

A CASE OF PERPETUAL MISJUDGEMENT

Bob Fuller ... or who?

by K.-B. Rau

This article is certainly nothing but a hypothesis. It is about a musician who has almost certainly been misidentified in the past, not been questioned thereafter, and will be shown as a distinctly own person in his own right.

As long as I have been collecting jazz recordings of the 1920s I have been bewildered by the strange sounds of clarinetists like Bob Fuller, Ernest Elliott, or George McClennon. Their styles of playing the clarinet appeared to be remnants of a long-gone period in our music and not worth any consideration or even investigation.

Discographers of early discographical times seem to have seen these clarinet players as old-fashioned, trashy and incompetent, and have therefore piled any strange or inferior clarinet playing up upon their names. As an example: The very non-professional tenor sax performance on the Original Jazz Hounds (see my article in N&N 68) has been heaped on Ernest Elliott's head all through Rust editions 3 to 6. In my Ernest Elliott investigation at my website www.harlem-fuss.com I stated that Elliott certainly was not responsible for it, since none of his stylistic characteristics can be found in this tenorist's style..

So, subsequently we find so much questionable clarinet playing attributed to Elliott (or Bob Fuller, to whom the same applies) that I decided to check Elliott's enormous list of recordings in chronological succession and to compile the above-mentioned investigation.

Since similar misjudgements have concerned Bob Fuller, our listening group are at present at present the same task for this player. My own conclusion is that we cannot judge these gentlemen's styles with our knowledge of jazz of the 1930s and 1940s and, thus, devalue it. Instead, we should judge them in their own time. But even then, we have to accept that these players did not belong to the crème of Harlem players, and that they lived their own musical life in very limited and probably unfortunate circumstances and situations.

With Bob Hitchens great, overdue and meticulous investigation in the Choo Choo Jazzers' recordings published in VJM Vol. 175 to 177, most recordings with the possible presence of Bob Fuller have been checked. And I have developed a rather reliable knowledge of Fuller's very own clarinet style. But the Choo Choo Jazzers' recordings – mainly on Ajax Records - came to an end in early 1925. From then on Fuller's recording activities are confined to some blues accompaniments and a series of trio recordings under his own lead for various companies.

But then – in the second half of 1926 – we find him listed in a series of beautiful band recordings, many under Thomas Morris' leadership and often accompanying singers, but, even if Bob Fuller seemed to have made a remarkable stylistic development before this time, we suddenly find a clarinetist whose stylistic features differ considerably from Fuller's.

All these recordings have been reissued and available in recent times. And yet, nobody seems to have acknowledged that the clarinetist on these sides has nothing in common with Fuller's sounds on his trio records of the same time.

The clarinet heard is definitely played in a modest Johnny Dodds style, with bent notes downward to subsequent notes in a "singing" way, the tone strong and secure with a wide and irregular medium vibrato, all of this not common in Harlem, New York, at this time. We hear long melodic phrases interrupted by frequent chordal arpeggios, in vertical phrasing, changing registers frequently. So, there was a need to find a clarinetist living in New York at the time, influenced by Dodds, and in the musical vicinity of Thomas Morris, who often acts as leader on these band recordings. I am positively aware that my task was something of a "circumstantial proof" as there are no company ledgers documenting the name of this very player. All contemporary discographies agree on Fuller at the given sessions.

Bob Fuller, in contrast, performs in a mixture of straight ahead Jazz playing and the use of Klezmer musical devices. He does not mix them permanently, but in well-ordered separated choruses or parts, each played in Jazz style or a Klezmer derived "freakish" style. He obviously lacks advanced harmonic knowledge and sensibility, which leads him to play unfitting or even wrong notes in many cases. His changes of register are frequent, and he prefers to stay in a chosen register for a separated and defined order. Fuller uses a strong and fast vibrato of narrow and irregular frequency. His playing is rhythmically simple and mostly on the beat. His time is rather erratic thus preventing him from swinging.

As a consequence – and considering all known clarinet players in New York in 1926/7 – I cannot help but ascribe all this clarinet playing to Albert 'Happy' Caldwell, although he himself did not claim his participation at all the sessions listed below. (There was one clarinetist in New York performing in a distinct Dodds-like "Western style" – Clarence Robinson - but he is evident only in 1922. And also Arville Harris – as we have got to know – was able to perform in a Dodds-like manner. Hear Eva Taylor's 'Red Hot Flo' where it is very probably Harris on clarinet.) And, Caldwell himself declared to have been greatly influenced by Johnny Dodds.

I have mentioned and commented on Caldwell's presence on tenor sax with Thomas Morris Seven Hot Babies on Victor in my article in Names & Numbers 79. Therefore, these sessions are not included here. But it has to be noted that most of the sessions listed below have Morris on trumpet and are recorded by the Victor company. Under "Notes" I have only listed the entries in the latest editions of BGR and Rust as reference.

All the below listed recordings have a clarinet with clear New Orleans diction, and have nothing in common with Fuller's known style. They are part of a "Western" concept of ensemble playing, not so much en vogue in New York.

MARGARET CARTER

New York, early Aug. 1926

Margaret Carter – voc;
 Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;
 Happy Caldwell – clt; unknown (*George McClennon?*) – clt, alt;
 Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo
 107041 I Want Plenty Grease In My Frying Pan
 107042 Come Get Me Papa, Before I Faint

PA 7511, Timeless CBC 1-030
 PA 7511, Timeless CBC 1-030

Most unfortunately Laurie Wright did not have the opportunity to continue his interview with Happy Caldwell published in Storyville 99. Thus, we do not know Happy's possible statements on this and the next session and have to rely on our own judgement and that of our listening companions. (Both this and the consecutive session have to be seen as one, following the sequence of matrix numbers and the recording company.) Both sessions were reissued in John R.T. Davies' famed 'Big Charlie Thomas' CD on Timeless and have therefore been – and still are – subject of much controversy. But, what do we hear:

Undisputed is Buddy Christian's presence as banjoist and probable organizer of the session.

On trumpet/cornet we hear the mysterious 'Big' Charlie Thomas as faintly remembered by Eva Taylor and on this basis identified in a remarkable series of recordings in Harlem in 1926. Despite any contradiction I am sure of this player's identity whatever his actual name might have been.

There is little heard from the trombone here, but the trombone break in the ensemble instrumental chorus of 'I Want Plenty Grease ...' is definitely Charlie Irvis and has nothing in common with anything heard from Jake Frazier on record.

Both reed players play clarinet in the second title, exclusively in pre-set arranged simple riffs. There is no ad-lib by any of the clarinetists here. In 'I Want Plenty Grease ...' only one clarinet can be distinguished, playing ad-lib and with a distinct Dodds influence in this style. This stylistic element might lead to Happy Caldwell regarding Preston Jackson's statements as to his stylistic ambitions early on in Chicago. Only that he is much steadier here than on the October 1923 sides.

The other reedman delivers a restrained obligato to the musical proceedings, obviously on alto saxophone, without identifiable individual elements.

The pianist takes a back seat in little differentiated accompaniment, using modest treble figurations in his right hand or simply pounding four-four rhythm with both hands. This might be a hint as to Mike Jackson's assumed presence here which corresponds to what I know of Jackson's style.

Notes:

- BGR*4: Margaret Carter –v; unknown –c; Charlie Irvis –tb; unknown –cl; Bob Fuller –cl -as; Louis Hooper –p; Buddy Christian –bj.
 - Rust*6: Margaret Carter –v; probably Tom Morris –c; Jake Frazier –tb; Happy Caldwell –cl; Bob Fuller –ss; Mike Jackson –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

BUDDY CHRISTIAN'S JAZZ RIPPERS

New York, early Aug. 1926

Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;
 Happy Caldwell – clt; unknown (*George McClennon?*) – clt;
 Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo, voc
 107043 South Rampart Street Blues
 107044 The Skunk

PA 8518, Timeless CBC 1-030
 PA 8518, Timeless CBC 1-030

These two sessions seem to be the only jazz sessions by Afro-American musicians on Pathe Actuelle early August 1926 and certainly were recorded in direct succession. Although there are known examples of changing personnel in the course of recording sessions in the history of jazz, we can consider both personnels identical. So, only this is to add here:

On 'South Rampart Street Blues' the clarinet soloist – who certainly is not the player assumed to be Happy Caldwell – plays in a distinct "freak" or even "gas-pipe" style, and it seems that both reed players are on clarinet now. Rust*6 names George McClennon as second reed man. Comparing these clarinet sounds with George McClennon's documented recordings at least show a most striking similarity. It is this "freak" player who commands all proceedings on the first title, the other clarinetist – Caldwell? – staying in the background. On 'The Skunk' the "freak" player plays the very simple melody, almost sounding like an alto sax because of his sharp tone. Caldwell – if it is he – obviously has difficulties to play a decent jazzy ad-lib part over the ensemble, possibly pre-set in parts. But this may be explained by the fast pace the band takes.

In this respect, Rust's possibility of George McClennon becomes quite reasonable and I am cautiously following. There is not any instance of Bob Fuller on these sides. But this would mean that most probably we also hear McClennon on the Margaret Carter sides, on alto in the first title and in the second one on clarinet together with Caldwell.

Big Charlie Thomas on trumpet/cornet is certain. Again, the trombonist is very restrained playing only ensemble parts as arranged. The singer in 'The Skunk' seems to be Mr. Buddy Christian himself as he is accompanied by the two clarinets and the trombone, the trumpet/cornet starting his solo into the vocal. Buddy Christian was a most respected pianist in his New Orleans days, and it is thus not surprising that he recorded his own compositions here. 'The Skunk' is easily recognized as a composition for solo piano. The band's pianist's only task is comping and delivering a simple chordal four beat rhythm.

It seems to be important here to note that 'South Rampart Street Blues' of this session as well as that of the 'New Orleans Blue Five' of Nov. 1926 (see below) is given as composed by "B. Fuller – B. Christian". This might have led to the assumption that Bob Fuller must be present on both sessions.

Notes:

- Rust*6: probably Charlie Thomas, c; Charlie Irvis, tb; George McClennon, cl; Bob Fuller, cl, ss; Mike Jackson, p; Buddy Christian, bj.

MAMIE SMITH

New York, Aug. 31, 1926

Mamie Smith – voc;
 Thomas Morris – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; unknown (*Happy Caldwell*) – clt;
 unknown (*J.C. Johnson*) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo
 36081-1 What Have I Done To Make Me Feel This Way ?
 36081-2 What Have I Done To Make Me Feel This Way ?
 36081-3 What Have I Done To Make Me Feel This Way ?
 36082-2 I Once Was Yours I'm Somebody Else's Now

Vic 20233 not on LP/CD
 Vic 20233, Doc DOCD 5360
 Vic LPV-534, Doc DOCD 5360
 Vic 20210, Doc DOCD 5360

This partly seems to be the same personnel as on the former Mamie Smith session with the exceptions of the clarinet player, who plays in a much more fashionable and modern style than Fuller, with interesting melodic phrases – unheard of by Fuller – especially in 'I Once Was Yours' and a completely different vibrato. Beautiful! Because of the time of recording and of Happy Caldwell's vicinity to the Thomas

Morris circle I assume that this might be Caldwell on clarinet here. There also are some elements of Omer Simeon's style. (Caldwell remembers having recorded with Mamie Smith, but did not recall the date or label.) Irvis' presence again is slightly doubtful, but the playing is closer to Irvis than on the preceding Mamie Smith session. The pianist plays strong four-beat two-fisted rhythm different from Mike Jackson. Unfortunately, he cannot be heard in solo. So, it is impossible to judge whether he could be J.C. Johnson as reported from his own testimony. The banjo player may be Christian, but this man here doubles time in 'What Have I Done ...' which elsewhere is unheard of by Christian. So, his presence has to be doubted. But it is his light banjo sound!

Notes:

- BGR*4: Tom Morris – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Bob Fuller – clt; prob. Mike Jackson or J.C. Johnson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo
- Rust*6: Tom Morris – c; Charlie Irvis – tb; Bob Fuller – cl; Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo

Notable differences of takes:

36081-1: this take not reissued in any form, thus no comment possible
36081-2: first bar of introduction – tpt fourth note D is somewhat fluffed and unclear
36081-3: first bar of introduction – tpt fourth note D is clear and clean

MANDY LEE

New York, Sep. 1926

Mandy Lee – voc;

Thomas Morris – tpt; Happy Caldwell – clt;

Mike Jackson – pno; unknown (Buddy Christian?) – bjo

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|--------|--|-----------|--------------------|
| 6859-1 | I Needs A Plenty Of Grease In My Frying Pan | Ban 1901 | not on LP/CD |
| 6859-2 | I Needs A Plenty Of Grease In My Frying Pan | Ban 1901 | not on LP/CD |
| 6859-6 | I Needs A Plenty Of Grease In My Frying Pan | Ban 1901, | Document DOCD-5515 |
| 6860-1 | Crap Shootin' Papa, Mama Done Caught Your Dice | Or 771 | not on LP/CD |
| 6860-6 | Crap Shootin' Papa, Mama Done Caught Your Dice | Ban 1901, | Document DOCD-5515 |

Thomas Morris and Mike Jackson are undisputed because of their stylistic features. But, certainly, the clarinetist is not Bob Fuller, but very probably Happy Caldwell judging from his very strong, un-erratic and Dodds inspired style. There is nothing that reminds of Bob Fuller! The banjo player is not Elmer Snowden, again for stylistic reasons. Following Storyville 158 (see below) he might be Buddy Christian, but the banjo sound is not his to my ears and the many tremolos he plays are not Christian's approach.

Notes:

- BGR*4: Tom Morris, cnt; Bob Fuller, clt; Mike Jackson, pno; prob Elmer Snowden, bjo
- Rust*6: Tom Morris -c; Bob Fuller -cl; Mike Jackson -p; ?Elmer Snowden, bj

Notable differences of takes:

Since there are no alternate takes reissued of any recorded title in any form, no comment is possible

ELIZABETH SMITH

New York, Sep. 06, 1926

Elizabeth Smith – voc, ukl (1);

Thomas Morris – tpt (2); Happy Caldwell – clt (2);

Mike Jackson – pno (2)

| | | | |
|---------|--|------------|-----------------|
| 36097-2 | No Sooner | Vic 20297, | RST JPCD-1526-2 |
| 36098-2 | Gwine To Have Bad Luck For Seven Years | Vic 20297, | RST JPCD-1526-2 |

Once again, this is not Bob Fuller's style at all. And again, I have to opt for Happy Caldwell's presence here from all I can hear and recognize. He is much less erratic and much more tasteful than Bob Fuller.

(The first title only has ukulele accompaniment by Miss Smith herself.)

Notes:

- BGR*4: E. Smith, own u (1); Tom Morris -c; Bob Fuller -cl; Mike Jackson -p (2)
- Rust*6: E. Smith, own u (1); Tom Morris -c; Bob Fuller -cl; Mike Jackson -p (2)

EVELYN PREER

New York, Sep. 08, 1926

Evelyn Preer – voc;

Thomas Morris – tpt; unknown (Happy Caldwell?) – clt, b-clt; unknown – vln;

unknown – pno; unknown – bjo; unknown - cymbal

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|--------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 6810-2 | Lucky Day | Ban 1848 | not on LP/CD |
| 6811-2 | The Birth Of The Blues | Ban 1848, | Document DOCD-5590 |

Judging from style, tone and vibrato this clarinetist might well be Happy Caldwell – in the light of other recordings dealt with here – doubling on clarinet and bass-clarinet. We know from his own testimony that he performed on all saxophones – I do not remember having heard him on baritone – but on this basis it would be easily possible that he also tried himself out on the bass-clarinet.

What little can be heard from the trumpet may well be by Thomas Morris, possibly trying out this rather unusual sort of personnel for recordings in the future (see below).

Notes:

- BGR*4: not listed

- Rust*6: unknown -c; unknown -tb; unknown -cl; unknown – vn; unknown -p; unknown -bj; unknown -d

EVELYN PREER

New York, Oct. 14, 1926

Evelyn Preer – voc;

Thomas Morris – tpt;

unknown (Happy Caldwell?), unknown – alt; unknown – vln;

unknown – pno; unknown – bjo; unknown – bbs; unknown – dms

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|---------|--|-----------|--------------|
| 36823-2 | It Takes A Good Woman To Keep A Good Man At Home | Vic 20306 | not on LP/CD |
|---------|--|-----------|--------------|

This record could not be heard, but Richard Rains lists it in his article in Frog Yearbook Vol. 1 and confirms that Morris is the cornet/trumpet player. Because of Caldwell's presence on many of Victor's blues accompaniments at this time it seems feasible the he may also be present on this side.

Notes:

- Rust*6: c; 2 as; vn; p; bj; bb; d

MARGARET JOHNSON Black And Blue Trio New York, Oct. 20, 1926
 Margaret Johnson – voc;
 Thomas Morris – tpt; *Happy Caldwell* – clt, sop;
 Mike Jackson – pno

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|---------|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| 36846-1 | When A 'Gator Hollers, Folks Say It's A Sign Of Rain | Vic 20333, | Document DOCD-5436 |
| 36846-2 | When A 'Gator Hollers, Folks Say It's A Sign Of Rain | Vic uniss. on 78, | Document DOCD-5436 |
| 36847-2 | Graysom Street Blues | Vic 20333, | Document DOCD-5436 |

Thomas and Mike Jackson are obvious on these sides. But again, the clarinetist definitely is not Bob Fuller. He shows definite similarities to Johnny Dodds' playing in tone, vibrato and phrasing. Much more than any other clarinet player in New York at this time. There is nothing that reminds of Fuller. Thus, I am convinced that we hear Happy Caldwell here. And from Caldwell's own testimony we know of his inclination towards Johnny Dodds. He plays very beautifully here!

Notes:

- BGR*4: Tom Morris, c; Bob Fuller, cl, ss; Mike Jackson, p

- Rust*6: Tom Morris -c; Bob Fuller -cl; Mike Jackson -p

Notable differences of takes:

36846-1: bar12 of 3. Chorus (voc) upbeat to clt solo (ca.1:48): clt plays 1 quarter pause, 1 eighth note F, 1 quarter note F, 1 quarter note Bb, 1 eighth note G

36846-2: bar12 of 3. Chorus (voc) upbeat to clt solo (ca.1:48): clt plays 1 eighth pause, 1 eighth + half note F, 2 eighth notes C# - D

NEW ORLEANS BLUE FIVE New York, Nov. 02, 1926
 Thomas Morris – tpt; Joe Nanton – tbn; *Happy Caldwell* – clt, sop;
 Mike Jackson – pno; *Bobbie Leecan* – gtr;
 Helen Baxter, Thomas Morris, Joe Nanton – dialogue (3,4)

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|---------|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| 36895-1 | My Baby Doesn't Squawk | Vic 20364, | Frog DGF 1 |
| 36895-2 | My Baby Doesn't Squawk | Vic 20364, | Frog DGF 1 |
| 36896-1 | The King Of The Zulus | Vic 20316, | Frog DGF 1 |
| 36896-2 | The King Of The Zulus | Vic 20316, | Frog DGF 1 |
| 36897-1 | South Rampart Street Blues | Vic 20653, | Frog DGF 1 |
| 36897-2 | South Rampart Street Blues | Vic 20653, | Frog DGF 1 |

Thomas Morris and Joe Nanton – later 'Tricky Sam' – are documented in the Victor Master Book, Vol. 2, by Brian Rust. On clarinet we hear the same man again as on the preceding Margaret Johnson session. He shines with his Johnny Dodds inspired playing – if somewhat "light" in comparison – but far from Bob Fuller and without any reasonable doubt Happy Caldwell. The pianist delivers the simplest sort of chordal accompaniment and does not show any characteristics. Only in 'South Rampart Street Blues' he shows his facilities as a stride pianist. And these are compatible with what I know of Mike Jackson's style. As for the guitarist: Richard Rains is right concerning his opinion as expressed in his article in Storyville 153 (below). So, this is certainly Bobby Leecan on guitar here.

Notes:

- Rust*6: Tom Morris -c; Joe Nanton -tb; Bob Fuller -cl, ss; Mike Jackson -p; Buddy Christian -g; Helen Baxter - Tom Morris – Joe Nanton - dialogue (3,4)

Notable differences of takes:

36895-1: bar 3 of intro (ca. 0:05): tpt plays 1 eighth note D, 1 quarter note D, 2 eighth notes D, 1 eighth not C, 1 eighth note A, 1 eighth note F#

36895-2: bar 3 of intro (ca. 0:05): tpt plays 1 eighth note D, 1 quarter note D, 1 eighth note D, 1 eighth not C, 1 eighth note A, 1 eighth note F#, 1 eighth note D (low)

36896-1: bar 10 of strain A (ca. 0:11): clt break clt attempts to play triplet run, but fails after first triplet

36896-2: bar 10 of strain A (ca. 0:11): clt break clt plays downward d-minor arpeggio in eighth notes

36897-1: bar 15/16 of 2. Verse (after pno solo)(ca. 1:21) upbeat to sop solo: 1 quarter note F, 2 eighth notes G – Gb (bar 15), 1 half note F (bar 16)

36897-2: bar 15/16 of 2. Verse (after pno solo)(ca. 1:21) upbeat to sop solo: 2 eighth notes F – F#, 1 quarter note G, 2 eighth notes G - Gb (bar 15), 1 half note F (bar 16)

SIX HOT BABIES Camden, N.J. Nov. 17, 1926
 Thomas Morris – tpt; Joe Nanton – tbn; *Happy Caldwell* – clt;
 Nat Shilkret – pno; *Fats Waller* – org; *Bobby Leecan* – gtr; unknown – dms

| | | | |
|-------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 36775 | All God's Chillun Got Wings | Vic unissued | not on LP/CD |
|-------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|

Victor Master Book lists only Shilkret by name, but Waller's presence seems to be fact as he recorded two titles (organ solos) immediately before with consecutive matrix numbers. Other names are not listed. Suggestions as published in Storyville 2, all Rust editions and Laurie Wright might be made according to the recordings of May and September 1927? John R.T. Davies (1953) and Steven Taylor do not list this item! So, this is a very doubtful Morris item.

But, referring to the assumed presence of Happy Caldwell at the foregoing sessions it seems feasible that he could have been part of this unissued session, proposed that this session also comprised musicians of the Thomas Morris circle.

Notes:

- Rust*6: Tom Morris, c; Joe Nanton, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Nat Shilkret, p; Fats Waller, or; ?Bobby Leecan, g; unknown, d.

EDNA WINSTON New York, Nov. 23, 1926
 Edna Winston – voc;
 Thomas Morris – tpt; unknown – tbn; *Happy Caldwell* – clt;
 unknown (*Phil Worde?*) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo

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|---------|--------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| 36958-3 | I Got A Mule To Ride | Vic 20407, | Document DOCD-5523 |
| 36959-2 | Mama's Gonna Drop Your Curtain | Vic 20424, | Document DOCD-5523 |
| 36960-3 | Pail In My Hand | Vic 20424, | Document DOCD-5523 |
| 36961-1 | Peeping Jim | Vic 20407, | Document DOCD-5523 |

Thomas Morris is definite. But the trombonist certainly is not Irvis, but a very beautiful, if unknown – or not yet identified – trombonist, one of the better players. His name might be known, but not linked with any known recordings. On clarinet we hear the same man I have associated with the name of Happy Caldwell at the recording sessions above.

The pianist performs in a much more flowery style than heard from Mike Jackson. He plays tinkling right-hand treble figures all the time, different from the sober Mike Jackson, and neglecting his left hand. The name Phil Worde comes to mind as a possibility. This pianist seems to have had some strong connection to the Victor company as he is listed almost exclusively on Victor recordings in 1926/27. He sometimes plays very retained and academic, but on other occasions with a very busy right hand as heard here. (This statement is to be seen with caution since some of his entries in the discographies on which my statement is based bear a question mark.)

Buddy Christian probably is on banjo. His instrument is still much more present than on other recordings. This might result from his position the microphone. The style and sound is Christian's.

Notes:

- BGR*4: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Bob Fuller, clt; Mike Jackson, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo.

- Rust*6: Tom Morris -c; Charlie Irvis -tb; Bob Fuller -cl; Mike Jackson -p; Buddy Christian -bj.

MONETTE MOORE

New York,

Jan. 26, 1927

Monette Moore – voc;

Thomas Morris – tpt; Happy Caldwell – clt; Ernest Elliott – bclt; unknown - flt;

Phil Worde – pno

37572-2 Moaning Sinner Blues

Vic 20484,

Document DOCD-5339

37573-1 Hard Hearted Papa

Vic 20484,

Document DOCD-5339

37573-2 Hard Hearted Papa

Vic 20484,

Document DOCD-5339

I have listed these sides because of Caldwell's assumed presence at Evelyn Preer's session of 08 September 1926 and on the possible presence at the next session below. To be honest: Caldwell's presence on these sides is doubtful, but should not be doubted without intense listening.

These sides have been seen by our listening group as a probable Thomas Morris appearance. When hearing these sides I am very uncertain re the trumpet player. The octave upward jump in both takes of 'Hard-Hearted Papa' rather hints at Rex Stewart, but other insecurities let me think of Morris. And – as we are in 1927 now – I think that Stewart would be much more developed and that Morris is the more likely candidate here. In relation to the next session below I think it most probable that this man, yet, is Thomas Morris.

Little can be heard of Happy Caldwell here, assuming that it is him on clarinet. The whole affair is arranged, presumably by the pianist, who plays according to the arranged passages. 'Moaning Sinner Blues' features no instrumental solos, but 'Hard Hearted Papa' has a bass clarinet solo at prominent place which probably is played by Elliott, judging from its very simple rhythmic structure and the use of dated slap-tongue technique. Referring to the following session of this same day the other clarinetist should then be Happy Caldwell. His clarinet is mainly coupled with the flute here, which gives the whole affair an airy and light sound compensated by the bass clarinet.

There is strong piano accompaniment to the items, presumably by Phil Worde, who might have been Moore's permanent accompanist at the time.

Notes:

- BGR*4: Rex Stewart, cnt; Ernest Elliott, clt; unknown, bcl; unknown, flt; poss Phil Worde, pno

- Rust*6: Rex Stewart -c; Ernest Elliott -cl; ? Phil Worde -p; unknown b-cl / f added

Notable differences of takes:

37573-1 bar three of introduction: tpt plays short eighth note upward jump G

37573-2 bar three of introduction: tpt plays dotted quarter note upward jump G

ELIZABETH SMITH

New York,

Jan. 26, 1927

Elizabeth Smith – voc;

Thomas Morris – tpt; Ernest Elliott, Happy Caldwell – clt; unknown – flt;

Phil Worde – pno

37574-2 Police Done Tore My Playhouse Down

Vic 21539,

RST-1526-2

The cornet player very probably is Thomas Morris, judging from tone, vibrato and flaws, just as in the Monette Moore session of this same day.

The clarinet player playing first part with his smears and slurs obviously is Ernest Elliott. But the clarinet soloist who also plays the coda certainly is a different man and might positively be Happy Caldwell who plays a beautiful Dodds-influenced solo.

Piano playing is compatible to what we had before and might therefore well be Worde (does anybody know anything about him?).

I only would urgently like to know who that flutist is!

Notes:

- BGR*4: Tom Morris, cnt; poss Ernest Elliott, Bob Fuller, clts; unknown, f; poss Edgar Dowell -p

- Rust*6: Rex Stewart -c; Ernest Elliott - Bob Fuller -cl; unknown -f; ? Phil Worde -p

EDNA WINSTON

New York,

Feb. 16, 1927

Edna Winston – voc;

Thomas Morris – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Happy Caldwell – clt, alt;

unknown (Phil Worde?) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo

37786-1 'Way After One And My Daddy Ain't Come Home Yet

Vic 20857,

Document DOCD-5523

37787-1 Joogie Blues

Vic 20654,

Document DOCD-5523

37788-1 Ever After On

Vic 20654,

Document DOCD-5523

37789-1 Rent Man Blues

Vic 20857,

Document DOCD-5523

Everything said about the session of Nov. 23, 1926 above applies to this recording date. Only that we hear Charlie Irvis with certainty here.

And the pianist – on my suggestion - is closer to Phil Worde than to Mike Jackson.

But this definitely is Happy Caldwell on reeds here again – or the man we have identified as being him at the sessions above!

Notes:

- BGR*4: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Bob Fuller, clt, alt; Mike Jackson, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo.

- Rust*6: Tom Morris -c; Charlie Irvis -tb; Bob Fuller -cl -as; Mike Jackson -p; Buddy Christian -bj.

EVELYN THOMPSON

New York,

Mar. 30, 1927

Evelyn Preer – voc;

Joe Smith – tpt; unknown (*Happy Caldwell?*) – clt;
 James P. Johnson - pno
 E-4781 / 82 / 83 High Life Made A Low Life Out Of Me Voc unissued not on LP/CD
 E-4784 Looking For The Sunshine, Walking Around In The Rain Voc 15548 not on LP/CD
 E-4786 Looking For The Sunshine, Walking Around In The Rain Voc 15548, Doc DOCD-5590

The clarinet player, who plays a probably pre-arranged part behind the cornet with very few exposed phrases, does not seem to be Elliott as none of his stylistic features can be detected here. Nor can there anything be associated with Fuller with any certainty. But clarinet tone and vibrato heard in the second title might point to Caldwell.

The cornetist/trumpeter might well be the lyrical and smooth Joe Smith, and James P. Johnson is a good assumption judging from style and rhythmic impetus.

Notes:

- BGR*4: not listed

- Rust*6: unknown -c; Ernest Elliott or Bob Fuller -cl; unknown -p

Notable differences of takes:

Since there are no alternate takes reissued of the second title in any form, no comment is possible

EVELYN THOMPSON New York, May, 1927
Evelyn Preer – voc;
 Joe Smith – tpt; unknown (*Happy Caldwell?*) – clt;
 James P. Johnson – pno
 E-4941 One Sweet Letter From You Voc 15548, Doc DOCD-5590

The clarinetist very probably is not Elliott for stylistic and technical reasons, although he was now able to play those downward arpeggios as heard here. I do not know the source for the assumption of George Bacquet, but what I remember from Morton's Orchestra / Red Hot Peppers of July 1929, where we hear a rhythmically wooden and rather antiquated clarinetist. What can be heard of the clarinet definitely fits to Caldwell's Doddsian style.

Joe Smith and James P. Johnson might be alright, but I feel that the piano player is a bit below Johnson's musical quality.

Notes:

- BGR*4: not listed!

- Rust*6: unknown -c; Ernest Elliott or Bob Fuller -cl; unknown -p

CLARA SMITH New York, Jul. 06, 1928
 Clara Smith – voc;
 unknown – tpt; unknown (*Happy Caldwell?*) – clt;
Marion Cumbo – vco; **Stanley Miller** - pno
 146507-1 Got My Mind On That Thing Col 14419-D, Document DOCD-5368
 146508 Ain't Got Nobody To Grind My Coffee Col unissued not on LP/CD

There are very few trumpet notes to judge the trumpet player's identity. Joe Smith's presence should have made a stronger impact on the recording, and at the end of the first title only the tonal quality of the few notes played might be a hint to Joe Smith. Mahony's booklet does not give the source of the listed musician for this session – which it usually does – and it might therefore be assumed that it is Mahony's suggestion only to give Joe Smith. I am inclined to hear a trumpeter from Clara Smith's working band. If this would be Smith it would be far below his usual quality.

Most interesting is the clarinetist's Dodds-derived style which he plays very expressively and with fervour. There were not many players in New York of this kind. This man could have been one of Clara Smith's touring band as before whose name would then certainly be unknown to us. But I see a small possibility that he could have been Albert 'Happy' Caldwell.

The violincello part is obviously played from music. Mr. Cumbo also appears on record with Eva Taylor in February 1928, but his playing shows no jazz whatsoever. Stanley Miller is the reliable pianist.

Notes:

- BGR*4: Joe Smith, cnt; unknown, clt; Marion Cumbo, 'cello; Stanley Miller, pno

- Rust*6: Joe Smith -c; unknown -cl; Marion Cumbo -vc; Stanley Miller -p

CLARA SMITH New York, Aug. 09, 1928
 Clara Smith – voc;
 unknown (*Happy Caldwell?*) – clt; unknown – kazoo;
 unknown (*Porter Grainger?*) – pno; unknown - gtr
 146828-3 Ain't Got Nobody To Grind My Coffee Col 14368-D, Document DOCD-5368

There is a kazoo player here trying to lead the band, but drops out of the proceedings very early on the record. When he rejoins the band, it is for a short solo which is not convincing. Interesting again, as in the foregoing session, is the clarinetist. He also plays in a more "Western" style, which was not fashionable in New York in those days. But I do not dare to identify Happy Caldwell here as this player plays with more fast runs than what I am accustomed from Caldwell. But I still see the faint possibility of his presence.

The pianist is unobtrusive and could be Porter Grainger, not Stanley Miller. But he plays with delicacy and good rhythm. The guitarist plays in a style akin to Bobby Leecan, but somewhat clumsy and dragging.

Notes:

- BGR*4: unknown kazoo, clt, pno, gtr.

- Rust*6: unknown kazoo, cl, p, g.

This, dear reader and listener, is my hypothesis identifying a distinct clarinet player on a couple of Victor – and other – recordings in New York in 1926-28. Please, listen now if interested and judge yourself without prejudice. I'd be pleased to find contradiction, or even agreement!

References:

- Storyville 99, Happy Horn, An interview with Happy Caldwell

- Rex Stewart, Boy Meets Horn
- John Chilton, Who's Who of Jazz
- Preston Jackson, Trombone Man
- Barry Kernfeld, The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz

My sincerest thanks again to Michael Rader and Dave Brown, crucial part of our listening team, for persistent advice and help – and doubts!