

A CASE OF BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

Clarence Williams' Longshoreman Blues on London LP

by K.-B. Rau

It is not very often today that the ambitious collector of Classic Jazz comes across the trace of a hitherto unknown or unheard alternate take of one of the classic recordings of our music.

The attentive reader of NAMES & NUMBERS – if inclined to listen to the music of the twenties – may have become aware of the ongoing project of re-researching the personnels of all Clarence Williams band recordings from November 1925 on (post Louis Armstrong) until May 1933 (just before the start of the “Swing band” recordings). The two periods of Cl. Williams' recordings not dealt with here may be the subject of a later project.

The research is being done mostly aurally by a group of passionate collectors worldwide, who have teamed up via the “RedHotJazz” web portal, and I have to report that until now a good deal of very interesting and unknown or unthought of facts have become apparent (see my comment to “Discographical Datum” : Eva Taylor by Bernhard H. Behncke in this issue of N&N).

In the course of our investigation now I once again stumbled over a most interesting and most thrilling note in STORYVILLE 141, p. 103, where the editor compiled a couple of late additions to his absolutely magnificent and unmatched book on King Oliver. I cite : “Peter Morgan wrote back in July 1988 that he had two different versions of *Longshoreman's Blues* on London AL 3561 (which claims matrix 272 on the sleeve) and Biograph BLP 12038 (which claims 272-A). I have now heard the London, and can confirm that it is different to my QRS which is as reported in the book. However, I note that the sleeve of this LP quotes ‘plain’ takes for all items, and it should not therefore be assumed that this is 272, it might equally be 272-B! The takes may be identified by the pick-up phrase on the alto after the four bar intro : 272-A: two short notes; long note; short note. London AL: four evenly spaced notes.”

STORYVILLE 141 was issued in 1990, and I made several attempts at that time to find someone who owned this elusive 10” LP. But, in vain! Now, with the help of the world-wide-web, and with the unmeasurable help of my good collecting friend Michael Rader of Karlsruhe, Germany, I got hold of this LP.

But I am unable to describe my immense disappointment when putting the LP on the turntable and finding out that this *Longshoreman Blues* (the ‘plain’ take) is identical to the common take on Biograph, other LPs and the recent Frog CD DGF 48. The only difference – and there really is one – is, that someone who transcribed the source disc to LP did not notice – or did not care – that there was a needle jump exactly during the third note of the alto – the long one ! – shortening it to the length of the other notes, and dropping half a bar (two beats) of the alto solo, so that the solo seemed to begin with four “evenly notes”, as L. Wright wrote in STORYVILLE. The remaining 2:30 minutes are absolutely identical to take 272-A on all other reissues. Really, a sad day last week! And: we cannot listen carefully enough!

But, could there exist a different pressing of this London LP? Unless its non-existence has not been proved there might still be a vague hope!?