

# THE RECORDINGS OF DAVE NELSON AND THE KING'S MEN / HARLEM HIGHLIGHTS

## An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

NELSON, 'Dave' Davidson C., trumpet, piano, arranger      born: Donaldsonville, Louisiana, 1905; died: New York City, 7th April 1946  
Nephew of Joe 'King' Oliver. Both parents played piano. First played violin and piano, then took up trumpet. First professional work with Marie Lucas Orchestra at Lincoln Gardens in Chicago. Played in Ma Rainey's Georgia Jazz Band, also did M.C.A. tour with Jelly Roll Morton. Worked with Richard M. Jones, who taught him arranging, member of Edgar Hayes' Eight Black Pirates (spring 1927). Led own band at Dreamland 1927, worked briefly with Jimmy Noone at The Apex Club, with Leroy Pickett Orchestra (late 1928), then toured with own band before settling in New York. Few months with Luis Russell (1929), toured with King Oliver (June – October 1930), then led own big band (late 1930). Again worked with King Oliver. Led own Hot Shots Band which toured with Mae West in 'The Constant Singer' (1931), then led own band for residencies in New York and New Jersey: Pelham Heath Inn, Laurel Gardens, Roebling Ballroom, Cedar Theatre, etc. From the mid-1930s played piano in own small band, worked on trumpet with own sextet during the early 1940s. During his last four years he was a staff arranger for the Lewis Publishing Co.. Continued gigging (on trumpet and piano) until shortly before suffering a fatal heart attack. (J. Chilton, Who's Who of Jazz)

- Storyville 2000-01, p. 188: "Clyde Bernhardt recalls Nelson as "One hell of an arranger, composer, leader and trumpeter." He said that Nelson did the rehearsing of the Oliver band and the compositions which bore his and Oliver's names like 'Boogie Woogie', 'Mule Face', etc. were really his own compositions with Oliver's name added as he was the leader of the band. When the royalty check arrived from Victor it was made out to Oliver, who retained the money. This led to a rift between him and Nelson which the latter did not want as they were related in some way. Nelson took the matter up with Victor, who with some understanding said they would switch the recording contract to Nelson and subsequently he recorded for them as Dave Nelson and the King's Men. Clyde added that Oliver sorely missed Nelson after this."

Dave Nelson recorded proficiently with King Oliver and his Orchestra in 1929/1930. On these recordings he also assumed a large part of trumpet solo duties, Oliver often being in a bad state of health and fitness. These recordings are part of my list 'King Oliver and his Orchestra' elsewhere on this website! On Dave Nelson's Chicago 1926-28 recordings see Christopher Hillman, 'A Paramount Cornettist', in Storyville 113, p.164.

This personnel-discography is based on RUST, JAZZ AND RAGTIME RECORDS 1897 - 1942.

Personnel are taken from this source, but modified in the light of earlier or subsequent research or on the strength of my own listening, discussed with our listening group or other interested collectors.

- Documented, most certain and aurally absolutely obvious identifications are listed thus: **Dave Nelson**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Dave Nelson*
- Not attributable identifications – although the musician in question might be an otherwise well-known person – are listed thus: **unknown**
- If a possible identification for an otherwise unknown musician is suggested by the author without the possibility to prove the factual evidence, it is listed thus: (*Dave Nelson*)

When feeling certain without a musician's documented presence, I have not refrained from altering Rust's statements without using italics. In any case, my statements are open to discussion and I would appreciate any contribution - pro or contra!

As always in my discographies on this website I have written recording sessions with their headings, dates, titles and names of musicians in italics, whenever I am convinced that the eponymous musician of this discography is not part of the accompanying group of this session! Documented names of musicians if known – in recording ledgers or on record labels – are listed in bold letters.

This discography still is - and will certainly be - a work in progress for a long time, if not eternally. Yet, on the way to a definite discography of all jazz recordings before 1942 - which certainly will never be possible - it is intended to fill some gaps that have not been treated before.

DAVE NELSON AND THE KING'S MEN / HARLEM HIGHLIGHTS

<b>001 DAVE NELSON AND THE KING'S MEN</b>	New York,	Jan. 14, 1931
Melvin Herbert, Harry Brown, Dave Nelson – tpt; Wilbur de Paris – tbn; Buster Bailey – clt; Glyn Paque, Wayman Carver – alt, clt; Charles Frazier - ten; Sam Allen – pno; Arthur Taylor – gtr; Simon Marrero – sbs; Gerald Hobson – dms; Dave Nelson – voc; <i>Dave Nelson</i> - arr		
64849-2 I Ain't Got Nobody	Vic 22639,	Frog DGF 11
64850-2 When Day Is Done	Vic 22639,	Frog DGF 11
64851-2 Some Of These Days	Vic 23039,	Frog DGF 11

On Dave Nelson's earlier recorded performances (Ida Cox, Bertha Henderson, etc.) he proved himself a rather weak and insecure trumpet player with a lack of pitch and/or of embouchure. This same lack of pitch – together with a strange vocal vibrato - is strongly felt in his vocals in all the titles of this recording session. And wisely he renounced playing trumpet solos in this session – with one exception in chorus 4 of 'Some Of These Days'. He might have been aware of his short-comings – and that the state of being 'King' Oliver's nephew was not necessarily an indication of musical quality.

Melvin Herbert appeared as lead-trumpet man with Cliff Jackson and his Krazy Kats and Ross De Lux Syncopators – apart from these Dave Nelson sessions. Harry Brown is un-listed in any other group in Rusts or other discographies, and might – perhaps – be confused with Nat Brown who played trumpet with the Leon Abbey Orchestra – aka Savoy Sultans – in South America in 1927. He may be the trumpet soloist in solos not attached to Dave Nelson's work in 'Structures of Tunes', below.

Wilbur de Paris is un-mistakable by his sharp tone and legato playing.

Brian Rust's 'Victor Master Book' lists four saxophones for this session. It must be considered that at this time big band arrangements were scored for three saxophones: first alto, second tenor, and third alto. Writing for four saxophones was a thing of the future, and common from about 1934 on. Thus, I assume that Bailey only played clarinet on these sides – mainly as a soloist. Glyn Paque was an accomplished alto player, as was Wayman Carver, who played alto with Snowden's Smalls' Paradise Band at this time ('Smash Your Baggage' film 1932). He does not use his flute on these sides. Together with Charles Frazier on tenor sax, they would have made a regular three-part saxophone section – as common at this time – plus a clarinet star as soloist.

We find a busy pianist, Sam Allen of later Teddy Hill and Stuff Smith fame, with the band. And a respectable string-bassist from New Orleans in Simon Marrero, who also was with Oscar Celestin in his home-town some years earlier. Guitarist Arthur Taylor also served with King Oliver's New York Orchestra, and drummer Gerald Hobson, listed also for Joe Steele's Orchestra.

The rudimentary arrangements are assumed to be Dave Nelson's own work.

Notes:

- *Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography, 1948: Dave Nelson, Melvin Herbert (tp); Wilbur de Paris (tb); Buster Bailey, Glyn Paque, Charlie Frazier, "Paducah" Bradley (s); Sam Allen (p); Arthur Taylor (g); Simon Marrero (b); Gerald Hobson (dm)*

- *Rust\*2: Dave Nelson (tpt, vcl); Melvin Herbert (tpt); Wilbur de Paris (tbn); Buster Bailey (clt); Glyn Paque, Jack Bradley (alt); Charles Frazier, Wayman Carver (ten); Sam Allen (pno); Arthur Taylor (gtr); Simon Marrero (sbs); Gerald Hobson (dms)*

- *Rust\*3: Dave Nelson -t -v; Melvin Herbert -Harry Brown -t; Wilbur de Paris -tb; Buster Bailey -Glyn Paque -cl -as; Charles Frazier - ts; Wayman Carver -ts -f; Sam Allen -p; Arthur Taylor -bj -g; Simon Marrero -sb; Gerald Hobson -d*

- *Rust\*4: Dave Nelson -t -v -dir; Melvin Herbert -Harry Brown -t; Wilbur de Paris -tb; Buster Bailey -Glyn Paque -cl -as; Charles Frazier - ts; Wayman Carver -ts -f; Sam Allen -p; Arthur Taylor -bj -g; Simon Marrero -sb; Gerald Hobson -d*

- *Rust\*6: Dave Nelson -t -v -dir; Melvin Herbert -Harry Brown -t; Wilbur de Paris -tb; Buster Bailey -Glyn Paque -cl -as; Charles Frazier - ts; Wayman Carver -ts -f; Sam Allen -p; Arthur Taylor -bj -g; Simon Marrero -bb; Gerald Hobson -d*

- *B. Rust, The Victor Master Book, Vol. 2: 3t/ tb/ 4s/ p/ bj/ bb/ d/ vocalist: Dave Nelson*

Structure of Tunes:

64849 I Ain't Got Nobody Key of G Victor  
(Intro 4 bars brass)(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA clts 16 – brass 8 – clts 8)(Chorus 2 32 bars AABA DN voc 30 – BB clt 2)(Chorus 3 32 bars AABA BB clts 15 – GP alt 1+8 – ens 8)

64850 When Day Is Done Key of G Victor  
(Intro 4 bars pno)(Chorus 1 32 bars ABAC ?HB o-tpt 16 – BB clt 8 – WdP m-tbn 6 – SA pno 2)(Chorus 2 32 bars ABAC DN voc 30 - ?HB m-tpt 2)(Chorus 3 32 bars ABAC ?FB m-tpt 16 – AT gtr 6 – CF ten 2+6 – ens 2)(tag 2 bars ens)

64851 Some Of These days Key of F Victor  
(Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AB ens + BB clt 24 – WdP o-tbn 8)(Chorus 2 32 bars AB DN voc + BB clt)(Chorus 3 32 bars AB BB clt 30 - ?DN o-tpt 2)(Chorus 4 32 bars AB DN o-tpt 30 - ?WC alt 2)(Chorus 5 32 bars AB ?WC alt 16 – SA pno 14 – CF ten 2)(Chorus 6 32 bars AB ens + BB clt 16 - ?o-tpt 8 – ens + BB clt 8)

<b>002 DAVE'S HARLEM HIGHLIGHTS</b>	New York,	Jun. 09, 1931
Melvin Herbert or Harry Brown, Clarence Brereton, Dave Nelson – tpt; Wilbur de Paris – tbn; Glyn Paque – alt, clt; Wayman Carver – alt, flt; Charles Frazier - ten; Sam Allen – pno; Arthur Taylor – bjo; Simon Marrero – sbs; Gerald Hobson – dms; Dave Nelson – voc; <i>Dave Nelson</i> - arr		
69905-1 Somebody Stole My Gal	TT C-1587,	Frog DGF 11
69906-1 Rockin' Chair	TT C-1576,	Frog DGF 11
69907-2 Loveless Love	TT C-1577,	Frog DGF 11
69908-2 St. Louis Blues	TT C-1588,	Frog DGF 11

The personnel for this session probably is largely the same as that one of Dave Nelson and the King's Men, above. But – although all the discographies affirm – Buster Bailey is not with this band. (This, by the way, would affirm my above proposition that Bailey was soloist only at the above session, and not part of the saxophone section.) The clarinet solo parts must then be played here by Glyn Paque, in accordance with his style of a bit strange and quirky phrasing and choice of notes.

All trumpet solo work is played by muted trumpet and may well be entirely by Dave Nelson. It is well within his instrumental scope. Very good is Wilbur de Paris on muted and open trombone, while poor Glyn Paque has to fill Buster Bailey's virtuoso chair, by what he has to

fail. There is little solo work by Charles Frazier. His tenor sax sounds very rough and has little to say. But Wayman Carver demonstrates that a flute may be played in a jazzy way, as well. But: Carver's rhythmic performance leaves much to be desired and sounds stiff. Sam Allen has little solo space, here, and Arthur Taylor (not Danny Barker! see below) has some banjo parts in 'Rockin' Chair' in conversation with Dave Nelson singing.

The arrangements used very probably are the work of Nelson, again, and show the same modest inventiveness and rudimentary ability of their writer like at the first recording session. (Dave Nelson never inserts any modulation to change the basic key of a tune.)

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: not listed

- Rust\*2: Dave Nelson (tpt, vcl); Melvin Herbert, Harry Brown (tpt); Clarence Berton (tbn); Buster Bailey (clt); Glyn Paque, Jack Bradley (alt); Charles Frazier, Wayman Carver (ten); Sam Allen (pno); Danny Barker (bjo); Simon Marrero (sbs); Gerald Hobson (dms); one sax omitted (sic!)

- Rust\*3: Dave Nelson -t -v; Melvin Herbert -Harry Brown -t; Clarence Berton -tb allegedly replaces de Paris; it seems likely that what really happens is that this man is Clarence Brereton, a trumpet player who in this case either plays tb or replaces either Herbert or Brown on t; Buster Bailey -Glyn Paque -cl -as; Charles Frazier - ts; Wayman Carver -ts -f; Sam Allen -p; Danny Barker -bj; Simon Marrero -sb; Gerald Hobson -d; one sax omitted (sic!)

- Rust\*4,\*6: Dave Nelson -t -v -dir; Clarence Brereton, Melvin Herbert or Harry Brown -t; Wilbur de Paris -tb; Buster Bailey -Glyn Paque -cl -as; Charles Frazier - ts; Wayman Carver -ts -f; Sam Allen -p; Danny Barker -bj; Simon Marrero -bb; Gerald Hobson -d

- Danny Barker, *A Life in Jazz, p.200*: Re personnel of 'Dave's Harlem Highlights': "Danny Barker maintains he was not present at this session, and that the banjoist was Arthur Taylor."

Structure of Tunes:

69905 *Somebody Stole My Gal* Key of Eb Timely Tunes

(Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 40 bars AA' CF ten+ens 8 - WdP o-tbn 8 - CF ten+ens 8 - CF ten 14 - ens 2)(tag 2 bars ens)(Chorus 2 40 bars AA' DN voc+GP clt 38 - GP clt 2)(Chorus 3 40 bars AA' GP clt 14 - WdP o-tbn 24 - ens 2)(tag 6 bars ens)(Chorus 4 40 bars AA' ?DN m-tpt 16 - GP alt 16 - ens 8)

69906 *Rockin' Chair* Key of Eb

Timely Tunes

(Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars ABCA ?DN m-tpt 16 - saxes 8 - WdP o-tbn 6 - ens 2)(tag 2 bars ens)(Chorus 2 32 bars ABCA DN voc+AT bjo 30 - ens 2)(Chorus 3 32 bars ABCA ens 12 - ten 8 - ens 2)

69907 *Loveless Love* Key of F/Bb

Timely Tunes

(Chorus 1 16 bars DN m-tpt)(Chorus 2 16 bars DN m-tpt)(Chorus 3 16 bars WC flt)(Chorus 4 16 bars DN voc+ AT bjo)(Chorus 5 16 bars DN voc+ AT bjo)(Chorus 6 16 bars ens+CF ten)(Chorus 7 16 bars WdP o-tbn 8 - ens 8)

69908 *St. Louis Blues* Key of G/Gm/G

Timely Tunes

(Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 12 bars ?DN m-tpt)(Chorus 2 12 bars ?DN m-tpt)(Verse 16 bars WdP m-tbn)(Chorus 3 12 bars DN voc)(Chorus 4 12 bars DN voc)(Chorus 5 12 bars SM sbs)(Chorus 6 12 bars ?DN m-tpt)(Chorus 7 12 bars AT bjo)(Chorus 8 12 bars SA pno)(Chorus 9 12 bars GP clt)(Chorus 10 12 bars GP clt)(Chorus 11 12 bars GP clt)(Chorus 12 12 bars GP clt)(Chorus 13 12 bars ens + GP clt)(Chorus 14 12 bars ens + GP clt)

K. - B. Rau

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