

Vanishing Culture Project
Cortez Oral History
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Length of Interview: 47:48
Interviewer: RC – Richard Culbreath
Transcriber: NCC

Richard Culbreath: Take minutes, you know?

[laughter]

Goose Culbreath: Oh, we went in there cold turkey now [laughter]. Richard said, "Now he's going to –" What was that tune you said I was going to do, and I couldn't think of that singer's name? There's no fiddle tune too, was there?

Female Speaker: You'd be lucky if you all get a practice session [laughter] Saturday night before you all played on Sunday [laughter].

GC: I can't remember what it was. But Richard said he's going to do so-and-so. I jumped in, and I said, "How's it going?" Lord says, "I don't know [laughter]."

RC: [laughter]

GC: Well, how I was I couldn't even think of it. Can you imagine being up on the stage like that and that happens? I could not take it.

RC: Yes. We get up there on that main stage up there the first year we were there. We were going to do "Alabama Jubilee." I couldn't think of it [laughter].

GC: [laughter]

[music playing]

RC: Do you want to do some stuff like "Life's Railway to Heaven" and "I'll Fly Away," some of those old kinds of [inaudible]?

GC: Just jump in there and let's see what we can do with it.

[music playing]

"Some glad morning when this life is over, I'll fly away. To a land on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away. I'll fly away, oh, glory, I'll fly away. When I die, hallelujah, by and by, I'll fly away. Just a few more weary days and the I'll fly away. To a land where joy shall never end, I'll fly away. I'll fly away, oh, glory, I'll fly away. When I die, hallelujah, by and by, I'll fly away." That would be pretty good.

Leo Galle: You're doing both.

[music playing]

GC: He went to Jesse's [laughter].

Ray Bach: We're going change gears, dude.

GC: [laughter]

RB: This is automatic.

GC: You all tie that E string up there on the same thing.

[music playing]

That damn thing slips on it.

RB: It's got a little railroad peg, like a little railroad spike, another railroad.

GC: I thought a while ago you were pulling that string over with your finger, but it wasn't.

RB: No.

GC: It's that thing holding it. I see it.

RB: I got a little railroad spike.

GC: [laughter]

RB: Got a little model railroad spike, and it holds it up there. Puts it right in there.

GC: You drill a hole in it or something?

RB: I drilled a little tiny hole in it. Then I put this railroad spike on with Super Glue.

GC: Well, I'll be doggone.

RB: Glued it in there. This stayed right there. I got one there, and I got one down here.

GC: Oh, I see. You were slipping it over in it.

RB: Yes.

GC: Well, they got a thing somewhere.

RB: Well, they got a slider thing you could slide it down.

GC: Yes.

RB: But it's a big, old, bulky thing. You got to drill a bunch of holes in your banjo. This railroad spike, you just got to drill one, tiny, little hole wherever you want one.

GC: That's a good idea.

RB: Works really good.

FS: It's a good thing you just back each other up.

RB: Yes. It's a whole lot cheaper. These railroad spikes, they only cost about \$1.50 for a great, big, old box of them.

GC: I've seen the fellow play in the guitar the other day with badge pegs on it.

[music playing]

She didn't like it. You'd turn it down, and it goes right back to the – she just played that tune all the way through there like that. He would run it down and back and then back and back.

RB: I'll be darned.

GC: The only thing I've ever seen on a guitar.

LG: The thing that stops it.

RB: Got D-tuners on the guitar.

GC: On the guitar, yes.

LG: They got those snaps on it.

GC: Yes.

RB: We got D-tuners on this, but I can only use them in G.

GC: Now, I played music with a fellow who worked at Visionary and down there that made a set of patent keys. He made them himself. They had the other kind where they could turn them down, but they'd have to roll them back. He made that set of keys. He used to come over to the house and play with them several times with the band. He would run it down. He'd just turn the peg and loosen it and go back to where it belonged.

RC: What did we play during the [crosstalk]?

RB: See, I made a set of keys like that one time for Vagaband and (Joe Hemp?). I took a little, tiny, railroad model thing, and I drilled a hole in it. It had a little screw on the side here. I could screw this screw out, and it had a little thing come out there. It'd catch that string, and it would bend it over. You could adjust them with a screw up here. But you turned it there and then bent it over and everything, and it would spring right back to where it was supposed to be.

GC: That's the way he made those things. He worked at Visionary down on 301 South.

LG: We did "Durham's Bull." You got "Matchbox."

GC: Hold on.

[music playing]

Michael Jepson: Now, before you guys start again, could you just introduce yourself for the camera over there? You can just turn around and give your name.

[laughter]

FS: If his shorts don't last.

LG: One time only. What you see is what you get, fellow.

[laughter]

RC: Mississippi wild man.

[laughter]

LG: Mississippi too.

MJ: But I want you all to say your name and everything. So, Rich, why don't you introduce the

—

RC: Well, I'm Richard Culbreath from Cortez Grand Old Opry, the Culbreath family here in Cortez. These are our friends. Leo Galle —

LG: Howdy?

RC: — from Biloxi, Mississippi. This is Ray Bach from Myakka City.

RB: Myakka City, Florida.

RC: Myakka City, Florida. That's metropolis.

RB: Metropolis.

RC: It's like Cortez's metropolis [laughter].

RB: Yes.

RC: I think everybody should know him. That's Goose [laughter].

MJ: I guess everybody should know Goose.

GC: Everybody should know Goose. What would we do without him [laughter]?

RC: He's the last surviving member of the original Cortez Grand Old Opry. Cortez's Culbreath family here and some friends.

MJ: If they don't know Goose, they soon will [laughter].

LG: "Matchbox" again.

GC: We're going do a little bit of "Matchbox Blues" [inaudible].

[music playing]

RC: See, I have to make sure I give you an A harp. I can play the harp, break in that to a harmonica.

GC: Good.

RC: I can play it too.

GC: That would go over really good.

RC: Yes, it would. I play better on a harmonica than a general banjo.

GC: It would be.

RC: That would be better on the harmonica where I can click them.

LG: Yes. Sing Goose.

GC: You want me to sing? You want me to sing the one I wrote myself [laughter]? "I love the ground that she walks on because she owns a lot [laughter]."

LG: [laughter] Get your jiggle and get this one up there.

[music playing]

LG: I think we ought to kick it up in that high gear on the last verse.

GC: You mean faster?

LG: Yes. Why not?

[music playing]

All right. When I sing it through one time, you play it through one time, it didn't kick a good.

GC: [laughter] You almost had me.

[music playing]

LG: Kick it up at high gear, folks, and let's rumble.

RC: How much of the fast do you want to do? You want to play it all fast? You want to play it fast-fast [laughter]?

RB: See, Bill Monroe did it. He did a slow version first.

LG: Slow version first.

RB: The last turnaround, he spins it up.

LG: He kicks in that overdrive. Right? Get overdrive on the last part there.

[music playing]

RC: Keep in mind these are half-hour shows. The more we drag these songs out, the less songs we're going to do.

RB: Yes.

RC: We want to get the "Orange Blossom Special."

GC: Yes.

RB: What can you do that in, A or D?

GC: E.

RC: I wish the Lord was going to do this here with fiddling sticks, but that's what the people want if we can do it.

GC: Yes. We'll just have to do it otherwise because I know he isn't going to be able to make it.

LG: Well, you could do it.

RC: I know I can do it. But it's what we're comfortable with. If you got that other fiddle tuned up.

GC: Yes. Well, I got the other one.

RC: Because they eat that up.

GC: Yes.

RC: Yes, definitely, we got to make that a part of the show at least on the main stage whether we do another one.

GC: Yes.

LG: Well, what I noticed I was –

RC: That's only a 20-minute show.

LG: I paid attention to them. You take that "Durham's Bull", "Matchbox," and those fiddling sticks and then back up and push. All right?

GC: Well, that's going to pretty well take care of that in 30 minutes if you go [inaudible].

RC: I know it. That's what I'm saying. Each one of these songs we're doing, if we pass them back and forth, we're going eat up 5 or 6 minutes.

GC: Yes, really.

RC: We're going to have to either cut them down or we're going to have to cut something out. There aren't two ways about it. It's only 30 minutes.

LG: Well, let's cut the songs out and get to fiddling and stuff in here [laughter].

RB: Well, as far as the banjo breaks and stuff, I'd rather just play a little bit of backup. I don't want to be standing out there playing a whole lot of banjo out front because I'm not that good at banjo playing.

RC: Now, don't get me wrong. This all adds to the thing, and we can take a break in it.

RB: Yes, well that's true.

RC: Maybe one break and out.

RB: But we don't want to do a break every song either. We don't want to feature the banjo and the fiddle and the guitar every song because then it gets –

RC: "Orange Blossom Special" we can do four.

RB: Yes.

GC: Yes.

RC: We don't even have to play the guitar part or sing if you want, play it through by yourself.

GC: It's just up to you all. I'll do whatever you want.

RC: Yes.

LG: Then do about twice by yourself there.

RB: As far as the banjo break in "Orange Blossom Special," I'd rather just sit back and vamp because usually they do that so fast, I can't keep up hardly anyhow.

RC: How about back up on the harmonica?

RB: Yes, I can do that too.

RC: On the "Orange Blossom Special." Yes, just give a little bit of [inaudible] back and forth.

RB: Yes, we can do that.

[music playing]

RC: [crosstalk] something we take a fracking or two?

GC: Whatever you want to do. We can take some pages. It doesn't matter to me.

RC: Just go through it by yourself. Let's just try it that way.

[music playing]

GC: That's the way they used to play it back then when they first put it out.

RC: That's what we want to do.

RB: Yes, that's what we want to do.

RC: Exactly like that. We don't need no guitar part. We don't need to do the singing. Just do it like that.

GC: That's the way they did it. Just like that.

RC: I'll announce it like I've announced it before, as the original version [laughter].

GC: Yes, it was [laughter].

RC: Now, the thing is, do you want to start it off or you want to –

[music playing]

GC: Yes. That was good.

RC: We can do that.

GC: We need Leo coming in there with that fast stuff too. Double time on the –

RC: Keep working on it.

[music playing]

GC: That's the way they ended it. That's the way they started off.

RC: There's another position even on "Durham's Bull." Say, let's take the fiddle songs and play the fiddle, and feature the banjo. We'll back you up. Then on singing ones, we'll take a break in. How about that?

RB: Sounds good to me.

GC: Yes.

RC: Then several times.

RB: Sounds really good to me.

RC: Just let him play the fiddle song all the way through. That way he won't be expecting me or you to come in. Then we can get a few more songs in that way. Because you won't sing one, he won't sing one. We'll have Lamar maybe (Mr. Spank?) will sing one.

GC: Yes. That's a good idea.

RB: That's a really good idea.

GC: We only got just a little while on stage.

RC: Yes. So, we'll get these things written down and say "Durham's Bull" again. Okay?

GC: Yes.

RC: You just go ahead and play "Durham's Bull," and we'll back you up. How about that?

LG: By hand.

RC: That way instead of getting up to Wallace Ds, I want him to show me how to do two of them [laughter].

GC: Wallace does too. He's like my dad now in this business.

RC: That's what I mean I want him to show me [laughter].

GC: They did for two sticks. It's an act too, the way you're doing those things.

RC: Now, you mentioned we know so many materials that we can do two complete shows. We can do three different shows. So, what we need to do is think about, say, that's one song each on the first show, one song each on second show. Do something different. You've done two?

GC: First, one of you [crosstalk].

RC: Let's just run through really quick.

LG: Like we can do it.

RC: We can do it, but you just threw it yourself. So, you won't be expecting us to back up.

[music playing]

RC: That's it right there.

LG: That took about a minute and 12 seconds.

GC: [laughter] Now, I might not get any longer.

RC: If you don't want to take a part in it let's just back up and I'll do the [crosstalk].

[music playing]

GC: In other words, you want me to back all the way from the mic [laughter]?

RC: No, if you feel comfortable enough to play it, man, I'd rather have the jigs in it because of the next song.

GC: Yes. Go ahead [laughter].

[music playing]

RC: We still need to refine it, I guess.

LG: Except that I'll be playing a little louder because I'll be able to hear you.

GC: Yes.

LG: Now, if you all want sing in on my chorus, that wouldn't need help.

[music playing]

GC: "Get you a copper kettle. Get you a copper coil. Cover with new-made corn mash and never more you'll toil. You'll just lay there by the juniper while the moon shines bright. Watch them jugs are filling in the pale moonlight. Again, they made corn whiskey. My great-granddaddy did too. We haven't paid no whiskey tax since 1792. We just lay there by the juniper while the moon is bright, watch them the jugs are filling in the pale moonlight. In the pale moonlight."

MJ: That's a good song.

[music playing]

RB: Is that (one "Yonder"?)

GC: Yes. Good old standard team.

FS: Speed?

GC: Just about that speed too.

RB: Yes, that was good.

GC: I like that little boogie-woogie type.

[music playing]

GC: That's as good as you want right there.

LG: A minute and a half there.

GC: Yes, probably.

RB: To see if I'm still good [laughter].

RC: Did anybody get time on it?

LG: I did.

RC: How long is that?

LG: A minute and a half.

RC: That was 1.5?

[music playing]

[laughter]

LG: 1 minute and 45 seconds.

RB: Did I move too fast?

MJ: Tell us a little bit about what you're doing and the history of that. Would you?

RC: Well, this is what we call fiddling sticks. They used to call it fiddling. Well, this is actually a reed at – what is it, salt grass?

GC: Sagebrush.

RC: You get them off the beach.

GC: Well, no. They'd get them out in the country. They got plenty of them up there in White Springs.

RC: [laughter] You take the reed, and you keep the rhythm time for the fiddle. Now, it's just termed fiddling sticks. This was done before the acoustic instruments and all were available, I guess. This is where they kept their rhythm. It's passed down through the family. I don't know where it originated, but we know they came from Ireland and might have brought it with them [laughter].

[music playing]

RC: [laughter]

GC: Well, that's a good song too, man.

RC: Yes.

LG: Same time.

RC: Now, the fiddle has to be tuned up so that that string will resonate. I don't want to give away his trade secrets [laughter].

GC: There's no secret to it, that's the way it's got to be tuned up.

RC: It's got to be tuned. It can't be tuned standard and not do it that way.

GC: This is the way they tuned it to play the straws and the fiddle if they didn't have a banjo. Back then, they didn't have any guitars up there in North Florida. That's where my dad comes from. They used to play the sticks and the fiddle. They'd tune it up like this and play all different tunes.

RC: Let me get that other straw.

GC: They used to play the "Hen Cackle" in this, but I never did learn it.

[music playing]

RC: [laughter]

GC: That's the old "Hen Cackle." My dad used to play it like that. But I never did try to play it. It seems like this. I always played it the other way.

RC: That seems right. I just wanted to try it with two. I've never done one like this.

[music playing]

RC: That's what –

GC: Boy, I've seen my dad do that many a time and uncle [inaudible].

RC: I've seen him.

GC: Uncle Baby D, you know him.

RC: He was sitting there.

GC: He did two straws at a time on it. Wallace can still do it. He did it.

RC: I want to find out just how he does it because that just –

GC: Yes, it's a rhythm to it.

RC: I've seen grandpa do that before.

GC: [laughter] It's got to be right too. It's coming in the same. When they get through, it sounds just like one stick. He showed us how to do the other way just with one stick.

RC: About a minute and a half piece?

LG: Yes.

RC: That's 4.5 minutes, right?

LG: Yes.

RC: Getting on with it.

LG: We have a few songs over there and then three minutes.

RC: A minute and a half, a minute and a half.

GC: Well, that's a good sound and fiddle.

RC: Goose, do you want to put the – now what is it, the thing that you do with the bow. What's the name?

GC: [laughter] Well, I can try it, but I'll tell you that it takes a while to get back in.

RC: I'll hold your knees together for you.

[laughter]

GC: It takes a while to get back into how to do that.

RC: You want to turn it over like a cello though? You want to do that one that way.

GC: He wants to get that on video.

RC: Play a little bit of "Mockingbird" and turn it over like a cello.

[music playing]

GC: I can't come in right [laughter].

RC: Might be a little fast.

GC: I know, but I got to come in because right now I'm not doing that.

RC: Yes, it's got to be a whole lot faster now because of the beat. It's a slow beat.

[music playing]

GC: I used to have it worked out really good.

RC: You got it on that tape.

GC: That's the first time I've done it.

RC: You got that part on the tape, I believe.

GC: Yes, I think it's on there.

MJ: You got it on tape already? You're going to do it later?

RC: Well, not the way he's done it there with the trick fiddling. We do have a version of it on that tape. I believe that he put the –

LG: We put it on the tape as well.

RC: Well, I got both now. I got the videotapes that we took over White Springs, and one of them was practicing out of Lloyd's.

GC: Here's the tune I've worked out. It used to be an old –

[music playing]

RC: You are not putting that part of the E minor in there.

GC: What's in it? Oh, yes. I just left that out [laughter].

LG: Well, I was putting it down.

[music playing]

[end of transcript]