

ORAL HISTORY T-0033
INTERVIEW WITH DRUIE BESS
INTERVIEWED BY PETER ETZKORN
JAZZMEN PROJECT
NOVEMBER 5, 1971

CORTINOVIS: Today is November 5 and this is Irene Cortinovic of the Oral History Program of the University of Missouri, Archives and Manuscripts Division; and today we have Mr. Druie Bess, a trombone player, in our jazz musician series. And along with the interview with me are Dr. Peter Etzkorn of the Sociology Department and Len Licata, a student assistant. So, suppose you just start, Druie, and just tell us where you were born and who you played with. Well, let's start with where you were born and how you learned to play music.

BESS: Well, I was born in Montgomery City, Missouri, July 24, 1901. Parents: Frank and Fannie Bess.

ETZKORN: Did you grow up in Missouri, then? Did you spend your early years in that town?

BESS: Early years in that town and my dad and another friend of his, named Ed Duffy, learned me how to play trombone, started me on the trombone.

ETZKORN: Did they have a band in that town?

BESS: Had a home-town band.

ETZKORN: Your father played in the band, too?

BESS: Father and Ed Duffy. He played the bass clef, my father played the treble clef. And Ed Duffy learned me how to play the bass clef, said that'd be better.

CORTINOVIS: Montgomery City still isn't a very big town. Were there many blacks in Montgomery City?

BESS: Well, quite a few, quite a few.

CORTINOVIS: So, then, what'd your dad do?

BESS: My dad worked at the electric plant. He was an engineer and fireman, at that time.

CORTINOVIS: So, where'd the band play?

BESS: Picnics and around in the vicinity.

ETZKORN: How old were you, then, when you started playing there?

BESS: About nine years old.

CORTINOVIS: Really?

BESS: That was around 1910.

ETZKORN: Did you have a standard-size trombone or did they have a small one for you?

BESS: No, I just barely could reach the sixth position. About as far as I could reach at that time.

CORTINOVIS: Where did your dad learn to play the trombone, Druie, do you know? Your dad, where did he learn to play trombone, do you know?

BESS: I don't know; he learned himself.

CORTINOVIS: Did he?

BESS: Ed Duffy must have learned from an instructor, I suppose. They played carnival. I was on carnival with him. I was about six years old. I remember that. That was around 1907-8.

CORTINOVIS: Around in Missouri did you play, then?

BESS: It was around Missouri at that time. Missouri and Kansas and...

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CORTINOVIS: Around in Missouri did you play, then?

BESS: It was around Missouri at that time. Missouri and Kansas and around in there.

CORTINOVIS: Do you remember the name of the carnival company?

BESS: No, can't remember.

CORTINOVIS: You accompanied the acts...?

BESS: My dad, he played in the band—they had a minstrel show. That's what they played for, the minstrel show.

CORTINOVIS: Did you travel in a railroad car?

BESS: I don't know. I forgot now just how we traveled. I guess it was a railroad car...I think it was.

CORTINOVIS: Elij Shaw told us about being in the railroad minstrels. It was, the whole minstrel show was on the car and the performance was given there, too, on the outside. They'd pull into a siding. But yours wasn't like that?

BESS: No.

CORTINOVIS: But you must have traveled on the railroad because the roads would have really been too . . .

BESS: They played lots, they played lots, right on lots.

ETZKORN: They must have played from sheet music, then. They played from notated music.

BESS: No, they played band music. In those days, they had...trombone had treble clef, treble clef and bass clef. Had two parts, two separate parts. They had it all, not just the bass clef. I

started playing and I went to school, high school, in Chicago, Lane Tech. and I had a nice teacher there. He taught me quite a bit about trombone. He took a lot of interest in me. They had me play in the orchestra there. They wouldn't let me play in the band. I just played in the orchestra.

ETZKORN: You played choir music, then, symphonic music in the orchestra?

BESS: Yeah, we played all kinds of music. At home we played all standing up, at home, all the numbers.

ETZKORN: Were there any other members of your family who played your uncle, your father and you or were there others?

BESS: Well, my father and I had a brother—he played a small violin, but he didn't go too far with that. Mother used to sing. But after I left Chicago, I went on the road, after I came back home.

CORTINOVIS: You mean you left Montgomery City to go to high school in Chicago? Was there a high school in Montgomery City?

BESS: Yeah, but I couldn't go there at the time.

CORTINOVIS: That's right. Did you have relatives in Chicago?

BESS: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: And you went to live with them while you went to high school?

BESS: I had a grandmother and an aunt.

CORTINOVIS: Whose idea was it that you go to Chicago, Druie, was that your mother's idea?

BESS: Well, yes, it wasn't mother and then I had a grandmother and aunt up there that wanted me to come. They liked me real well.

EZKORN: You had visited with them before? You had been to Chicago before then?

BESS: Oh, yeah. I had been up there before. I went on the minstrel show and put on long pants. I wore short pants up until I went on the minstrel show.

CORTINOVIS: About what year was that?

BESS: That was about 1921, that's when the first minstrel show. I wore short pants until I was about 20 years old. I was on Herbie's Minstrel two years.

ETZKORN: Was that out of Chicago?

BESS: No. It was just on the road. It was a tent show down South.

CORTINOVIS: How did you get those jobs like, did you say, the Herbie's Minstrel Show?

BESS: Herbert's. Well, I had a cousin on there and at first I went out on the Dandy Dixie Minstrel and there was a bunch from my hometown. And that show stranded. And that show stranded. And I had a cousin who played bass on the home town band. He was a real fine bass player, too. And said to him a ticket down to join them down in Kentucky. So, I joined them and played two years over there and that show was beginning to...minstrel shows was starting to go down. Because I went with R. M. Harvey, Harvey, R. M. Harvey's Minstrels. Then, next in '23 and '24 I was just playing band music and everything, but during that time we had, during that time we was on Harvey's Minstrels, why it was the first time I heard jazz, first time I heard jazz music. We had a little jazz music act, one of the acts on there. I was playing, actually, with an older trombone player by the name of Frank Curry...was playing trombone. That was the first time I heard jazz.

ETZKORN: Where did he come from, that Frank? Did he come from New Orleans or...?

BESS: Me?

CORTINOVIS: No, no, Frank.

BESS: I don't know where Frank Curry come from. He come from down South somewhere. Mississippi, somewhere down there. But, anyway, that's the first time I heard...

ETZKORN: How large was a group, like the Minstrel Show orchestra, how many people would be in the band?

BESS: In a band?

ETZKORN: Trombone, of course?

BESS: Well, at that time, we had about 18 pieces. See, they featured bands on a minstrel show. On R. M. Harvey, had around 20 pieces. The band would draw the people. It was very exciting, very exciting. Fine musicians, too. Finest musicians I ever played with.

ETZKORN: Would you all travel along or would you pick up people in the different towns?

BESS: All traveled together. R. M. Harvey had two fine Pullman cars. Stateroom. Staterooms.

CORTINOVIS: So, when you came to a town, did they have a parade first?

BESS: Had a parade, had a twelve o'clock parade. On Herbie's Minstrel we used to march all over the different sections of town. On Harvey's Minstrel they was a little more sophisticated. Play in the theaters. We just go down, go out in front of the theater or sometime we'd go down to a square and play a concert and march over there. We had fine looking uniforms, high hats and those tailed coats.

CORTINOVIS: Do you have any pictures of those days?

BESS: No, I haven't got any of those pictures.

CORTINOVIS: Besides the tent shows, did you play any place else with these minstrel shows?

BESS: Most of the minstrel shows broke up. R. M. Harvey broke up in 1924. I went to Chicago and there were some IOU's mixed up in it. He was supposed to pay us off there. He was a very rich man, though, R. M. Harvey. Well off. He did pay us off, but it was a little late and I played around there for a while. I didn't belong to any unions, so I couldn't get any union jobs. I had to play way out...

CORTINOVIS: In Chicago you're talking about?

BESS: Talking about. I played out in Cicero. I played out around in there. Gangland days. Shots going off; I finally quit, I finally quit over there and went into St. Joe, Missouri.

ETZKORN: Did you ever join the union?

BESS: They didn't have any unions, at that time, on our show. They had what you call seniority and how good you was. You got paid that-a-way. If you got real good end of a long time, your salary went up every year.

ETZKORN: When you were with the minstrel show, did they pay you enough that you could have a family?

BESS: Oh, yeah, at that time. The kind of salary they were paying at that time you could get along with it. You could get a dozen eggs for a dime.

CORTINOVIS: What kind of salary were they paying, now?

BESS: Well, they'd go about \$15 a week and would keep going up until you get about 25. On R. M. Harvey, they had Modern Black Patti on there. She got way up there.

CORTINOVIS: Who was that, Druie?

BESS: Modern Black Patti. They called her the Modern Black Patti. There was a Black Patti right before her, only she was older.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, she was named after Adelina Patti, the opera singer?

BESS: I guess so.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, I see.

BESS: She could make all those high notes.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, after Adelina Patti.

BESS: She used to sing this number, I can't think of the name of it. I used to do it with a trombone. She'd make that high note. Now, that was with the Nu-Way Jazz Hounds, in St.

Joe, Missouri. And I stayed there and that's where I met my first wife. I stayed around there two or three years. I started playing with Jess Stone's Blue Serenaders.

CORTINOVIS: So, then, you went from this straight music, you really played straight band music...

BESS: I played straight band music and played trombone solos.

CORTINOVIS: What kind of pieces did you play? Do you remember any of them?

BESS: What, solos? I played "Annie Laurie" with about four variations. There was another number called "Sole of the Surf." "Sole of the Surf" was another number that was a trombone solo. I played several of them. I can't think of all of them. I played all, the whole family of trombones by myself back at that time. They all was out at that time. The whole family of the trombone. A whole lot of those numbers came out at the same time.

ETZKORN: You always stuck with a slide trombone? You didn't try the valve trombone?

BESS: No. No valve.

CORTINOVIS: So, then, you went with the Nu-Way Jazz Hounds. Well, how did you get from straight music to jazz?

BESS: Well, now, it was a...I copied. See, I converted. I seen I couldn't make no money the other way, playing pretty, so I had to get kinda rough with it.

CORTINOVIS: Modern. Would this be about 1925?

BESS: About 1925. Yeah, I started playing with Jess Stone. He was a great arranger. He's all around New York now. He was writing a lot of arrangements and that was just set up for me because I could play anything. I could play the bassoon at that time, play anything. I could read two, three bars ahead at that time, didn't worry about the music. I had a lot of arrangements. He had about nine pieces of band, nine, ten pieces. He was playing me a lot on sweet pieces and jazz pieces that I played at that time. But ragtime really came out before any of them.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever play ragtime?

BESS: Well, they had some ragtime music coming out.

CORTINOVIS: It was mostly piano music but did they have arrangements for...

BESS: They had, they had band. They had some band rag. Ragtime band and blues and then came jazz. Now jazz, speaking about jazz, the slide doesn't play jazz. But the real sound of jazz, a lot of them don't really get that. They play it but they don't get the real sound of jazz. See, what I converted over to, it... and I was a pretty good jazz player myself. See, I know what they doing, I been around good jazz players. I know what they're doing. I know everything they're doing about the trombone because I followed it, listened, and I'd catch what they're doing. Tell me how to do it and I found out how to do it because I watched it

and played with it. There's plenty of them can play jazz and it was the sound.

ETZKORN: What is the distinction in the sound?

BESS: The sound is something, I tell you. Some of the things I've noticed about some of the sound...I noticed some of the, I noticed one thing about the clarinets. I'll go to a clarinet for instance. Now, there are some good clarinet players that play jazz and I've heard some real good clarinet players, but seems like the jazz clarinet players, the real good jazz players, got kind of a reedy sound, to me. I sounds good but it's not as clear all through. It's kind of a reedy sound, just like Yardbird, Yardbird Parker. Now, I knew him way back when, when they had trouble with him in a section, playing in his section. But still, he come out to be one of the greatest jazz players. He had that reedy sound. I don't know...too. You know, that kind of a feeling. I feel something at times when I'm playing. I feel it the older I get. Now, I play better jazz now than I played ten, twelve years ago. Right now I play, well, it's just something I feel. I pick up my horn and I play it...just something I feel, just something I do to the notes. Something I feel toward different notes and things. It's just different than playing what you hear somebody play. See, you hand just slides, you're not feeling anything. You just play what you hear. Well, it comes out the way it was, that's jazz. You are playing jazz. You're playing the same thing he's playing. Just like when I started playing trombone, I mean later on, about jazz I'm talking about, I didn't have no kind of a style. I heard a record one day with Miff Mole on it. I sounded so good to me because he used good tone. He used good tone and he moved on his horn fast. I guess you all heard of him, haven't you?

CORTINOVIS: The name sounds familiar.

BESS: Miff Mole. Now I copied him. At that time he was quite a trombone player. Played with Paul Whiteman and all of them. Well, I looked, I studied music quite a bit, I knew what he was playing. He was playing thirds, a lot of thirds. It was easy to copy. But it sounded good. It was good swing but it was good sound. I played it for a long time and they called me "Miff," nicknamed me "Miff" all the time I was playing with the Oklahoma Blue Devils. I said, "Well, from now on I ain't gonna copy nobody, all the way. I'll just take a piece of somebody." And then probably I'd make a style of my own. But, they all copied.

CORTINOVIS: They, everybody would be calling other people Druie.

BESS: Yeah. You get a style that everybody likes. I have pieces of everybody. Everybody copies. All of us copy. Rules of the game. Everybody copies after each other. And some that get a best sound or sound that goes with the public is the popular one. It's like J. J. Johnson. He plays trombone. I remember him way back. Now, he chose his trombone. Now, the trombone, they ain't never knowed to sound real good unless you have some kind of slurs in it. I mean to get a feeling out of a trombone. But he does it. It still sounds good. And he's won all the awards, lately. But he sounds good, sounds good to me. I just can't see it. The guy... I just can't see it. That's it.

CORTINOVIS: It seems to me that a lot of St. Louis musicians once played with the Oklahoma Blue Devils. Did you play with them after you played with Jess Stone?

BESS: After I played with Jess Stone? Yes, I played...yeah, I played with them. I played with

them about, from 1929 to...till they broke up in 1933. They broke up in 1933.

CORTINOVIS: Where did they play mostly?

BESS: They played Oklahoma, Texas,...and went up into Iowa, Nebraska, Omaha, Nebraska, went out Souix City, Souix Falls, South Dakota, and Minneapolis, Minnesota...and then Kansas City, we worked out of there quite a while. All those towns we worked out of quite...

CORTINOVIS: Who was the leader of the band when you played with them?

BESS: Walter Page.

CORTINOVIS: Walter Page. Who else played with them when you played with them, Druie?

BESS: Well, in the beginning it was Hot Lips Page and...

CORTINOVIS: Are they brothers, Walter and Hot Lips Page?

BESS: No. They're no kin. One played bass. The other played trumpet. Then, later on we got Lester Young in the band. We had a good arranger in the band I have to mention. His name was Buster Smith. We called him Buster Smith. I really don't know what his first name is. We called him Buster. But he was out of Texas, Dallas, Texas and he was a real fine arranger. I played mostly his arrangements.

ETZKORN: Then, your fellow musicians were all reading music, or they could read at least?

BESS: Oh, all of them, all of them.

CORTINOVIS: I would imagine that they did in the Oklahoma Blue Devils; but I forgot to ask you back here before you talked about one of the minstrel shows having such good arrangements. Wasn't that kind of unusual to have a book of arrangements that early?

BESS: They had mostly stocks. Stocks and we played mostly concerts. With the minstrel shows. We had a lot of stocks and played a lot of standards—overtures. Had very fine musicians. Some of the finest musicians I ever played with in my life was in there. I never seen such good musicians. I don't know where they took music at.

ETZKORN: How about that Frank that trombonist with the jazz in that minstrel group?

CORTINOVIS: Frank Curry?

BESS: Frank Curry? I don't know what become of him, but Frank was about the first trombone player I played with...that when I came to the show he was the only one there. I never will forget him. He used to take his horn down and play wild every time someone important came to see...try catching me sleeping; I broke him of that; We got to be real good friends. Now, I went to Minneapolis and I played up there for a while with Pettifus. There was a Harry Pettifus, a fine saxophonist and this Oscar Pettiful, he was a baby! There was a family band. I never will forget it. It was a family band. They had all of them, girls, a bunch of them. Now, I left them and started to play with Grant Moore till their band, around '34, till

their band broke up.

ETZKORN: You did have a job during the Depression.

BESS: Yeah. Then I came down here in '35, that was in '34...1934...

CORTINOVIS: To St. Louis.

BESS: I came down here and I started playing with Eddie Randle. He named the Blue Devils after the band I played with. The Oklahoma Blue Devils.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, you know, Eddie has been out here to give us a tape recording. We had a really nice...

BESS: He told me that after the time I started playing with him. I knew he had the same name but he told me he might name them after this band.

CORTINOVIS: So, then, you took all those hundreds of one-nighters with Eddie Randle.

BESS: Oh, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Every night a different place. Eddie would have them lined up as far ahead as a year and it was just one night. You know, when I consider the job it was to get all those engagements and move everybody and all that every night...

BESS: Eight, nine jobs a week. Afternoons, everything. He ran one of the "giginst" band I played with. Then I left Eddie...

ETZKORN: What did you play with Eddie? Was it mainly jazz at this point or still standard arrangements?

BESS: Well...Why I liked the band?

CORTINOVIS: No, when you were with Eddie, what kind of music...?

BESS: Oh, we played...a lot of nice numbers. He had kind of a sweet band. Then he had some swinging numbers in there, too.

CORTINOVIS: Hot.

BESS: Yeah, he had some hot numbers in there.

CORTINOVIS: He played for dancing, you played for dancing mostly, didn't you?

BESS: We did play mostly for dancing.

CORTINOVIS: So, you would have to play some...

BESS: Yeah, a variety of music. Tried to fit everybody. But I used to have to play "Gettin' Sentimental Over You" two or three times a night, in the key of D. I'll never forget. Eddie

said, "Make up your weak mind." I never will forget what he said. They'd ask for it all the time. It was popular at that time.

ETZKORN: Did you ever get asked to play other instruments as well, other brass, or did you just play your trombone?

BESS: Just trombone.

ETZKORN: I shouldn't say just trombone because that's a marvelous thing, but sometimes side men have to pick up other instruments as well.

BESS: Yeah, that's right.

ETZKORN: But you didn't find that was necessary.

BESS: After I left his band, I started playing with Eddie Johnson, Fate Marable...

CORTINOVIS: Where did Fate have...then, this would be in the 30's?

BESS: That was in '39. I was just jobbing around then, from one band to another.

CORTINOVIS: So, then, where was Fate playing then? On the boat?

BESS: He wasn't playing on the boat. He was just jobbing around there waiting for the boat to open up. The boat would open up and he would start playing around in April and we play around in Pittsburg. I played around in Pittsburg until Labor Day. But Carter had most of those jobs, that is on the boat. I got the last job with him in '40.

CORTINOVIS: Who was this Carter?

BESS: Robert Carter.

CORTINOVIS: Robert Carter.

BESS: Robert Carter; was playing with him. He and I were both playing with him.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever play on the boat then? What boat was it that...

BESS: Ma'am?

CORTINOVIS: I say, did you play on a boat, did you say? Did you say that when you...

BESS: There was room for me trombone on the boat.

CORTINOVIS: What boat was it that you played on?

BESS: Senator.

CORTINOVIS: The Senator.

BESS: Senator, in Pittsburg.

CORTINOVIS: That wasn't a Streckfuss boat up there was it?

BESS: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, it was a Streckfuss.

BESS: Yes, yes. It was a Streckfuss.

Mixed conversation.

BESS: He had all the boats.

CORTINOVIS: He sure did.

BESS: He had all of them.

CORTINOVIS: Well, tell us a little bit about Fate Marable, Cruie. I guess he was just about one of the most famous musicians to play around St. Louis. What kind of a man was he?

BESS: Fate was a nice man, nice man to work under. He was the one that, well, he spoke about this, this piano player that's so popular out in Pittsburg now...that wrote "Misty."

CORTINOVIS: That wrote "Misty."

BESS: He used to come on the boat and play all the time. He used to get him all the time. He was wild about it. He used to say he was going to be a great man some day. He used to say to this boy. I can't recall his name right now.

CORTINOVIS: The composer of the song "Misty"?

BESS: No, the one that wrote it. He didn't compose it. He wrote it. He just wrote it.

CORTINOVIS: The music?

BESS: He just wrote the music. Piano player. But Fate, he's a nice fella to work for. I worked with him and I worked with Dewey Jackson. Made some jiving with him. Archie Burnside. He is...I forgot to mention him. I made quite a few jobs with him.

ETZKORN: These were all coronet players, people you mentioned right now? Burnstein?

BESS: Who?

ETZKORN: Did he play the coronet or the trumpet?

BESS: Who?

ETZKORN: Burnstein...Burnside?

BESS: Drummer.

ETZKORN: A drummer.

CORTINOVIS: A lot of band leaders were drummers, weren't they?

BESS: Well, no.

CORTINOVIS: No?

BESS: No. All them I named before him wasn't drummers.

CORTINOVIS: They're piano players, aren't they? Eddie Johnson, Fate...

BESS: Dewey Jackson was a trumpeter.

CORTINOVIS: Was Dewey Jackson a trumpeter?

BESS: He was one of the best jazz trumpeters in town, at one time.

CORTINOVIS: Almost everybody says so. So many people have remarked who have played with Fate Marable or heard him, that he was such a good technical man.

BESS: Oh, he's a fine piano player. Play anything you put up there.

CORTINOVIS: Play anything...

BESS: Any key, any key. He could play in any key. He was good. Louie used to send for him every year. Come up here and pay all his expenses.

CORTINOVIS: You mean Louie Armstrong?

BESS: Yeah, Louie Armstrong. He had Louie on the boats several times when he was coming up.

CORTINOVIS: Right, in 1920. Louie Armstrong, in his autobiography, gives Fate Marable credit that it was, because it was Fate insisting he learn how to read music before he'd hire him on the boat.

BESS: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: He had learned to read music when he was a little kid but because he was trying to take after King Oliver, then, he decided he could play by ear like King Oliver did. But Fate Marable insisted that he study music. And he always said that he'd never have gotten nearly as far if it hadn't been for Fate Marable.

BESS: He liked Fate. He said to Fate every day, he said, "Well, I'm going up to New York around Christmas time." Every year. He said all expenses paid, could stay as long as he wanted to stay. Then he'd send him back home.

CORTINOVIS: My husband and I used to go to the old Victorian Club and hear Fate Marable when he played. You know that big piano bar on the first floor and he played the Victorian Club. I guess that was one of the last places he ever played. It was down there on Washington just west of Grand Avenue. A big, it was like a dinner club. You've played with Dewey Jackson and you've really played with some good band leaders.

BESS: Now, I played with Dewey _____ . That was in 1941. I played...

CORTINOVIS: In the Club Plantation.

BESS: I played in the Club Plantation till 194—till about the middle of 1941. Then they started running big bands in there and Earl Hines came in here. He was sort of a trombone player and I started playing with him. I played with him '44, '45, '46 with Earl Hines.

CORTINOVIS: Mean, you traveled with him?

BESS: Yeah, I traveled with him. And, then...

CORTINOVIS: What kinds of places did Earl Hines play?

BESS: All them, all them, he played some theaters out west, he played those _____ I can't take them.

CORTINOVIS; In concerts, or...

BESS: Well, we played a lot of stage. A lot of stage concerts.

CORTINOVIS: On stage shows?

BESS: Stage concerts, yeah. Played a lot. They had me featured on some of those...

CORTINOVIS: Was that a pretty big band?

BESS: Had about twenty-four pieces.

CORTINOVIS: Well, Jeter-Pillar had a pretty big band, too.

BESS: They had a good band, too.

CORTINOVIS: They played down at the Club Plantation, what, about 10 years.

BESS: Yeah, we won a contest in that Wild Ruth had. It wasn't Wild Ruth but one of them had. We got the most votes in. And then, let's see, that was '46. '47, what'd I do? I played with Eddie again. I was supposed to go back to Earl's band but Earl broke up his band and went with Louie Armstrong's All-Stars. And then I started playing with Eddie Johnson again. We played up to the Plantation for a while. And then, another trombone player that was playing with the Ringling Brothers about fifteen years, his home was here. A fella by the name of Harvey Langford.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, sure.

BESS: Now, Harvey Langford and I took up a friendship some way or another, I guess. Anyway, we got acquainted some way or another and around the winter of '47, I believe it was, he wanted me to go on the show with him. Go on the Ringling. I told him I didn't know, I didn't much want sax, at the time. "Oh," he said, "come on and try. A trombone player over there has just died." Consumption, I think he died. But, anyway, I decided to go over there, see what it was like. So I go on over there to Ringling and the band leader died at the end of that year. He died in '49, January '49, so I stayed a year over there.

CORTINOVIS: Did you travel with the circus band?

BESS: Yeah, I traveled. That was the last year they had a colored band on that circus.

CORTINOVIS: So, what cities did you play with that band?

BESS: Well, everywhere they regularly played. Played all, everywhere they regularly played, they had a side show. They were under a tent, then. See, they're not under a tent now. And they played way out. We had to take a bus out there. The show was so large, we couldn't play in no city. Was way out.

CORTINOVIS: They used to come out here across from where St. Louis University is. Played on Grand Avenue there. Grand and Market. Wasn't there a big field where the Ringling Brothers used to play?

BESS: Did they play there?

CORTINOVIS: Yeah.

BESS: I know wherever we went, they always took us in a bus out to work.

CORTINOVIS: How did you like playing with all those lions and tigers?

BESS: Well, it was all right and I was going to go back and I kind of liked it. I told Harvey, I says, well...the band leader, his name was Abe Wright, he called us in, called us two trombone players in. He says, "I want to tell you that you fellas, you all play better together than...any two trombone players I've had since I've been in show business." Well, when we was over on the show. Merle Evans heard us play and he said that we was the two best trombone players that they ever had. The Side Show Manager, too. Well, we just got together and made our slurs together and everything. In rehearsal, we just got everything down. We really did sound good. It sounded good to me. He's one of the nicest trombone players in show business I played with; that is, as far as the band. Harvey's good on the slide.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, and Tab Smith, a lot of musicians that have really been famous in St. Louis.

BESS: And I left, let's see, '49 went with another circus. I can't think of the name of it. It was second to Ringling. I can't think of the name of it right off, now.

CORTINOVIS: Hornbeck or one of those?

BESS: Ma'am?

CORTINOVIS: Hornbeck or one of those?

BESS: No. I can't think of the name for anything, right now. Can't think of it. But, anyway, see, '50, '51 I came home, see, father died in '51. Let's see, '52, '51-'52 I started playing here. I played out here on a jammer. I played in Carter's place in '52. For about six months with Singleton Palmer. That's the first time I played with Singleton Palmer. I played about six months in his place and I started playing out here on a jammer with Joe Smith at Windemere.

CORTINOVIS: With whom?

BESS: Joe Smith.

BESS: Yeah, he had the band out at Windemere. I played '52, '53, and, let's see, '54. I think that's just about the end for...that is my playing. I was just playing here and there, I mean, jobbing.

CORTINOVIS: Do you still practice, Druie?

BESS: Yeah, I still practice.

CORTINOVIS: Every day?

BESS: Well, about every day but some days I practice. I can't do much unless I do practice. That is, I don't feel like that I can do a job unless I practice. Do it pretty good, because a lot of things I want to play, if I don't practice, I'm not sure I'm going to make it. That's what makes me...

CORTINOVIS: That would hurt your feelings.

BESS; That's why I really have to practice. A lot of people don't do it. But I feel like I should do it. I think that's just about the end of my career, I mean as far as playing pretty steady.

CORTINOVIS: I know you played on the Jazz on the River. Was that fun?

BESS: Oh, yeah. I had fun. They made a band leader out of me that night.

CORTINOVIS; Were you ever a band leader before?

BESS: Oh, I been a band leader. I started to bring up my diploma that I got in Chicago around 1919 from H. A. Vandercook for directing. I started to bring it out here to show you all but I figured, well, they don't want to see nothing like that nohow. They want to hear something about jazz. But, in the beginning, I wanted to be a trombone soloist and a band leader, writing and arranging. I wanted to be the whole works. But after I joined the show and I seen what the band leaders had to go through, well, then, I decided I didn't want to be no band leader 'cause I don't see why...! have a reason I won't even mention it because you got the tape. But, I wouldn't want to be no band leader, I mean, continually be a band leader. I look at it two or three different ways. The band leader, you got how many mouths he got to

feed? You got eight pieces of jazz, ten, twelve, twenty or whatever it is, you got to keep going. But a side man, he's only got one. He just has to look out for that one. So, I decided I'd just stay, just be a side man and let everybody else have the worry. All I had to do was worry about getting there and playing. Only thing I see about being on Big Time, that is being with a Big Time band and playing and being a soloist and things like that, it is a little nerve-racking; because every time you go out to play, you got to play good. Sometimes, they ain't supposed to do it, I don't think, now. I don't know. But they used to tape you on a tape recorder and there's a lot of different people out there hearing you, different critics and you want to make a showing. You want to be good. And that kind of...it makes you want to practice. Sometimes you over-practice. You go out and you left everything in the practice. You practice too much. You can't do as well. That's the reason why you see a lot of musicians maybe take a little drink or something else. That's one of the reasons. I'm quite sure, see, because I used to drink a little bit myself. Called it a little "nerve tonic."

ETZKORN: Did you ever write any music, then? Your ambition was initially to compose music. You must have done some composing.

BESS: No, I dreamt up a number once. That is the melody and everything, in a dream. I went and had it copyrighted, but, well, there's one person I left out of here I shouldn't have left out of here. Harry Winn. I guess you all heard of him. This Harry Winn, I made a lot of jobs with him through the fifties, you know, '54, and around through there. Through there, except he died and I had a band, too, so it kind of broke me. In '64 I had it for about six months. He had us all booked up. He had a lot of work for me. I was band leader for, I guess, for about six months. I had no worry at all about that. But, I had my number in a dream, it was. It was a pretty name, it was a sweet number, you could swing it, too. But, I never did do anything with it. I started to send it to King Cole, when he was living. It was that far back. Somehow or another I knew his brother. Bill. His brother and I were real good friends. But, King Cole, I met him and everything, but I wasn't as close to him as I was to his brother. If I had been as close to him as I was to his brother, I would have sent it to him, see. He probably would have played it for me because this number just about fit him.

ETZKORN: Did you ever record it?

BESS: No, I never did do nothing to it. I just played it on the horn and I played it to Harry Winn. I never will forget it. Harry and I would say...well, we would play it and make a theme song out of it. But somehow or another we just let it drop. Someway or another we just didn't go any further. So, that's just about the only number...

ETZKORN: Did you ever do any teaching? Have any kids come to you like you went to your dad and...

BESS: Well, I done some teaching. I don't know, I don't seem to have...this-a-way, I can't find words right now to say it, when I'd tell somebody something, I kind of look for them to remember it. And I'd turn and ask them again and they done forgot it.

ETZKORN: Didn't have the patience for it.

BESS: Yeah, my daddy learned me how to play trombone. Daddy saying, "close, this is

closed; down below the bell, sixth position. Up by the bell, fourth position. Up above the bell, third position. Closed for third position, down by the bell. And then up for second position. And close and you got your scale, you got your B flat scale. Now I'm gonna run it for you, see." Well, then, I done that, but the tone was real poor. The tone sounded like a cowboy or something like that. But, see, I remember what he done. Now, I've had some fellas come to me who were pretty well for the trombone. I started playing around on it for a while...looked like they couldn't play a note. Looked like they got disgusted 'cause they couldn't play nothing. Best thing when you're going to teach someone, just don't play too much on the horn or they will get...seems like they get disgusted. I tried to learn a guy how to play high notes. I used to could play way up there. An octave above B flat. Make it most any time. High up, make it most any time. Now, I can't do that, but you see, there's a lot of guys that get up there at G above the staff learning how to play. You try to tell them how to coordinate and everything. He can't do it and then, finally he'll get disgusted. He don't come back no more. That's the only thing I see. I just feel that people I run into, probably everyone is alike, but it just seems like to me when you tell somebody, they should remember it. I don't know why they should. You know, it's just that easy. If you want to remember something, I just feel...

CORTINOVIS: Don't like to tell them twice?

BESS: (mumbled)

CORTINOVIS: I'd like to ask you something, too, about when you remarked that in Chicago you belonged to the union. Did you join Local 197 when you came down here? St. Louis?

BESS: No, when I joined this local down here, I was playing with...that is, I belonged to the 627 up there in Kansas City. I belonged to Kansas City. That's the way that was.

CORTINOVIS: Then, you just transferred down here to 197.

BESS: Transferred, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Do you think that it made it harder for you to find jobs, now that the unions have merged?

BESS: Oh, no, no. I don't think it is. Now, if I was a younger man, it might be a little harder for me in a way...in this-a-way, 'cause, see, I'd probably be out hustling. You got to do something for yourself. Now I have always went in town, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, St. Joe, some of those places. I'd take my horn and we used to jam around different places. 'Course, some times they won't allow that. I don't think they allow it around here too much. I used to take my horn and go around and jam. Jam around different places. If you go and mix with people, mix around with them and can do something and can play, you're going to play up on somebody, then. But if you go and you want somebody to look you up, and give you a job, but maybe you can't do nothing. After you get it, you don't practice your horn. They got a job for you. Okay, they don't know what you can do, getting around with them, mixing with the, that is if you can, and they know what you can do. They know you can play...

CORTINOVIS: Do you mean times when you were out of work you'd just go around and jam and then something would turn up, right?

BESS: Well, that's what I used to do when I was a younger man. At that time, they were doing those things. Now, for instance, I'd go up to Kansas City, or Minneapolis or some of them places like that, I'd go in there and I'd have my horn, one of them little old suitcases (that's all I carried), horn, suitcase, and a bag of music. That's all I'd need, see. I'd go on in there and I knew I could play. I knew I could play good enough with any of them. I felt that way anyway. I'd go on in there and if there's guys all playing, I'd say "Let me play." "What are you playing?" Maybe some of them I know, some of them. I'd sit in there and play. It may be that the other fella was in there playing and we'd jam together and maybe play the lead or something like...you're good enough to play the horn. If you was good enough and fast, first thing you know, the guy says, "This ought to do it." It's the way I want it. I got a whole lot of jobs...lot of jobs that I could have taken, that was offered to me and I wouldn't even take. The musician a good friends of mine and wouldn't take it. Just go on out. I might not even had no job. But I knew I was going to get a job somewhere. I would, I'd walk out and somebody would hire me somewhere else. A lot of times you go out and make enemies by taking somebody's job. "Let somebody work in my place. You play good, you play good anyhow." Like me, every time I go somewhere, I try to play good. Play good, anyhow. Maybe somebody ask you where you working at and I'd say, "I'm not working anywhere. I'm just messing around." "You want to work here?" "Well, I'd like to work here. As a soloist?" He'd say "Yeah." I says, "I suppose I'll take it." He says, "Yeah." I'd say, "I want to remain friends." I wouldn't take it. I could get a job somewhere else. I said, "If he don't want it, I'll play." He say, "Well, all right." Maybe the guy's got two jobs. Maybe he's got a day job or something like that. Maybe still wants a job. Maybe he needs the money. Maybe he's buying a home, or putting the kids through school. You do that, and you make enemies. I ain't got no enemies around this jazz city. Here or nowhere else. I ain't got no job, some fellas got two jobs, two or three jobs. Walk around with four jobs. Get a job every now and then.

CORTINOVIS: Is there anything else you want to know, Peter?

ETZKORN: Yeah. What do you think of that new music the kids are playing? Have you ever tried to play that kind of thing they call Rock and Roll?

BESS: Rock and Roll? I've never...I've heard it. I think I could play it. I'm sure I could play it. I'm not worried about that. The only thing I don't like about it is it's too noisy. I put some cotton in my ears to play it. I hear enough of it. See, my ears...I can't stand too much on my ears. That's the only thing is about it...I just can't...(Both talking) But, I imagine I could play it. Some of it is kind of crazy. It stops.

ETZKORN: Apparently, some people find it quite difficult to play with this new kind of music.

BESS: Well, see, they don't go like regular music. Regular music, it's got 12, 16, 32 bars. Some of them don't go by no rules. They don't have no rules. They're liable to stop on fifth bars or ninth bars. You don't come up like that. That's the only thing about it. You just don't do it that-a-way, that's the whole thing. I hear them all the time. I look for them to stop, you know, then they go over. Sometimes they die off, see. It's got a jive, quite a bit of jive in it. It's got no rules, no regulations. Unless everybody gets together like they do and rehearse it, they won't know what they're going to do. Most of them play it by ear, anyhow. If it ever

happened that they had to play with music, they'd be in an awful fix. Make one or two changes, two or three changes, four maybe...

ETZKORN: 'Course, you have played in your own life with people who didn't read music, who were just playing by ear.

BESS: Said what?

ETZKORN: I would imagine that in your own career, that you have played with people who did not read music.

BESS: Oh, yeah. I'd soon find it out, too. I found out right quick. I remember a boy, he was going to play slide trombone. I'd tell when they didn't know how to read—I'd know.

CORTINOVIS: You know, these bands you played with like when you traveled with the circus or when you played with Earl Hines or the Oklahoma Blue Devils, were these mixed bands with white men and black men in it?

BESS: There were no mixed bands.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever play with a mixed band?

BESS: Mixed bands, yeah, I have. Yeah, I played some. Well, back in through those days, they didn't mix, they didn't mix them like that.

CORTINOVIS: Well, Martin MacKay told me that in Kansas City he played with a mixed band.

BESS: Well, yeah, they mix up now.

CORTINOVIS: No, this would be like back in the thirties.

BESS: Oh, back in there. No, you seldom see anything like that.

CORTINOVIS: How about the audiences, though, Druie. Were those...did you play for white audiences?

BESS: Yeah, played for white, yeah. All up through Iowa, they was all white. All white.

CORTINOVIS: Those places in Iowa that you played, were those some of those big dance halls?

BESS: Some of the finest in the country. I never seen such...

CORTINOVIS: I don't think you've ever heard of those, Peter. They were...there is a few left, a few remnants left. One or two in Iowa and one or two in Illinois. But around in the thirties, people had built these gigantic dance halls which would hold literally thousands of people and they'd be like out in somebody's corn field. And people would come for like a hundred and fifty miles.

BESS: And they'd put on a waltz, they had waltz lights, had a great big light, a big ball, with lights on it and the lights would help get the colors all around. It was beautiful. It's beautiful, I mean, it is something. There was a fella up there by the name of Tom, he had one in Souix City, can't think of his last name. Lawrence Welk was talking about him here the other night. I played the same place. I remember Lawrence Welk. I remember Lawrence Welk when he was in Iowa, had a great big old truck. They would sleep in this truck and it was all cut out. Just a regular great big old truck. He had about seven pieces in there. I remember. But, we used to pass him, maybe on the side on the road, asleep—seven pieces. All up through Iowa. He was all up through there when we was up there. We'd run into him all the time.

CORTINOVIS: So, where did you usually stay when you'd go into those cities?

BESS: Ma'am?

CORTINOVIS: I say, where would you usually stay, like when you go into Sioux City?

BESS: Oh, we had...we stayed mostly in rooming houses. They had rooming houses all over the country. There weren't no hotels. They didn't have but a few hotels, but mostly rooming houses.

CORTINOVIS: For like salesmen and people like musicians and transients.

BESS: Well, you see...yeah. You see a lot of them, and a lot of them, well, they knew a band was coming to town. And sometimes, too, the rent would kind of go up a little, too. Way we used to do, see, there's a racket to all of them. They all have a racket, and so you have a racket. You'd get in with them. Just like I'd get in with the landladies. When I'd stay there, I'd pay the top rent and then I'd get in with her. Most of the landladies run those places. So, I'd get in with her and I'd say, "The next time I come here, we may work out of here. Now, you want to give me some kind of a little cut. We can get together and get this down. This is too high, it's too much money. I'll stay with you all the time; won't go over there. I'll stay here." Well, then, she'd cut down and we'd stay there. A lot of the time we'd work out of there for two or three months. We'd get a cut. That's the way I'd do it. When you first go in there, you don't know them. They think you're going in there and going right out. They get all they can out of you. You just have to work out there. I'll tell you, life is a little bit...it seems like now, life is a little bit too rough for older men. It's all right for younger men. See, now, like me, I wouldn't want a new place every night but I used to love it. It was fun to me. They'd jive me and I'd jive them back. Now, see, it wouldn't be no fun because most of the time if I go out, I have to have some good money. And they are paying good money now. Just like Louie. It's the same with Louie. When he had his All-Stars, he was paying some \$200 a night. Now, if you take \$200 a night, that's mighty nice little money. That ain't bad.

ETZKORN: Well, what would you do in a town during the day if you were playing at night? Sleep around in the rooming house or...?

BESS: What? Now? Well, I'll tell you now. I wouldn't stay in a rooming house now. If I was on the road now, I'll tell you exactly what I'd be doing. I'd have to be getting by on \$175 welfare money. I'd stay at some nice hotel, like the Chase or something like that. You see, staying out, unless I knew somebody personally, staying in these houses, staying out at night

is dangerous. When you come home, when you come in, somebody gotta be laying for you to take your money or your horn or something, if you're not in the right type of place.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever have that happen to you?

BESS: No, not yet. I've never had them take no horn but I've been robbed, though. I was robbed around, well, around '68.

CORTINOVIS: No, I mean when you were traveling.

BESS: Oh, no, that's what I say. I've traveled all over the United States and Canada, and some kids knew me. See, I got some little grandchildren. The grandkids called me Grandpa. It was probably some kids. They didn't hurt me or nothing, they just scared me, see, and at night they just took the money off me and took off and run. They didn't bother me. I didn't care about the money. Just as long as they didn't hurt me.

CORTINOVIS: You bet.

BESS: I think they knew me, see, because they wouldn't have got that lose to me if it hadn't of been that...I'd meet them all the time at night. This bunch that came along, I thought it was some of them. Otherwise, I see a bunch of them coming at me like that, I wouldn't let them come near me. I'd see a whole bunch of them, I'd tear off. I'd go across the street, go knock on somebody's door. "Let me in here", see.

LICATA: You fellas played every night, right, when you went on these tours?

BESS: Oh, yeah.

LICATA: What did you do during...

BESS: Most of the time we played every night, but sometimes we didn't. All the shows we played every night. We were booked every night.

LICATA: What about during the daytime? Did you just go out or rehearse?

BESS: Just relax. Maybe they'd have a rehearsal, or something like that. It wasn't bad at all.

LICATA: It was a pretty good life?

BESS: Yeah, I liked it. Oh, yeah, I liked show business. If the minstrel shows were running today, I'd probably be out there today. Yeah, I liked it.

ETZKORN: Did you ever play any movie houses while they were still having the big orchestra in the movie houses?

BESS: Well, I played in the pits this-a-way on the shows is all. I never played for no movies, you know, like that. But I played the pits with the shows. If the show would be the attraction, we'd go in the pit and play. Then I played the show.

LICATA: When do you think the best period was? Was it during the twenties or the thirties, during the swing era when all the Big Bands were around? Which period did you enjoy the most?

BESS: That I enjoyed the best?

LICATA: Yeah.

BESS: Well, I don't know. It's hard to tell. When I was younger, in the twenties, when I was young, of course, naturally, it was quite a bit of excitement along through there. But I didn't know nothing. I was so dumb. I was so dumb about everything. But in the thirties, it was a little better for me, in a way. Because I kind of knew how to handle myself.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, you were a small-town boy. Montgomery City is not a very big town now.

BESS: But, I kind of knew how to handle myself from experience. Experience of the twenties learned me how to handle myself in the thirties because in the twenties I liked a little excitement in things, back then. I just didn't know what was going on. See, I didn't know, I just didn't know what was happening.

CORTINOVIS: You were spending all your money and spending whatever you made.

BESS: Yeah, it didn't make a bit of difference. I said, "I'll get some more," not thinking I might get sick or something. But never nothing happened to me. I always had good health. The little older you get, the smarter you get, if you want to get smart. You learn by your mistakes. I don't believe in going through the same thing twice. Just like, well, I was married twice. My first wife, well, was shot. She...those boys late at night in the city, who named me Grandpa. Well, of course, she died. But the second wife, I was traveling with Earl Hines and she said I stayed away too much and put on for a divorce. Well, about a year after the divorce, our divorce and everything, then she wanted to re-marry. Well, see, I didn't want her no more. See, after you talk to people, ask them...do you want this, I believe in this. Here's the way I look at it. You give them a shot at something, you say, "You want a divorce or you don't. Now I'll go along with you. I believe in sticking. Now, if you want it, this is it. If you don't want it, I'll try to stick it out. It's the only way."

CORTINOVIS: You mean ladies can't change their minds?

BESS: No, here's what I'm talking about...is this.

CORTINOVIS: I know, I'm teasing. But ladies like to change their minds.

BESS: Oh, yeah, they change their minds. But after a year, see, after a year...I've been waiting for somebody for a year, see, a year's a long time, see. She done changed; I done changed in a year, see. There's a whole lot of difference. It's going to be even more difficult than then, I feel. It's going to be different. I don't want that; I'd rather go try something else.

CORTINOVIS: Of all the music that you played, Druie, what did you like to play the best? What kind of music did you like to play the best?

BESS: Well, I like it all. Kind of hard for me to say which I like the best. I started out...! liked the real sweet music in the beginning. I still like it, 'course.

ETZKORN: Do you remember the first tune you played on your trombone? Do you remember which was the first thing you really...

BESS: First? I don't think I...I don't think I can.

ETZKORN: My boy is just taking coronet lessons and he finally managed to play "Auld Lang Syne." That's his first song.

BESS: I don't know what my first number was. I'd just like to know that. If I'd knew that someday that I was going to do something like that...But when I started out, I didn't know I was going to be a trombone player. Only thing that really gave me...made me feel like I wanted to play, my daddy say, "If you learn how to play it in a year, I'll buy you a new trombone."

ETZKORN: Did that work?

BESS: That's what he told me.

CORTINOVIS: You might try that.

BESS: Inside a year, I was playing. I played with the band, hometown band. All the numbers. They played sally trombone, all them standard numbers. And I was playing.

ETZKORN: Do you still have your own horn?

BESS: I was playing everything they was playing. I'll tell you how I was playing a lot of it, though. See, a lot of it...I had a very good memory. Memory and a good ear. Some of it I was reading. A lot of it I had a very good memory of it. That's the way I learned it. I kind of half-way fooled them, to a certain extent. See, he moved over to the coronet. Ed Duncan, the one who learned me how to play the bass clef, he was playing trombone. 'Course, he taught me all about, you know, the sharps, you come up. Of course, I learned a whole lot from him. Some of it I would read and some of it I would memorize. I had a very good memory and he was playing right along with me, see. My daddy got me a new trombone. And he told me when he got me this new trombone, he said, "Now, Druie, this has to last. The next one is on you. From now on, it's you. You make or you break it." I said, "Well, Dad," I said, "every time I make some money, I'll give you a piece of it." He said, "Don't give it to me. Give it to your mother." He says, "I'll get part of it through her." So every time I'd make some money, I would send them a dollar or two dollars out of whatever I made until I got married. Then I wasn't able to send them money. You know how these wives are. They want all the money they pay you. So, I couldn't give them too much after that. But, that's the way it ended. I kept that trombone all the way down in the twenties. Then, I bought another one.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, there's just one other thing I wanted to ask you. Did you ever record? Did you ever make any records?

BESS: Oh, I made some records with Jess Stone. That was back in 1927.

CORTINOVIS: On Okay labels?

BESS: On Okay and then I made...

ETZKORN: Where? In Chicago?

BESS: No, here in St. Louis. I was living up there in St. Joe. We came down here and made them.

CORTINOVIS: Do you remember where that was that you went to cut that record?

BESS: I don't know where that place was.

CORTINOVIS: Was it a studio?

BESS: It seemed like to be something like a little studio.

CORTINOVIS: I didn't know there was any here.

BESS: I didn't know it either until then. We made that record. I remember one side of it but I can't remember...! remember "Starvation Blues." The reason why I remember that so well is because around up that way we was having a little rough time, at that time, and we'd get kind of hungry. He wrote that number.

CORTINOVIS: That had a lot of meaning, huh? Well, Druie, we don't want to keep you all afternoon. I think that's about everything I wanted

to... ETZKORN: Well, I think about the only thing...you mentioned that your father died in 1951.

BESS: '51.

ETZKORN: Right. Did he live all the time in Montgomery or did your family move away?

BESS: No, they lived there in Montgomery. My mother, she died in '64. She had a heart attack.

ETZKORN: And your brother stayed in Montgomery, too?

BESS: Yeah, he stayed there. He got a little home up there. Now, there ain't nobody staying there, now.

CORTINOVIS: Your mother must have been quite an old lady.

BESS: Oh, yeah. She was eighty-three.

ETZKORN: Well, that's a good sign for you.

BESS: If she'd been living now, she'd be about 90. She's about twenty years older than I am.

LICATA: I was going to ask you if you thought jazz was making a big comeback or is dead jazz as you knew it or do you have any feeling about it?

BESS: Oh, I think jazz is coming back. I believe it will. I don't think it will ever die right out. Of course, I don't know. It's just something that practically all the music, all the swing music, is based off it. Everything that you play has got some jazz in it.

CORTINOVIS: What is jazz? What would you say jazz is if somebody asked you?

BESS: Well, I don't know the real definition of it.

CORTINOVIS: No, just your definition of it.

BESS: Mine?

CORTINOVIS: If someone was trying to get you to distinguish between jazz and another kind of music, how would you tell them what jazz is? What would you say jazz was?

LICATA: Remember you were telling me when we were driving over about the difference in sounds?

BESS: Oh, yeah, well, it is. Jazz has a different sound. It has different sounds.

CORTINOVIS: Do you think it is improvisation, you know, where everybody takes a line and then they do their own thing there?

BESS: Well, it's that too. That's in there, too. But, the sound and what we call "riff" has got something to do with it, too. I don't know how you spell "riff" with musical terms. They use it just like they use everything...it's certain little things that they use. Most musicians have got portions of it. They use it mostly when they play, if you ever notice it. I remember from way back the things they use now because I still use parts of it. You can hardly get around it, to play it successfully. But, it seems like it throws you out of line, if you don't use those little things. What I mean is it's fine if you use something else, but I know from experience...course, haven't done nothing but copy myself, but when I come through with ragtime and blues, I try to be a fine musician. I didn't know nothing about it until I heard it and, of course, I copied it, just like everybody else copies things. I copied it. I noticed that about the copying part of it, I noticed a difference in my playing at times and what another trombone player be playing. He played with us and he played different from me. To me he sounded a little better. To me that type of jazz sounded better than me at that time. But I found out what he was doing so I'd take parts of his and add it to mine. Just like Jack Teagarden, where we were working out of Oklahoma City, why his mother was living close in a colored neighborhood. They didn't live far from a colored neighborhood. We were playing at a dance one night and he was on his way to join Red Nichols and he came up and sat in with us and played. He's been around. He's copied a whole lot. He's copied. He's not original but, now, he's supposed to be one of the top jazzmen. Now, he still sounds different from me. He's been around them fellas more than me. Everywhere he'd go he'd jam around with them. He had more experience than I did. And he sounded different than them. His tone

sounds different. Did you ever notice his tone. You listen to some of his records. I'll tell you, his tone is different from Tommy Dorsey's. You notice that?

CORTINOVIS: It's just like a signature, isn't it?

BESS: Yeah, the tone is what makes the difference in the whole thing. Tommy Dorsey played "Gettin' Sentimental Over You." Jack T. Lawrence plays it too, but he won't sound as good as Tommy Dorsey playing it, I don't think. I mean just playing it just straight. He might play jazz, he might play it better. You know what I mean? But just straight...But if you go into jazz. Jack Teogarden would probably beat him because he uses a different tone. His tone is something. You just listen to the top men, who are supposed to be tops, and listen to the tone. And you listen to the other fellas that is trying to play jazz, well, he's playing it. He ain't trying, he's playing it, too. But the tone is different.

CORTINOVIS: Everybody has got their own.

BESS: Yeah, that's the only place that I see where the difference in jazz playing is in tonation.

CORTINOVIS: Well, I think I'm finished.

ETZKORN: It's very, very nice of you to come here.

BESS: Oh, yeah.

ETZKORN: The University will be grateful to you.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, we're really tickled to death that you could come out this afternoon. Do you think you could come out and hear the fellas who are going to play for us in about two weeks?

BESS: What date?

CORTINOVIS: They're coming right downstairs.

BESS: What date?

CORTINOVIS: It's going to be the seventeenth during the day from 11:30 to 1:30 for our students.

LICATA: If you think you can make it, I'll come out and get you.

ETZKORN: Bring your horn along.

BESS: I'd better not do that.

CORTINOVIS: Would you like to come?

BESS: Well, I'd have to find out yet whether I can make it or not. I'm in a little business myself. See, I have a little rooming house and I get guys that work out of there. That's my

little hope card, now.

CORTINOVIS: So, you know all about it. Well, I certainly thank you lots, Druie, for coming out. I think we have got such an interesting tape. I think the whole thing has just been so interesting. I want to check some of these spellings with you so we'll turn it off now, then.

BESS: Well, I'm glad you liked it, then. I'm not a very good speaker.

CORTINOVIS: I think you had fun, too.

BESS: What?

CORTINOVIS: I think you had fun, too.

BESS: Oh, yeah. I may have said some things on there I probably shouldn't have said.