factories and manufacturing deals in the big Northern cities, or cities above the Mason-Dixon line, because it's heavily populated, and it all goes with vote and politics. The state of Ohio got . . . as much people in the state of Ohio as there is in Mississippi and Louisiana. Pennsylvania got three times as much. Illinois, gangs of people in Illinois. Big factories. There's mines. Coal mines. Steel mines. That's what's happened to the country. All them things have closed here, because steel mine was great for automobiles and buses. Japan then come on. It's a challenge, so that you're being knocked off kilter. Nothing you can do with it until you find a solution to get that business back that went to Japan. You see some articles now that say "made in Korea." Shirts. It's all them people. They help the enemy before they help their own people. Russia give them cars, and people spent trillions of dollars going to the moon first. Remember that, when a man went to the moon? This country was like crazy, because how could this dumb bunny over there get to the moon before us? Not to the moon. He went to outer space. He didn't go to the moon. So we had to beat him, and we went to the moon. After you get to the moon, I was thinking you walk on it, because you thought it was on fire. They get up there, they find it was ashes. So they get out and walked on the moon, and they say, "Walk. Man walked on the moon." Hot damn. The whole world was, "How can he walk on the moon, walk upside down?" If you're looking at it, it's got to be, have to have a hell of a brain to calculate how you could walk on it before you get there. You're going there. When you get there, how you going to do it? How can you stop from bumping into it? They had all that arranged. There's some wizards in this country. They landed. They were about 20 feet above the moon. They got out, and they walked on the moon. They must have been scared [expletive deleted]. They didn't know if it was solid or it was sawdust or whatever there was.

All that goes in the interview too?

White: Yeah. [laughter]

Barker: You got that? We was talking about the states and the music business. The poor people in the South and the rich people in the South feel effects of a depression before them people in the great big cities. When I got to New York in 1930, there was talk of a depression. It actually hadn't hit New York City, because New York City's not a manufacturing city like Cleveland and Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. They manufacture

things there. New York distributes the things over the phone. They have offices in New York. Have the European connection there, Oriental . . . Frisco [San Francisco] got the Oriental connection, and that's a entanglement.

White: When your uncle Paul Barbarin invited you to come up . . .

Barker: He told me to come up. He didn't invite me. He commanded me. He said, "Come on up. Come on up here. You'll get something to do. If you don't, you'll get you a day job." So I went up there. He and Red Allen met me. That's a comedy scene there, meeting me in the Pennsylvania Station and getting on a subway. That was a hell of a scene, five o'clock meeting in New York. 50,000 people running all directions, nobody bumping into one another. Coming this way. Going thataway. Coming this way. Making them commuter trains, Long Island trains. Going into Pennsylvania. Going . . . Trains is pulling out. They ran electric trains. People got the time, watch time to what time to get on that train. Train pull out on the minute. Man, [expletive deleted], I'm trying to get through this crowd with a banjo and a paper box valise. [Expletive deleted]. I seen all these people. I ain't used to bumping into people. They're about 30 feet from me, telling me to come on through. It looked like a stampede. You know them Spanish people be running with them bulls in the evening, out in Spain you see them?

White: [laughs] In the town, yeah.

Barker: Yeah and they're running. Them bulls is behind them. That's the kind of scene that was to me. I said, "[expletive deleted], I'll miss it." "Come on through." I said, "Uh-uh, man." Finally, they got through, and they grabbed me by the hand and drug me through all them people, boy. The people just walked around, didn't say nothing. They know it's a emergency. They ain't got time in New York to explain. You're supposed to know that I'm trying to get home, you're trying to get home. If I bump into you, I don't mean to, but that's the process.

White: What kind of banjo did you bring up there?

Barker: Brought a Paramount banjo.

White: How many strings.

Barker: Just had paid for it. A four-string banjo. The kind Kimball had. Kimball was a star around here. I wanted the same kind, and I could play it pretty good. Get to New York with a banjo. I'm around there for about two weeks. While I'm there they take me to the Rhythm Club, Paul and Red Allen. Rhythm Club was where . . . They had about three clubs around there: the Mimo Club, the Rhythm Club, and the Band Box. Three clubs where the musicians hung out at. There, every day I get introduced to different musicians. Paul has a guy around there name of Alphonso Steele, a drummer, about my

size, but he's older than me, much older than me. Paul said, "Look out for my nephew, Steele." Steele said, "All right. I'll look out for him. Is he all right? Is he wise, or he's a fool?" Paul say, "He's not a fool. He's partly wise, Southern wise." They kidding and joking. Every day I'd see Steele around, and Steele is showing me all these people. The second day out of there . . . The first day they brought me there, went in the Rhythm Club, there was King Oliver and Jelly Roll [Morton] playing pool. Fletcher Henderson was at another. They had four pool tables. Fletcher Henderson was at another pool table playing pool. Fletcher and Peekaboo Jimmy, who was a New York drummer, and he was a hog [? (inaudible)]. Knocked out about ten musicians. They give him some lip and they tell you don't do something on the bandstand, and you keep on doing it, or you give him some lip. He had the fastest uppercut that you ever . . . Nobody could see where it came from. He'll knock you out and knock you down and let you . . . drag you over and let you in the corner 'til you revive yourself, like a sack of potatoes. That was Peekaboo Jimmy. "Peekaboo Jimmy," Steele said, "he's a knockout man." Then I said, "Let me try him." I did like that man. Peekaboo Jimmy, his hands came up, and he just . . . I had my hand up, he just pushed me like this, sssssshhhhhhh. I stumbled back about ten steps and fell to the ground. [laughter] He say, "You're all right, kid." Me and Peekaboo, he gave me some gigs. So they introduced me to Jelly Roll and King Oliver. They were pretty good pool players. Jelly Roll was a shark. And Fletcher Henderson was playing with Peekaboo Jimmy, and they was talking about Fletcher Henderson. Fletcher Henderson come in the Rhythm Club, he don't speak to nobody. He just stand up like a statue and look around. He's well dressed. Changed clothes two or three times a day. It was the most famous black band in the world, working at the Roseland Ballroom. Coleman Hawkins in his band. Kaiser Marshall in his band. Buster Bailey was in his band.

White: Don Redman?

Barker: John Kirby was in his band. Don Redman had left about two years and was the leader of the Cotton Pickers.

White: McKinney's Cotton Pickers?

Barker: McKinney sent for Don to come and arrange and lead the Cotton Pickers. That's how that was. So I'm seeing Jelly, and Jelly Roll would say, "How you doing, Home Town?" every time I see, every day I see him. He called me "Home Town." I don't think he ever even remembered my name. He didn't have to. I knew his name, but he wasn't . . . He just saw me, finally, a home boy, simple little home boy coming from New Orleans, trying to look smart and act like a New Yorker. Said, "How you doing, Home Town?" I said, "All right." "Say Home Town, how many musicians you know in this . . . how many cockroaches?" That's what he called musicians, because he was mad with musicians, because he . . . [laughter] They didn't dig his music. They played his gigs, but they didn't know nothing about the way back. You know that swing that Jelly had in his band. They didn't know nothing about that. That was from Chicago. He had hired Chicago musicians

who had heard King Oliver and them people play that, that different kind of raunchy sort of get-down thing. He had them people record. He would hire them, and they couldn't get his feel. He would play gigs with them, but he'd feature the solos. He'd have them lay out or have the drummer play brushes, but the rest of the band, sit down and keep quiet. The music in front of them, they could play, but they couldn't feel it and they weren't interested, so he got tired of hiring them. He stopped gigs.

White: So he was trying to play his stuff like he recorded, like *Black Bottom Stomp* and *The Pearls*?

Barker: Like the way he played. That's right. Nobody . . . The musicians he had had weren't New Yorkers. In fact there's no New York, very few are New York musicians. They all come from somewhere. Most of them, a lot of them come from the West Indian islands. They change their name and they change their speech and they try to be American.

So, I'm around, he say, "You think you can get me six cockroaches?", after I knew him a while. Said, "Yeah, I think I can get you six cockroaches." He said, "I got a good gig coming, a couple of good gigs. A gig is paying like 8, 10 dollars then. He said, "O.k." He said, "You're sure?" I say, "Yeah." Said, "Have them here Wednesday evening. Have them here at five o'clock. We're going to go out of town. Not far from here. About a hour's drive, out on Long Island or somewhere in Jersey. I'm going to look out for you. I'll pay you well if you can get them." "O.k." So Tommy Bedford was there, and he said, "What did Jelly say? Did Jelly ask you to get a band?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "So you think I can get a band?" "Yeah, I'll show you, because I'll play." "Can I play? You want me to play the gig?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'll help you get the musicians." So he helped me get the musicians, and they were there, and Jelly Roll pat me on the shoulder, "All right, Home Town. It's all right." Said, "These cockroaches, I'm going to make it, we'll make it with them. They don't know nothing about our music." That's the way he talked.

We played the gig. I think I got it in my book, when Jelly Roll played for the millionaires out there, out on Long Island. They got millionaires from all over the country. They got homes out on Long Island, up in Massachusetts, up in the East. We played this gig in this great big home you see in Long Island and the northern . . . southern part of Kentucky, Newport, Rhode Island. They got nothing but mansions there. Magnates. People who made a whole lot of money. The Armor and Swift Packing Company. Different week, the William Wrigleys. All them kind of people that made money out of a family product. Borax acid. They got a picture. You see them people's pictures on it. They had flour, about five different kinds of flour they used to have, with the families, whole family on the flour, the cloth printed, like them shirts they wear now with that imprint on it? They had them people, and that's the people Jelly played for. And Luckey Roberts. Heard of Luckey Roberts?

White: Oh yeah. Stride piano player.

Barker: Great piano player. He entertained. He had been doing that, man, for gangs of years. He'd play a party, and he would . . . the girls, the people would come over and shake his hand. Some of them would kiss him on the forehead. "Oh, Mr. Luckey." "We're so happy to play this party. Last time I played for you was for your sister's wedding, not your wedding." Or your aunt's, and your cousin had a christening, a birthday party, that kind of crap. Played for him, Luckey Roberts. I played for him and I ain't never got that money until this day. Say, "I don't pay off on the job. I'll pay off during the week when I get a check." I'll go along with it, because I'm scuffling. So I'll see him around the club. I say, "When you get your check, Mr. Roberts?" He said, "Oh yeah, kid, I'll tell you. Next Tuesday," he said, "You come to this address," and you wrote down. I went and rang on them people's home, some white people's home. I rang the bell. "I want to see Mr. Roberts." "There's no Mr. Roberts live here." He sent you on a wild goose chase. So after that I never asked him for the money no more. I just looked at it as lost.

About a dozen occasions I got the band. Home Town got a band for Jelly Roll. Some of those tunes, he say, "You can fall in here, homey." I'd play a little bit, because I'm interested in what he's doing. The rest of them ain't even trying.

White: What were they doing?

Barker: Just sitting there, because he's playing solo, like that boy that played last night. He remind me of Jelly Roll, the way he took off on the stage like Jelly Roll did. That first number, how he got up and talked, and you was telling me he looked so big on the stage. You see, you noticed that?

White: Harry Connick, yeah.

Barker: That's show business. And that's that. I'm playing them gigs with Jelly Roll. Jelly Roll's calling me Home Town, and all the time I'm meeting all them other people around. All kinds of characters, got good jobs and steady jobs in clubs. Clubs you never heard of. Exclusive clubs. You just carried on. You just do the best you can. After I'm there about . . . No, I'm in New York exactly a month and I get a job in a club called the Nest Club?

White: Where was that?

Barker: In Harlem. It's a club on 133rd Street. Later it became Dickie Wells's nightclub. It was on a basement on the ground floor with a club called the . . . a funny name. The Fun Box? No. The Fun Box is near . . . The Mad House, on the first floor. The Mad

House. Downstairs was the Nest Club. I played in there. You go to work at ten o'clock at night and you come out ten o'clock in the morning, because it was a depression that set in, and we didn't get a crowd until after three o'clock in the morning. Three, four, five . . . five o'clock, the band go on, because you sit there all night. There might be parties drifting in. It was just to winter. I had never seen snow, real snow falling.

The doorman there, he had seven singers there: Mamie Smith, Clara Smith, and another Smith. Can't think of her name. It wasn't Bessie. It was another one. But they had all these Smith names, Smith people. Anybody could name a Smith, they put that on the marqee of the theater. They put a sign, Smith Sisters. Great singers, Smith, and you see a little name. It'd be Susie Smith, Annie Smith. And I say, "I thought it was Bessie Smith or the ones that recorded." Bessie Smith or Clara Smith, or the other one, Mamie Smith. Say, "Let's go see," because all them Smith girls can sing. We go and see. A big come on.

They stole my banjo. I left my banjo overnight in the club. Come back the next night, the banjo was gone. Because it was snowing out there, and I didn't want to carry it. For other reasons too, maybe. So, come back to work, the banjo's gone. I ask Harry White, I said—who I was working with, who had been a member of Duke Ellington's first band from Washington. He was from the White Brothers Band, which was a great jazz band or jazz orchestra in Washington. They came to New York and fizzled out, like so many bands came there and fizzled out, coming to make their name. So he said, Harry White said, "Danny, I don't know what to do about this banjo. Your banjo's stolen, but if I was you, I wouldn't worry about it too much, because . . . unless you're in love with it." He said, "Everybody's beginning to play guitars now." "Play guitar?" He says, "Yeah, guitars. They're playing guitars. I noticed Fletcher Henderson's got a guitar player. Chick Webb's got a guitar player. Charlie Johnson. All them boys who were banjo players, they're playing guitars." He said, "Yeah." He said, "I tell you what you do. I'm going to speak to the boss, Johnny Carey. Johnny Carey was two black guys look like two white guys, him and Mal Fraser looked white, but they were black.

[Barker probably meant to say "Johnny," referring to the club owner, rather than "Harry," referring to the musician, in portions of the dialogue that follows:]

And they . . . he went to him and he brought me, and they came . . . and he called me, and he told, asked Harry White, say, "Harry." Harry say, "What?" Say, "They stole the kid's banjo." So Harry said, "What you want me to do about that?" Say, "I don't know," he said. "You know, it was stolen in your place. Maybe you could check out and find out who stole it. Get him his banjo back." Harry say, "How am I going to do that?" Said, "I'll think about it." He say, "This is what I'm talking about, Harry," he say. "You see the kid is smart. They begin to play guitars now." He says, "Yeah?" Say, "What'cha hinting at?" He said, "If we get a guitar, would you let him come and sit in?, and in two weeks I'll have him playing the basic chords of the guitar, like a apprenticeship with the guitar. I

give him a chance. You can make believe he's playing when he ain't, and in two weeks he be knowing enough how to play the guitar. Give him the basics." Harry says, "It's all right with me. It's all right with me," he said, "but I ain't got no money to buy him no guitar." Harry said, "We'll try to get him a guitar. We just opened this place. You see, we're trying to pay the overhead and pay the cook and pay them girls and all that." Say, "I'm about to close up." He said, "No, don't close up. Just let me have him for two weeks 'til he learn this guitar." Said, "All right." So he said, "O.k., all right, kid, I'm Harry, I'm sorry, man." Harry was . . . him and Mal was dealing in, what you call?, call girls, all kinds of night things, people do at night. It's the difference between day people and night people. You dealing with stocks and bonds in the day, them people start with arms and legs at night. That's what they deal in. Bootleg whiskey. It was Prohibition then. All kinds of fictitious deals going down. The night people, they busy as day people, but they doing things that happen at night. So I said, "I'll try it. Man, I'm disillusioned." He say, "You know anybody got a guitar?" I said, "No, I seen Bill . . .

White: Johnson?

Barker: Luis Russell's man. Yeah, Bill, that's who. I can't think of his last name. He had a guitar, two guitars on a stand when I saw him. So he say, "Go ask him to loan you a guitar." Your uncle's in the band. He knows you. You ain't going to run away with the guitar. So I went to see him, and he loaned me the guitar. He told me, he said, "You see the first four strings on that guitar. It's the same as the ukulele. Now you come there and you fool around, and I'll show you the different keys." He showed me the C chord, he showed a C7 chord, the C minor chord, and that's all your fingering on the guitar. I'm familiar with the ukulele, so [expletive deleted]. I said, "Yeah." So I sit on the bandstand, and I had liberty to play muted or not, 'til I get with, get the construction of the chords. That's how I started playing the guitar. Had a few formal lessons, but not . . .

White: Who taught you lessons when you took them?

Barker: Harry White [Bill Johnson] showed me them four basic things. The rest I did, I bought me some books, and Bernard Addison gave me some pointers, but he was always in a hurry. I asked different guitar players. I went by their house, and they showed me things. Veterans, guitar players.

White: So pretty much you were learning how to play the role of rhythm guitar at the time.

Barker: That's right. Rhythm guitar. That's what they had.

White: Basic, steady, swinging rhythm.

Barker: Yeah. That's what they wanted. That's what the bands wanted. Them small combinations, you could venture out, but I never worked with many of them. I was a big-band guitar player. As of now, I'm basically rhythm. I feel rhythm and I understand rhythm. People go to a club. If you play the tempo too fast, they gonna walk off the floor, because they didn't come here for no marathon or no Olympics. They come there to have a medium tempo dance. He dance with his woman. Woman can dance with her man, and she ain't gonna get winded, eyes popping out of her head and all out of breath. That make her gonna drink some whiskey. And she could have another drink of whiskey. Next thing you know, her legs in the air like a Thanksgiving turkey. That cause conniptions. You understand what conniptions is?

White: I think so.

Barker: If you don't, ask me later. I'll explain it. That is a part of this business.

From there on, I learned to be a New Yorker. How to watch the watch, your wristwatch. What time it is, because people, they dutiful up there. They don't mess around with time. They tell you, "Be on time," you see guys running. "It's a nine o'clock meeting, and it's urgent that you get there." You'll see cats all out of breath, getting there for nine o'clock. So, all right, everything [? (inaudible)]. Say, "I don't want to miss this date." Because if you come at 9:10, they close the doors. If you wasn't there, you miss it. So I learned to always be five or ten minutes ahead. I do that today. That's the most important thing you can have in any business, is to watch the watch. That's what I went about doing.

From there on, they go all these bands, and the trend is changing. It was jazz and all . . . the big word became "swing."

White: When did that start?

Barker: When Benny Goodman came. They needed a title for him. Paul Whiteman was called the King of Jazz. Here comes Benny Goodman. They name him the King of Swing. And . . . what's his name . . . Presley, the King of Rock.

White: Rock and roll.

Barker: Yeah, names. What's the boy the police put in jail? James Brown, the King of Rhythm-and-Blues.

White: Godfather . . .

Barker: Godfather.

White: . . . of Soul.

Barker: You got it. One of them was the King of Rhythm-and-Blues. The Godfather of Soul. I was on, almost on the right track.

White: When you were up in New York around that time, people like Charlie Christian hadn't gotten there yet, huh?

Barker: No. Charlie Christian came to New York . . .

[recording engineer:] [? (inaudible; change of tape, evidently)]

[The interview resumes:]

White: We were talking about playing guitar in big bands in the '30s, and you were saying that mainly you played rhythm, which is what you had to . . . Were you reading then, like the rest of the band?

Barker: No, we couldn't read. Lot of them guitar players didn't read. They give you symbols on the chords.

White: Chord symbols.

Barker: Yeah, because a lot of arrangers didn't know how to arrange for guitar, so there was very simple things. Even a commercial orchestration you bought, there was always a symbol. C 7 flat 5th, C 7 9th, C 7 this, B-flat 7 augmented 5th. This has that, and you know what a C 7 was. You had the 5th in it. It was up to you to sound what you hear. You had to do a whole lot of quick analectic attitude. Let's fit this with the . . . That's what the bandleaders wanted you to do, to bend the tones. They don't want you to stay strict to that. They want you to put that little lilt in there. It was like a heartbeat. You could hear it in some of the big bands. Benny Goodman's band you could hear it. You could hear it in Duke's band when Freddie Guy felt like playing. But you always heard it in Basie's band, because Basie had allowed . . . the arrangers had arranged so that there would be open space where you could hear that thump thump thump thump thump thump. That was very important to swing music. Other than that, you didn't worry about it. You didn't play what no . . . what groups . . . you wouldn't involve people who was doing eccentrics. Playing the guitar behind their head or playing all them high tones. There wasn't amplification then. That just came in around 19-what? . . . 1938, it start spreading, first electric guitar. Exploded in Teddy Bunn's hand. He had it, and it caught on fire. From that day on I would not entrust it. You sweat and get electrified, electrocuted. Your fingers get sweaty. They hadn't invented all that [expletive deleted]. You pick up a guitar, [expletive deleted], and you saw a cat scream and have the string marks across his fingers. I remember that.

White: So how did they hear you? You're playing behind a big band. You have an instrument that's lower than a banjo.

Barker: You could feel it without the electricity. Or the bass coordinates. You and the bass hit that thump together, and you could hear it. The arrangers didn't make the arrangement too compact to overshadow the openings.

White: You had spaces in the music.

Barker: You had spaces hear that, you could hear the chunk. Chunk chunk chunk chunk. And that's it. That's what they wanted.

White: Were you mainly playing downstrokes, or you went down and up?

Barker: No, I played down and up, because I played with a bunch of musicians didn't know what the hell they were doing, so I developed a [? (inaudible)]. Then I got . . .

White: Eight, figure eight.

Barker: I do that with the banjo, yeah. That's what they wanted. Allan Reuss was a master. He was with Benny Goodman. That boy who was with Tommy Dorsey. I know his name. Carmen Mastren. We know one another. Allan Reuss. And there was what's-his-name, with Basie.

White: Freddie Green.

Barker: Freddie Green with Basie. He got more recognition, because Basie being a rhythm man, he featured his rhythm section more than any band in the history of music. They'd just start chomping. They call it chomping. A lot of tunes he'd have, a few of them tenor battles in the band, they would be open and the rhythm just be going 'til they wind up to take off again. So that was a band what had a good example of that. And the didn't have no need no electricity, because a big mic[rophone] was standing there, so the mic could pick you up. In Basie's band, I'm talking about.

White: Did you play with a mic with Cab Calloway?

Barker: No, I didn't have no mic. I was with a hell of a rhythm section, and they accept the rhythm section as it was. I wasn't overshadowed. When you get them four instruments together—the piano, the guitar, the banjo [*sic*: bass], and the drum, a tuned-up drum, like Walter Johnson—[expletive deleted], you couldn't beat that. It was a thump, like a heartbeat.

White: You were given freedom to make your own inversions on these chords, right?

Barker: You stayed closest to the harmony that you could. You don't want to be contrary. You run a series of C chords. C diminished. C augmented. Whatever it is. And you stay there. The bandleader trusts you to do the best you can, and you do the best you can from your knowledge what that sequence.

White: But, did you play . . . if you played the C chord, the C was on top, and then the E and G, whatever?

Barker: According to the arranger, what he has there. The sound of the arrangement. They had a hell of arrangers in them days, like Andy Gibson. Who else? Guitar player from Kansas City. One of the greatest. Played trombone with Lunceford and he also played guitar. He played more guitar than anybody at that time. Can't think of his name [Eddie Durham]. He died a few years ago. He was a bitch. He should have played guitar all the time, but he wanted to play trombone. He played trombone because he was a arranger, and he was noted for arranging voices of a brass section. Four horns, four trombones, and three trombones. He was a master of voicing those instruments, so they fit in nice. All that you get when you're with liberal-minded bandleaders who understand . . . They hire you because you're noted for something, and they left you alone. That's your department.

Clarence Holiday played great guitar with Fletcher Henderson. I never got to know him well. Fletcher Henderson's band broke up. He hired Lawrence Lucie for a while, and then I never saw Clarence Holiday, Billie Holiday's father, no more. I don't know what happened to him. But he come out of Baltimore, and there were great banjo players and guitar players come out of Baltimore. Banjo Bernie. Him, Bernard Addison. Aw man, so many I recall. John Trueheart with Chick Webb. He was the master. Everybody went to hear him. They see him just chomp on that guitar with Chick Webb. You see all that, and you get a lesson from seeing how it's done while the people are working. You go home, and you think of that, and you figure it out, and you do that. When the people say, "Oh, man, he play just like Trueheart. That's Trueheart's thing." You can see them talking, because you got that sound, and that's what you go by.

White: Who . . . when that sound was coming along, who set the standards for that? Who were some, one of the earliest guitar players to play like that?

Barker: John Trueheart.

White: Oh, he was.

Barker: John Trueheart, and Holiday. Billie Holiday's daddy, with Fletcher Henderson.

White: Clarence.

Barker: They were the two leading bands in the Savoy in New York. Chick Webb was the boss uptown Savoy. Fletcher Henderson was the boss downtown at the Roseland. Tommy Dorsey and his brother, they had a band together. They broke up, so there was two more guitar players. Carmen Mastren, he went up to Savoy, listened to John Trueheart. Went to Roseland, listened to Holiday. [? (inaudible)] come around Lucky Millinder's band, because he's playing all around there, and he dug what I'm doing too, because I'm trying to play like Trueheart. Next thing you know, he's playing like that. Then what's-his-name? Guitar player. Les Paul. He come and upset everybody, because he invented some new [expletive deleted] for the electric guitar and playing. He started hanging up in Harlem. Said, "That white boy's up there." Somebody says, "He's playing some guitar." "Where's he at?" They say, "[? (inaudible)] Club." Place be packed up with musicians, coming to hear him and his old lady, Mary Ford. They just come uptown to have fun, and the people loved them. He played that God-damned guitar and that amp. Man, you could hear him down the street in these joints. Wake up the neighborhood. Police have to go up there and tell him to come down, calm down.

That's what you're doing. As you go along, you're learning. You're learning, and you're seeing things. There's so much happening. You see people making money. You see people dying of grief. You see people who has this great talent. They become alcoholics. They become dope addicts. You see them become bums on the street, begging for nickels. Not in Harlem. They'd be downtown, with their hands out, begging. "Look, it's" so-and-so. "Come on, you're begging." Instead of getting them a day job, I know so many musicians stopped playing, went on the subways, riding the subways. Downtown you see them in department stores, pushing a big old wagon. They move around the hall, furnitures. So you learn to roll with the punches and bounce.

You learn real quick to try to help others, and you get help from somewhere else, not from the people you help. But you learn to share. And that's what we share. My wife, if she'd never cook another dinner, I'd never squawk. She fed more musicians than the Salvation Army. I used to bring hungry [expletive deleted] home [laughter]. Said, "What am I going to feed them?" I said, "You can fix something like that." She'd chop up some food, and cat would bite his lips off, because he never ate food seasoned like we season down here. "Man, I sure appreciate this dinner. Oh man, I never taste nothing like that in my life." She say, "Go around the corner and get some chops," and she fix them some chops and throw some tomato gravy in there, the onions and garlic and parsley and fix up a concoction. You can smell it in the kitchen. I almost had to put iron bars by the doors to keep them from breaking down my kitchen. That's a part of the game.

Most of the guys I know, they're dead. My good friends. There's a few left, but that's life. But I learned something in New York. It'll make a man out of you or kill you. That [expletive deleted] make a man out of you. They learn you how to deny yourself, how to deprive yourself, how to do without when you can't afford. All that goes with music. I've

been in bands, had a pocketful of money, money in all pockets and couldn't get nothing to eat. People wouldn't serve us. If they wouldn't serve us, they say, "We ain't got nothing to eat here," or the place done closed down when you get through work. So you just . . . you don't squawk. Situations happen you can't correct and you can't avoid.

I come back to New Orleans, and this is the land of plenty. This is the land of plenty. Plenty of everything. Plenty of food. Plenty of [expletive deleted]. [laughter] Leave that in. Don't cut it out. Say it's a error.

White: Of course you mean cats, right?

Barker: Yeah, sure, pussycats. Little cats. I got six of them I feed around here. Meow, Minnie, Ginny, Sally, Tom, and Willie.

White: That little grey one that's running out there.

I think we can wrap up for today.

Barker: You can talk about jazz 'til doomsday. All kinds of one-nighters. All kinds of traveling. All kinds of writing songs. Getting your money. Don't get paid your royalties. Cats die, and he sell the company to his great cousin, and you can't find his cousin. There's money. You know your song is making money, but you can't get it. Get all kinds of fictitious letters. So you just roll with the punches. What's due you in this world, that's what you going to get. If you don't get it, no need to grieve about it.

Thank you. First session.

White: First session, yeah. And we'll continue this.

Barker: Second session should be more drastic. More dramatic.

White: Yeah, we hope this weather is a little bit . . .

[end of session one]

Barker: You just got to do your own thing. That's what Duke Ellington did. He didn't never work for nobody.

[recording engineer:] This is Danny Barker, session two.

White: To put everything in perspective from the first session, we talked a lot about your early days, coming up in New Orleans in the [French] Quarter, about your parents and your family. We said that you had come from a quite extensive musical family. Do have any idea about how many musicians were in your family.

Barker: 40-some or more. Interrelated. Not all family, but interrelated, like Paul Barbarin, my uncle, who's my Godfather. He and Jimmie Noone married two sisters. Brother Cornbread [Joseph Thomas] is our cousin. Bibbs Lazard. Do you know Bibbs? He was a drummer, played with . . . Who had the restaurant on Orleans Street?

White: Ducky [? (spelling)] Chase?

Barker: Chase had a band. The drummer Bibbs . . .

White: Louis Bibbs?

Barker: Lazard, no, Lazard. Lazard was the drummer. Bibbs Lazard. He was the drummer. Great young drummer. Great. But he just simmered down, just phased out. He was a cousin. Way back, my grandfather and Manny Perez were interrelated. You heard of Manny Perez?

White: Sure.

Barker: And I had a uncle. Great clarinet player. He was a virtuoso. Louis Arthidore. That's my grandmother's maiden name. Her younger brother.

White: Who did he play with?

Barker: He played with the Olympia Band. He was highly respected. He was considered a genius back then, but he died young, at the age of 21. He went in the district. He was messing around with them women, and he got one of them AIDS diseases, something like that. He didn't tell his people what he had, because he was so highly respected for them, he was ashamed of himself. Whenever they did get to him, find out what was wrong, it was too late. He had let that disease eat him up. That's Louis Arthidore.

Big Belly Fob [Octave Clements]. That's a trombone player. That's Lionel Tapo's uncle. You heard of Lionel Tapo? Banjo player?

White: Yeah.

Barker: His uncle.

White: How was that related to you?

Barker: That's related to my grandmother. His people Arthidores. He was a trombone player and all them kind of people, and he was interrelated to people. So that thing went spread out like a tree leaves. I got a part of that in my book [Danny Barker, *A Life in Jazz,* ed. Alyn Shipton (1986), chapter 4].

White: Yeah, I read that about your family. You mention quite a few famous musicians in the family in addition to the Barbarins. You say that Louis Barbarin's daughter had married Louis Nelson, right?

Barker: Louis Nelson's son.

White: You told us the other day about your uncles, Uncle Paul and Lucien and Louis, and Esther Bigeou, your cousin.

Barker: Esther Bigeou had a brother, [Clifford "Boy"] Bigeou. He had a spasm, famous spasm band. Makeshift. They were in the building trades. Plasterers, bricklayers, and all that business. And they love a good time, like we love here. On weekends, they ball. They had a little spasm band. The kazoo. They swung, man. I heard them.

White: What did they call themselves?

Barker: Just a spasm band. They didn't have no name like [? (inaudible)], because they didn't hustle ballrooms. They just played parties, or you invited them to your party, and they played some entertainment for you.

White: And Lionel Tapo?

Barker: Lionel Tapo was Big Belly Fob's nephew. Lionel Tapo. His stepbrother played guitar. Can't think of his name. You got him there? Lionel and his brother?

White: His brother-in-law. You mentioned Howard Mandolf.

Barker: Howard Mandolf. That's right. But Lionel has a brother. He's got another name, only it's not the same father.

White: Charlie Tapo?

Barker: Charlie . . . Has it got Charlie Tapo there?

White: Um-hm. Lionel's brother.

Barker: Charlie something-else. But Lionel is a Tapo. So it's as close as I could get to it. It didn't matter too much to me, because I just put their names down to show you, just give you a inkling of this thing, just enough to see how involved music gets into a family.

White: Yes, I understand. That's very common in New Orleans, these musical families.

Barker: That's right. Now they got Cie Frazier and his relations interrelated with . . . The Fraziers interrelated with the Williams. Dave Williams?, his family. They all come in the same neighborhood, and they're all . . . Then there was the Fraziers, the Parlebons [?(spelling)], who else? Fraziers, Parlebons, Dollioles, they're all interliving in the same vicinity, about three or four blocks, and they're all interrelated with somewhere. Wish I could do more research on that.

White: We talked about your life in New Orleans, and then we talked about your travels, early travels in New York, but before you went to New York, you did tour a little bit around the South in the '20s.

Barker: That's right.

White: You played with Little Brother Montgomery in Mississippi?

Barker: Yeah.

White: What was that like?

Barker: Couple of gigs as a trio. He wanted somebody to go with him, and I could go along. I played enough banjo to give a . . . to stay in tune. I've been learning this all the time. We made a couple of tours out there in Mississippi.

White: Did you stay overnight, different towns?

Barker: For a weekend. We played for a weekend. Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Come back Monday morning with very little money. Had plenty to eat and drink and plenty women, but very little money. My mother say, "Why you going out there? You're going out there with them fast women. You got to take it easy." Said, "Why don't you get married? All them fast women you . . ." Because my father had went in the district. They had separated. The district was a exciting place in New Orleans. People handling money, because the greatest commodity for sale in the world, goes from the king down to the pauper, is sex. That's a commodity that can always get a price. That's where you have these men who travel the world. They're seamen and they're travelers, and when they want to relax, they want a woman. They ain't got time for New Orleans courting, when they're sending roses and bouquets of flowers and candy. So you put up or shut up, and

you put some money across the board, and it's a practice to get that fast dollar. That's reality. It goes from the lowest to the highest of financial doings.

White: In the late '20s, around 1928, you also did a little touring with David Jones and Lee Collins?

Barker: Lee Collins and Ernest Kelly before David Jones. Went . . . played like 20 one-nighters, and every one of them was a baza, which means it's a bust-out, was nothing. They tell you, "You should have come here Thursday." Thursday was payday. You come here on Saturday and Sunday or Monday, ain't nobody. Nobody got no money. They spend up all their money.

You mentioned David Jones, you mention a real giant. You never hear his name, but he was a real giant. He played tenor saxophone, played clarinet. His main forte was tenor sax and the mellophone and french horn. He was a master of that. He ran changes. He changed the whole process of saxophone playing. While Louis was on the boat . . . They were on the boat with David Jones in Fate Marable's band. I mentioned that, I think, before, that on the steamboat, up on the top is a calliope, and that's up on the roof. Louis used to go up there every day and practice. You had the whole expanse of the whole universe up there in the high heavens, and when you blow a horn like that, you can hear echoes. It's fascinating. Ten o'clock in the morning or three o'clock in the evening, you get the shade behind one of the smokestacks, and he'd go up there every day and practice. He was well fortified, Louis, when he went to New York . . . went to St. Louis. He made three trips over to St. Louis. Each summer he was on a boat.

White: Was that on the Capitol?

Barker: The Capitol, and they would wait for him, everybody in St. Louis. They had a club they called the Chauffeurs' Club. Minstel show bands went through there. Every kind of band that played well enough, they went and jammed . . . They didn't call it jamming. They called it "play out." They used to call it a play out. Going to play out, play your repertoire at the Chauffeurs' Club. They had a word back to St. Louis when Louis joined the band. Have this young trumpet player on the boat who was playing great. Louis left the middle register, strained up the horn, and started going altissimo above the . . . because he was well fed on that boat, and the discipline of getting your food . . . You had your breakfast on time and your lunch on time and dinner on time, your supper on time, and a snack, and if you ate, you ate each one, and he had that power. Played without a empty stomach. Played with a full stomach.

They called it a bow knot. Remember, I was imagining how he . . . You ever hear that boat at night?

White: Yeah.

Barker: You hear it?

White: Yeah.

Barker: All right. The way the wind blows, that's the way it carries the sound. You know about that?

White: Um-hm.

Barker: Well when Louis blowed, sometime at night you could hear him. Or in the daytime. They didn't have all these automobiles. They didn't have all these cars that make the noise to compete with the sound, and New Orleans always has a low ceiling and a low atmosphere and water. We surrounded by water. Surrounded with bayous, rivers, and lakes. That right?

White: Um-hm.

Barker: And the city's a crescent. There's this one part that's equal, if you notice, one part that's connected to the land, but the circle of the river . . . If you get on the river, you see the river bends. So that's a perfect ama . . . How you say that? There's a word. Not atmosphere. It's another word [amphitheater]. Louis played that. Played, and he could hear himself. If you blow, if it's quiet, you can hear you blowing [Barker sings], and you can hear that.

White: Like an echo?

Barker: That's what I'm talking about. It's a echo. David Jones and he used to get together, and after a while they split, because David Jones was running changes on the horn, not this [? (inaudible)] or this plain. David Jones was running changes, and that's . . . but he was a finished musician. David Jones had been greatly trained with music, and he knew changes. He's running chords. He run chords on the mellophone. It got so that Fate [Marable] would feature him and Louis playing, because that was fascinating to Fate to hear them variations. That's what you got in New Orleans, because they had the different cultures.

So they had this challenge with Louis and David Jones, and David's getting Louis all the time to run changes. That's why you hear Louis could do all them variations. David Jones had a influence on him doing that, because there was a challenge on that boat.

Later on, I saw them, and they never hug one another like they did when they started. They went to Chicago when they, when the weekend excursion they used to have would leave here on Saturday, arrive in Chicago on a Sunday, and then you play at the Warrick

Hall, which was a Louisiana Hall, where all the people, Louisiana people . . . They're great for having halls, like they have here. Never saw David or Louis hug. They said, "Hello. How you doing?" It seemed like David, playing a little smaller, a little softer instrument, didn't have the power, but he had the tonal quality that he run changes. That put Louis on the changes. When he played *Cornet Chop Suey* and all that, he run chord changes. But they don't give . . . Louis was surrounded by great musicians there. Fate Marable, a great piano player. Made a impression on the right ones. It was funny to hear him, because he was like a god on the river. [? (inaudible)] played in Fate Marable's band.

That's how later on David Jones goes to St. Louis, and he joins the Missourians band. He runs them changes. People had never heard nothing like that. Old man that don't got no recognition. But I knew it. I sit in the band with Jones and Collins's band and heard him. One time I was . . . He was playing, and I was playing the right chords, and I went up a half a tone or something. Something I done, it was in harmony, and he looked around at me and smiled, because very few people would have . . . I'm just taking chances, you dig. I had good ears, more ears than eyes, in music. The story goes that David Jones, they opened up the Savoy, or they played the Savoy . . .

White: Jones–Collins?

Barker: No. David Jones with the Missourians. They featured David Jones. All the saxophone players who was in the know went up to hear this phenomenal guy from St. Louis. He wasn't listed as from New Orleans. It was the Missourians, so they say, "There's a cat from St. Louis." But he wasn't from . . . He was from New Orleans. "Man, he's doing something on the horn nobody heard." Coleman Hawkins, all of them. Before they was doing what you call a slap tongue. [Barker makes a clucking noise.] You heard that?

White: Yes.

Barker: You know how to do that?

White: I tried. I can't.

Barker: But you know what I'm talking about?

White: Oh yeah. When you slap your tongue against the reed, it has a popping sound.

Barker: That's what they used to do. You would do more of that than you done variations. David Jones didn't come there with no slap tongue. David Jones run the changes all over the place. There were all the saxophones. Coleman Hawkins was the star in New York, because he was doing the ["cluck cluck cluck" sound]. They told him, you

better go up there and hear that cat from New Orleans. That's how, that's the greatest scene he created. He went up there and heard David Jones, and he listened and he listened and he listened. He got off a couple of nights from Fletcher's band to go up there and hear David Jones. Next when David Jones and them left the Savoy, Coleman Hawkins had a new style. But if you say that, people are going to say to you, Lee Collins taught me that. David Jones stop all that slap tonguing. They start running variations, they call it first. But the New Yorkers call it running changes. Changes, call it that, they call it changes. You know about that?

White: Yeah. It's important that you say that, because a lot of people give . . . they credit people like Coleman Hawkins with starting that on the saxophone, that stuff, and I thought that that had started earlier. Let me ask you this: you think, then, that it was very important, those years that Louis Armstrong spent on the Capitol with Fate Marable's band, because you hear in the middle and late '20s, when he started making his own Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings, him using quite a lot of, running a lot of chords, and playing augmented and diminished chords, and all those things, when not a whole lot of other people were doing that.

Barker: They didn't know nothing about that, especially these people that didn't, wasn't from this culture. You got it, but you didn't get it in the sense of direct. You got it in the moans and groans and the element of the Baptist church. You get sounds in the Baptist church. There are maybe two-, three- hundred people there, and you can hear . . . You hear Brother Jones, if you're familiar with the church, when he comes up with something [Barker moans a melody]. A lament. All kinds of laments you hear. You can tell when Sister Brown or Sister Jackson, when she . . . and they allowed one another to do them things, so they running them changes all the time in the Baptist church, but it's laments, so they're swinging, and the emphasis [Barker sings ". . . gonna meet my Lord, when I get to . . ."]. It's swinging. They clapping hands [He claps a backbeat rhythm]. They don't have no tambourine. The Holy Rollers come in with the tambourine. Then you had a rhythm. But you hear [his clapping continues]. So you're born . . . You're raised up in that. You come up, and Louis had all that. All that went in his horn playing.

White: What religious background did you have coming out? Did you hear all that Baptist sanctified music as a kid?

Barker: Well sure. I went to the Baptist church with my grandmother. Baptist church. Our church was on . . . there was . . . on black Orleans. You know where Orleans, where you're crossing from the [? (inaudible)], where you turn there? You know where the entrance you go into the . . . in the Municipal Auditorium?

White: Yes.

Barker: On Orleans Street?

White: Uh-huh.

Barker: That entrance?

White: Yes.

Barker: Across the street from that was a street. You notice the street where you can park coming from Claiborne Street [North Claiborne Avenue]. You can park, and you can park across the street in a couple of streets over there. Lafitte [Street] and [? Bayou Road]. You know what I'm talking about? [? Bayou Road]. Two streets there. They still there, but they stop at [North] Villere Street. They had a fire . . .

White: Fire station.

Barker: There were streets used to be there.

White: Where the interstate comes down.

Barker: Huh?

White: Where the I-10 comes down now, and there's a fire station?

Barker: Oh, yeah. Now you got it. You see the way the I-10 comes down. O.k. Well it went straight 'til you got to Basin Street. When you turn . . . You remember when Marsalis was here and he went around the square in the corner, or you went to see him, I think. He was second-lining. You know where you turn that corner there?

White: Right.

Barker: O.k. There was a street there, and there was a alley that ran from one of them streets coming down to Rampart Street, and they called that Eclipse Alley. Maybe I can pinpoint it. You see where the . . . you know you come out of Rampart Street, coming uptown, and you turn out St. Peter [Street]. Is it St. Peter? One of them streets there. St. Peter. You make that turn, and you go into Claiborne?

White: Yeah. I know what you're talking about.

Barker: It's before Toulouse [Street]. St. Peter. St. Peter Street, I think.

White: St. Peter is right before Toulouse.

Barker: You know where that . . . at the end of the Jackson Square.

White: There’s Orleans, and then on that other side is . . .

Barker: The lake side. On the other side is St. Peter.

White: St. Peter, and then on the other side is . . .

Barker: St. Ann [Street]?

White: St. Ann.

Barker: St. Ann. You know where you turn there, and you make that little turn and go around? Up in there was . . . across from there, was a place called Eclipse Alley. They got a ware . . . They had a warehouse over there. The warehouse is still there. You park on . . . Is it St. Louis? Yeah. St. Louis Street. By the cemetary? But going downtown, you can go up in that street and they got a warehouse up in there?

White: Right.

Barker: Up in there was this alley. It was the notorious Eclipse Alley. That’s where you’re going to get them ten-cents whores in there. You take a chance, you go up in there. Cats used to take their boys up there, get them a woman. You got a boy and he ain’t acting right, and he’s 18, 17 years old. So you take him. Get him a woman. You know you won’t be bothered. Or he’s bashful with girls. You take him to Mama Luce and she take care of him. Had them women, that was their profession. They used to take care of little boys. They show him what to do.

David. I got away from my subject.

White: David Jones?

Barker: David Jones upset New York with that thing. Everybody stopped slap tonguing. But they don’t give him credit. But Lee Collins used to know all that. Man, that was . . . if he could . . . could have interviewed him.

White: Was David Jones the first one to start doing that, or was he just the first good one?

Barker: No, they had been doing it. What you mean? Variations?

White: Yes. Running changes.

Barker: Variations come out of *High Society*. It was a part of the Creole culture. [Alphonse] Picou. Big Eye Louis [Nelson]. Charlie McCurtis. All them old clarinet players, they played the variations. That's what the instrument is for.

White: So it started on the clarinet and continued into the saxophone.

Barker: That's right. The variations.

White: So you can find evolution in the reed tradition from the role of the clarinet playing arpeggios . . .

Barker: That's what I'm talking about. That was David Jones was the master of that with the mellophone. He done the thing the clarinet players would do. Johnny Dodds was on the boat with him, wasn't he?

White: Yeah. Johnny Dodds. Yeah. Baby Dodds.

Barker: That's where he had a nest, a boomerang, I'd say, to bust out. They were young then, and they were all experimenting. They had all these halls, which you don't have in them other towns. You had 15 to 20 black halls, and that's not counting the clubs. The Lions Club, the Bulls Club, the Saints and Sinners Club. There was another club. There was the Bears Club, or did that . . . that fizzled out. Bulls and bears, as in the stock exchange. They say if the market's good, they call it the bulls, or the bears. It's a term they use in stock [? (inaudible)]. There's some of these black cats that work for the cotton exchange and the sugar exchange. There was big things down here, because Louisiana was a great rice and sugar market. Shipped that rice and sugar all over the world.

I get away from my point. You got to keep me up on my point, what I'm talking about. So that's where the two clubs were called, bulls and . . . cats worked for the . . . it was a term they used, the bulls and the bears. The Bulls continued, became a famous club uptown, the most famous. And the Bears fizzled out.

So you had all these places to play, all this amusement, because people worked hard here, and then they played hard. Worked hard and they played hard, and they . . . there were instruments and there was experiment, because you had all these hell of a trumpet players here. Manuel Perez. King Oliver. Freddie Keppard. Arnold Metoyer.

White: Kid Rena.

Barker: Kid Rena. Buddy Petit. Chris Kelly. Every element of Chicago had its halls. Every element of Chicago had its musicians who played for them halls. You wouldn't expect Chris Kelly to play them funky lowdown blues where Piron played, and Piron wouldn't play the joints where Chris Kelly played, or Kid Rena or Buddy. You

understand? Each level of society had their music. It was a well calculated thing. It was well practiced. Certain musicians played for certain people.

That changed the whole saxophone scene. It was David Jones. That's what Lee Collins tells me, and I could see it. I could see it, how he mastered that tenor saxophone. When I get to New York, I really see what . . . He had started playing here. But New Orleans is never famous for famous tenor players, because this was the clarinet town. Had clarinets after clarinets. Good players who could play. Big Eye Louis. Picou. What's his name? Georgie Boyd. He was a bitch.

White: Did you hear George Boyd?

Barker: Sure. The boy played in my yard with Kid Punch's band.

White: How did he sound? There's not much . . . George Boyd never recorded.

Barker: No. They all had that sound of bending notes, playing the blues and all, but they all played in tune. They never deviated from playing some other notes or bending a note wrong. They played within the context of the music. That's what's got to be watched when you're playing a clarinet. You got to play that [expletive deleted] in tune, because it reflects. You got a problem on a note, [? (inaudible)] if you know it, but you got to play that clarinet in tune. If you play like George Lewis, he was never considered a great clarinet player. He got famous after Bunk Johnson picked him up, and the Englishmen could copy him easy, and the Frenchmen, because he didn't play a conglameration of notes, not real fast. Never played nothing real up in tempo, like Willie Humphrey could do. Willie Humphrey, if you get him, keep your ass back, [expletive deleted], but he's in tune, and you got to watch that. White people, they don't know a whole lot about music, but they put a stamp on you. Told you that once before. Hate to see when they start panning you. They're just waiting 'til you get famous. When you get [? (inaudible)], then they're going to start picking you to pieces. That's what they go for here. And playing in tune. George Lewis and two or three of them other clarinet players around here, of that school. That was the unfinished school. They never [? (inaudible)] George Lewis to go nowhere. He was famous after Bunk picked him up, and they had the nucleus of that band, and that was supposed to be a New Orleans jazz band, but New Orleans musicians never considered George Lewis's band, that whole, that group . . . Jim Robinson wasn't considered as no great trombone player. They was as old as Kid Ory. They ain't never went nowhere. You understand? It's where you went, even if you went on your own. People sent for a band, but they never sent for them people. Lawrence Marrerro, he played a straight strict strict strict beat, half tired, half asleep, plink plink plink plink plink plink plink plink plink plink plink. His brother was a bitch. John.

White: Did John record? John Marrerro?

Barker: John recorded with Piron. I'm not sure. But he could have recorded. Maybe not, because he was a musician that just didn't give a damn whether he played or not. Had a wife that worked, and if he got a gig, it didn't matter, but he always had a choice of all the bands, the best bands. You see him with Piron's band. You see him with Papa Celestin's band, because them two brothers was rated. The old man was supposed to be one of the boss bass players here, Billy Moran [or Morand (?spelling)]. Marrerro. They call him Billy Moran(d?). When they say "Billy Moran's playing," all them bass players run there to see, to listen to him. You ever heard of a musician named "Raddy" Jean Vigne?

White: No.

Barker: Raddy Jean Vigne was the boss of the drummers downtown. Raddy Jean Vigne had a moustache, and he played like this when he played. That's what Baby Dodds got that from. You ever see Baby Dodds?

White: Pictures. Only on pictures.

Barker: He played, when he played, he was [? (inaudible)], like he was dancing with a woman. That come out of ragtime. They kept them snare drums going. Raddy Jean Vigne and his [? (inaudible)] moustache, he's good looking, pretty brown . . . He's a master bricklayer and plasterer. Building trades. He didn't play music for a living. He played, but he had more, make more money than ten bands, because he did all that masonry work in the French Quarter. They call him Raddy Jean Vigne. Baby Dodds and all the great drummers went to see him. I saw him play once in the Cooperator's Hall, and everybody looking. They say 'Raddy Jean Vigne," and I couldn't see what the hell he was doing, because I didn't know. There's quite a few musicians here, you never hear their name, but he was the boss drummer everybody respected. Jean Vigne. They called him "Raddy." Not r-a-t-t-y. It's two words they got there: r-a-d-d-y. Raddy. Raddy means you don't give a damn. Ratty means you do rat things. Say, "He's a rat," you know he's in trouble, out of jail or something. Raddy Jean Vigne, just everything he did, he did with a rhythm. When he walked the street, he walked. "That's Raddy Jean Vigne, Raddy." [Barker snaps his fingers in rhythm.] They can't tell . . . I'm saying this second-hand, because my uncle and them talk about this man, but you never hear them mention his name. He come out of that school with Ernest Trepannier, Alec Bigard, Henry Morton. You ever heard of Henry Morton?

White: Yeah.

Barker: Had the barber shop.

White: Where was that barber shop?

Barker: On Iberville Street. You know where you park behind Krouse?

White: Yes.

Barker: Down the street a little bit, where there's a big [? (inaudible)] going back of town, to the next street after Basin Street, Franklin Street . . . Basin, yeah, Franklin, and the next street. What is that? Liberty?

White: Liberty.

Barker: That street, there's a big parking lot. Go upstairs.

White: Right.

Barker: Right there, that's where his barber shop was. In that block was all them whore houses, sporting houses. Henry Morton and what's his name? Red Dugas. Red Dugas was a drummer. Had a woman had a sporting house, and he didn't do nothing. She wanted her man to rest hisself, because he was always tired. Didn't do nothing. Red Dugas. Looked white. Could have been white, if he wanted to.

White: When you were a kid, did you see . . . did you ever see anything in Storyville or . . . ?

Barker: When I was a kid I used to go in Storyville, because my daddy was in Storyville.

White: That's where he lived?

Barker: That's where he lived. He had a woman, Miss Celie, who had a rooming house. She had a house. That house, it doesn't stand there no more. You know where the [?Jeune] Hotel was?

White: Yes.

Barker: It's new. Got another name now.

White: The Clarion.

Barker: Across the street from the Clarion, there's buildings there now. It was a row of houses, and when you go in above Canal [Street], you go to the next street. It wasn't Gravier [Street] then. It was called Gasket Street. Gasket and [South] Liberty [streets], Gasket, Marais [Street], Gasket, [?Villere], Gasket, [?Poydras]. All up in there was the uptown side of the red light district. It was black and white over there, all the way to Claiborne Street. Claiborne Street and you went back there, and where Louis was, right

here, that was the battlefield. Gravier, Perdido [streets]. Perdido and Bolivar [streets], back then. When they say "Perdido and Bolivar," that was a honky tonk. That's where the renegades went out there. Rough people. Rough women. That's what Louis come up with. They had a dump back there. People talk about that dump. It was at [South] Galvez and [South] Miro [streets] and Gravier and Perdido. That was the battlefield. They had this big dump back there. Open space where they had all kinds of [expletive deleted]. When the wagon would come, the people would go out there to see what they dumping. The reason for that was they had . . . the United States, they used to bring stuff in this country. According to the customs, you could not bring that in this country. It wasn't made right, or it was contaminated, or it was considered . . . they didn't have the right things in there to protect people in America, because you have to drink different kinds of water. You can't . . . all that kind of business. Stuff come from all the world. From India, everywhere. They sent it here to America. Try to get a market. They would condemn it for various reasons, and they had all this cargo. They bring it out and they throw it on the dump. These people in that area went out there on the dump and get all this stuff. All kinds of food goods. Something that's perishable.

So what was that about?

White: We were talking about some of the musicians in New Orleans and your travels before you went with the big bands. You had mentioned the last time that you went on up to New York in 1930, right?

Barker: 1929.

White: '29, to stay with your uncle Paul, and he brought you . . .

Barker: No. No. That's . . . I went on a excursion. Used to have excursions. I'd go from New Orleans to Chicago. L & N. No, the Illinois Central. You went up to Chicago. Train be loaded with people go to visit their people for the weekend. That's the first time, the second time I went to Chicago. I went to Chicago. That's 1928 or '29. I went to Chicago first 1921. Paul was playing with King Oliver's band. You dig how far back that ten-year period is?

White: Pretty far.

Barker: From '20 to '30. King Oliver had his career. You have your career in music for a certain length period of time, and then you phase out. Very few bands have kept on persist. There was Duke [Ellington], because he paid his own band out of his own royalties, I think. Should have made, had millions from his royalties, but he spent that money to keep his band together best he could, because he couldn't play the major hotels like the rest of these people. But the man was devoted to his music, and he paid out his own royalties to keep his band going.

Guy Lombardo was a perennial favorite at the Roosevelt Hotel. That was part of his deal. I had the pleasure of playing there with a band. They wanted a banjo. Herb Mann, a Jewish friend of mine, he told me, he say, "The man said he wanted a banjo. I said, 'I know a banjo player, but he's colored.' He say, 'I don't care what he is, if it's a Chinaman. Can he play the banjo?'" He said, "Yeah, he can play. He swings." So he called me, say, "Call him. He said, 'Call me'." I rushed down there to the Roosevelt Hotel. It was a band. This guy. Can't think of his name. He used to work, had been working at them excursion boats. World-wide. What they call them boats, that you go there from . . .? On the cruise ships.

White: Cruise ships, yeah.

Barker: On cruise ships. By that, he had worked, had all kinds of musicians he played with at different times. People would quit or they'd leave or you'd fire them, and you'd get the best you could on a ship. Did that for years. When I walked up, he was there waiting for me. I had to walk that whole hall at the Roosevelt, coming to the stand, and I got my banjo. Everybody looked at me like, scanning me, and I walked up and said, "Hello." He said, "Hello. How are you? Welcome to the band. Come on in. Take your chances. Maybe we can try this." I fell in. Well, [expletive deleted], there wasn't nothing hard for me there, and I played with him there. They had a Brazilian piano player. They had a Cuban drummer, the greatest of drummers. Can't think of his name. Joe something. He gave my wife a ukulele. Got the ukulele up here. One of the finest ukuleles you can buy, a Martin. Him, and they had a hell of a trombone player and saxophone player and clarinet player. I played there 'til it closed.

White: Why did you first go to Chicago in 1921?

Barker: My uncle Paul Barbarin was with King Oliver. He sent for his mother to come up. She said, "I'll take Willie." That's my uncle. He's two years older than me. I'm what? 10. Willie's 12. So I started crying, "I want to go." So they talked about it. Said all right. You take me too, so there's two of us. My grandmother and my grandfather and me [?(inaudible)] and Willie, my uncle, we go to Chicago. Paul. I'm there. I'm hearing music all the time, because Chicago's a all-night town. Speakeasy town. Me and Willie would get up six o'clock in the morning and walk around the South Side. There was two clubs there. Had a hell of a entertainer. He was a drummer. I can't think of his name. It'll come to me. Ollie. Ollie Powers. Put that name in. A big thing in Chicago jazz. Ollie Powers used to sing. Ollie Powers. And there was another club where Tony Jackson was. You see when you walk the streets, just about the ground is the sidewalk floor. There was a window. You could look down in the building. Me and my uncle used to go in there, Willie, lay on our stomach and watch the people in the cabaret. People couldn't see us, but we be looking. This is 7 o'clock in the morning, and these people in there balling, and you look on the street, people going to school, people going to work, and we're up in the

[? (inaudible)], laying on our stomach. You see the men kissing the women, feeling on the women. You see the band playing. I was looking at Ollie Powers and Tony Jackson in another club.

White: Tony Jackson, the famous piano player?

Barker: The great piano player. Yeah.

White: From here? Who composed *Pretty Baby*?

Barker: Yeah.

White: So you go to see King Oliver. Did you hear . . . you heard his band?

Barker: I never heard King Oliver's band in Chicago. They show you a picture where he played in a ball park. You seen that picture in one of them books?

White: Yes.

Barker: As far as me going to the club, I didn't go. It was Savoy and Royal Gardens. The Royal Gardens is something else. What they call it now? Not the Savoy. It was the Royal Gardens.

White: Kelly's Stable?

Barker: No. That's something else. There was a white club. There was . . . I almost had it. It wasn't the Savoy. It was the Royal Gardens, and what's another club? It was the same club, changed their name.

White: Lincoln Gardens.

Barker: That's one and the same. The Savoy and the Lincoln. I played there when we went to Chicago on the excursion. We played there. I told you David Jones just waved at Louis. Never come and hugged like two long lost brothers. And Louis always held that in to him, I guess. Their old grudges. Last time I seen David Jones, I working at Lee Collins's band. Never made no money with that band. All we did was flop. Nobody came out, because Lee Collins had competition there. Papa Celestin was out there. Chris Kelly was out there. Kid Rena was out there. Buddy Petit was in and out of town. [? (inaudible)] he's away, over there in Bogalousa somewhere, shacking up with some woman. He leave his wife here without no food, and she's gonna send something, but he don't send nothing. He go out and stay five, six weeks and come back and expect to get big welcome, but he ain't coming home with no money.

White: Let me ask you this. When you . . . after you . . . you went to Chicago first in 1921. When was the next time you went?

Barker: ’29. Went there with Lee Collins and David Jones.

White: Where did you play in Chicago?

Barker: We played at the Warrick Hall, because they gave a dance. Professor Cook. You ever heard of him?

White: Yeah.

Barker: Professor Cook was also a promoter. He was sort of a leader of the black entertainer. Lyric Theater, New Orleans, Rampart Street. Famous Professor Cook.

White: Was that the guy also known as Doc Cook, who had a Dreamland?

Barker: No. No. Doc Cook is a famous musician who had a great band. Jimmie Noone and Freddie Keppard was in his band. They call him Doc Cook.

White: What was Professor Cook’s first name?

Barker: Professor Cook? I don’t know his first. It’ll come to me, but I ain’t, we ain’t go time to find it. It’s two different Cooks. One couldn’t read no music and barely could read and write. That was Professor Cook. Doc Cook was a man who had different degrees from music, higher bred and higher learned and highly calculated. He ended up going to New York City and was a staff arranger for NBC.

White: How long did you play in Chicago?

Barker: Played just one night, which was a Sunday night. I played. Louis came by.

White: Louis Armstrong.

Barker: Louis came by.

White: Was that the first time you met him or did you know him in New Orleans?

Barker: That was the first time I saw him in person. I’d heard of him. You saw his picture all over the place. It was just like you knew him, because my uncle Paul knew him. You understand? Louis claimed Paul was his best drummer he worked with. Paul used to get on his horse behind him. Them drums. Had a ride thing he did, like this. You got to . . . [Barker evidently demonstrates a drum posture] . . . You see some drummers

do that. That was part of Paul's routine. Part of Raddy Jean Vigne's routine. Raddy Jean Vigne wasn't going nowhere with no Mickey Mouse man, don't know if the contract's . . . he was above all that. He was a contractor. He had a fine house, I imagine, because he was in the building trade. I saw him, but I never heard no more of him, because you never hear nobody mention about him.

White: What was the name of the club you were with David Jones?

Barker: The Warrick Club. That's in Chicago. It's still there.

White: And Louis Armstrong walked in.

Barker: He came in, because that was his home boys, because everybody from Louisiana knew there was a excursion coming from New Orleans, because these people was bringing food up there to them people. Not that they was hungry, but they couldn't get the same red beans up there. You got their lima beans. That's a 12-hour ride and a pickled pork meat or whatever. Or coffee the way they have it. Anything they had here. Or they sent them a big old box of chicken. They've cooked that . . . They cook it here. Everybody in Chicago knew the Warrick Hall was the headquarters of New Orleans activities.

White: What did Armstrong first say to you, or what did you first say to him?

Barker: He didn't say. He just waved at the band. He come in, everybody crowd him. There's Louis. [Expletive deleted], you couldn't get to him. It was 10-deep around him. He'd inch his way. "Come on in, Louis." He was a hero, man, [expletive deleted]. They come to the front of the stand, and they talking and they making over him, and he's going for that. He like that. He's smiling, "Hey, hey." Laughing, "That's what I . . . What you say?" Everybody's trying to get his, shake his hand, like they do a hero. So they said, "Play us something, Pops. Play us something, Pops." There was a horn there. There was a band that played. We played also, but there was a band there playing. They had a little trumpet player supposed to be a bitch in Chicago. He . . . His horn was there, see. So my mother . . . so what? . . . he said. . . So they said, "Give me . . . give me that . . . get that horn for Louis." It was right there. So I just took the horn and handed it to the people. I didn't think nobody would begrudge Louis Armstrong blowing their horn. That was a honor for the [? (inaudible)]. Boy. [laughter] Louis played *When You're Smiling*. Blowing. It tore up the house. They're still screaming. So when we got off, the band come on, and I don't know how the horn got back to the stand. So this little guy told me, this trumpet player said, "Who told you to give Louis Armstrong my [expletive deleted] horn? What you do? Why? Man, that is vicious, boy," that I handed Louis the horn. I didn't think it was . . . I thought the horn was blessed, like the Pope had blessed it. [laughter]. He's going to raise all that. "Why you . . ." So Lee Collins say, "Aw, man. Come on, man. Don't talk to this fool." Lee Collins. This little guy about so high. Lee

Collins six feet tall. “Come on, man. Talk to this fool who don’t want Armstrong to play his horn. That horn is got a smile on its face. It never, first time it’s really been played.” Or some kind of remark like that. And that’s it. I can’t think of his name. He was supposed to be a great trumpet player around Chicago. [Milt] Hinton knew his name. I tell Hinton about it. Hinton say he was a evil little [expletive deleted].

So that was Louis’s deal. Louis went to the table with all them fast-living people, them pimps and them sporting women from New Orleans. They brought all that from New Orleans to Chicago. Whole families moved over there, was involved in the meat business. I enjoyed that stay.

White: That was just one night that you all played. Then you came to New Orleans?

Barker: Came back to New Orleans. Yeah. It was a excursion. Come back . . . You come back on a Tuesday. You left on a Friday and you came back on a Tuesday.

White: The next time you went up North, after . . .

Barker: I come back here and was married and I got a house and furniture, and I’m working at El Alamo. That’s at Canal and Burgundy [streets], over that Woolworth’s store. There was a dime a dance joint up there. I worked there for about a year. I quit. Got tired of it, because of the . . . you had . . . you play from 8 ’til 1 continuously. You get a break of 10 minutes on the hour, each man, but that music never stops, because the hustle was a dime a dance. you got to keep them girls dancing. I quit, and I went with Lee Collins and David Jones. That band, at the Astoria. That’s at Gravier and Rampart [streets]. You remember? You don’t remember, because that’s been torn down.

White: I read about it. So then you went up to New York?

Barker: No. We’re playing. We ain’t doing nothing. We go on the road and come back stranded two or three times. Got that rent to pay. Them people don’t want to hear nothing about where you’ve been on the road and all that business. Man want his rent. So my uncle Paul called down and asked how I was doing, because he’s like a father to me. Said, “Tell him I’m’a call him, call on him. I want to talk to him.” I got on the phone. We talked. Can’t go into details on that, but we talked. He said, “What’cha doing?” I said, “I ain’t doing nothing.” Said, “It’s rough.” He said, “Why don’t you come up here?” See, this is 1930. The Depression hadn’t hit New York like it hit Chicago. New York is a business town, like typewriters and writing paper. But Chicago’s the stockyard, Armour’s packing company, Swifts, [? (inaudible)], them big packing companies. Wrigley Spearmint gum and all them. Kellogg’s Corn Flakes. All that from the wheat fields of the West. All kinds of big factories there that manufacture. The bread basket of the United States, Chicago. So there’s always work there. A lot of black wents there because they was always need help in the slaughterhouse. Packing meat, smoking meat, salting meat.

So I go to New York. Now there's Chick Webb on the Savoy. Fletcher Henderson is at Roseland. And Jelly Roll had left Rosemont. There was Charlie Johnson at Smalls' Paradise. Fats Waller was in Connie's Inn. Chick Webb was on the Savoy. Charlie Johnson was at Smalls' Paradise. The city just lit up with musicians. People . . . it is the beginning of the fall. It's September or October. Everybody's well dressed, well groomed, wearing the fashion clothes. In the evening everybody going to the restaurant down Seventh Avenue, Lexington Avenue. You see all these people, prim and proper. This is not the South. This is the East. There were hamburg hats. They walking in their overcoats. In New York, there come September, about September the 15th, Hawkins comes in. Hawkins is the wind. They call, "Hawkins blew last night." Hawkins is the wind from the . . . What's that cape? No. Hudson Bay. Hudson Bay is right in the center of the country? It's a big bay you see there. Hudson River comes out somewhere up in there. But that's where . . . It's bigger than a state. If I had a map, you could see it. They say, "Hawkins is here." You hear the wind blow. [Barker whistles.] It's getting colder. The summer's . . . People come in with overcoats on. There's a scarf, and they wearing spats on their shoes, and they got gloves. Big wool scarves. Hawkins is arriving. For about two weeks, he begin to hear that wind. [Barker whistles.]

You can get that down, what I'm doing? You can hear somebody, right?

White: Yeah, you can hear it.

Barker: Second day I was there they brought me to the Rhythm Club, Red Allen and my uncle. Introduced me to some musicians. He said, "It takes time." He had patience, Paul. He said, "It takes time, but you get to know the guys, and don't be discouraged, because you can play. You got the rhythm. You got the feel. You from home. You play like you play at home, and you'll be all right." He introduced me to Alphonso Steele. Alphonso Steele was up in his forties then. Alphonse Steele was a little guy. You'll see him on a picture I got here. I'll show you some time. He knew everything. He was from St. Augustine, Florida. His family got in some trouble in the South, and they migrated to New York. St. Augustine, Florida. That's where he was from. So Paul said . . . He introduced me to Steele. Steele say, "Yeah, you're going to do good here, kid." [? (inaudible)] on a cigar. Said, "Yeah, you're going to do good here, kid." Got his Chesterfield coat. "Yeah, you'll do all right." Big [? (inaudible)]. Medium [? (inaudible)] drummer. He was originally a waiter, but he played drums too. He played a little funky butt piano. He could play enough piano to play a party. He was into music, but he made his money as a waiter. Then later on he start playing drums full. So he said, "Yeah, you . . . don't worry about it. I'm going to introduce you to the right people. I'm'a tell you who's the cats and who's the dogs." That's the way he talked. That was Steele. Steele used to tell me everything. He showed me everything. Everything I wanted to know, I asked Steele, and Steele would tell me. And when he say, "See Jelly Roll on the corner, talking." I say, "Yeah." "See Jelly Roll. He's a great musician, but he talks too much.

He's great, but he talks too much. He get on your nerves. I don't want to hear him talk about what he did and what he didn't do." Jelly Roll talk what he was doing that nobody knew nothing about. Jelly Roll was from New Orleans, and he had heard great jazz, where these people in New York didn't know nothing about no jazz. They never knew about getting down. You grab a woman and do your thing. He was in a hurry, so they say, from the adage of New Orleans, you don't want to be in no hurry with no woman and all that jumping around. Get her close to you, breast to breast, bosom to bosom, belly to belly, and you dance with your woman. Up there they in a hurry, or they're too proper. The woman's here and you over there. You're holding her from a distance. Right here you grab on right. First thing you try to get as close as you can, in a sneaky sort of way. You try to bring her in. [laughter]

You seen all that. There's a corner in New York, 131st, '32nd, '33rd, '34th Street, and Seventh Avenue. That's where the Lafayette Theater was. There was Connie's Inn there. There was the Madhouse there. There was the Rhythm Club this street, and the Band Box around the corner. Everybody, the show girls, the show women, all the show people, when they came out, they came around Big John's. It was Prohibition then. Up in between the alley and the Lafayette hall, there was a alley up in there. Good size. You could pull a cart through. Up in there was Big John's. It was a speakeasy. He had some kind of in with the law. All the performers used to hang in there, and he sold booze across the bar, which was against the law down here, but in New York they overlook it, because average New York, when you get there, they ain't from New York anyhow, so they don't know about what's too wrong, because you go there and you get your whipping. It's lots like going to fight Muhammad Ali, going to New York, because they're punching at you from all angles, because you don't know.

White: A lot of . . . You say they had musicians from all over. There were . . . What was happening in jazz then? Were most of the jazz musicians from different places, parts of the country?

Barker: Yeah, they came from . . . Bands come there and break up. The Missourians come there, and they broke up. Alabamians come there, and they about to break up. Ike Dixon, that band from Baltimore, they came there and went back to Baltimore. Zach Whyte, the Cotton Pickers. All them bands is coming into New York, because out of New York, there's the only place you heard there was, on the radio, was Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway, and then the Savoy put on a program. That's the only place where you could hear a colored band on the radio. On a station called WJZ, which was a affiliate of WNBC. Everybody came there, because that's the only place. They left Chicago to come to New York. Sammy Stewart come to New York. Had a great band in Chicago in a theater. Come there and it fizzled out. Big Sidney [Catlett]. He brought all them people there. All them musicians you read about, a lot of them came to New York and got stranded.

White: Was Armstrong in New York at that time?

Barker: Armstrong was in Chicago and he was making one-night stands, and he come . . . he had been . . . when I got there, he had been to New York in Hot Chocolates. It was a Broadway show which was a hit. Fats Waller and Andy Razaf wrote the music. *Ain't Misbehavin', What did I do to be so black and blue,* all them songs. The show closed, and then Louis got in trouble with them gangsters. They wanted to control him, and they suggest that he leave, and he went over to Europe, and he stayed over there almost two years. I'm talking about around 1932 and '33. But you still got the Savoy. Chick Webb's up there, waiting for these bands. You get a booking in the Savoy, then you had to face Chick Webb. You come there playing a New Orleans tempo or a Georgia tempo or the Southern Syncopators and different bands from Memphis. Big bands. They come in, various names, if you look through the thing, archives, you see the names of them bands. They came there, and they go to the Savoy and play, and they didn't know the tempos of the Savoy, which was the Lindy-hoppers was there. They would dance. If you didn't play their tempos, they just look at you. That's where Chick Webb and King Oliver had this battle. It was a night that King Oliver and Chick Webb had a battle of music. They had the truck go around, like I tell in my book. The truck used to go around playing the music, advertising the Savoy. Chick Webb and Paul and them, and King Oliver, they got this battle of music. First set, King Oliver played. The second set, nobody danced. They looked. They didn't say nothing. A little jive applause. Then Chick Webb come in, and announce Chick Webb. Big applause. Chick went on and went through that tempo. [Barker imitates a fast hi-hat cymbal rhythm.] Start that Lindy-hop. That was them people's rhythm. King Oliver don't know . . . if he knows about it, he could do it.

[recording engineer:] This is Danny Barker, tape 3.

White: You had a lot of associations with New Orleans musicians up there.

Barker: There weren't that many. The ones who were there, they were working with bands. I was the only one out there by myself. All the musicians was mad about New Orleans musicians, because they were innovators. Al Morgan come in. The first day he was there. Next day he was with the McKinney's Cotton Pickers. From McKinney's Cotton Pickers he went with Cab Calloway. All that in three months, because he played bass. They had never heard no bass player like that. They just were beginning to play the bass in 1930, because Pops Foster had upset New York with the bass the way he slapped it, and him and [Wellman] Braud, they were the first two to bring orchestra bass into swing. Wellman Braud went with Duke Ellington, was with Duke Ellington. You couldn't get a chance to get to Braud, because it was a white club in a black section. Very few black people went to the Cotton Club. Not that they wanted to go, because the nightclub was a dull sort of a place. Smalls' Paradise was a nightclub which swung. Then

there was the Savoy. Then there was the Renaissance. Aw man, and there was a dozen others places with every element of black people. You get a chance to see all them people. West End the people hang out in one . . . certain bars. The black Cubans hang out in another bar. The Barbadans hang out in another. People from Virginia hang out in another bar. They had all that. People went to the source of their pleasures and their relations.

What was that first question?

White: I was asking you about the . . .

Barker: . . . the New Orleans musicians.

White: Yeah, in New York.

Barker: There wasn't that many.

White: Did you meet Sidney Bechet up there?

Barker: You heard of Sidney Bechet. Sidney Bechet is in Europe. You heard, but he had made that famous record where he was running changes when nobody ever heard it. The *Wild Man Blues.* You ever heard of that?

White: Um-hm.

Barker: Or the *Wild Cat Blues.*

White: *Wild Cat.* Yeah.

Barker: That was a famous record, was a sensational hit. He played the soprano, which most musicians, saxophone, didn't fool with, because they say you couldn't play it in tune. But Sidney Bechet played it in tune, if you want to consider that. And he played it masterful, because he had been a broken-hearted trumpet player, cornet player. He could play a little cornet. He made a record playing all instruments, didn't he?

White: Quite a few, yeah. Called his one-man band. *Sheik of Araby* and some other.

Barker: That is the story of that. But I was there alone. Who . . . anytime you hit that corner or them street corners, '30 street [130th Street], '31st, '32nd, '33rd on Seventh Avenue, and you come there, they can tell you ain't from there, because you don't wear the clothes they're wearing. You got on them little Southern clothes, them little suits that they have down here, and the wind is blowing Hawkins, cut that corner, "Hawkins," they say. [Barker whistles.] "Hear that wind, boy, blowing. Cats . . ." You got one of them

little Mickey Mouse coats on. You got to get your lead sheet. That's what Steele said. No. "You got to get rid of that lead sheet. Got to get a full arrangement, man." That's the way Steele talked. My tutor. My mentor. He say, "You got . . . see that little flimsy suit. You catch pneumonia up there with that. You got to get on some long drawers. Get some bull [? (inaudible)]." Say, "Not cotton. You get wool bull [? (inaudible)]." Say, "It's a difference, because I'm from the South. I'm telling you I know." That's the way he talked to me. He cued me to a whole lot of shortcuts.

He's my friend. Then McGhee comes up. Herbert Morand's little brother. We come up together. He comes up. He's a little deaf, and he's got a temper. He didn't like to take no instructions. He had a temper, and he would punch in a minute. He could punch King Kong. If you make him mad, he would go upside your head. He knocked Bechet down. He beat two, three other musicians. Tell him, "Man, tighten up the drummer some." "Do I tell you how to tighten up your act? Why you want to tell me?" Then he get close to you. He talking to you and he moving in on you. "Why would you tell me when you say . . . you tell me how to play? Do I tell you how to play my instrument?" He's right on you. When you say, "Well I . . ." [Barker makes the sound of a loud punch.] Out. He laying on the floor. He knock you out. Sneaky, sneaky. [laughter]. By the time you get up to get some water . . . He could fool around a boxing ring, so he know where to hit you on a certain way, hit a man on his jaw. That's why they go for . . . see this bone up here. They go for that bone and knock your brain out. The vibration. [Barker makes another punching sound.] He's there.

Every time I get a job, I'm making all rehearsals, bands. "Yeah, he play pretty good, the kid." I'm playing the banjo, but the banjo's going out. There's a story behind that banjo, to the guitar. Guitars is coming in. In New Orleans you had a banjo, and the banjo set the rhythm, the harmony for the foundation of the band. But in New York it was a piano player and playing on guitars. What was the rest of that question?

White: I was just asking you about the musicians you were associated with up there, and you were telling me about different people. What about . . .

Barker: Making new friends up there.

White: . . . Albert Nicholas? James P. Johnson?

Barker: Albert Nicholas is working with Red Allen, Pops Foster, Paul Barbarin, in Luis Russell's band, who [Russell] was a Panamanian piano player. Came through here. They treated him nice here. He had a band in Tom Anderson['s New Cabaret and Restaurant, New Orleans]. He's a very sweet gentleman, and he's nice, nice smile, always got a smile. It's a [expletive deleted] smile. Always got a smile. He'd get in tune. A good piano player. He comes to New Orleans. He got jazz. Then he got the Panamanian rhythms, so he could play funky. He knows about shaking and having a loose, moving body, because

he's from down there with them gutbucket people in Panama. You got them barrelhouse people all over the world. In Chinatown. In China they got some Chinamens that swing out.

You're with them people, and Barney Bigard and Braud. You got something to look forward to. Barney Bigard and Wellman Braud are with Duke Ellington. That's the top band. That's in the Cotton Club. Cotton Club is like heaven of jazz in them days. Then you got Red Allen, Pops Foster, Albert Nicholas, Paul Barbarin in Luis Russell's band. That's a New Orleans band. Braud was upsetting all the bass players. When they get a chance to see him, they trying to find out what he's doing with that bass. Duke Ellington's putting out them records, and you heard it, if you heard the early Ellington records, you hear that bass. He just took Sonny Greer with him, because Sonny Greer didn't know New Orleans jazz. He had a big mouth, so he would talk, but Braud would just take him, override him. It goes like this, playing that bass, man. He'd take Sonny and Duke with him, and Freddie Guy. If you hear one of them records, like, what's the name? Name some of them.

White: *The Mooche*?

Barker: Yeah, *The Mooche,* but them fast movement. *St. Louis Toodle-oo* and them kind of things. You hear Braud. He's just a musician. You can dig that. He just take that tempo where he feel it should go. Duke didn't mind, because there was energy given, and it made his band swing, that had never swung before. The same thing was happening with Pops Foster with Luis Russell. The place, the Saratoga club where they're working, was loaded with bass players. All kinds of bass players. Come there playing tubas. They come there to see how to get with that bass fiddle. A lot of them fizzled out, didn't play no more, because their fingers got blisters on it. They didn't know how to work with that. You play bass, you got to develop a thick callous on your . . .

White: Fingertips.

Barker: Yeah. You use tape. Tape your fingers. But you always had trouble until you get that big callous. Then you don't have no more trouble. And they didn't have amplification then. Braud used to tape up his fingers and pull that whole band with him. Pops Foster had a certain tape he used to keep from getting them blisters and them pus in your fingers, 'til the amplifiers come in, and they put a pickup on a bass. That relieved everything. Now they got . . . they got something now that they . . . what's that hell of a bass player? You see him with everybody. He sits down and plays. Play with no effort. He don't even hurt his fingers, they way they got that rigged now. You play like a touch system.

That's the people are there. They looking at me. They see me, and they know what I'm doing. I'm there. I just come there, in New York. You don't see Barney, because after

they leave the Cotton Club around 4 o'clock, 3:30, they go to Big John's, which is a bar where the chorus girls hang out all over New York. All the performers all hang out. The place be packed and jammed like this inside, and outside on the street is all these performers talking shop 'til daybreak. Seven, eight o'clock in the morning, they still there. They go home and go to sleep and [expletive deleted], to make their show that night. So you see all these people. Steele was pointing out everybody to me. "Who's that?" "That's Will Marion Cook. That's . . ." Big names, he be calling the people. I didn't know who they are, but I know they're carrying some weight. Jelly Roll was on the corner, talking. People pass Jelly Roll, all them knowledgeable people, they talk he talk too much, but they would provoke him. He went for that. He liked the stage. Jelly Roll be on the corner talking to a bunch of people.

There's three shifts in New York. That's the 7 'til . . . 7 'til what is eight hours? 7 in the morning.

White: 3.

Barker: 'til 3. Yeah, that's a shift in New York. And there's a shift from 4 to . . . eight . . . 'til 11. That's another shift. Talking about working people.

White: 4 'til what? 12? Or 3 to 11?

Barker: Whatever it is. From 4 in the evening 'til . . . eight hours. That's another shift.

White: 12.

Barker: And at night you see people going to work from 12 . . . they getting, going to the subway . . . from 12 to what? to 4 . . . 'til 8. That's three shifts. That's what's going around all, because New York is a night and day town. You see some office buildings in New York City when you go there, 3 o'clock in the morning you see it's lit up, because them people are [? (inaudible)] to business, how to calculate their business. So you got all these black people who are always looking for pleasure when they get through from work, the ones who work from what in the morning? 8 'til 4 or something.

White: 8 in the morning?

Barker: They pull eight hours. At what time? 8 'til what? 8 'til 4?

White: 8 to 4?

Barker: All right. After 4, you see them out in the street. They go in and ball, have their fun maybe four, five hours, and go home and go to sleep, or go to their wife, or go home and come out. That the shift you see in routines. Nobody tells you that, but you see that.

But when you get some day work, you understand about that. They call . . . what you call shifts. That's what you're seeing. In the morning you see all these people going, rushing to work, and you see all these schoolchildren going to school, and then you look around, and you see all these cats coming out of basements of buildings. They're coming out of the basements of these buildings. When they open the door, the smoke come out. Look like the place was on fire or smoking. You see all this smoke. Everybody there smoking. You wonder why they don't suffocate now, but after years later, you realize all the nightclubs you sit in and inhale all that smoke, so you . . . go ahead.

White: How did you get started? Who did you play with, the first bands that you played with, and how did you get into playing in the big bands?

Barker: The big bands are there. They got what? They're coming to New York. They're being built up. Billy Fowler's band. Bud Harrison's band. Charlie Johnson's band. McKinney's Cotton Pickers band. Fletcher Henderson's band. Horace Henderson's band. [Vernon] Andrade . . . Andrade . . . what's the one? The Renaissance Ballroom. He had a good band. Al Morgan and a couple of New Orleans . . . Zutty worked with him a while.

White: Zutty Singleton?

Barker: Yeah. There's what? Ike Dixon from Baltimore. There's Frankie Fairfax from Philadelphia. There was another great band out of Philadelphia. That's . . . what's his name? Zach Whyte was another band, Western band. They're all coming into New York. There's Bennie Moten come to New York. Don Albert come to New York. There's the Southland Syncopators, come out of Florida. There's gangs of bands, man. They call them territory bands. They come to New York, and they come, they're all wild eyed. I had got to be a New Yorker now. I'm watching the behavior of these cats. The bus pull up, or you go there and you see a bus pull up, and the guys get out the bus, and they're looking around like rabbits out of a cage. "This is New York. That there's the Lafayette Theater. There. Now that's Connie's Inn." And I'm with Steele or somebody, looking. I'm a New Yorker now. I'm looking. I see some cats I know I've seen before. Some musicians go from band to band to band. There's a saxophone player named [?Pierce], played baritone like a white boy. He played with everybody's band at one time. You see him with . . . what's the band from Savoy? Had a sister named Ella? Johnson. He became a preacher after the Savoy. Buddy Johnson's band. It was a swinging band. Had a lot of music. You heard that band?

White: I've heard the name.

Barker: Buddy Johnson had a band out of New York. He had a lot of . . . three or four New Orleans musicians in that band, stayed with the band their whole career. All of a sudden he decided to get religion and he put the band down. But he worked at the Savoy.

He looked just like that boy. Every time I see him I think of Buddy Johnson. You know the boy that play all them instruments, the bagpipe and all that?

White: James Rivers.

Barker: Look just like James Rivers. They could be twins.

So you're there and you're seeing all that. There's Broadway. You go down to Broadway. My uncle Paul is a songwriter, and I go down to Broadway with him. I done made a dozen trips playing them dancing schools, making auditions. They had a whole lot of auditions, these people making auditions. You see guys trying to get a band together. [?Bass Gillins]. They play them dancing schools. Their whole career they're in New York, but they never get with a big famous band. They play all them other little joints. Little funky nightclubs, and they . . . and jazz joints. You see them people. They're working all the time. You get introduced to them maybe ten times before they realize, "Oh, I met you before. Yeah." You've been introduced to them.

What was your question?

White: I wanted to know, how did you get with the big bands and who were the first bands you . . . ?

Barker: You had rehearsals with big bands all the time. You got these performers start getting big bands. After Cab Calloway, Ralph Cooper got a band. Tiny Bradshaw got a band. Lucky Millinder got a band. Eddie . . . can't think of his name. Must have been about 30 or 40 people had bands. They're trying. They want to get a hit song, but they ain't had the sense to try to get a tricky or a clever theme song that everybody should start . . . Cab Calloway had "Hi-de hi-de hi-de ho, he-de he-de he-de he." Fats Waller had his things. You need material. You need theme songs. You need songs that give you . . . you identify with.

White: Which was the first band that you played with like that? The first big band?

Barker: First big band was Luis Russell. Guitar player, Bill Johnson, used to get drunk, to the annoyance of Paul and Pops Foster. I'm there. So Bill Johnson don't show up or some [expletive deleted], so they send for me. But Luis Russell knew I'm a kid. He's looking for names in his band. I don't have no name, you understand? He's looking for a name. He want to get Lee Blair, who had been with Jelly Roll, or Jeff Williams and different hell of a guitars players who had changed from guitar to banjo. I just had changed from. I didn't tell you the story of my banjo, or did I?

White: Yes. Last time.

Barker: So I'm scuffling with the guitar. New York's not no place to go there to practice. When you get to New York, you're supposed to have your gun cocked and ready to shot. You don't come there going in the woodshed. When they pulled the rug from under me by stealing my banjo, I had to learn the guitar right away. The only way I learn it is by watching, because there's a lot of people . . . I went to teachers, and they sleeping, or they want too much to teach, or they don't want to be bothered. Selfish people, don't want to share nothing. So you have to go and watch and get books and listen to what Eddie Lang and them people is doing. And what . . . Truehart was the boss of the rhythm guitar players. Everybody went to hear Truehart with Chick Webb. They had a lifting rhythm they played, and the way he invert them chords, and you can hear it. It wasn't amplified. That band was swinging. Everybody, you go to Savoy and there were what?, 20 guitar players, standing in front of the bandstand, watching Truehart. He knew what was happening. He was a nice fellow. I know some guitar players turned around. They didn't want you to see nothing. Had some hell of a guitar players. I tried to get me a few lessons. Say they ain't got time. They didn't want to share nothing. Later on I see them, and they say, "Hello, Dan. How you . . ." I say, "Oh yeah. See you later man." I drop that same [expletive deleted] on them. I'm with Cab Calloway then, which every guitar player in America, white or black, would like to be with Cab Calloway.

White: Why's that?

Barker: Because of the money. That's why. Money first. Work every week. Two jobs. Work the Cotton Club and play in the theater in daytime. Play the Paramount, the Grand, and the Lowes. You play them theaters in Brooklyn. You can play about six weeks around New York The Bronx has a couple of theaters. Brooklyn. Yonkers. Queens. All them theaters. People, loaded with people. Theaters. You play that. Cab Calloway was doing all that. He had a band. He had [Albert] Socarras's band, a great Cuban flute player. He had eight-piece band that played, open a show . . . open a club and 10 o'clock, and they played 'til 11 o'clock. Intermission in between. 11 o'clock. They played 'til 12. They put on a little light show. Cab, wherever he was, arrived at this with a police escort. They brought him to Harlem to the Cotton Club. Closed that show where he played in the theater and go right on stage. Valet have a new suit of clothes for him. He showered real quick. Get hisself together. Go out and do his show. He do them two shows. Then he go home and go to sleep. Or go in a hotel, if he were living . . . He didn't . . . He wasn't living in Yonkers then. That's [? (inaudible)] suburb. That's like Jefferson Parish. He would go in and be ready to hit that stage in a theater the next day at 12 o'clock. Cab was doubling all the time. Making this fantastic money, of that time. When you look at it now, that ain't nothing. It's peanuts. But if he'd have saved his money, he'd have been wealthy. But he got hooked with race horses. All them, through them years, he played the horses. So you go through that [expletive deleted].

So I'm there. I'm playing with all these different bands. I met so many people. Danny Logan. I played with his band for about six months. Went to Baltimore and played a new

club some black people opened. Hell of a club. The people didn't know too much about show business. They had the place loaded with booze. Big trucks loaded with booze used to come in. They didn't sell that kind of booze, but the band drank up all the booze. You had the bands right in front of the bandstand. Everybody had him a quart. The bartenders didn't say nothing. They just ripped the people off. Club closed.

Different bands. Dave Nelson had a band. That was King Oliver's nephew. I went on Broadway in 1931 with Dave Nelson. I played Mae West's show. That's big time. I didn't know what Broadway is. I'd heard of it, but I didn't know the significance of it until I played Mae West's show. The stagehands begin to talk about the show. You stand around them and you listen. They tell you. They talk about who's show is great, who's show is a success. It's a Gershwin show. It's a [?Shields] show or [A(braham) L(incoln)] Erlanger show. These people put on shows every year.

White: What was the name of the show with Mae West that you were in?

Barker: *The Constant Sinner.* She was supposed to be the sinner for women. She had a Harlem lover, George Givot. I never seen him no more. He's a handsome Greek. Come to Broadway and they're going to make a big star out of him. He went from her to Los Angeles, Hollywood. He went there and for some reason . . . he must have married some rich woman . . . he got fed up with Hollywood, and he disappeared. Never heard no more of him. That was a experience there.

White: What were you playing in that show?

Barker: I was playing a couple of songs. Something Dave Nelson had wrote. Dave Nelson's wife, colored woman, she had been with a great show that went to Russia. It was a sensation in Europe around 1921, '20. Lot of shows, black shows, going all over Europe, being accepted in a civil . . . supposed to be savages 'til they see you on the stage doing that sophisticated [expletive deleted] and change your mind. They always show you as a babboon or the jungle. Always when it's some black people, there was a jungle. Ape up in the tree. Big stuffed ape. But the whole world did a ripoff job on us. You saw that in New York.

Danny Logan's band. Orville Brown's band. Dave Nelson's band. Tommy Jones's band.

White: Lucky Millinder?

Barker: Lucky Millinder's a big . . . He hadn't come to New York then. Lucky Millinder come to New York around 1935. Chicago band. The band broke up. Stayed around and he organized a New York band. He was a performer with them. Could talk. Educated. Smarter than the average person. Lucky Millinder was a bitch.

White: You played with that band.

Barker: Played with . . . that band was . . . Irving Mills had two . . . they had two bands in the Cotton Club, Cab Calloway. If he was in, Duke Ellington was out on the road. Duke Ellington was out, then Cab Calloway went in. But the money was in the theaters, not in the club. You got the publicity because you come in there, and you brought your new arrangements, and you had a network shot, WJZ, which was like NBC. It was two twin stations, but the government made them break up, because they were a monopoly. They became NBC and WJZ, apart from one another. The Cotton Club had WJZ. You broadcast, and down in New Orleans you could hear Cab Calloway. You could hear Duke Ellington. So that's what you . . . you aspired to get in them bands.

What was your question again?

White: How did you first get in Cab's band?

Barker: I'm around there, and I'm starting from the bottom. It's 1930, with Harry White's band. I'm with Dave Nelson's band. I'm with Danny Logan's band. I'm with Luis Russell's band. Played with Louis . . . played a short tour with Louis Armstrong, through Virginia. Bill Johnson got drunk, and Luis Russell wanted to hire somebody else. Paul told him, "If you hire somebody else, I quit. Hire my nephew." So he hired me. Bill Johnson got well again and then Bill Johnson got drunk again. They had to tolerate Bill. Bill Johnson's a good guitar player, but he had never played with real New Orleans swing, which was Pops Foster and Paul Barbarin. You got to perk up when you play with them people, because they're swinging.

White: This is not the same Bill Johnson that played with King Oliver.

Barker: No. No.

White: That's different.

Barker: That's a Bill Johnson, and there's another Bill Johnson. Bill Johnson was a common name. Must have been a thousand of them in the United States. No, Bill Johnson played with King Oliver was one of the first . . . He was with that Original Creole Band with Freddie Keppard on the Orpheum Circuit.

White: Right.

Barker: He settled in Chicago. He had his brother, was Bunk Johnson. No. No. Other Johnson. It'll come to me. His brother was a hustler and a pimp. Played the piano. Had a little joint just for him and his friends in Chicago . . . in Los Angeles. And they had a sister. That's how Jelly Roll got with them, because Jelly Roll was going with their sister,

who was a fast woman. I don't know. There's no reason to go into too much details there, but all them people lived in a certain element of society where they're smart people. They live off the fat of the land. Fast women. Fast men. A whole lot of them were involved with do-wrong people. They get hot dresses. Hot means something is stolen. Hot dresses. Hot coats. Hot jewelry. Everything they . . . It's the underworld. It's part of America.

I'm going, jumping from these bands. This band to that band. This band to that band. And Baron Lee. Jimmy Ferguson was a handsome black cat who didn't sing. He didn't dance. He was a straight man with comedians. He come back from Europe, and he shake hands with the right people. The Cotton Club was looking for names. When Duke and Cab would both be out, they wanted a name, so they . . . they looked for the name. There was a Duke. There was a Cab. There was a Earl. Earl Hines. All them had titles. And the King. King Oliver and all them names. So here comes . . . they want a name, so they call Jimmy Ferguson "Baron Lee." That's easy to remember. Baron Lee. And it makes a good display for the marquee. You know what the marquee is? In front of the theater.

White: The sign outside the front. Yeah.

Barker: "Baron Lee and his Cotton Club Orchestra." You see Cotton Club Orchestra, you know it's going to be a bitch, because it's a Cotton Club show, or patterned after the Cotton Club show. So you're with him, and you go play what you call third-rate, second-rate theaters. You play all through Pennsylvania and Ohio, but you're playing theaters that is not big movie palaces. Every town had a big movie palace. The Paramount this or the Strand or the State Theater. They had them significant names. Pantages down here, after . . . what's? . . . In Chicago they had this . . . can't think of the name. The Chicago Theater. The Oriental Theater. Los Angeles had the Olympia Theater. Cincinnati had a name on the theater. There were circuits. They had all that planned out. The business, show people.

I'm with Baron Lee. Baron Lee playing a split week, they call it. They play four weeks in Marion, Ohio. And you play three days. No. Four days in Marion, Ohio. Three days in Sandusky. Ohio's a money state. People's got money, and they live good. They have beautiful homes, white and black. It's one of the most aggressive and progressive states in the Union, Ohio. You play them theaters. You can play two or three months in Ohio. You just pick out the major cities. They're small. They're not big, huge metropolises. They're small cities. Toledo. Columbus. Oh man, I could go . . . Just look at the map. You see them . . . some dots on the map is bigger than others. You can tell. You play all them little towns. You play four weeks here. And you go in the Cotton Club. People see it. "Hey, this is Baron Lee." "Baron Lee, yeah." America's in a hurry. "Cotton Club, Cotton Club." "Oh yes, go see the Cotton." You got a string of girls. Maybe you got eight girls where the Cotton Club got 14. You got a comedian. A regular routine, but it's cut down. You play that with him, with Baron Lee. You got on the road. You getting $35 a week. That's all it is. It's not a big thing like . . . that was pretty good money, because

you get a room for a dollar a night, or maybe $3.50 a week in a rooming house. You couldn't stay in a hotel. If you stayed in a hotel, you couldn't afford it. People say they had to sleep in them little dumps and all that. Them cats be arguing, but you couldn't afford it. If you went in a hotel room, how you going to pay it?

White: It's expensive.

Barker: Yeah. It's $2.50 a night. That's half of your salary you make. What you going to send home for? Where you go in a colored neighborhood, and they end up always had rooming houses. That's why people stayed in rooming houses, because they couldn't afford a hotel, if they let you in the hotel, you're . . . how the hell you going to go stay in the Sheriton Hotel. Them big hotels. That's people with . . . they don't stay in there. They just go because they're tending to business.

White: Weren't a lot of the hotels segregated?

Barker: Yeah. Everything in America was segregated. The theater, when you played them little, some of them little towns, or some of the big towns, they wouldn't feed you in the restaurants. There was . . . You had to get in a cab, pool the four of you get in a cab and you go to the colored section. Every [? (inaudible)] it's all show people and railroad people that travel. They knew certain little hotels that you could . . . little restaurants that you could eat at. Got a place in Cincinnati called Jim's. Every evening he had a basement. He could seat 20, 30 people. Had them great big pots and them cooks back there. They give you home cooking, they called it. It's not what you get in the rest. It's cooked rice, beans, ham hock or ham, beef, or whatever it is. You got a plate of food. You go there. You got a little . . . what they call that? Entree? You get a entree for a dinner. Because according to the doctors, you ain't supposed to eat . . . stuff your belly with all that garbage.

White: That's what they tell you.

Barker: Well all right. That's what you went through. But if you look back at that, you don't be getting annoyed about where you stand. You don't get annoyed. You just, when you hit town, they know to go see Miss [? (inaudible)]. "Let's go to Miss Rose's house, or Miss [? (inaudible)] house." Some women, they just . . . if it was a big railroad town, like St. Louis or Cincinnati, or Toledo, they always had two or three rooming house for the railroad men, because the railroad men's coming in every day. They wants to get off the train. They want to get them a room for 24 hours, and they want . . . where I can bring in my chick. And they have chicks available there around, because the railroad man's in town with a quick dollar. Not a gang of dollars, but a quick dollar. That quick dollar means a lot in American society.

White: How did you first meet Cab?

Barker: Don't meet Cab. You see Cab, and Cab is big and famous, and you don't see Cab at all. Cab is in a limosene going somewhere. Cab is a star. When Cab get off work, Cab don't be hanging in them joints with them people. Cab is going home, because Cab has got a good understanding. He's got to give a show day and night. So he stays fit. His doctor told him, "Stay physically fit. You got to rest your body. It's a machine." He was told that. You are told that, because you got to . . . Sometime, you get an abundance of work, got to do three things a day. You play a nightclub at night, you play the theaters in the day, and in between, you making records, or you're making a movie. The guy have that [expletive deleted] timed so you can come there and do, what you call?, a vignette. Just a small part, and they go in and do that. Come back and you made that money. You got them arrangers, agents, that do all that for you. They arrange all that for you. You're working by the clock. The first thing Steele had told me, he said, "Danny, watch the clock. See this here?" [Barker taps his watch repeatedly.] Wristwatch. "Be on time, man." Say, "You don't have to be the greatest. Me, I ain't the greatest, but you see, I be sitting in all them bands?" I say, "Yeah." He said, "Them cats, when they make more money, they get charged up in the head, and they don't make time. These people make time in New York. I'm from the South." He used to coach me this [expletive deleted]. "Watch your watch. Be on time, because they'll hire you if you don't play much as him. If you don't play much as Bernard Addison or Teddy Bunn or Truehart or sometime they can't get them. If you're there, and you're dressed neat, have a clean shirt on, nice tie. Keep you nails clean. People like to see clean people around them. Class. And you'll make it. That's been part of my success, being available, and watching. Watch the time," he said.

I went through that routine, and that's when I made it [? (inaudible)]. All them fast living people. I found out right away you don't . . . [? (inaudible)] say "Man, you got a wife. Take care of your wife. That's what you got a wife. You got a wife. She can cook for you. You couldn't afford to pay for the service you get. Wife. So you have to take care of her. There's two ways, three ways to look at that. She'll cook for you, wash your drawers, do some other things." He told me all his woman. "She going to be nice to you, hug and kiss you."

White: And Cab?

Barker: You don't see Cab. Cab is listening. He always had stool pigeons in them big bands. They're always big-mouth cats in the band, talking about who's the greatest. The leader don't have to hear that he is. He hears what the musicians said. Said, "Teddy Bunn's the greatest guitar player." "No, Bernard Addison." "No, Bernard. No, no. Truehart." "Who's Truehart?" Say, "Bobby Johnson." "No, Bill Johnson." "No, no, man. The greatest is John Truehart with Chick Webb." So that stays in the leader's name. So he going to hire a musician, [? (inaudible)] I try to get Truehart. Can't get Truehart, because Truehart ain't going to leave Chick Webb, because they come up together. Can't get Bobby Johnson. He's stationed in New York and he don't want to travel, because he

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got a hustle in the day with the numbers racket. So you . . . here I'm there. I'm ready to jump on anybody. I'll go with a elephant if the elephant's . . . [? (inaudible)] a camel. I say, "Let's go. I'm ready." Because I done learned . . . I've learned to make that dollar and watch that watch. Steele told me. "They would be talking about, I can't drum. I can drum good as some of these drummers, but they don't respect me as a drummer. I've got to live with that. So you don't pay what people tell you. If everybody talk funny about you, it's [? (inaudible)] talk good about you." Said, "You just go on, and don't get in no trouble. Do the best you can." That's what I've been doing. That's why I'm here.

White: So, Cab called you for an audition?

Barker: No. Meantime Paul and Red Allen . . . Red Allen's getting ready to go on his own and go with Fletcher Henderson and Pops Foster. They getting ready to break up the Luis Russell band. Everybody's scattered around. I'm playing with all these bands, and there's Benny Carter.

White: Benny Carter?

Barker: That's Benny Carter. Benny Carter, he starts great bands, but the bands fizzle out during that period. Band in '34. Band in '36. Every two years he come out with a band. Band in '38. Band in '40. The band in '38, I joined the band, because I'm around. Me and Johnny Williams and . . . what? Spencer Williams [?the drummer Spencer O'Neill]. Rhythm section. We call one another "Section."

[voices nearby]. That's interrupting. You all talking too loud.

White: Keep going.

Barker: I'm there. I'm around. I around where all the action is, so they be seeing me. I'm around. I'm sharp, neat. Always I'm like that, because you dress up every day, and I like that. Dress up. Collar and tie, and you go out. The bars that you hang out in, and the joints you hang in, there are always chorus girls around, show chicks. You're young and you're smart and you want to be a man. You see these women, stacked up, little waist, hips like a horse, and they all there, and you're there, so you want to be sharp, like everybody else. I hang out with the sharp people. Steele had told me, "You hang out with people that's successful. Stay away from them do-wrong people, drinking all that wine and smoking them cigarettes. Stay away from all. You don't need that." He didn't have to tell me that. I was going to do that anyhow. So I'm there, with Danny Logan's band, Baron Lee's band. Played with Luis Russell's band and Billy Fowler's band. I got with the band and went down to Carolina and got stranded. You got a taste of that, and you come back. Everybody want to know where you disappeared. "Man, if you'd 'a been here, man, they was looking for you." But you're out on the road in Winston Salem, Carolina, scuffling, waiting. Ain't nothing happening. So you're back. So they said,

"Lucky Millinder's looking for a guitar player. He's breaking up the Blue Rhythm Band. It's going to be Lucky Millinder and his Cotton Club Orchestra. No more Blue Rhythm Band." Did I tell you why the Blue Rhythm Band was founded?

White: No.

Barker: Irving Mills. You heard of him? Mills Music?

White: Oh sure. Publisher.

Barker: Irving Mills, he was interested in Duke Ellington. He was Duke Ellington's success, because he advised Duke, and there's certain racial people who control Broadway. The Shuberts and the Derringers and the Zeigfield people. Carrolls. All the little Carrolls ran the George White Scandals, Ziegfield follies and the minstrel . . . They had what you call the burlesque shows. You know about the burlesque show? What about it? Burlesque show is a show where they use suggestive lyrics and they do suggestive things on the stage. People go to see that, because it's real life and it's raunchy. You go there, and you laugh. The comedian's doing all kinds of funny things that you would do, but you wouldn't do it, because you're polite. You'd never do . . . comedian will do all that and get away with it, with a woman.

I got away from my point again. I'm there, in New York. Where was I?

White: You had gotten stranded, and you came back to New York.

Barker: Came back. That's right.

White: And so Cab . . .

Barker: No, no. No Cab. He . . .

White: Not yet.

Barker: It's Benny Carter.

White: O.k. You mentioned Lucky Millinder.

Barker: I'm with Lucky Millinder for three years. We played everything between Duke and Cab. What they didn't want, they shove in Lucky Millinder. Irving Mills was handling Lucky Millinder for a while. Lucky Millinder mess up with the money. Drank it. Throwed it away in the salary. They got mad with him. Said, "We got to get rid of this monkey." So he never was a success no more, because you couldn't trust him to bring the salary back in. That was the end of . . . So I'm with Lucky Millinder's band. Lucky

Millinder's hitting from here. Going, playing one-nighters here. Going to play a theater there and three or four one-nighters. He's hitting and missing. He's walking around all begging poor, but he done lost favor with the big dogs, the people who controlled everything. They said he's . . . you can't depend on him. I guess Lucky didn't like it, people taking a big slice of his money. Some people just can't stand that, but that's a part of the game. Them people got to keep their offices going. They don't mean to [? (inaudible)], but they got to get a certain amount of money from percentage point of calculation. What they do for you is with regard you have to pay. So that was . . . I'm with Lucky Millinder. Everybody's talking about Lucky Millinder's band. They got Tab Smith, Billy Kyle, Walter Johnson, who was one of the greatest drummers ever happened. He turned swing drumming around from all them . . . hitting them cymbals all. He came up with that smooth thing which Jo Jones and them did with Basie. That was Walter Johnson started that with Fletcher Henderson, because Kaiser Marshall had them cymbals. Always beating on cymbals and disrupting the rhythm. But here come this smooth thing, where you can just [? (inaudible)]. You can simmer it down.

White: What was he hitting?

Barker: Hitting those cymbals. On the tom-tom.

White: Light.

Barker: Yeah, down to according to how you at. If you ask, "Bring it up," and he'll bring it up. But it went from [? (inaudible)] playing one level of tempo, it went to bring it up and going down. Walter Johnson could do that. It's like you're riding a horse, and it's beautiful. So, Walter Johnson was in the band. He had left Fletcher Henderson's band. Big Sid Catlett taken his place. It was about money or something. But he's the one who revolutionized from all them hitting them big cymbals like this. Zildjian came in with cymbals. You heard of Zildjian?

White: Sure.

Barker: Zildjian, they come in with cymbals. Never known to give a cymbal to nobody. You paid for a cymbal. All drummers is waiting 'til they get to somewhere out of Boston, where they had this factory. You could go in there and see them making cymbals. Zildjian.

I'm with Lucky Millinder. The band is jumping. Tab Smith. Arnold Adams. Wilbur De Paris. All them people's passing through that band. It's one of them . . .

White: This is around 1937, '38?

Barker: ’38, ’39. Cab is breaking up the band. The band was the Missourians band before. When he joined the band, they put him in front of the Missourians band. The band had survived. That’s the band David Jones had been in. Never heard him, because after I joined the band, I never . . . them half a dozen musicians who were still there, they never spoke to nobody, because they resented they were being chopped off, like you chop off a cake. One at a time. Cab was getting rid of them, because he was mad when they didn’t treat him right when he direct the band. They were them big great . . . thought they was the great Missourians. Cab was fined . . . He’s fined . . . a trumpet player and a bass player and the guitar player. They was two left. It was Foots Thomas and Andrew Brown and Lammar Wright.

White: Foots Thomas played sax with Jelly Roll, right?

Barker: Tenor sax. Yeah. Foots Thomas nice people, person, and a hell of arranger, and a nice gentleman. He . . . no conniver. Never put nobody down. Just great. So they wanted, Cab wanted to get a guitar player. I had made a record with Chu and Roy.

White: Chu Berry.

Barker: Yeah. Chu and Roy.

White: Roy?

Barker: Yeah. It’s called *Sittin’ In*. It was one of the first Commodore records made.

White: Who was Roy? Roy?

Barker: Roy Eldridge . . .

White: Roy Eldridge.

Barker: . . . and Chu Berry. They were buddies. They got angry with me and never liked me no more, because they used to go around Harlem at night, going from joint to joint. They’re having a cutting contest. Going look for people. They say, “Roy be on too, and Chu Berry’s in town. Yeah, they be in tonight. They say they be here. Tell all them tenor players and all them trumpet players, come in and get their whippin’.” That was the thing. Everybody used to pack the joint, pack them joints. I don’t know if the boss gave them any money, but they was a drawing card, man. They say, “Chu and Roy are going to be there.” Chu and Roy. Who else? It was somebody else. It was a drummer. Tommy Benford. He would be with them sometime. They’ll work you to death, man. You’ll be streaming wet, because they’re playing . . . Roy like to play 20 choruses. Chu Berry like . . . They wanted me to play the guitar with them. They like what I did. After I get through, I ain’t going to play nowhere with nobody. Going out there to please all these critics. [

[Expletive deleted] you got all these critics hang in the joint. They going to stand around. Can't blow his nose, but he going to tell you, man, so and so. Be pointing at you. Deliberate. Look at you. "He's Danny Barker. He's all right, but he don't come to" so and so. You can see them . . . You leave yourself open for criticism. I don't need that. I done played with Lee Collins. I had the pleasure of playing for Louis. I don't need that [expletive deleted]. So they mad at me, because I wouldn't come out with them, because some joints didn't have a piano, and they liked my rhythm, when I played the right chords for them. So I wasn't going out there, expose myself.

White: The recording you made with Roy Eldridge and Chu Berry, was that your first recording?

Barker: No. I'd made a recording with Red Allen. Red Allen. I missed a date with Jelly Roll. He couldn't find me, or who he sent to get me, they couldn't. But I didn't regret it, because Jelly Roll's music was something special in them days. It's embarrassing to go in the studio, and they give you something to play, and you can't cut it. A lot of things I turned down if I felt I couldn't cut the mustard, as they say. I didn't go.

All right. I'm there. Now I'm known, you understand, because I'm around everywhere. I ain't no great soloist, but I'm a great rhythm man. "Danny. Yeah, man. Keep that beat going, man." So Cab needs a guitar player. So Chu Berry . . . I'd been playing with him and Roy . . . reluctantly, he was a yes man, and he had a way of ooing into the boss. He get the boss's ear. He's got the boss's ear. "Get Danny Barker." "Yeah, Cab want you to . . . they want . . . they were looking . . . they want you . . . you going to join Cab's band." What's the matter? Like I'm making nothing with anticipation. I been doing this for nine years now, from 1930 to 1939. So, all right. Go join Cab's band. So, Cab . . . Where the hell's Cab's playing? Cab's playing at the big auditorium in New York. The Palace, they call it. Grand . . . Can't think of the name. Palace. Like 10,000 people there. So I'm going. I go up there, and I'm sitting next to Milt Hinton. Milt Hinton and Cozy Cole. Cozy Cole know me. Cozy Cole had been working dancing schools as a leader. Them dime-a-dance joints. There's Milt Hinton. He's playing bass, but I have heard Pops Foster and I have heard Braud. So he ain't impressing me the least bit. He's just young and he's fast. I sit next to him. We greet one another. But they watching me. I just did what I did with Lucky. Played the biggest, fattest chords I could find. Give them, give the music a lilt, which they didn't have. Something about rhythm. You play anticipation.

White: Anticipating the beat?

Barker: Yeah. You play, but you just don't play a beat. You ain't playing a beat for a beat. You playing . . . you swinging, in other words. It's a swing. You give a lift, and you invert, and you moving. I'm eyeballing. I'm from New Orleans. I eyeball him, to see Hinton. He's liking, and I notice from what he was playing, he start playing a little different with him, what I'm playing, because the band had a lilt, which they didn't have

before. It was flat. I'm sitting next to Cozy Cole on this side, and Cozy Cole's playing ratamacues and paradiddles and all that business. Paradiddle. Ratamacues. Flamadiddles and all. I never heard no [expletive deleted] about no flamadiddles and . . . That's a techniques of drum technique. You go in the army, they use all that to get soldiers to march into a war to get his brains blowed up. [Barker's sings a military drum rhythm.] And you run out there and the bomb will explode. Pow. You don't know how you've left this world. They don't ever find. They don't even find no bones.

White: That's true.

Barker: Say that's true.

White: So you had just gotten . . .

Barker: So I'm in Cab's band. So they get the word. They ask Cab, "What do you think?" "He's all right. He's all right. He's all right." Well I was with [? (inaudible)]. I was with Benny Carter's band. Benny Carter's band was a triumphant band. When you worked with Benny Carter, [expletive deleted]. Everybody, they didn't speak to you before, speak to you, because you're with Benny Carter. Benny Carter had heard me and Johnny Williams and Walter Johnson. I don't know why he didn't hire, because Walter Johnson was . . . Cozy Cole had a bigger name than Walter Johnson, but he wasn't as good a drummer as Walter Johnson. Walter Johnson, like I told you, brought in swing. A different swing than Paul Barbarin and Baby Dodds and Big Sid [Catlett] and them people. It was a lilting swing.

All right, you're there. You just try to make it. I wasn't a soloist, but I was a great rhythm guitar player, became. But the critics don't want to hear nothing about no rhythm. They want to know how much technique you got. They always analyzing you and putting in classification. Tal Farlow. Name some hell of a guitar players. What's that Mary Ford and her husband? What's his name?

White: Les Paul?

Barker: Les Paul. I saw him on a thing the other night. That's somebody who's played so much guitar in them days. He . . . funny. He got famous and made that record. Can't think of the name of the record. Electric. He had that work, that electric guitar. He'd work it up to almost a perfection of that time. He come up to Harlem. They had about 30, 40 joints where musicians, performers hang out. "Say that white boy's up here." In Harlem. "That white boy's up here with that electric guitar. Have you heard him?" I said, "No." "Say where he's going to be?" I said such a place. And he would be there. They'd be running guitar players there, watching what's his name, Les Paul and Mary Ford just come and give a free concert. So you go with that.

I'm with Benny Carter. Benny Carter's satisfied what I do. When he pass judgement on you, everybody in Benny Carter's band makes the transition to another band or a small group. You reach the major league level, because you're in *Down Beat.* They tell you what Cab's doing and who's in the band. You're making records with Cab. They got your name with them people, and they know you. But if you're not a soloist, the critics and the writers come around. They never come to me, because I'm not a soloist. I'm a rhythm. What they going to? They say, "good rhythm section" or something, but they never get the publicity like Cozy would get or Hinton would get, because they're out there going to jam every night somewhere, and they're the number two and number three in the level of the *Down Beat* polls. See their names up there. You don't see my name nowhere where the guitar's at, because all the guitar players is great soloists.

White: Single string.

Barker: Virtuosos. But you put them in the band, and the bandleader say after the first, "Get rid of that guy, man. He's running all over that instrument. We want somebody with the beat."

White: You . . . A lot of times, when people refer to your playing in the big bands, in addition to the rhythm, they talk about something that you mention, playing fat chords. Tell me a little about what that is and what it involves.

Barker: If you don't have a piano, and you don't have a bass . . . if you notice when I play, that's why I play the six-string banjo, because that's what Johnny St. Cyr played. A lot of people don't even understand what the hell they're listening to. If you heard that thing which is a surprise . . . I mean that rhythm . . . I play it on Marsalis's record?

White: Yeah. [*The*] *Majesty of the Blues*?

Barker: Yeah. When you heard me. They turn me . . . turn it over to me?

White: Yes.

Barker: I didn't do no single picking. I just put some rhythm that goes way back in New Orleans playing. That's what them people . . . They put the rigamarolle, figure-eight strokes. It does something to people. It make people want to dance, because it's rhythmic, and it's not plink plank and plank plank plink. It's got a body to it. That's what Johnny St. Cyr played on the Louis Armstrong records. He don't . . . he ain't playing the banjo, but you don't hear no plink plank plink. It's artistry with that. That's what I do. But down here, people are so down on plantations and banjos and minstrel shows, river boats, they look at me like I come from outer space. But they don't know what they're listening. People are prejudiced. What they see is what impress them. What they see. What they

see. They don't want to understand what they're hearing. You can't try to sell it to them. You just let them go. Forget about it.

White: So the basis of just playing a chord would be just playing six . . .

Barker: No just playing. Playing chords. You don't say "just playing." You say "playing chords." It's something that's a rhythm thing. You do it, and that fills the band. You don't leave no open spots.

White: So what do you mean when you say, when you talk about fat playing, fat chords?

Barker: Big. You see a guitar has six strings. Four bottom strings, and there's four in the center, and there's four at the top. Three elements of fours. [Barker evidently shows the instrument to White.] This is four, right? At the bottom. From here, there's four in the center. What we got?

White: You're talking about six altogether, right?

Barker: Yeah. You got four at the bottom. That's the big strings. E, A, D, G. Now you got A . . . what I said? . . . E, A, D, G. That's the top four. Big string on top. Then you got D, G, B . . . no. I have to write it down. Calculations. Chords? Fat ones? Whatever?

White: Yeah. Fat chords.

Barker: That's the E string. E, A, D, G. That's four. Here's four. And here's four. You got what I'm talking about?

White: Yeah.

Barker: You play these four. Then you play these four here. Then you play these four at the bottom. You're not just playing straight. You're playing . . . Forget about it. You got that?

White: O.k. So, in other words, so you . . .

Barker: So you playing this four for volume. Then you play them middle four. If you're going to play a single string, you play these small strings. That's the E, B, G, D. You play them four. That's where most of them solo guitars plays on, this little E, because it's high. You see them rock-and-roll, heavy metal. They get way up the neck. Sound like a clarinet up there, or a flute, piccolo. That's it. They want something solid, they get here. They want something heavy, rhythm, you play here. So that's three elements of what you got. You master that. You ain't going to get none of them virtuosos to be fooling with these others four, sets of four.

White: With the lower tones?

Barker: No, they don't. They're selling. George Benson, you hear him up here. They got that facility. That fast [expletive deleted].

White: On the higher strings.

Barker: You go down here, bass, you got the volume.

White: So when you talk about fat chords, what do you mean?

Barker: You mean a sound, a beat, a beat. Chunk chunk chunk chunk chunk chunk chunk. It's fat. Not three-string chord or two string or one string. You got four. The four elements of four. That's what you're doing. This is the thumb in the back of the guitar. That's the bottom four, and you got the middle four here, and you got the top four. You got that? Bottom four . . . You got six strings . . . and the middle four, and the top four. So that's what you do. You learn to master that. The guys with Tommy Dorsey, Carmen Mastren know that. The boy with Benny Goodman, he knows that. Freddie Green knows that. Holiday with Fletcher Henderson, he knows that. John Truehart with Chick Webb, he knows that. You're there, and you watch them, what they're doing, and you coordinate with the rhythm section.

Down here, they don't know nothing about that. It's always been an individual thing here. You find yourself, you're liable to find yourself playing with Chester Zardis. He's playing his own tempo. He pull the band with him. Once you set the tempo, he takes it away, and he's going his way. You got to tolerate that [expletive deleted]. Your section, you wait to see where we're at before you just start pluck, and he going into his thing. *His* thing. No, it's not your thing. It's . . . You got three other men there. Piano player. And that make the piano players disgusted, because he's pulling the tempo. You don't play four on everything. You do not play four. You play two, and you relax according to the notes that's in the melody of the chord. It don't call for no four. Everything is on four. It ruins your record.

White: So every song suggest certain types of rhythm.

Barker: That's right. That's right. That's right.

White: So you should follow the . . .

Barker: You coordinate with the section you're with. If you're going to go play ball, or football, they have what you call running backs. Them different backs, and this one is watching this, and this one's watching that. It's the coordination. They watching the

others. That's why you have a successful team. That's why the Green Bay Packers used to run over everybody, because they had that [expletive deleted] coordination. You play in a band, and you have to sit there and play, and the cat's running away with the tempo. His tempo. It ain't your tempo. You lay back and you see what the hell's happening. But if you're going to play . . . "Oh he's a great bass player." "Yeah." He's pulling the tempo. You want to quit first chance you get. Don't call me no more. Take my guitar and break over your head. Don't call. I told two, three cats, "Don't never call this house no more."

White: I know. I heard you say that before, because that's one of the problems that you have. You find quite a lot today in New Orleans and in music in general. A lot of people getting into their own thing and not really working as a team.

Barker: It's diversified. Everybody wants to be on first, wants to be the king. He wants to show off himself. You don't call . . . here's a quartet, the Modern Jazz Quartet. It's remarkable to see them rehearse. They'll rehearse one note. It's disgusting [? (inaudible)]. And John, John Lewis?

White: John Lewis, yeah.

Barker: Yeah, he wants it a certain thing. Connie Kay wants to swing out. "No, Connie, watch this." That bass player, he wants [? (inaudible)]. Who else in that band?

White: Let's see. John Lewis, Connie Kay.

Barker: There's a vibraphone.

White: Milt Jackson.

Barker: Milt Jackson. He . . . They got that time. It's remarkable, the tempos. Those records should be collected to see how that . . . They do that for hours. Even John Lewis liable to stay two hours on one note. That note is just . . . he's for that. The rest of them ain't for that, but he's the leader, so you going with the [? (inaudible)].

White: Tell us a little bit more about your years with Cab.

Barker: I joined Cab's band, and I'm playing. The dressing room. They traveled my first class by train, and I'm in a train on a Pullman. You travel by Pullman. You sleep on . . . Nobody wants to go in the upper berth, because you got to climb up there to get in there. All the old timers, they got the main berths on the bottom, closest to the door, closest to the men's room. Some cat have weak bladders and have to get up at night and all that [expletive deleted]. You play.

Now I come. I'm . . . This boy . . . What the hell's his name? He had been in the band way back. The remnants of the band had them choice seats, them choice berths. You know what a berth is?

White: Um-hm.

Barker: Berth, and you pull a curtain, and you sleep in there. The Pullman porter makes the bed for you. If you're fat, they have to get a ladder for you to get up in an upper berth, so Chu Berry, they put him down on the floor, because he's fat. I'm a newcomer. I'm due to have the third berth from the door, because that boy, that seniority, and it was . . . I'm supposed to take his place, but by hook or crook they didn't. They put me . . . you know. Chicanery. Underhand [expletive deleted]. They put me way in the back, up at the top. I didn't mind, because I'm successful now. I'm with Cab Calloway.

I'm in the band now. Milt Hinton . . . When the band play in a theater, when they get through playing, Cozy Cole, he get off. Wipe hisself off, whatever. Then he go in his dressing room, and he's got a drum pad, and he's practicing paradiddles, ratamacues, flamadiddles, all them things out the book, all day. That's all. He's chewing gum and playing this. After ten minutes after the stage, he tend to his needs, he's practicing this [expletive deleted]. They got me in a room with him. That [expletive deleted] monotonous. I done played a two-hour show. I don't want to hear nothing for the next hour. I don't want to hear no paradiddles, all that [expletive deleted]. He's playing his paradiddles, and it ain't swinging, like his show, gutsy swinging. You listen to that, so I tried to get out the room. I learned about the theater. Everybody wants to be on the first floor in the theater. The star's room is first. The next star is next. Them rooms. There's about six rooms on the first floor. That's all the superstars, because they do the hard work, and they got to get to their room right away, maybe to change. You can't be running up no stairs. You understand that? So I'm there with Cozy Cole. He's a star. I don't want to be in that room with them God-damn drums all in my ears. So I asked the valet, "Can I get another room?" He said, "Yeah, take any of them rooms out on the second floor." I get me a room up there. I cleaned it out.

Dizzy Gillespie joined the band, and they gave him a room way up in the roof, because the cats didn't like him, because he come there with this new music. That Chinese music. That's what Cab called it. So I'm closer. I say, "Come on over here, man." He say, "Where you at, Danny?" We had been in Lucky Millinder's band for a while, because they had formed a clique to get rid of Harry Edison, but Harry Edison was a St. Louis gutbucket trumpet player, and they was going to have a clique got formed to get Charlie Shavers and who else, in that band? Charlie Shavers and somebody. They had planned to get rid of Harry and get Dizzy Gillespie, because they went to school together.

White: Was Jonah Jones in that band?

Barker: Yeah, Jonah Jones was in the band. Yeah, he was there when I went there.

So they ignored Diz. I said, "Diz, come on with me," because we was friends from New York. A little small friendship. I remember I had to try to pull that deal with him on, with Lucky Millinder. So Dizzy and I had a room together. You see me and Dizzy sleeping on the bus together. You see that picture?

White: Um-hm.

Barker: There's a new magazine that's come out. He and I are real friends. His wife Lorraine was there. She was a chorus girl. Cab used to change chorus girls. A chorus girl would leave. There's Lorraine traveling with Dizzy. She was a number one Apollo chorus, but he never would hire her. He could give her a job, since she's with her husband. Wouldn't that look plausible? But he didn't.

You're looking all that. Chu Berry, him and Roy Eldridge want to go around every night. Every town they get in, they go look for people. They building up their reputations, and they want me to come, after playing them four, five shows. Get my guitar and go with them, looking out for guitar players. Ain't nobody going to embarrass me in no club. Some cat's been practicing 15 years. He can make a guitar. You understand. And here I come with them two hogs. They come, chewing up tenor players and chewing up trumpet players. And they got mad . . . Chu got mad as hell with me. He was doing that in New York. They want . . . but when I get there, here he wants to go and jam. Who he had? Him and Shad Collins, they were going. When Dizzy come in, he couldn't, Chu couldn't understand what Dizzy was playing. He wasn't into that [expletive deleted].

White: So Dizzy was playing what became bebop.

Barker: He was playing. Yeah.

White: Advanced harmonies.

Barker: Yeah. In Cab's band. Cab's used to hearing a Armstrong rendition or a Doc Cheatham rendition or whatever. Lips Page rendition. Or a Harry James rendition. And here's Dizzy Gillespie starting on a flatted fifth and running all through the music. You can see them cats in the reed section jerking. "What's that note? That note." They wasn't used to hearing that kind of harmony. I'm sitting there looking, because I play guitar. I can only go up a half tone, because it's frets. [? (inaudible)] went up a half tone. But you see the band . . . when get around to play a solo, you can see the band, their shoulders. They waiting. Like you give them a shock treatment, electricity. That's going in the book. I said, "Keep that in my book." That's it. They didn't dig Diz. Diz didn't fit in there, because it's another era, and he . . . Cab was geared . . . with plunger in the trumpet.

Plunger and effects. Dizzy's going out to outer space, and they couldn't understand that, so they had to scuffle. That was it.

I stayed there, and the word begin to get around. Bennie Payne, the piano player . . . I walked in the dressing room. We had been friendly, been out together. Said, "Hey, what you say, Bennie?" He's sitting at the piano. I looked at him. He says, "I tell you. I don't appreciate no man, can't play one solo on his instrument." Said, "Well I'm very sorry, Bennie. I can't play. I'm sorry." He say, "Yeah, man, I don't appreciate . . ." I can't buy his appreciation. I please Bennie Carter. Why I got to please him? So, o.k. But I lived to see he went in the Army and he got Dave Rivera in his place. When he come back, Cab didn't want him back. So he hung around the band. After his two week's are up, he hung around the band, dickering and begging for his job. Say, "I been with you all these years. More than 10 years. Why you letting me go? Where I'm gonna go? What I'm gonna do? I've been in the Army, I served my country, and I come back to my job, and my job . . . I heard somebody was saying . . . them cats was laughing." But Bennie Payne was a fine piano player, and he could sing. And he had a way with women. He could walk to damn near any woman, say, "Hello, sweetheart. How are you?," because a woman like to be embraced. He just had that, "Hello, darling. [? (inaudible)] How are you, sweetheart? I'm so glad to see you. How's the children?" And on. Nobody would get mad, because he didn't look back the second time. He had that. Now he . . . all them towns we played, there was cocktail lounges, where he could . . . he went in there and he'd break up the place, just singing, playing. People liked what he did, and they would ask him, "Why don't you . . . ?" You're with Cab. He loved Cab's band. But he could stop. So in this period of time, when he got him on notice and done paid him off, but he's still hanging on, begging for his job. They buy him a train ticket for him to go to the next stop, because he want his job, and if he don't get his job back, he's going to die of grief. With me, he could have took his job and stuck it. That's what I told him. Cab, when I quit.

White: In '46?

Barker: Yeah, '46 '47. '46, o.k. So, something was happening. I say, "Well . . . they said . . . I said, "I don't know. I would like to leave the band, but I can't play nothing." This is Bennie Payne, standing there. I said, "I can't play." Said, "They say I can't play nothing. But you see me, if I can't play nothing . . ." "Ah." It gave him a hint. He's listening. We's talking a little. I said, "Me, if I had any problem in this band, I'd tell him where to go with a kiss right now." I guess it must have got back to Cab. But Bennie Payne just drifted off, and that was the end. Instead of him going to all them cocktail lounges, all them people that knew him around the corner . . . country. I know musicians do that. I know musicians do that. Like Bill Doggett and them, they got certain clubs they go to play the month of June, and month of July. This . . . four weeks here. Four weeks there. Four weeks there. And the year's over. It's not long. It's 12 four weeks. They do that the year 'round, just play them spots, and they get recommended to other spots. So I looked

at him, how he begged for his job after telling me he can't respect nobody that can't play no . . . Cab wasn't going to let me play no solos. You understand? Even if I could play.

White: Because he wanted just rhythm.

Barker: Yeah, and that's what the band want. They had a quartet used to go out front. Chu Berry, Tyree Glenn, Cozy Cole, myself, and Hinton. Five. A quintet. They called it Cab Jivers. We would go out. Chu Berry's up front. Jonah Jones up front. Tyree Glenn with the vibraphone. Me and Hinton's in the back. The show don't last that long for you to stay out there no 15 minutes playing no jam session. So you do your thing, but Chu Berry used to hog up the whole scene. Now what I look like grabbing a solo behind that? You understand? If I was . . . what's his name? Them great virtuoso. But that's not my forte. I played.

Army came up. Drafting Army. They draft . . . two or three cats went out to Army, went to the Army. I can't call their names now. They called me to go to the draft. I told them I got something to give you. In them days they tell you about travel, about going into induction. Whatever job you had, they couldn't fire you. They used . . . You had to go and do your duty. Got to get inducted. Go through the examination of. So I come to New York and I done that. I say, "I don't know if I'm coming back." He say, "When you come back, you can have your job." Say, "I'll leave it open. I won't hire nobody." He said, "I won't have nobody. Your job will be here when you come back." So I go to New York. I go down to the induction. While I'm in induction, he say, "You're accepted." What happened, the next day I'm going to spend the weekend home. While I'm home, the newspaper come out. They used to put headlines out: "Men over 35 or with children deferred 'til later notice." Then you read the fine points, see you don't have to report no more. If you legitimate, and that's what's on your statement, with your child, one child or two, you don't have to go to the draft no more, 'til further notice, because the war was simmering down. So I go back to the band at Columbus, Ohio. Go back to the band. I'm waiting. I get there a day ahead. The band came, and I went to the theater. I'm at the theater. Jonah Jones, we's talking a while, he said, "Man, you sure was missed in that band." He said, "[expletive deleted], Cozy Cole's playing one thing, Hinton's playing something else, Bennie Payne look like he's going to sleep." Said, "The whole section was raggedy. You could feel it after you. Looked like what you was doing kept the rhythm. It's like taking the heart out of a band." I said, "Yes," and I come back. Everybody was smiling, saying, "Hello, Danny. How are you? Glad to see you back. Glad . . ." But Jonah done told me, say, "Man, you was missing." Now you can know, understand what I'm talking about, if you listen to Basie's band, who featured that, and if you hear the guitar's out, you can see what I'm talking about. But you got to have a keen ear, and know about that. I'm not bragging about this.

White: How did Cab react? How did you get along with him? How did he react when you came . . . ?

Barker: I don't tell no bosses. "Hello, Cab. How are you?" I don't go to his dressing room. I stay . . . Say, "How you doing, Danny?" I say, "Fine. How you doing, Cab? How's everything?" Cab is busy in his office. They got some musicians who will be at Cab's door, talking to him. I don't know what you're going to talk about. Cab must have a million, he had a million plus then. What I'm . . . Got two pennies in my pocket. What I'm going to be running up in Cab's face? You're not respected when you be running up in boss's face. Is that right? You stay away from the boss. Let him send for you. When I got out there and found out with the money, making a hundred . . . got up to a hundred and a quarter a week. Man, after I payed my bills and buy my food and send 50, 60 dollars home, most of the time 50 every week . . . She could manage. Great manager. Man, I didn't have nothing.

We bought them big Taylor trunks. Big as this thing. The old show trunks. All big time show people used to buy them. There were hundreds of them around New York in storage where shows had flopped. Fanny Brice's trunk. Mae West's trunk. Eva Tanguay's trunks. W. C. Field's trunks. All them trunks, they had a certain warehouse on Broadway that used to take these trunks. You put them in storage, and if the guys wouldn't . . . after a certain date, wouldn't pay up the bills for the trunk, these people kept them trunks. When you want [? (inaudible)], had to pay storage, or they would sell them. These trunks had a ironing board in it, a iron. You could iron your clothes. They had a little compartment there where you could save your money. If a burglar broke in, if he didn't know what's what, you could put your money. Stash, in other words. I got one of them big trunks. I like clothes. I couldn't buy no clothes on the road. I stayed them seven years in a big front with nothing to back it up, because you couldn't save nothing. That didn't mean nothing to me.

And then I [? (inaudible)]. I'm a composer. I'm a writer. I got about 50 tunes on records. I don't get the royalties I should get, because the publishers, they got a thing they do. You sign with a publisher. He's got your tune for 15, 20 years, and he wills it to his nephew. When he dies, his nephew changes the name of the company on purpose, with the copyrights, and it take . . . you have to get a Supreme Court judge lawyer to check out your tunes, where it was sold to this cousin, to that cousin, and this uncle and his grandchild. That goes for everybody, regardless of race. When you hit Broadway, them people sitting in them offices late at night calculating how to wreck you out your money legitimately. They don't shoot you with a pistol. They shoot you with a pencil. They thinking [? (inaudible)]. Calculating.

White: After '46 when you left Cab's band, you got . . . you didn't continue with the big bands, you got into doing . . .

Barker: There was no more big . . . Big bands was phasing out. I was out of Cab's band maybe two years when the band broke up. Cab went with a small group, about seven pieces.

White: How did you quit Cab, by the way?

Barker: I quit Cab. We came home. We're playing the Paramount Theater. We came home. Saturday night and Sunday night . . . no, Saturday night we had a little party at the house. I stayed up 'til four o'clock in the morning. High. You don't give a so-and-so. You're enjoying your family, and you're trying to find out your home. You're eating . . . afraid to pull out a drawer in your house. You have to shift a role, because you don't do that when you room in people's rooming houses. They leave their things in there, and you don't . . . So you're home, even afraid to . . . "This is my house. Let me look in there and see . . ." You're disgusted, man. You're going to leave your home. You got your comfort with your wife. You're with your child. She don't see you much. That's seven years I don't see my little girl much, because I'm on the road. They got reasonable culture, but you don't see them. You're on the road Christmas. He give you two weeks vacation every Christmas, Cab. A week before Christmas and a week after. New Year's Day . . . New Year's Eve, you . . . the day before New Year's Eve you catch the . . . There was a ticket for you at the office. Go get the train ticket, and you catch that train. The famous train, from New York to Chicago. You get in Chicago New Year's Day, and you go to rehearsal two o'clock for . . . 'til you come to work at ten o'clock that night. You open up the New Year's. *Auld Lang Syne* and all that business. You stay there a month.

So I'm in New York, and I'm high, and I wake up. It's ten o'clock, and the show hits at 11:30, because you're doing five or six shows in New York. No, this is not the time when I quit. I'm telling you about the Chicago.

I want to tell you about the time I quit. O.k. I'm home. Sunday . . . Saturday night we had a baza at the house, good time. I wake up, it's ten o'clock. I jumped up. Son-of-a . . . Missed the show. Hurried and put my clothes on. Going out in the street. Guitar's at the theater. Get my . . . Go out in the street, and I get a cab. I can't get a cab. I wait. 15 minutes I'm trying to get a cab, because where I live, cab's ain't running smooth. I finally get a cab, and I get to the theater, and the band's on the stage. The band is playing. In the band is about . . . what? There's ten men on the stage. No, eight men on the stage, and the rest of them is all late. This is the Paramount Theater. It's half empty. Cab is waiting for us like a professor with a stick. He said, "Man, you know you're home. You're on Broadway, man. You don't do this in these theaters." I ain't said nothing. So whoever's singing when they put the blackout, the stage, the electrician up there, he knows what's happening. He look and see a half-empty stage, so he knows how to pinpoint, blackout the stage and pinpoint the spotlight small, so everybody can . . . just them people can see, so you can't see what's going on, and you look like . . . [? (inaudible)]. All right. Go on on. So I go on the stage, and you sneak on like this. The people be laughing in the theater,

because about half of them out there show people. They know what the hell is happening, and they be laughing. They laugh, and the people, other people, be one of that square people. They don't know what's happening. I sneak on. When I look around, Shad Collins, here he come. He sneak on. There's another big laugh. Then the guy take the spotlight and put it on somebody else who will make some noise with the spotlight in it to get your attract . . . And another cat sneak on. They're sneaking on.

White: So they put the spotlight somewhere else?

Barker: Yeah, you see, to get the dark, because it . . .

White: To make it dark.

Barker: . . . [? (inaudible)] to get dark. But the people that knows theater, and Broadway's full of show people who's disappointed, successful, and they all out there in the audience, wannabee stars. They understand. Or their relatives is stars. That's a hell of a place, New York.

O.k. Payday come. So they laugh, and payday come. I heard that I'm fined. They say, "You fined." I get my pay envelope. $20 out of my pay envelope. I say, "What is this?" Say, "Cab fined you all for being late." I say, "Yeah." So I got to the six guys that was late with me. I say, "Did you get fined?" "No." "No, I didn't get anything taken out of my money." "Did you get fined?" "No, I didn't take nothing out your money." "Did you get fined?" "No, I didn't take nothing out of my . . . He didn't take nothing out of my money." Et cetera. I'm the only one. I'm incensed behind it. After the show, I go to his room. I say, "Uh." He say, "Yeah, what is it Danny?" I say, "Why you fine me and you didn't fine nobody else missing the show?" He said, "Because you supposed to know better." Said, "I mean, why? I didn't do it intentionally." He said, "I know you had a good time last night. I know you were celebrating over here. But you got to show for these people." I said, "I don't know. I don't think I'm going to go for this, Cab." He said, "Well, o.k." So I went to the dressing room, and I wrote a notice. You got to give a written notice. A written notice, "After this week . . ." or "After next week" or whatever, "I want to terminate my" whatever.

White: Association . . . employment with the band.

Barker: Yeah. O.k. So, when he got that, I don't know what he did. So the valet told me, he say, "I didn't think he was that serious. Nobody quit Cab Calloway's band." No, no. That's one of the top money bands in the country. For him. He's making the money. The agency. They've got country clubs and yachts and all that [expletive deleted].

So he sent for me. He said, "Why you quitting the band?" "I'm quitting the band because you fined me." I said, "I need that money. I got to pay my bills." He said, "I got to fine

you. I got to keep discipline in my band." I said, "Why didn't you discipline the rest of them guys? I been here. I don't pull no lateness with your band. I don't give you no problem. I'm on time. I think I'm neat." He said, "The notice . . . your notice . . . the fine is . . . I can't rescind" or whatever it is. "I can't rescind the fine." I said, "O.k." I said, "Well I quit." "O.k."

Now the band, two or three of them in the band that was my friend, say, "Man, I wouldn't quit the band. I wouldn't . . ." See, I don't what to hear that [expletive deleted] about not quitting. I quit, because I want to stay home. That's it. He begged me 'til the last to stay. "Why? What did I do to you?" He was, felt bad, because he had never had nobody to quit him. So he tell me, say "Listen." He says, "Now, since you're leaving, can you get me a guitar player that plays like you and act like you and be . . . don't give me no problem?" I say, "I may can." "O.k." He say, "No hard feelings, eh?" I say, "No, ain't no hard feeling." I say, "I just need my money. That's all. If I got my money, wouldn't be no . . ." It's going to be hard feelings if I don't get my money, my $20. [laughter]

So, I'm going somewhere around there. I want to get rid of that trunk, because they're going to take that trunk back on the road. I see Smitty. You know who's Smitty? John Smith was a rhythm guitar player. Played like me. Doubt if he did rhythm good as me, but he was my friend. Smitty. He's working. Alphonse Steele had got about more than a hundred musicians jobs with the Corn Exchange Bank as messengers. Hilton Jefferson. Some of the greatest musicians. They work for the Corn Exchange Bank as messengers, going from this bank to bring things to the next bank. Now they got these boys on bicycles. Speeding through that. But they got musicians, they had musicians who were sober, sober-minded, and had them, because musicians knew how to talk to people. Musicians knew how to wear collar and tie. And he had a flair for show business, and he didn't get in people's way. He was disciplined to crowds of people. So that's why they hired musicians.

So I seen Smitty. I said, "What you doing?" He said, he say, "I'm working with the bank." I say, "How is it?" "Oh, you know. There's nothing happens there. The same thing every day." I say, "You want a job?" He said, "What kind of job?" I said, "Playing music." Say, "Where? Where you going to find me a job?" I said, "Man, with Cab Calloway." He said, "Well, ain't you with Cab Calloway?" I said, "Not any more." Said, "What happened?" I said, "I quit." I said, "And Cab asked me to find somebody who played rhythm, like we do." I gave him respect. He said, "You kidding?" I said, "No, I'm not kidding." I say, "Come on. I'll bring you to him." He was making a delivery then for the bank, on Broadway, and I took him to Cab. Cab was fortunate, was in his room. Cab said, "Danny Barker. Yeah Danny. What's happening?" I say, "I brought you a guitar player." He said, "Yeah. Bring him in." So I brought him in. Introduced Smitty. I say . . . Smitty say . . . Cab say, "I've seen you." Smitty say, "Yeah. I've seen you everywhere." [? (inaudible)] a little jovial conversation. He said, "You want to work in my band?" Smitty say, "Yeah." Said, "Dan, if it's all right with Dan. Dan says you're looking for a

guitar player." I said, "Yeah. It would be nice for you." He said, "Well, o.k. You see Rudolf, and he'll give you the same routine like he give all newcomers in the band, about your luggage, and what we have here, and what we don't have, what we won't allow." Et cetera. So, I said, "See you Cab." He said, "O.k., Danny. Thanks." And I walked out. But he had never had nobody to quit him. So Smitty stayed there 'til the band broke up.

White: A couple of years later. So after that you go into . . .

Barker: I'm back on Broadway. I'm hustling songs. You dig, I'm hustling songs. They had these fly guitar players in all these combinations. The spiritual rhythm. Little small bands like John Kirby. All kinds of people that got swinging groups. 52nd Street is jumping, something there, and bebop's in full blaze.There wasn't no place for no rhythm guitar player. If you go out there and you could do George Benson and Teddy Bunn. So many guitar players. It was a whole new regime.

Here I am. I meet a fiddler player, Clarence Moore, they call him [? (inaudible)]. He was a great . . . he was a virtuoso on a fiddle, but being black, he didn't get in the circles as a classical music, or he wasn't aggressive enough. But he could play all that classical music, and he could entertain. But he used to go to Hoboken, New Jersey, and hustle. He go to Hell's Kitchen, the West Side of New York, and them Irish boys and Italian boys, and entertain and hustle on the weekend. He used to have guitar players. He'd get a guitar player with him. So he seen me. I saw him. He's talking. I say, "What you doing?" He say, "I wait for the weekend. I just work the weekend. Friday, Saturday, Sunday afternoons, and I wrap it up 'til next week." That's the way he talks, philosophical about life. He said, "You want to come with me. You can make some money. You'll make enough to pay your rent and eat, on the weekend." I said, "O.k. Where to meet me?" Said, "All right. You meet me." It's getting fall now. He said, "When you come, put on a dark shirt and a tie. Want to look sharper than the patrons, because we hustling.

What was your question that you asked me?

White: You were doing that and you were pushing songs, and then you did a lot of things for your wife, Blue Lu, and you made some recordings.

Barker: No, not a lot. She never was interested. She don't want to be nobody looking at her, trying to feel on her, and telling her . . . That's what they do. Steppin' Fetchit, the great comedian. We played some gigs with him when I was here with my little group, my little band. There's a picture of the band around here somewhere, on the wall, with the bus. See the bus over there? That little bus? In 19-what-year-that-was we played one-nighters in Lafayette, Louisiana, Donaldsonville, almost to Houston, Texas. All little towns, when she had a hit record. *A Little Bird Told Me.*

White: Did you write that?

Barker: No, but it was a big hit, and she covered the record for Capitol and got more distribution than the girl who actually made the record on a small label. We went to California to live. The people in California was angry with us, because we covered that California girl's record. There's a big story behind that.

All right. So I go with Clarence, with the guitar, and we go on the West Side. He goes to a joint, a bar, regular bar, corner bar. There's Irish and Italians in this bar. He stands outside. People in the bar's looking. They see these two colored guys out there, but the bartenders know him. The boss know him. They check out his fiddle. You stand outside the bar, and I got the guitar. Say, "You in tune?" "Yeah, right." We fooling around. All the people . . . some of them who can see is looking. He say . . . take the fiddle, say [Barker sings]. Irish. *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling.* He play that so pretty, you hear a pin drop in there. After he plays, stop a while, and then he go, *Take Me Back to Sorrento,* for the Italians. [Barker sings.] He played it so pretty. All the Italians in this club, and he walked in the door. He said, "*Erin Go Bragh*." That means something in Irish, in Gaelic, in Irish. *Erin Go Bragh*. Happy to everybody. And he said something in Italian. He tell me, "Applaud." [Barker claps] I applaud, and all the people applaud. Then he walk in like he own the joint, with his fiddle in his hand. There's a bunch of Italians, old Italians there, and they said . . . they start arguing amongst their self, and they said, "Nice fiddle . . ."

How many minutes yet?

White: 10.

Barker: They said, "Nice fiddle." Old Italian there. Long-haired, like St. Peter. He's sitting there, and he's scarred, a great professor. He said, "Hey, you got a beautiful instrument. Say, but you . . ." "But what?" He said, "You a classical musician?" I say, "Yes." Say, "I play all types of music. Chinese music, Japanese music, and sometime a little Italian music." Get a little laugh. The guy said, "Can you do . . ." opus so-and-so and so-and-so. "Wait, I got it before you finish." And he went and played his opus. I'm watching the old cat. "Uh-huh. Um-hm." He's enjoying what he's listening to. When he get through, bartender say, "How you doing, [?C. . .]" [C. . .] say, "I'm not doing so good. Times is kind of rough with me. Got a rent to pay and all that business." Say that loud, and the people hear. The bartender put three quarters in a glass and shake them like that. The waiter come around and pick up the glass and go around from table to table. Them people's poor too. They ain't got much money, but they give you something. Clarence be shucking with them people, and he sing. Not no great voice, but he sings enough for the song. He said, "You got to learn some songs, Danny. I might get sick. You can come out here and hustle yourself." So I started listening to them Irish songs. *When Irish Eyes are Smiling, Come Back to Sorrento.* Don't do them now, because I have no reason. *Margie.* All the standards. *East Side, West Side, All Around the Town.* That was a

whole new outlet for me. I didn't have to worry about nobody. I became what you call a strolling entertainer. You understand? Strolling entertainer. Every weekend I could go somewhere and make me some money.

White: In the history of jazz you have recorded with probably as wide a range of people than anybody. A lot of what you mention in your book and a lot of what's talked about is your . . . the songs that you did with your wife and your own group. Some of the songs that you wrote, like *Here's a Little Girl, Don't You Make Me High,* and some of those others. When did all of that take place and what was that like?

Barker: That taken place around '38, just before I joined Cab. Just when I . . . just before I joined Cab, my wife got a contract, one of them jive contracts with Decca. Decca Records. You never met Decca. You met [J.] Mayo Williams, who was a black cat who was in charge of all the race artists. They call them race records. Decca. You went through him. You never met the big . . . the president of the company. Didn't pay you no respect. You had to deal with Mayo Williams, who was a bandit. They gave him your money. He take his top off, and he give you what he thought was right. I'd met Perry Bradford. You heard of Perry Bradford?

White: Sure.

Barker: Me and him were tight. I'd worked with James P. Johnson. I was tight with him. James P. Johnson . . . At that time I was working with James P. Johnson before I joined Benny Carter. Between Cab. James P. Johnson heard the record, *Don't You Feel My Legs,* say, "You got a hit. I'm working with you." He said . . . I said, "Yeah." He said, "Yeah, but bring your vasoline." I said, "Bring my vasoline for what?" He said, "Because you're going to get screwed." [? (inaudible)] know what that mean. He wrote *The Charleston, If I Could Be With You One Hour Tonight, Yamacrow,* which is a operatic thing, classical thing. All kinds of songs. He had a show on the road for 10, 12 years. The Pantages circuit. You never heard of that. The Pantages. That Orpheum circuit. The [?Lowell] circuit. The TOBA circuit. And the burlesque. Minsky's burlesque circuit. That's all circles of people traveling all the time, from all levels of show business. He had been on the road. He wore them big old college raccoon coats in the wintertime, and a derby and a big cigar. James P. Johnson. Wrote the [Barker sings]. He was the mentor of Fats Waller. I worked with him, [expletive deleted] with him. He liked what I did on the guitar.

Played some jobs with Willie "the Lion" Smith. I'll have to tell you about that sometime. Willie "the Lion" Smith said, "You my favorite guitar player, Dan." I say, "Why? Why'd you say that, all the wizards in town?" He said, "You the only guitar player that know when to raise his hand. When the piano player's playing, you play when he make arpeggio, you don't be hitting chords conflicted with that." I stop. And when they start again, let him play his solo. When he going to go into embellishment or change chords,

keys—they do that, piano players, when they're playing—raise my hand. Don't touch a note. Then come right in. He said, "I never seen nobody do that. That's what you call respect." And I gets that from "The Lion" in front of a gang of people. Not a gang of people. About six critical musicians.

White: You recorded with quite a few people, a range of people from . . . You did radio broadcasts with Louis Armstrong. You made a recording with Charlie Parker. That's right?

Barker: Yeah.

White: You recorded in a thing that's recently been reissued on video and CD . . . that's being widely discussed again, in *The Sound of Jazz,* which had Billie Holiday, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, and many many other legendary jazz figures.

Barker: Yeah, all of them dying, most of them. Drank their self or doped their self to death. Billie was dying then. Just skin and bones. Lester Young had been . . . drank so much brandy, 'til his eyes . . . You can see that their eyes look like two . . . something in a bowl . . . look like two eggs in a bowl of milk. Eyes that lost their pupils, he was so drunk. Had to lead him. In that solo you see Lester take with Billie, they had to lead him . . . pick him up, almost, and lead him to the bandstand. When they brought . . . to not the bandstand. To the mic. They told Ben Webster to follow him. If he didn't make it in time, to move right in and pick up the solo. That's for production. They would lead him away. But he got right there, and the tune was bouncing, real grooving. Lester just took his time, and this from experience, played a real lazy slow solo which is a classic. When they got through they put . . . his valet had a guy with him, take him in, took him in the corner, set him on a escape ladder, steps they have in the place.

White: Then you recorded with quite a few other people, most recently, in recent years, Wynton Marsalis. What was it like recording with such a wide range of people, going from some of the early jazz pioneers to some of the latest up and coming . . .

Barker: You just go on. Something you think you can make, you make. If the people really want you, they'll go with what you do. You don't be running up and grabbing things where they're going to give you some virtuoso music to read technically. I don't do that, because I can't. I don't see that far with music. I'm playing rhythm guitar, and I go along with that.

What was your question again?

White: I was asking, what was it like to play with so many legendary people up until . . .

Barker: You go and play. Most of them will accept me, because most of them want the solos. What I would do, they would like to have that. So you can have that. You go and play.

White: But you played a nice single-string on *The Death of Jazz* on *Majesty of the Blues* with Wynton Marsalis.

Barker: Yeah, but you see that. I'd never heard that before. I'd never heard the song, and they didn't have a rehearsal for that. In fact I don't remember rehearsing it. Did you?

White: No. There was no rehearsal.

Barker: All right. So they say, "All right. Play." But they played like 20 choruses before that. Everybody took a solo. So I'm listening. I know the chord structures, and it wasn't nothing that you need no hell of a technique. It's enough. So I just did the real plain ordinary minor relative changes. To a minor, to a seven, to a minor, to a seven. It's not aggressive. It's not forceful, because I don't have that speed. Benson and them would have did snakes all over that. I didn't. I just played the melody, and it was almost embarrassing, because I didn't put nothing innovative in there.

White: I thought it was very creative.

Barker: I don't know. I don't know. In fact I wasn't particular about going up there. It was all right to go. Because they've got all those guitar players [? (inaudible)]. They can wail.

White: We're just about out of tape right now. Anything you'd like to say in . . .

Barker: Yeah. That's about it?

White: . . . closing?

Barker: Yeah? What I'd like to say? Yeah. I'd like to say it has been a pleasure in a profession to be a musician, to have left New Orleans, played with New Orleans . . . some of the early greats in the '20s. From 1925 to '30 I played with Buddy Petit. I sat in with Kid Rena. Played with David Jones and Lee Collins. I played with old man Glenny. I played with old man Kimball. I played with some very old musicians. I played with Big Eye Louis [Nelson]. Played with John Handy. It was a pleasure. I journeyed to New York. I played with Benny Carter. Step-by-step. Played with Benny Carter. I played with Baron Lee. I played with Danny Logan's band. I played with Jim . . . James P. Johnson's band. Played with Dave Nelson's band. I played with . . . who else? Lucky Millinder's band, which was an exciting band. Played battle music with Basie, and he was the victor. He blowed Basie out the place. Didn't give him a chance to go on. The people say that.

They tell you they think you're lying, get that kind of discredit. Had a battle of music. They had four bands on the road, playing. Basie's band. Cab Calloway's band. Ike Dixon's band. And a band out of Ohio. Can't think of the name right now. Four buses. We played this dance. It was a marathon or a spectacular jam battle of bands. The West, the East, the South, and the North. And we . . . and I had the pleasure of doing that. I've recorded with a lot of musicians who appreciated me, and quite a few . . . the leaders would appreciate me, but some of the bands . . . [the tape ends abruptly].

[Transcribed by Barry Kernfeld from a digital copy of the tape reels]