

Early Jazz Days In N. O. Recalled

BY BOB MORRIS

These torrid Sunday afternoons many Orleansians head for the lakefront. Some families have been going for generations in a custom of long standing—which is not likely to change.

Around the turn of the century a favored lake resort was Milneburg, where gay picnics with beer and dancing made the summer seem more agreeable. And of course there was music.

ONE SULTRY afternoon years ago a band of musicians was mounting a platform, blowing practice runs on their instruments and getting ready to play. A couple of other musicians

him, it reads like a jazz hall of fame.

"Let's see," he reflected, "there was Dave Perkins, Johnny Lala, Alcide Nunez, the Christian boys—Frank, Charlie and Emile — Tom Brown, Arnold Loyocano, Nick LaRocca, George and Abbie Brunies—all the Brunies family had musical talent — Larry Shields, Gus Muller and Lawrence Vega—that Vega was one of the finest cornets I ever heard."

"Then my own son, Alfred Laine, played alto horn with us.

"And of course there was Willie Guitar," he smiled. "Guitar played bass and lived on Music St.

"We were kept so busy with several bands going at once, playing for parades, dances, picnics and funerals, that I used to post assignments on a bulletin board. Then the men could come in, take a look, and find out where they were working that day.

"I remember I had an all-blind band once. Five men and not one of them could see. Only the piano player could 'read' music—by braille. Every time I got in a jam and needed some musicians in a hurry, I could always count on the blind boys to help me out."

FULLY AS enthusiastic as Papa about the early days of New Orleans music is Mama Laine. The genial couple lives at 2842 N. Prieur.

"I don't understand some of this modern jazz so much," Mama admits. "But the people seem to like it and that's what counts, same as then."

The Laines dragged out a pile of scrapbooks and photo albums containing a rich chapter of New Orleans' past. Some of the musicians in the pictures are famous and some are dead—but all are a part of history they helped create.

"Look," said Mama, indicating a snapshot of a young boy, "here's little Georgie. He was wearing his new suit that day." Little Georgie proved to be George Brunies, the famed trombonist, who currently is over 50 if he's a day.

And there was a picture of Papa receiving an award from the New Orleans Jazz Club in 1951 honoring him as the "father of white jazz."

BUT LIFE for the Laines means more than browsing among mementoes of the past. After all the vigorous years spent hammering at an anvil for the Dennis Sheen Transfer Co. and then playing jazz until late hours at night—besides being all avid volunteer fireman—Jack Laine is far from ready to quit.

"He's always on the go," Mama said. "Sometimes he'll stay at Shell Beach for a few days, then he'll be helping somebody with some project or other, then he's dashing somewhere else." She paused. "A regular gadabout," she smiled. "The rest of the time he's out in the shed working on those hats."

A visit to the shed adjoining the Laine household reveals an assembly line with dozens of firemen's helmets in various stages of completion. Laine's gnarled blacksmith hands turn them out with loving care.

"There's quite a demand for these things," he said. "Fire companies are always asking me

Paul Ferrara, Sharkey's drummer, planning to join Erwin's band when it leaves town.



Criswell
PREDICTS

The item presents for entertainment, arguments or whatever, the predictions and personal advice of Joseph King Criswell. Questions for Criswell should be addressed to him, care of this item, 722 Union, New Orleans. He will answer as many as space permits, using only the writer's initials. Please do not send money.

Q—Since the Board of Health closed up my husband's restaurant, he refuses to eat just for spite. Now he makes me feel guilty and says I should have kept the restaurant clean. I'm a sick woman and still have my job as a school teacher. How nasty can a man get? Will he ever start eating again? He looks healthy enough. Maude R.

A—Your husband is a very stubborn man, but you can be sure he is not starving himself, even though he would like you to think so. I advise you to prepare your meals as usual and don't worry about him. He will soon be back to normal.

Q—I'm an elderly lady and always had a good sense of humor. The other day I was sitting alone, rocking myself by the living room window, looking out like I do so much now and suddenly something struck me like a shot out of a cannon. I realized that I had not laughed in five years. Chills ran all through me and I thought back to the times when I was so gay and carefree, laughing all the time. What has happened? Has life lost all its lustre? M.S.I.

A—These past five years have been most hectic for you and you lost your husband and two children. As time goes on unhappy memories will fade and new faces and events will come into your life. You will laugh and you will sing as you did years ago. Your prayers will be answered.

Q—I was discharged from the Army in World War I with a dishonorable discharge. I've been in jail time and time again. Once I had three wives. There's a lot I've done and the way I look at it, I've gained far more experience through this than the average man. Now, my best friend refuses to give me a job with his insurance company. Should I bring pressure to bear?

Lloyd F. Rt. 4

A—Your past record is a very active one, but it is nothing to be proud of. Your friend feels you have turned over a new leaf, but he cannot expose himself nor his very reliable company to ridicule. There have been and will be opportunities for you to prove yourself and return to society, but there are many scars which will remain on your record.

Q—I tell W what B said about their family? Will this cause too much trouble or would it be best if I minded my own business? This is terrible. Emma 480-X

A—I advise you to let things continue as they have and do not mention this matter. It will come out of its own accord, and I am afraid there will be some trouble when it is revealed. Do not involve yourself, but merely be an onlooker.



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—John E. Kuhlman Photo
PAPA LAINE
so many boys

sauntered by, bulky horn cases under their arms, on their way to work nearby. One, eyeing the platform, nudged the other.

"Say, we're really going to have to play some today," he said. "That's Jack Laine's Reliance Band."

NOW 83 YEARS OLD, "Papa" Laine recalls that competition really was keen in those days.

"But we usually managed to hold our own," he chuckled. This is a typically modest statement from the retired blacksmith who once ran five bands at one time.

He earned the title of Papa because dozens of New Orleans' early jazz musicians broke into music by playing in one or more of his organizations.

"My boys," he said, "were among the best in the city. Some were polished musicians, and some couldn't read a single note. But when we put them all together the band would really sound fine."

Laine's groups were basically military bands. Occasionally they would vary the standard march fare by playing some lively number the boys had worked out in rehearsal.

"We didn't call it jazz then," Papa Laine remarked. "We'd never heard of that name. We just called it ragtime." But jazz it was.

BORN SEPT. 21, 1873, George Vital Laine began beating on tin pans when he was a child. One day, when he was eight, his father brought home a drum—a real drum from an Army surplus auction.

"I didn't know how to play the thing," Papa Lane now reminisces, "but I soon figured it out."

Practice, not training, is what made Laine proficient on his instrument. Later, when he was leading his own groups, he would hire a man whether he'd had musical schooling or not. The main thing was: Did he really want to play?

"I remember," Laine mused, "one time Chink Martin came to me and told me he thought he could play the tuba, although he'd never tried.

"So I got hold of a tuba somewhere for eight dollars and put it in his hands and said, 'Play it.' Sure enough, he did."

And Chink has been playing it ever since with considerable success, as every jazz follower knows.

WHEN PAPA starts recalling some of the men who played for

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