

Dan on "Big" Sid Catlett

Producer: Hank Hehmsoth

[music] drum solo

[Dan Morgenstern] One of the people that we should talk about is the wonderful "Big" Sid Catlett who unfortunately I didn't get to know but because he went and died on us you know but when he shouldn't have. Not long before that at "Lou Terrazzi's", which was this place which we have mentioned before on 47th Street and he was at the bar and Hot Lips Page was playing and hit a high note and blacked out, slid down the back of the bandstand, but got up again and really insisted on finishing the set. And then I was at the bar as well and Sid took Lips, put his arm around him and said you know you better take care of yourself! Take it easy, you know, and ironically, that was the last time I saw him. And then, very shortly after that, heard that he had died backstage in Chicago. I saw him a number of times at Central Plaza. We have to talk about Central Plaza - Stuyvesant Casino, ' cuz that was fascinating in terms... but he had this one thing that he did which was an example of great showmanship. I don't know how he managed to do this, but he put a cigarette in his mouth, and then he bounced his stick off his snare, it went up pretty far, ... straight up... he had a lighter of one of those Zippo things, he lit the cigarette, caught the stick on the way down, [laughter] and was an acrobatic feat, and I saw him do that more than once. But he was such a marvelous musician... [music, and drum solo] "Big" Sid was Louis' [Armstrong] favorite drummer although Louis of course had that long early relationship with Zutty [Singleton] and Paul Barbarin did nicely in the band, but Sid was the best to Louis, and you can tell. There's a big band Louis record of "Wolverine Blues". Sid on that it's like textbook, you know. And then, at a slow tempo, probably the best, although it's all instrumental, no vocals, "Sleepy Time Down South". It's well recorded, and you can hear his cymbal there and it's just beautiful. There is a film, a weird little film, that has the Kirby Band in it, and then [Gene] Krupa comes in, and Sid is in it as well. And then of course he's in "Jammin' The Blues" [drum solo] where somebody told me that it's not what you see when he switches off with Joe Jones... it's actually the opposite on the soundtrack [laughter] Those are all the strange things. And Sid was a really, really sweet man nice man. Unfortunately, he was a smoker, you know, of cigarettes. The other stuff doesn't hurt you but the cigarettes do....