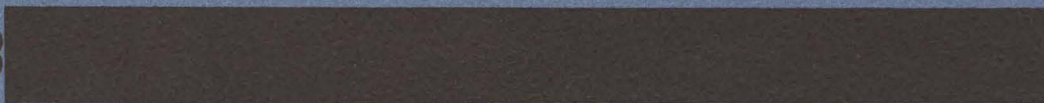


Folkways Records FA 2671

*The Six and Seven-Eight
String Band of New Orleans*



Coda by Edmond Souchon, M.D.

With a Foreword by Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

Musical Backgrounds by Sam Charters



William Kleppinger, mandolin; Bernie Shields, steel guitar;
Frank "Red" Mackie, string bass;
Dr. Edmond Souchon, guitar.

SIDE 1:

Band 1: Original Dixieland Jazz Band One-Step
Band 2: Jealous
Band 3: When The Saints Go Marching In
Band 4: Medley in "D" (Hawaiian guitar solo)
Band 5: High Society (introducing, Maryland)
Band 6: Old Green River (vocal by Edmond Souchon, M.D.)
Band 7: Tico-Tico
Band 8: Donna Clara
Band 9: Medley: Winter Nights—Stumbling

SIDE 2:

Band 1: Who's Sorry Now
Band 2: My Josephine
Band 3: Bei Mir Bist Du Schon
Band 4: Clarinet Marmalade
Band 5: Lazy River (introducing, Changes)
Band 6: Tico-Tico
Band 7: Original Dixieland Jazz Band One-Step
Band 8: Tiger Rag

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

*The Six and Seven-Eights
String Band of New Orleans*

the
SIX AND SEVEN-EIGHTHS
STRING BAND OF NEW ORLEANS

FRIENDS OF MUSIC IN NEW ORLEANS

by

Frederic Ramsey, Jr.

FOREWORD

Recordings by the Six and Seven-Eights String Band of New Orleans unite traditions that have persisted strongly in both European and American music, while adding an ingredient new to both; instead of being based on the classic or semi-classic repertoire, selections played stem from jazz sources and jazz feeling.

The traditional instrumental elements present are those which descend in a long and rather complicated line from the classic Spanish guitar, which in turn owes its origin to oriental instruments first heard in Spain as played by Moors in the twelfth century. The mandolin, heard also in these recordings, is the most recent member of the lute family, yet it can claim essentially the same instrumental ancestry.

It is natural that stringed instruments of the lute family would undergo many transitions, as their easy portability has rendered them great travelers. It is also to be expected that the relative ease with which they could be acquired and mastered should give them wide circulation, and that in this circulation, they would be adapted to many repertoires and many ways of playing.

Earlier instances of non-professional musicians turning to these instruments for play and relaxation are numerous. In "The Harvard Dictionary of Music," for example, it is stated that "miller Veit Bach, J.S. Bach's grandfather, is reported to have entertained himself while grinding the flour" and strumming a "cythringen," a related string instrument. From the same source, we also learn that a writer, J. Zuth, prepared a monograph for the musical quarterly, *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* (1918-1935) on "Mandolin Manuscripts in the Library of the Society of the Friends of Music in Vienna." (*Die Mandolinhandschriften in der Bibliothek der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien.*)

The nineteenth century in the United States witnessed a passion for guitar music that was widespread. A family document in this writer's possession is a copybook of songs for guitar played by a young undergraduate at West Point; its cover leaf bears the inscription, "C.F. Ruff, 1839." Ruff later saw service in the Southwest, and eventually became a Brigadier-General. His frontier career, and service in the Mexican War of 1846, are in contrast to tender lyrics so carefully entered in the copybook, yet they were as much a part of his life as were the alarms and excursions of military campaigns.

"The guitar was the rage in the 1850's," we read in "Alabama, A Guide to the Deep South" (Federal Writer's Project, Hastings House, 1941), "and no young lady was considered 'accomplished' unless she could play 'The Spanish Fandango' and one or two other pieces."

But by the early 1900's, changes had been effected in the musical environment of at least one southern city. Possibly the young ladies still kept to the seclusion of their drawing rooms to play the fandango, but young men of that era were free to seek out other experiences, and other kinds of music.

Young Edmond Souchon, born to a distinguished medical family of New Orleans, began to play both guitar and mandolin circa 1909-1910. (See photographs) Perhaps, in another era and another place, he might have turned to Spanish dances and sentimental love songs for inspiration, and undoubtedly he would have learned to perform them well. But this was New Orleans, 1909. "We were literally surrounded by great bands," says Dr. Souchon, "Never a day went by without either a parade or a funeral and with these came those wonderful marching bands!" An article in the New Orleans Times-Picayune, (September 25, 1949) fills in the rest of their background: "Joe 'King' Oliver was just reaching his zenith. He was playing in a famous Negro cabaret at the edge of Storyville, and in his band were some of the greatest names in the jazz world -- Kid Ory, Johnny and Baby Dodds, Clarence Williams, Pops Foster ... The members of the Six and Seven-Eights who were old enough, borrowed their fathers' long pants and went to sit by the curbstone outside the cafe to hear the 'King' blow down the walls. Then, when the music was fresh in their minds, they went home and tried, as best they could, to imitate it on strings"

"I watched Johnny Dodds so hard," Bill Kleppinger is reported saying, "I could tell you the shape of his fingernails!"

"Bill had ideas about being a clarinetist then," Dr. Souchon explains, "He never mastered the wind instrument, but his fingering on the mandolin is exactly like that of a clarinet."

"Some of the great white jazz bands were either at their height then, or in the process of formation," the Times-Picayune continues: "Tom Brown's Band, Fisher's Brass Band, 'Happy' Schilling's Band, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, Brownlee's Orchestra and Abbie Brunies are all names spoken with reverence by the present Six and Seven-Eights."

"In the back room of old Tom Anderson's cafe, down in Storyville, there was a three-piece string orchestra -- mandolin, guitar, and string bass. Those of the Six and Seven-Eights who could muster their courage -- and the price of a beer -- ventured in. And if one of them had the price of a round of beers for the trio, he was rewarded by a private lesson."

"The Six and Seven-Eights Band became the official band about town when 'not too noisy, but hot' music was wanted. The college groups and the 'silk stocking' element both adopted them, and even assistant secretary of the Navy, Commodore Ernest Lee Jahnce, made them official band for pleasant week ends aboard his sumptuous house boat, 'Aunt Dinah.'

"From 1912 until the beginning of World War I, the Six and Seven-Eights played for social and charitable functions. Even a few weddings were included in the agenda, and the band moved to many sections of the state, and even to some parts of Mississippi, to play."



photo from "JAZZMEN"

The band's greatest triumph came when an invitation was received to play at the Queen's Supper and Dance at the Stratford Club on Madri Gras night..."

Through the various changes of time and personnel described in background notes by Sam Charters which follow, the Six and Seven-Eights Band has kept its amateur status. Dr. Edmond Souchon is a prominent New Orleans surgeon; the mandolin player, Bill Kleppinger, is customs inspector of the Port of New Orleans; the string bass man, "Red" Mackie, is head of a pine oil manufacturing firm; the steel guitarist, Bernie Shields, heads a department of a large ship-ping concern. Their music-making has been a hobby, pursued with all the devotion and consuming all the time that only very busy men can find for such things.

Their devotion has kept alive something very precious in our culture, the sort of thing many Europeans can't believe exist in the United States, where it is presumed that all men of affairs are brisk and efficient, but totally lacking in sympathy for music, art, or other creative activity.

Undoubtedly, there were other groups of southern musicians who transposed their impressions of jazz and folk strains for performance in small string bands. Remnants of the tradition have been found in other areas (see "Music from the South," Volume 5, Folkways FP 654), and the folksinger, Leadbelly, has said that he played with a small string band that roamed the streets of Dallas, in 1910. In this group, he played guitar, accordion, mandolin, mouth harp and string bass, - as required by changing personnel.

But the lives of all the early Negro string bands that roamed the South were short, and none of these bands, whose musicians underwent a variety of adventures, ever achieved any historical continuity.

This is a blank that has been filled in by the members of the Six and Seven-Eights group, whose more fortunate position has enabled them to stay with music over a longer period of time. How long the period has been can be imagined by Dr. Souchon's recollections of some of the first guitar-mandolin music he knew, on hearing string duets in Volume 5 of "Music from the South:" "...the mandolin-guitar duets brought back many fond memories, for I used to pay a Negro mandolin and guitar player 25¢ an hour to let me come over to his cabin, back of Pass Christian, and play along with him. He taught me much, and a great deal of his style was exactly as these two players on the record."

The continuity of the Six and Seven-Eighths group has enabled it to arrive at an easy familiarity with the New Orleans repertoire, as well as with certain favorite popular songs (in the history of music from New Orleans, the popular song, handled as improvised music, makes up a large part of any group's repertoire). It has also given the group's playing a homogeneity that is lacking in many combinations, regardless of whether horns, reeds, or strings are played.

Aside from these considerations, the Six and Seven-Eighths have also created something. Catching first impressions of the music rolling out along

streets of uptown New Orleans or blaring forth from behind closed doors of a cabaret a few paces beyond Basin Street, they took them home and transposed them into something that has become, over the years, unique. Admittedly, they are not attempting a "re-creation" or "revival" of earlier music; they have taken a facet of that music, cut and polished it with loving care until it hardly resembles the rough stone original. This facet glistens with a precision and an attraction that belongs to them, and we are grateful that they have been willing, through recordings made originally for their personal satisfaction, to share it with others.

THE 6 7/8 - MUSICAL BACKGROUNDS

by Sam Charters

I

In a city of fine, little known musicians one of New Orleans finest and least known jazz groups is the string jazz band, the 6 7/8's. Since 1913 the band has been playing on an amateur basis - usually for friends - and until 1949, when two records by the band were privately issued, the 6 7/8's was almost completely unknown outside the city. The instrumentation - Bill Kleppinger playing the mandolin; Bernie Shields, steel guitar; Edmond Souchon, M.D., guitar; Frank "Red" Mackie, bass - is deceptive. This string group plays the traditional New Orleans jazz band repertoire with an intelligence, taste, and exuberant excitement that has produced some of the finest music to come out of this "second jazz era."

The 6 7/8's originally was a college string orchestra that wasn't a lot different from the string orchestras that were popular in colleges and universities in the years before the first World War. There were seven members, one a small violin player, Hilton "Midget" Harrison; so the name, the 6 7/8's. Bernie Shields and Edmond Souchon were in the 6 7/8's at Tulane University, out on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans. Musicians like Joe Oliver, Sidney Bechet, Zue Robertson, and Clarence Williams were playing the dances at the Tulane gym with Armond Piron's Olympia Orchestra. The sporting set used to stand between the back wall and the band stand and listen to the drummer, "Happy" Bolton, sing smutty versions of the orchestra numbers.

When war was declared in 1917 Bill Kleppinger, the mandolin player from a rival band, the Invincibles, found himself in the same artillery battery with Edmond Souchon and two others from the 6 7/8's, Charlie Hardy, a ukelele player, and Roland Rexach, a second violin player. The four played together until reassignments separated them. When Bill returned to New Orleans in 1919 most of the musicians had dispersed. Edmond was completing his medical studies in Chicago, Bernie Shields was in South America. Bill played in a small string group with "Red" Mackie until it expanded into the New Orleans Owls. a dance orchestra, he dropped



LALA'S CABARET - New Orleans, La. photo by Frederic Ramsey Jr.

out, rather than learn clarinet. Edmond, who was practising in the city now, called him and the two began playing together again. In the late '20's Bernie returned to the city, and to the 6 7/8's; and in the early '30's "Red" joined them on bass, replacing Thompson McKay.

In the years since then that the four have played together they've developed a beautifully balanced and integrated ensemble sound. They are superb musicians in fundamental agreement about the music they want to play, and the instrumental combination - more a coincidence than anything else - is just about perfect for what they want to do. Since there was no violin Bill developed a mandolin style patterned on the New Orleans clarinet style, and his playins is brilliant. Edmond has said that the versions of "High Society" and "Dixieland One Step" on this record are the best the group has ever done, and probably will ever do. I think he's right, though there's always the chance they may even outdo themselves someday.

One of the earliest of the numbers here is the wonderful "Medley in D", with Bernie, Edmond and "Red". No one can remember what all the numbers are, but Bernie remembers them as the "Hawaiian" numbers that were the rage when he first started playing. The "Medley", too, is the best chance to hear the guitar work of Edmond Souchon. In recent years Edmond has been playing and recording with some of the finest band men in New Orleans - Johnny

Wiggs, Raymond Burke, Ray Bauduc, and Tom Brown, to name a few - but I've always felt that he was at his best with the 6 7/8's.

All four are active business and professional men in New Orleans, and they have very little opportunity to play together. In the years I've been in the city I've heard them play only four times. The most recently was for the annual Jazz concert of the Baton Rouge Jazz Club in December, 1955. It was the only time I've heard them in public. They followed nearly two hours of brassy big band jazz and completely captivated the audience. They were a little nervous and worried about the impression they'd make, but after the first number they were completely at home. Here was the melody, the swinging rhythm, the drive and warmth of the finest New Orleans music. Here - in other words - was the 6 7/8's.

II

There was a lot of string jazz music in New Orleans in the years between 1910 and 1925, but very little of it was recorded. The 1949 recordings by the 6 7/8's, first issued on a "New Orleans Originals" label by Edmond Souchon, were the first recordings of an entirely string jazz group in the city. In January, 1956 recordings became available of duets by Edmond and Charlie Hardy, an original member of the 6 7/8's who had come down from his home in

Indianapolis, Indiana for a few days.

There are several recordings made in the city in the '20's which have interesting examples of string music. The string group that Bill Kleppinger and "Red" Mackie played with before it became the New Orleans Owls included Rene Jelpi on banjo, and the fine guitarist, Monk Smith. Monk and Jelpi are on the recordings made by the Owls, from 1925 to 1928, Monk playing saxophone. At one point on the recording of "That's A' Plenty" (Original issue Columbia 1547), Monk switches to guitar and Jelpi to tenor guitar, and they play two delightful string jazz choruses that are very reminiscent of the sound of the 6 7/8's. The Brunswick recordings by Monk Hazel and his Bienville Roof Orchestra have three solos by another guitarist, Joe Capraro, who plays very much like Monk Smith.

The only Negro string group of any importance in the city was the Silver Leaf Orchestra, organized about 1894. This, however, was a dance orchestra reading standard arrangements, and including three or four violins. About 1907 the Silver Leaf reorganized with wind instrumentation.

This New Orleans string music should certainly not be considered a pre-jazz source music, so completely was the repertoire and style influenced by the ensemble style of the early jazz orchestra. Many musicians, like "Red" Mackie and Monk Smith, played in both kinds of groups, as does Edmond Souchon today -- there was certainly an inter-development of ideas -- but I feel that the string music is probably best thought of as a complementary development in the pattern of growth of the New Orleans band style.

Editor's Note: We asked Dr. Souchon if he could find time apart from his heavy duties as surgeon and liaison officer to the outside world of all good things from New Orleans, to write a few notes about his experiences with the Six and Seven Eights String Band, and how he remembers the Band as coming into being. He has very kindly obliged us with this first-hand.

The personnel listed under the Six and Seven Eighths Band is Not the "Original" band, but one that was filled in with "substitutes" because some of the regular men could not make the trip.

Edmond Souchon, guitar; Bernie Shields, banjo; and steel guitar; Howard McCaleb, guitar and Uke; Roland Rexach, 2nd violin; Earl Crumb, drums; Robert Reynolds, guitar; Hylton Harrison, 1st violin.

The "regulars" are: Souchon, Shields, Rexach, Reynolds and Harrison.

The "Mr. & Mrs. Bernard Shields" listed are the "Sr" Shields; Sara Shields was a daughter; and is sister to Bernie. The entire family are from a theatrical background, Santos Shields, a twin to Sara, often made trips with the family, and appeared in sketches and dramas which they all put on. Sydney Shields, Bernie's oldest sister, was Walker Whiteside's leading lady for many years on Broadway, and is the one who really be-

came famous. She was lovely and quite talented - still living in New York, and she frequently acts in advisory capacity for plays, and helps actors get jobs.

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SUMMER OF 1914 !

CODA

by

Edmond Souchon, M. D.

Sometimes, just for the love of music, untrained hands will find their way to instruments and develop a certain amount of dexterity. Perhaps it is the sheer joy of playing that develops their ability even beyond their capabilities.

We grew up in a city that was exciting beyond words. Fate had decreed that several nationalities, of many mores and customs from numerous removed countries, should melt together in one and only one place, New Orleans. The music which had been developing since 1850 was emerging as a solid, well-defined idiom. Just about that time, our young ears began to register, perceive, accept -- and enjoy what was going on! Was it very unnatural that we too should attempt to get in on the bandwagon? We started playing music for fun.

The differences in age of members of the group is easily spanned by an octave of years, possibly less. The fact that we came from the same sort of stock and from the same side of the railroad tracks probably accounts for our finally gravitating to the same spot. Then too, economic conditions under which we were fortunate enough to have been born enabled us to do the same things, see and hear the same things, within a fairly closely knit circle.

I readily recall the earliest attempts. Horrible! I speak of myself, as I had not heard the rest of this group till several years later. But the enthusiasm and ingrained desire to persist, continue, and learn, far outbalanced the discords and the fumbled notes.

I have a photo, taken one Sunday afternoon, about 1911, when we first began to play together. We'd meet at Bob and Harry Reynolds' home, all get into shorts, and play all afternoon. Then we'd go out and play for some gals the rest of the evening.

The pianola roll was enjoying its day, and Thomas Alva Edison's talking machine had barely passed the point of being an interesting experiment on a cylinder. There was no such thing as radio or television.

Soon, we began to take our music along to liven up parties. We were all about 18, then . . . we just couldn't get enough!

When a hobby happens to be music, the amateur sometimes has something special on the professional: a deep love for the subject that sometimes carries him beyond his original goal. It might be said, truthfully, that this foursome is totally and entirely adequate unto itself. We are our own best listeners, and our own worst critics. An audience is nice, and the fellowship that goes with a musical evening is helped many times by enthusiastic friends. But frequently the reverse is true -- when playing for our own enjoyment, we have found ourselves playing our best music!

This is the way the tape recordings heard in this Folkways release were made -- they were originally intended for no one's ears but our own. We did hope, though, that they would be a kind of insurance -- should the passing of time overtake any of us, we would still have that sound preserved for those left behind.

Now that they are to be released, we are sincerely hopeful that succeeding generations will listen with sympathetic understanding -- perhaps even pleasure -- to this music that has given us so much fun.

At the same time, we are grateful to those friends among our own generation who have understood and encouraged us. In all probability, this is the one factor that has kept us together these many years.

THE MUSICIANS OF THE SIX AND SEVEN-EIGHTS STRING BAND OF NEW ORLEANS. . . BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES SUBMITTED BY EDMOND SOUCHON, M.D.

BILL KLEPPINGER is the brother-in-law of Paul Mares, of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. He is married to Ninon Mares, a lovely lady who is good medicine for fiery Bill. Bill's surviving brother-in-law is Joe Mares, owner of a New Orleans recording company that issues music from that city under the Southland label.

Bill first played with a band called "The Invincibles," and lived directly across the street from the Reynolds'. I don't know why the Reynolds did not invite him over at once, or whether Bill turned them down, but it was a long time that we used to see him sitting on his porch practicing all alone. He finally gathered a group, all string, that was far and away better than the Six and Seven-Eights. Their ideas of harmonies and progressions always fascinated me. The only thing they lacked, we had: the drive and the pep.

Eventually, the "Invincibles" became the "New Orleans Owls" - when one by one they switched to reed and brass. Bill is about the only one who stuck with strings! And, I believe, he tried clarinet. Bill, as we all know, is the "star" of our group.

RED MACKIE - probably far and away the best "all around" musician in the Six and Seven-Eights. Red could play any instrument you could name - from string bass, to uke, to tuba, to guitar, to woodwind, to trombone. The only reason he hardly touched a trumpet was because his brother Dick, regarded as one of New Orleans' greatest at that time, played a very fine cornet. Red also plays a very extraordinary, "quiet," experimental, investigating piano. He is continually searching for new chords - and most of the time, finding them. He played professionally with "The Owls," but got fed up "when he could not play like people wanted him to." Seldom plays now, unless we have a session. And yet, he's as good as he ever was! Is doing a "Big Business" with his "Mackie Pine Oil" and has lately developed an oil or wax for coating potatoes and other fruits and vegetables which is going over quite well nationally.

BERNIE SHIELDS has always been connected with "Show Business". His whole family were actors, from his mother and father on down, with his sister Sidney being Walker Whiteside's leading lady on Broadway for many years and in many plays.

Bernie started on banjo, also on mandolin and uke. Switched to "steel guitar," his first introduction to this type of music being the plantation Negroes who used a large steel knife across the strings, with the guitar tuned to a chord - or sometimes they used an ordinary water glass.



"THE 6 and 7/8 STRING BAND" TODAY 1 to r, Bill Kleppinger, mandolin; Bernie Shields, guitar; Red Mackie, bass; Dr. Souchon, guitar.

He plays a very nice rhythm guitar, and is the greatest storehouse of songs (mostly of the barrel-house variety and not for polite ears). He was a magician with his own act on the Orpheum circuit for many years, and still does magic tricks for benefits on occasion. Bernie, up to just a few years ago - incidentally, Bernie is the "oldster" of the

bunch, being about 61 years old -- was one of the finest tennis players in the South. His home is overrun with trophies of every description and from all parts of the country. His Spanish is excellent, both in speaking and writing, and he can "get along" in French.

SIX AND SEVEN-EIGHTHS STRING BAND OF NEW ORLEANS

William Kleppinger, mandolin; Bernie Shields, steel guitar; Frank "Red" Mackie, string bass; Dr. Edmond Souchon, guitar.

SIDE I (FP 671A):

- Band 1. Original Dixieland Jazz Band One-Step
- Band 2. Jealous
- Band 3. When The Saints Go Marching In
- Band 4. Medley in "D" (Hawaiian guitar solo)
- Band 5. High Society (introducing, Maryland)
- Band 6. Old Green River (vocal by Edmond Souchon, M. D.)
- Band 7. Tico-Tico
- Band 8. Donna Clara
- Band 9. Medley: Winter Nights - Stumbling

SIDE II (FP 671B):

- Band 1. Who's Sorry Now
- Band 2. My Josephine
- Band 3. Bei Mir Bist Du Schon
- Band 4. Clarinet Marmalade
- Band 5. Lazy River (introducing, Changes)
- Band 6. Tico-Tico
- Band 7. Original Dixieland Jazz Band One-Step
- Band 8. Tiger Rag



Photostat of "Six and Seven Eighths" aboard the "Aunt Dinah." Asst. Secretary of the Navy, Ernest Lee Jancke's House Boat. Week-end houseparty. Summer, 1915. Kneeling, l. to r.: Hilton "Midget" Harrison, violin; Charles Hardy, Uke; Standing: Bill Gibbons, guitar - mandolin; Shields O'Reardon, mandolin; Earl Crumb, drums (sometimes banjo); Bob Reynolds, guitar; Edmond Souchon, guitar (note: 12-string).

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