

3-15-1977

Interview no. 291

Frank Quartell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Frank Quartell by Daisy Grunau, 1977, "Interview no. 291," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Frank Quartell (1901-1984)
INTERVIEWER: Daisy Grunau
PROJECT: El Paso History
DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 15, 1977
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 291
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 291
TRANSCRIBER: Sarah E. John
DATE TRANSCRIBED: May, 1977

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in Chicago, Illinois on October 6, 1901; trumpet player with the Kentucky Five in St. Louis in 1918; played with Paul Biese six months in 1919; Oriole Orchestra member in 1920 for a year and a half; played with Arnold Johnson for one year, 1921, and Paul Specht in 1922 at the Alemac Hotel in New Jersey; organized Frankie Quartell's Melody Boys in 1923 at the Montmartre Cafe; OKEH Records artist, recorded with Paul Whitman in 1922; played with Isham Jones' Orchestra for a year and a half; organized Frankie Quartell's Orchestra at the Bouche Villa Venice in Chicago and Miami Beach; also Chateau Madrid in Havana, Cuba, from 1933 to 1936; worked with Nick Lucas Orchestra at the Hollywood Dinner Club in New York in 1936; played at Colosimo's, Chicago's oldest cafe from 1939-1941; enlisted in the Army on November 20, 1942, in Special Services as a bandleader and was stationed at the Air Force Training Command at the Stevens Hotel, Chicago (now the Hilton Hotel); manager of the Morocco Theatre Cafe at 11 N. Clark St. in Chicago in 1944, and manager of the Stowaway Room at the Stowell Hotel in Los Angeles, California in 1945; played at the Indio Cocktail Lounge in Indio, California; appointed manager of the Colonnade Hotel Auditorium, Singertsland, Riviera Beach, Florida in 1954; retired and living in El Paso; 75 years of age.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; his beginnings in music; the Edgewater Beach Hotel and Mr. Severo G. González of the Central Café in Cd. Juárez; working in Galveston, Cd. Juárez, and El Paso; prominent businessmen in El Paso in the late 1920's and early 1930's; the first radio station in El Paso; people who used to frequent the Central Café.

45 minutes
16 pages

Prologue

The years 1900 to 1930 were transition years, rooted in times simpler than ours. Americans were going about the business of making a new world.

We Americans faced the twentieth century with a buoyant confidence and enthusiasm. Our European ancestors had conquered a vast continent, re-defining a wilderness that had shaped them into a new people.

When the last frontiers closed in 1890, we were no longer adventurers and colonists, but the United States of America; a country rich in History and resources and national traditions. We were a people destined to turn outward and assure leadership in an ever more complex world.

The year 1900 was best of my times--the worst of my times. It was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of my belief and disbelief, but the greatest Era in the Music business and happiness in my life. We are all creatures of God. He made us all equal or belonging to the body. Once in a while in our life some individual creates something new. With me it was the "Wah-Wah" sound in 1920. I recorded it on Brunswick Record #2323-A with the Oriol Terrace Orchestra. The title was "Carolina in the Morning." Since then many musicians have imitated the sound quality. The Organs of today make an imitation sound, not geniune--"Now you know, kids."

Good always wins in the longrun over Evil. "Try to do something Good now."

Frankie Quartell, El Paso's Midnite Son

Horn Blowers Never Die

By Frankie Quartell

The Boy from Hull House

Jazz Trumpeteer, Bandleader

Ambition: Auditory Visual Memory

The Characters, Incidents, Places and Situations in this story are authentic and actual happenings. Some of the famous people and places in this story are now gone. Remembered, but not forgotten.

In 1926 I was playing Trumpet with the Edgewater Beach Hotel Orchestra in Chicago. The Hotel sponsored a chartered train each year, called the Edgewater Beach Hotel Kentucky Derby Special, from Chicago to Louisville for the Kentucky Derby. It would leave Chicago in the A.M. and stop at French Lick, Indiana that night. The train was side tracked near French Lick Springs Hotel for the night, for the passengers to enjoy the seven gambling establishments that thrived in the valley. Most famous was the Brown Casino, located across the street from the French Lick Hotel where the rich and famous came to gamble.

The next day, the Edgewater Beach Hotel Orchestra played a concert in the lobby of the Hotel for the guests. After the concert, I had the pleasure to meet Mr. and Mrs. S.G. González, of El Paso, Texas. They were on vacation. During our conversation Mr. González said, "If you ever decide to come to El Paso, I own the Central Café in Juárez, Old México, and would like to have you work for me as my orchestra leader."

During the Prohibition Era in Galveston, Texas, in 1927, most of the small clubs were nothing but speak-easies. Sam Maceo from Galveston, Texas, visiting in Chicago to see the Dempsey-Tunney fight at Soldiers Field, and also in search of

talent for his new Grotto nightclub gambling casino, hired me to bring my band to his new club the following summer, to open April 15th, 1927. For the length of my engagement at the Grotto, I lived at the Galvez Hotel, directly across the Murdock fishing pier. The new Grotto was built at the end of the pier. In the center of the pier was a restaurant that specialized in seafood.

The Murdock fishing pier was built of a heavy wooden structure, and along side of it was the public beach where the vacationers would come to fish and swim from all parts of Texas. At that time there were only two large hotels in Galveston: The Jean LaFitte, located in the downtown section, and the Galvez, on the beach. There were only a few guests during the week, but starting around 6pm on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, they were filled to capacity, especially the Galvez, as it was convenient to the beach.

On the beach there was also an amusement park (Joyland Park). It had kiddie rides and also a dance pavillion. Jimmy Joy and his orchestra played there during the season, for the park. They started tearing it down in September of that year to make room for the New Buccaneer Hotel that now stands. In some sections of Galveston were the Red Light Districts, called "Down the Line," where the customers could get girls and booze at any time.

Sam Maceo, a Sicilian, was the Al Capone of Galveston. As a young man he was a barber. He was the second of three brothers, Rose, Sam, and Vince. He had a super personality, well liked by everyone in Galveston and Houston. He and his older brother, Rose, and Dutch Voight built the first large nightclub and gambling casino in Galveston, called the Hollywood Supper Club. Gambling was illegal in Texas. The Texas Rangers came in from Austin one day and closed the place, putting them out of business. Through the grapevine I found out that Frank Nitti (the enforcer), who was their treasurer at that time, absconded with \$60,000 of their money and went to Chicago to join the Capone syndicate. They were angry when they found out he stole the money. Sometime in the 1950's Frank

Nitti was found shot to death in a vacant lot in a Chicago suburb.

Sam Maceo was a bachelor with a suite of rooms at the Galvez Hotel across from his club, the Grotto. Every year he would take a trip to New York City to buy a new wardrobe made special for him by his tailor. He was dark complexioned but he favored white suits and shoes.

When the casino in the Grotto was not busy the dealers that worked for him would go outside of the club on the pier and watch the swimmers and fishermen, but would always be on the lookout for Sam coming to the club. When anyone of them spotted him coming he would say, "Back to work boys, here comes the Black Maria." Sam did a lot for Galveston. In 1927 he sponsored the Beauty Contest Pageant on Galveston Island, and Frank his promoter, used to run the beauty pageant in Atlantic City, N.J.; but they were discontinued, so Sam brought it to Galveston. The winner that year was Miss Van Dusen of Chicago, sponsored by Ethel Kendall, owner of the Merry Garden Ballroom of Chicago.

While in Galveston I met some well known people from Texas: Bob O'Donald from Dallas. He was head of Texas Interstate Theaters. George, Lillian and Elliot Shepps of Dallas, owners of Shepp's Baking Company. After prohibition they converted the Bakery into a brewery that brewed the famous Shepps Beer in Texas. Also Mary Shields and her husband, owners of the Shields Lumber Company in Dallas, also Joe Ballestera of Dallas, who was in the Tile and Terraza business. Mr. Shepps, Sr. started the Shepps baking company selling bread from an old wagon drawn by a horse. Sam Maceo told me he built a new Greyhound Dog Race Track in San Antonio, Texas, and he could not open or operate it, because his political choice in the election was defeated. It stood idle. He also said, "Someday I will build a new steel pier and club here in Galveston." He did build it in the '30s and the club was named the Ballanese Room. He brought in Phil Harris and name brands for the opening. He and Phil Harris became good friends. Phil Harris later married Alice Faye while living at the Galvez Hotel in 1942.

In 1929 I had a six week engagement in Dallas at the El Tivoli nightclub, run by Jimmy Groves of the Groves Lumber Company in Oakcliff, and Coodles Cockrell, a wealthy oil man from Amarillo, Texas. The El Tivoli nightclub, formerly a country club, was located on the Fort Worth pike between Dallas and Ft. Worth. At the time, while I was in Dallas, Ted Weems and his orchestra were playing in the roof garden at the Baker Hotel. With his band was Perry Como, the singer, and Elmo Tanner, the whistler. They were just starting out and weren't too well known at the time.

At the end of my six weeks engagement, I left for El Paso. When I arrived the American Legion National Convention was being held here. I got in touch with Mr. González at the Central Café in Juárez. He was glad to see me and asked if I was ready to go to work for him. We agreed on salary, so I went to work for him. We had a 10-piece band, eight Mexicans and two American musicians, and he had to get a permit for me to work in Juárez. I worked from 6pm to 11:45pm, which was closing time to allow the American tourists to get across the border bridge which closed at midnight; because if they missed the 12 o'clock curfew, they would have to stay in Juárez over night. The only good hotel in Juárez at that time was the Río Bravo, one block from the Central Café on the 16th of September St. The manager was Charlie Knoblock from El Paso. The Bull Ring was located along the railroad tracks about two blocks from the Río Bravo Hotel. There was no night life in El Paso because of Prohibition in the States. The popular bars in Juárez were the Central Café, Big Kid's, Harry Mitchell's Restaurant and Bar on the 16th of September, Joe Miller's Castle Café, Lobby #2, and the Tivoli located at the end of Santa Fe St. bridge re-entry to El Paso. Also the Ritz sidewalk cafe in Juárez, run by John Ford.

Mr. Hussman Hotel, just completed the Caroline Apartments, named after his wife, located in the 3300 block on Pershing Rd.

On July 19, 1929, the first radio station WDAH, "The Voice of the Río Grande,"

atop the Del Norte Hotel, was dedicated by Mayor R.E. Thomason. Then a radio ball was held in the Paso del Norte and featured the grand opening of El Paso's new station.

I was hired to do a breakfast show in the small studio of WDAH for one half hour, six days a week. All they could afford to pay me was \$15.00 per week for a half hour program, because they were just starting out. I announced my own program, played my trumpet and sang the theme song, "The Bouncing Baby." In the lyrics I would use the names of some of the businessmen from El Paso who frequented the Central Café in Juárez regularly: Bill Tooley, Knox Hotel owner; Louis Zork, of the Zork Hardware Co.; Johnny Frierson, newspaper editor; Leo Munson of Munson, Dunnigan and Ryan Co.; Bill Hoover of the Cotton Exchange; W.J. Hooten and Dorrance Roderick, publisher of the El Paso Post & Times. When they came in for dinner at night, they would say, "Frankie, I heard my name mentioned on your radio program this morning." This type of entertainment was to their liking. Some of these businessmen have since passed away.

I met Conrad Hilton Sr. at the Central Café. He was in El Paso to start the building of the Hilton Hotel [now the Plaza Hotel] on the site where the old Sheldon Hotel once stood. I also knew him from the Dallas Hilton, while living there, when playing at the El Tivoli. He also lived there with his family.

Louella Parsons, the famous Hollywood columnist, and Dr. Martin of Los Angeles were spending their honeymoon in El Paso, and were at the Central Café in Juárez. They dined and danced to my music every night of the two weeks they were here. They sent a message by their waiter to the bandstand that they would like to meet me, so at intermission I went to their table. They told me how much they enjoyed my music, and asked if I would like to go to Hollywood, that Dr. Martin would see that my band went into the Hollywood Biltmore Hotel. Louella Parsons had great ideas for the types of costumes we would wear, and our type of music would be sensational there. Louella was in a happy mood so I thanked them for the compliment

and told them if I decided, I would get in touch with them. Louella Parsons, approaching her 90th birthday, was confined to a Los Angeles sanitarium, and since then has passed away.

The University of Texas was called the College of Mines. The only entertainment in El Paso at that time was McDonald's Red Mill 10¢ A Dance at the entrance of Washington Park, and John Hall's Rainbow Room on Texas St. across from the old Popular Dry Goods Store. Of course you could stay at home and buy a pint of bootleg Happy Water for \$1.50 at Longwell's Garage on San Francisco St. if you knew the night manager.

The music stores were Tri State and Mac McKenzie, downtown, and Frankie Quartell's Music Shop at 816 Piedras in 5 Points. When I opened the music store, I moved from the Garden Apartments to 918 Cedar St.

The street cars from downtown ran on Yandell to 5 Points, stopped in front of the old Masonic Hospital. The end of the line was where the Sears store is now located. There were buses running to Ft. Bliss. The Cavalry was here then.

On New Years Eve in 1930, after my band finished at the Central, we played for the New Years party at the new country club from 12:30am till 4am. It was located in the valley on the west part of town.

Since the first of the year business at my music store started to fall off, we were beginning to feel the Depression, so I had to close it. Also about 150 small banks throughout the state of Texas were closing. In Juárez, they too were starting to feel the drop in business, due to the Depression in the States.

I enlisted in the Army November 20th, 1942, in Special Service as a bandleader, was stationed at the Air Force Training Command, Stevens Hotel, Chicago, now the Hilton Hotel.

I am 75 years old, retired and living in El Paso. I was born in Chicago on October 6, 1901.

* * * * *

I left out of my story about Mr. González being a great human being and promoter. In 1926 (?) he brought Jack Dempsey to Juárez to put on an exhibition in the boxing arena he had built in 1926. I have a newspaper clipping of this. (Coliseum in Juárez 1926-Tiger Flowers champ.)

Mr. González also financed and helped a young Mexican boy to start a radio broadcast from Juárez from the Central Café. He also helped a crippled lady in Juárez--bought her leg braces so she could walk.

Mrs. González is still alive but is very sick. The last time I talked to her was on March 15th. She is bedridden but she did listen to our program on Station KTEP and she called me on the phone and told me how much she enjoyed the program. Mr. S.G. González died in 1972. Mrs. G. is still living but not in good health; she is living at 1256 Nevada (?) St. in El Paso, Texas.

Interview with Frank Quartell by Daisy Grunau of the West Texas Council on Aging on KTEP, March 15, 1977.

G: Good morning. This is Daisy Grunau of the agency of the West Texas Council on Aging. As most of you know, this is a program for older people and those of you who are concerned or interested in the health and welfare of elderly relatives. It usually is an information program dealing with services and activities affecting older people, and we either have representatives of service agencies or senior citizens who are active in organizations. Today we are departing a bit from our usual format and we're going back to take a look at old El Paso and the life of a retired professional musician, still a member of the Musicians Union, who was a well-known jazz trumpeter and band leader, Frank Quartell. Good morning, Frank.

Q: Good morning, Daisy. How are you all out there? You all come back, sure enough? Here I am!

G: I wanted Frank to tell us a little about his early days, because I know that during his professional career he met many famous people. Apparently as a youth, Frank, you were brought up in Chicago and went to Hull House, which is a very famous settlement house.

Q: Right.

G: Who was there when you were there?

Q: Ms. Jane Addams and Mrs. Joseph T. Bowen.

G: I know the name Jane Addams will strike a spark in many listeners who have been in either social work or nursing, because she's one of the pioneers. Frank, tell us a little bit about yourself and how you went into music. I'm leaving the field wide open. You just tell us how you started and a little bit about your life at that time.

Q: Well, Hull House was supported by Mrs. Bowen and Jane Addams. It was for poor Jewish, Italian, and Irish boys--all nationalities. It was a settlement house, more or less. They had a gymnasium where they could play basketball, they had a room where they could play billiards, a band room, bowling alley, and a room where they could cast metal objects. Also they had the Bowen Hall for parties and dances.

G: This was unusual in those days, wasn't it?

Q: Well, yes, it was; but it brought up a lot of good people. Fellas like Paul Muni come out of there, and well-known professional people.

G: Is that where you started in music, Frank?

Q: Yes, ma'am.

G: Tell us about that.

Q: I started when I was about 10 years old. They used to give us boys instruments that they had on hand. They started me off on a clarinet because my dad played a clarinet. But I didn't like the clarinet and after I had it a couple of weeks they gave me an old, dented cornet. As I went along I kept improving and I asked my bandleader, James Sylvester, if I could get a better cornet. We'd get lessons--we'd sit around and get about 10 minutes of instruction and they'd give us four or five bars to study at home. I brought my brother Anthony down and told him that Jimmy Sylvester had a nice silver plated gold-bell Lyon and Healy cornet and he wanted \$25.00 for it. I asked my brother if he'd buy it for me. He and Jimmy Sylvester went to school together, so my brother arranged to give him a few dollars a week so that I could have this new cornet. That's how I started.

G: How old were you when you got into professional playing?

Q: I started to play professional when I got to be about 12 or 13 years of age. We organized kids' bands. At that time the schools around Chicago didn't have bands like they do today in the public schools. There was the Hull House Boys Band, and there was the Daily News Boys Band that was run by the newspaper. Lane High

School, a boys' school, had a band in those days. We would get together and on Wednesday nights they would have a dance at these public schools. We'd get about four or five boys and they'd give us four or five dollars apiece to play so the kids at school could dance. See, that's where I started. And as I kept improving I got better jobs on weekends. We'd play for dances, clubs, fraternities and sororities. That's the way I started in the band business.

G: Frank, didn't you tell me you worked at the Edgewater Beach Hotel? I'm leading Frank into telling us how he came to El Paso, but the story prior to that is interesting. You actually came because of somebody you met in Chicago.

Q: I met Mr. Severo G. González, owner of the Central Café in Juárez, when the Edgewater Beach Hotel Orchestra was going along with the guests to the Kentucky Derby in Louisville.

G: You mean they used to transport guests down there?

Q: Yes. They would run an Edgewater Beach Special every year. People like Mr. Matt Winn, owner of the Kentucky Downs who lived at the hotel, and people like the Bradleys that were intersted in the horse races down at the Kentucky Derby, took this train so the guests could go to the races and also to the gambling establishments in French Lick Springs, Indiana. For most of the wealthy people, that was quite a well-known resort. Mr. and Mrs. González were on a vacation in 1926 from El Paso, and one afternoon before we went to Louisville we played a concert in the lobby of the Brown Hotel. Mr. and Mrs. González were there and heard the concert. When I got through, Mrs. González approached me and said, "Frank, I liked your concert. If you ever get a chance and want to come to El Paso, I have the Central Café. I have Mexican boys playing there but I'm allowed two Americans. I'd like to have you there as my leader because they need improvement on more modern music," as they were playing Ragtime.

G: Frank, at this time were you leading the band when you played there?

Q: No. The Edgewater Beach Hotel Orchestra was composed of all-star musicians from

Paul Whiteman's Orchestra, Isham Jones, and others throughout the United States. Mr. Dewey, the owner of the Edgewater Beach Hotel, organized the orchestra of all-stars during that era.

G: And yet Mr. González selected you as someone he'd like to use in his place of business in Juárez.

Q: Yes, after talking to him. The reason why I came here a number of years later (in 1929) was that my wife had tuberculosis. I found out about it when I was playing at the Winton Hotel in Cleveland from my doctor, and he advised me to either take her to Saranac Lake or come to El Paso. Now, I had an offer from Paul Whiteman in 1922. I went to New York, I made a recording with him, but he didn't offer me enough money to stay with his band. So Mr. Gus Hensen, recording manager for Brunswick Records, asked me if I would like to go back to the Edgewater Beach Hotel with Benny Kruger's Orchestra for more money, and I did. I didn't accept Mr. Whiteman's offer. I came into Chicago with Benny Kruger's Orchestra, I made several recordings for Brunswick, and I came back to the Edgewater Beach Hotel. After that I had my own band in 1926. I played at WMAQ Radio Station. I had a small five piece band with Joe Gallicchio, who was the leader at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. The station featured Amos and Andy. They would go on till about 11:45 at night, and then I would have a 15 minute program. They would tune in my little group in the North Pole for Admiral Byrd's expedition every evening for their listening pleasure.

G: That's interesting. Now, you came down and worked in Galveston, didn't you?

Q: I played in Galveston for Sam Maceo to September 15, 1927. From Galveston I went to New Orleans later the same year at the Little Club. The job terminated on New Years Eve. From New Orleans I went back to Chicago. Wayne King was starting his band at the Aragon Ballroom. I had five days to play there as a double band. Then I went into the Beaumont Club in Chicago. It was a gambling casino and it was raided by the DA's office--they chopped the place down. After

the Beaumont Club closed, I started to come to El Paso in 1929. I told my wife I'd meet her here, because she had to come here for her health. So on my way here I stopped in Dallas. George and Lillian Shepp, who have the Shepp's Baking Company, and Mary Shields and her husband, who have the Shields Lumber Company, used to come to Galveston on their vacation.

G: Oh, they knew you from Galveston.

Q: Yes ma'am. I worked for Sam Maceo in Galveston at The Grotto.

G: You mentioned you played on a pier down there.

Q: Yes, there was a pier where The Grotto was--Murdock Fishing Pier.

G: The Grotto was where you played, and I recall you mentioned something in your historical sketch that there was some proximity to organized crime and gangsters. Didn't you mention Frank Nitte?

Q: Well, yes. He was connected with the Maceo clan. Then Maceo was the Al Capone of Galveston. When Governor Sharon Moody was in office, Sam Maceo had all the rights to all the gambling in Texas.

G: I guess we're talking about illegal gambling.

Q: Well, yes. But he built a beautiful dog track in San Antonio, and because a politician he was backing got defeated in the election in 1926, he couldn't open it. It laid there stymied after it was built.

G: What happened to Frank Nitte?

Q: Well, he was the treasurer for the Maceo clan. They had the Hollywood Club in 1926. That was the first large gambling club in Texas. When the Texas Rangers came down there from Austin, they chopped the place down, and Nitte absconded with about \$70,000 of their money, and they were mad at him. So I heard through the grapevine that if they ever caught up with him it was going to be "curtains." Years later, in the '50s or so, Nitte was found shot to death in one of these empty lots in the suburbs just outside of Chicago, but I don't know the cause.

G: You thought he went up and joined the Capone gang, became a Caponite.

Q: He did.

G: Well, Frank, tell us about playing in Juárez.

Q: Well, when I played in Juárez we had a lot of fun. That was the only entertainment here in El Paso at the time. El Paso was a small, western, Texas town. What I remember about El Paso in those days was the little Mexican women walking around with long, dark dresses, a dark shawl around their heads and a black veil, I guess to keep from inhaling dust when we'd have our windy days. And being a Catholic I thought they were nuns at first, but that's the way they dressed and walked around El Paso! And there was quite a lot of prominent people from El Paso that come to the Central Café in Juárez.

G: You say that this was the only entertainment spot in the area?

Q: The only place that was in El Paso was the Red Mill at the entrance to Washington Park, and it was a 10¢ a dance place run by Jack McDonald. Also there was the Rainbow Room run by John Hall upstairs from the chocolate shop across from the Popular Dry Goods Company in downtown El Paso. That was the only entertainment here. But of course if people wanted to stay at home, if they knew the night manager at Longwell's Garage on San Francisco Street, they could get a pint of bootleg whiskey for a dollar and a half. I called it "happy water!"

G: What you're telling us now is that this was during Prohibition.

Q: Right.

G: And did you have to have a permit to work in Juárez?

Q: Yes, I had to have a permit for six months there as an American citizen.

G: And then you lived in El Paso.

Q: I lived in El Paso.

G: I know you can't go into detail, but who are some of the people that came over to the nightclub?

Q: Some of my dear friends that I remember were Dorrance Roderick and his wife

(they danced to my band) and Mr. Hooten--they were both with the El Paso Times. John Frierson was with the Herald Post at 401 Mills Street. At that time it was a Scripps-Howard paper, but Dorrance Roderick took it over. Before that they were in the old building on San Francisco Street. Then there was Leo Munson of Munson, Dunnigan and Ryan. He was my close friend and would come over and see me every night. Lou Zork of the Zork Hardware Company. John Ford--he owned a sidewalk cafe in Juárez called The Ritz and he worked as a bartender at the Big Kid across the street from the Central in Juárez. When beer came back, John Ford started a beer distributing company across from my music store at 816 Piedras Street called The Ritz Beer Distributors. He had two cases of beer when he started in business. His son, Jim, now is president of the Munson, Dunnigan and Ryan Hardware Company. Also, Harry Hussman, Sr. and his son, Harry Jr., had a miniature golf course here. Now his son is head of the Montwood Bank--Tom Hussman. And when Mr. Hussman built his first apartments, he named them in honor of his wife--The Caroline Apartments--on about 3300 Pershing. I took an apartment there. When I first came to El Paso I was living at the Del Norte, and Mr. Hussman said, "Why don't you take an apartment here? I'm building a nice apartment house and I'm naming it for my wife."

G: And this was the first real commercial apartment house in the town?

Q: Well, I think it was--I mean, new at the time.

G: I'm just mentally comparing it with what we have today. We're practically wall-to-wall apartments.

Q: Right. Well, when I opened my music store I lived in the Garden Apartments on Montana Street for a while, and there also was a young man that was running the El Paso Times, Johnny Frierson, who lived in that apartment house. When I opened my music store I moved to 918 Cedar Street, which was close to my place of

business. Then there was Bill Tooley who owned the Knox Hotel. That was on San Francisco Street. It's torn down now because of the Civic Center. Later on he managed the Hotel Paso del Norte. When I was in Los Angeles managing the Stowaway Room in the Stowell Hotel, he was manager of the Hall Hotel on Hill St., and El Paso money bought the Roslyn East and Roslyn West Hotels on Main St. in Los Angeles. Also the Ambassador Hotel was operated by El Paso interests.

G: And he was one of the people you met when you were playing in Juárez.

Q: Right.

G: Tell us some more. It sounds as if you were going over a roster.

Q: Bill Hoover, Sr., of the Hoover family; Bill Hoover, Jr. and his brother Jimmy-- they started the Cotton Exchange here. Jimmy died in 1929--he was stabbed to death by a worker on their cotton plantation.

G: Frank, was this a big cotton town then?

Q: It absolutely was. We had a lot of textile industries around El Paso and in Juárez at that time. They've all disappeared.

G: But the cotton was raised here, is that right?

Q: Right. And the Hoover family had quite an interest in it.

G: Now, go back to your people. I didn't mean to take you away.

Q: There was Baggio Casciano, who is now the President of the Musicians Union.

G: He was one of the early El Pasoans.

Q: Right. He's been in there for some time. He's about 86 years of age. And there was Carl O. Wyler, head of KTSM and the Tri State Music Company. Fred Borland was the manager of the Lobby #2 in Juárez. The owner was Don Gómez, president of the DM Distillery Co., S.A. in Juárez. I could talk and carry on about a lot of beautiful people. There was Joe Oakie. He's the head of the Druggist Association in Texas now. Mr. Peyton and his wife Mary danced there--they used to call him "The Baby Beef King."

G: That means cattle, too.

Q: Right.

G: Frank, I want to go back to some of the people you've met in Juárez who perhaps were not local. When you were playing in Juárez you mentioned seeing and talking with Louella Parsons.

Q: Right, I did.

G: Would you tell us a little about that?

Q: Well, she and Dr. Martin spent their honeymoon here for two weeks and they'd come into the Central and have dinner each night because I had the only big band in this part of the country at that time. One night she sent a waiter up to the bandstand with a note telling me that she wanted to meet me. After our dance set I walked to their table and they introduced themselves and said, "We enjoy your music and we'd like to know if you'd be interested in coming to Los Angeles." Miss Parsons said, "My husband has an interest in a Hollywood Biltmore Hotel. We like your kind of music and the kind of costumes I have in mind that you would wear would be the Mexican-type, real bright and brilliant costumes. If you decide to come we'd like to have you organize a band in California."

G: Did you ever take her up on it?

Q: Well, after things got bad here in El Paso, I closed my music store after the first of the year. We played the New Years Eve party at the El Paso Country Club, and then I decided to go to California. In the meantime, on this radio station I was broadcasting from, from the Del Norte Hotel, there was a young chap by the name of Al Benfield in Tucson. His folks were building the Pioneer Hotel there. He sent me a wire when I was still at the Central. He said, "If you happen to have a chance, I would like for you and your band to come down here." He was learning the hotel business when I was at the Edgewater Beach Hotel back in '25 or '26. He was a clerk. His folks built the Pioneer

Hotel. I told him that on my way to California I would stop in to see him. I thought El Paso was a small town, but when I got to Tucson, it was very small-- only about two blocks long! The hotel was built and he asked me if I would stay there and take care of all his entertainment in the hotel. He gave me and my wife a suite of rooms for the night, a nice breakfast and lunch, with no charge. He pleaded with me to stay. I said, "Mr. Benfield, I thought El Paso was a small town, but this really is not too big either. Where do your people come from?" He said, "Oh, we have wealthy people from all these ranches here. Frank, this is going to be a great resort someday." I said, "Well, I'm on my way to Los Angeles. I've got an invitation from Louella Parsons and Dr. Martin."

G: Did that turn out?

Q: No! I had a brand new Erskin car made by Studebaker in 1928 that I bought when I left Chicago, and after I got to Los Angeles, I sold it for \$365.00 so I could get some employment. I went to New York and I organized a band, and Mr. Leo Fitzgerald put me in the Ambassador Club on Broadway and 42nd Street in the Winter Garden Theatre building. It was run by Larry Faye and New York (Dutch Schultz) Flagenheim. When I found out who the people were that were running the club, I wanted to get out of there! Clara Bow was their star tap dancer in the N.T.G. Review. Mr. Leo Fitzgerald booked her and he also managed Nick Lucas, the "Crooning Troubador and his guitar."

G: Didn't I hear you mention that you were in contact with Perry Como in his early days?

Q: Yes. When I was in Dallas, just before I came to El Paso, Ted Weems and his band were playing at the Baker Hotel Roof Garden in Dallas, and Perry Como and the whistler, Elmo Tanner, were with his band. They were just starting out. Now, Ted Weems and his brother and the boys in the band, when they had time off they would come to the El-Tivoli and listen to my band. I remember when the Weems brothers just started in the business. Paul Speck who I worked for at the Alamac

Hotel in New York had a booking agency, and he organized a band for them at the Rosemont Ballroom in Brooklyn. That's how they started in the music business.

G: And you said Perry Como was in Dallas?

Q: He was just starting to sing with the bands then. Before that he was a barber. He was with the Ted Weems band in Dallas. He wasn't too well-known.

G: If I recall correctly, you said something about knowing Phil Harris.

Q: Phil Harris followed me in Galveston maybe 10 or 12 years later; in fact, in '42 when he married Alice Faye. But I was brought back to Galveston by Sam Maceo when he rebuildt the Hollywood Club in 1934. I was at The Grotto in 1927. Now The Hollywood Club was rebuilt and Phil Harris came in later. Sam Maceo told me he was going to build a steel pier. You know, he brought that beauty pageant from Atlantic City to Galveston. The girl that won that year was from Chicago. Her name was Miss Van Dusen, and she was sponsored by Ethel Kendall, owner of the Merry Garden Ballroom. My band played at the Merry Garden Ballroom in 1922.

G: Haven't I heard you mention meeting Conrad Hilton, Sr.?

Q: Right.

G: Was that here?

Q: Well, I lived at his Hilton Hotel while I was in Dallas working at El-Tivoli. He and his family were running the hotel on the American Plan.

G: You mean he was actually operating it?

Q: Right, and he lived there with his family. When he came to El Paso, the Sheldon Hotel had burned down just a short while before I came here. (I had some old film on the hotel that I had taken.) He came to El Paso to try to get some help to build the Hilton Hotel, which is now the Plaza Hotel. He came in to see me because I lived in his hotel while I was in Dallas.

G: As I recall, he did get his financial backing here and really got started here.

Q: He did, yes ma'am. He's about 90 years old now. I knew him when he was a young man!

- G: And he was actually working at hotel work.
- Q: Right. He and his wife had an American Plan hotel and I lived there.
- G: What about Benny Goodman, Frank? Tell us a little bit about that.
- Q: He started out of Hull House just like I did.
- G: Benny Goodman did?
- Q: Yes, ma'am.
- G: I know what you mean now, talking about Paul Muni, Benny Goodman and yourself, that a great many people really started careers from there.
- Q: Benny Goodman played in the Boys Band with my kid brothers Joe and Ernie, a clarinet player. One of my brothers, Joe, died here about a year ago. He was also a musician. He played in the Columbia Studios and he recorded a lot of background music for big pictures like "Duel in the Sun." He also played with the Woodie Herman Band. He was a trombone player.
- G: Was he playing when you got Benny Goodman to play with you?
- Q: Well, my brothers were just coming up. Joe was about Benny's age, and Benny was about 13 years old. I needed a saxophone player. I had a band at the Montmartre Café where Helen Morgan was singing in her first floorshow appearance. Before that she was a show girl at Bouche's Villa Venice in Chicago in 1922.
- G: You weren't much older than Benny Goodman, were you?
- Q: Well, I would say I'm a bit older. Benny Goodman must be 69, and I'm 75. I was 75 on my last birthday.
- G: I don't think people listening to you would believe that.
- Q: Well, I'm 75 years young.
- G: But Benny really got started with you?
- Q: I needed a saxophone player. I went down to Hull House to see the boys in the band and Jimmy Sylvester. They were playing the Minon Overture. I liked the way he executed that number. It's quite a difficult clarinet number. In the meantime I'd heard about him from my brothers Joe and Ernie and some of the

boys that were playing in the Hull House band, that he was a good musician. So I had him come down and audition on a Saturday night for my band. I was just starting to record for OKAY Records. I heard him play, and he was 20 years ahead of everyone at that time, as far as jazz was concerned on clarinet. So I hired him.

G: How long was he with you, Frank?

Q: Just one night! The next night I went down to work and the boss laid me out for hiring a young kid that played so different. He said, "He's gonna spoil your band!" He insulted me in front of the customers in the Montmartre Café.

G: And this was over Benny Goodman?

Q: Over Benny Goodman. I went on the bandstand, packed my horn and left, and left the band there. They were fired and given their two weeks notice.

G: And yet you say Benny Goodman at that time was really 20 years ahead of his time.

Q: Why, sure. He was. He's the "King of Swing" right now. I worked with him and Glenn Miller at the Black Hawk Restaurant in Chicago in the Ben Pollick Orchestra. I made several recordings with them, "Memphis Blues" and "Waiting for Katy Dear" on Victor Records. But if you want to get back, I can't say too much about El Paso. I wish I could speak more.

G: Would you please tell us about the first radio station in El Paso, WDAH? In your historical sketch you mentioned that it was called "The Voice of the Rio Grande." Where was that located?

Q: It was at the top of the Del Norte Hotel. They had no employees, just the people that ran the station. I used to have a girl piano player that worked there part time and a banjo player that worked at the Rainbow Room by the name of Johnson. We'd do a little program in the morning and I would mention the names of all these businessmen over the radio station, all these wonderful people.

G: Was it sort of a disc jockey job?

Q: Well, maybe. I played my trumpet. I had to do my own announcing. They had

a small studio. I did a tune called "The Bouncing Baby" and I introduced myself as "Frankie Quartell, El Paso's Midnight Son."

G: Why?

Q: Well, I worked at night. My music business always was between 10 and 4 in the morning. And I would sing this song "The Bouncing Baby" and I would say, "Let's call him Charley" or "Let's call him George" or John, or Harry; and I would mention some of the great names and say, "What about Harry Hussman?" and "What about Chris Fox, Mr. McAfee (president of the State National Bank) and Mr. Hoover and Bill Tooley?" They were big people here, and when they would come in at night, they would tell me about hearing me on radio. And they enjoyed that kind of entertainment.

G: It sounds like probably one of the first talk shows in a sense, in that you had to do the talking.

Q: They didn't pay much money. They paid me \$15.00 a week, because they were just starting out then.

G: I was wondering what the salaries for musicians were.

Q: I was making a good salary on the other side. Mr. González paid me \$250.00 a week while the other musicians were getting \$30.00.

G: In other words, you were carrying both jobs.

Q: Yes, ma'am. Before they used to work on tips. They had an old tin horn like they had on the old Victrola phonograph machine, with a box; and people would toss in coins for tips for the musicians. And that was their salary! I want to talk about one more man that's very interesting, by the name of Old Man Snyder. He used to raise Arabian horses here in El Paso and he used to sell them to the generals and all the officers in the Mexican Army for \$5000.00 and \$6000.00. He would come to the Central Café and he'd say, "Frank, I've got an Arabian horse picked out for you. Why don't you come over and get him?" I'd say, "I've got no place to keep him." But he was a real Texan. He would come in with his boots and his work clothes, and his wife and daughter would come in

their evening gowns. And he kept telling me about this horse. Now, he'd get tight and he'd chew tobacco and spit on the side, and his wife would call him on it. He'd say, "Keep quiet. Frank, I want you to get four boys and come to my home."

G: I was going to ask you where all these ranches were. You said the city itself was small.

Q: He had a big ranch here where he raised his horses, and he was always talking about saving this horse for me, when was I going to pick him up? I had no place to put him. I said, "I only live in an apartment." He said, "Why don't you rent yourself a stable so you can keep him? He's a beautiful horse." He was quite an individual. The reason I remember him, he would get tight and invite all his friends that were at the Central to his home. He'd take us to his home and I'd bring four or five musicians. He'd say, "Frank, I'll give you \$50.00 and \$10.00 apiece for the musicians. Come to my house. I've got a lot of friends coming over." We'd go to his home; he lived on Mesa close by here. There wasn't very many homes there at that time. He'd get there and he'd go to bed and leave his wife to take care of the party. They had whiskey and a buffet lunch, all you could eat and drink.

G: It sounds like a real western party.

Q: He was a real Texan. He was enjoying himself and I can't forget him. I had to mention it. I would also like to mention about Marsha Hunter, who is with the Peyton Foundation.

G: I think you did want to say thank you to Marsha Hunter for her help with you getting a trumpet and getting yourself started again. I think she will be very happy with that acknowledgement. Frank, I think we could go on and on. There's so many things I have to ask you that we didn't get into. Frank tells stories about not being able to cross the bridge after a certain hour from México.

Q: Right.

G: And many of the things in early El Paso when the University used to be the School of Mines. But we will have to say, "Thank you Frankie Quartell, you've given us a great half hour here." This is Daisy Grunau. I thank you for listening; have a nice week.

Postscript to Interview

Q: Now, let's go on. This is Frankie Quartell: How to deal with sin in your life.

"Sorrow breaks up old habits and replaces them with new and better habits, a fact which suggests that sorrow is a device of nature by which she keeps man from becoming enslaved by complacency and self-satisfaction. This gave me freedom I would never have known without this experience, and paved the way for the writing of my book. In parting, I say, "Take care of yourself; and hornblowers never die--they just blow away like a violent, wild, wild, wild, wind."

Postscript to Interview

Mayor R. E. Thomason dedicated a radio ball which was held in the Del Norte Hotel and featured the grand opening of El Paso's new radio station. On August 23, 1929, broadcasting started from the Tri State Music Company. In 1930, among the first radio broadcasts from Juárez, México was station XEJ. The founder was young Don Pedro Meneses Hoios. He was called by many as Pete. He introduced the first audience programs from the old Teatro Zaragoza. His remote control music programs came from the dance floor of the Lobby #2 Cafe on Juárez Avenue.

I, Frank Quartell, was the bandleader and MC, and commentator or announcer on XEJ during our broadcast of the floorshow for the heavily populated El Paso clientele.

Some entertainers who performed were Alberto Sergio, known as the "Great Mexican Tenor," an 11-year old Spanish dancer known as Marquita, and piano player Leo Rocco, who played American songs. I would play trumpet solos.

It is possible that Severo González, owner of the ~~Central Cafe~~ and the old El Tivoli in Juárez, financed Don Pedro when he began the first radio station in Juárez.