

# THE RECORDINGS OF HELEN GROSS

## An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

Howard Rye, booklet to Document DOCD-5477: "Annotating one of the very few LP reissues featuring Helen Gross, discographer John Godrich wrote: "Helen Gross was exclusively an Ajax singer as far as is known, and although she made at least twenty-seven titles for this company, nothing whatever is known of her background." She is also one of the most underrated of the female vaudeville blues singers. Since 1979, we have learned that she recorded a single title for Edison, which was not issued at the time ... and that the name is not a pseudonym, even though researchers have apparently still not found an advertisement for a public appearance."

### HELEN GROSS

001	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Apr. 09-23, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	<i>Thomas Morris</i> – cnt; Bob Fuller – clt, <u>alt</u> ;			
	Louis Hooper – pno			
31561	He's Never Gonna Throw Me Down		Ajax 17037,	Document DOCD-5477
31564	Hard Luck Blues		Ajax 17037,	Document DOCD-5477
31565	Eavesdropper's Blues		Ajax 17036,	Document DOCD-5477
31567	Haunted House Blues		Ajax 17036,	Document DOCD-5477

This very probably is Thomas Morris, certainly not Bubber Miley. This tpt/cnt player does not belong to the Johnny Dunn influenced group of players, but plays "Western style".

**DB:** as received but definite Tom.

#### Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*
- RR 77-6, RR 86-6: *Bubber Miley, Bob Fuller, Louis Hooper (this as to the reliability of musicians' memories!)*.
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *BGR\*4: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p; unknown effects*
- *Rust\*6: Tom Morris, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*

002	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	May 18-26, 1924
	Helen Gross - voc			
	Bob Fuller - clt; <i>Louis Hooper</i> - pno			
31585	Better Give Your Sweetie What She Needs		Ajax 17042,	Document DOCD-5511
31587	I Wanna Jazz Some More		Ajax 17042,	Document DOCD-5511
31588	Foolish Woman's Blues		Ajax 17050,	Document DOCD-5477
31590	Strange Man		Ajax 17050,	Document DOCD-5477

Kidd in RR 77 lists Hooper as "probably". Obviously Hooper himself was not certain on his own style and presence. I (KBR) am not accomplished in judging piano players, so I'd prefer to leave Hooper's presence as listed. But I think to hear Hooper here, although the piano playing might be a bit stronger on the first coupling than on the second. There are no Joe Davis effects in these titles as given. And there is no Bubber Miley as per Hooper on Ajax 17050.

#### Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*
- RR 77-6: *Bob Fuller, probably Louis Hooper (first two titles); Bob Fuller, Louis Hooper, Joe Davis. Note: Joe Davis provides the 'effects' on Ajax 17050 (sic-KBR). He is heard in other records in brief speaking roles (second two titles)*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper first coupling: Bob Fuller, cl; prob Louis Hooper, p. second coupling: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *BGR\*4: Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p; Joe Davis, effects*
- *Rust\*6: Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p; Joe Davis, effects*

003	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Jun. 21-26, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	Bob Fuller - clt; Porter Grainger - pno			

31594	Ghost Walkin' Blues	Ajax 17051,	Document DOCD-5477
31596	My Man Ain't Yo' Man	Ajax 17051,	Document DOCD-5477

Personnel very probably correct as given.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*
- *RR 77-6: Fuller, Grainger.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *BGR\*4: Bob Fuller, cl; Porter Grainger, p; Joe Davis, effects*
- *Rust\*6: Bob Fuller, cl; Porter Grainger, p; Joe Davis, effects*

004-1	<b>HELEN GROSS</b> Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Jun. 21-26, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;		
	<i>Louis Metcalf</i> – tpt; Bob Fuller - clt;		
	<i>Louis Hooper</i> - pno		
31609	Rockin' Chair Blues	Ajax 17046,	Document DOCD-5477
31611	Sorrowful Blues	Ajax 17046,	Document DOCD-5477

Bob Fuller OK. The trumpet player has similarities to Bubber Miley, but shows more rhythmic freedom and slurs in many notes that I do not know from Miley – and another vibrato. He might indeed be Metcalf with his somewhat squeezed notes. And he shows only very little Dunn influence. This might be Metcalf's first recording.

I do not hear anything reminding me of Cliff Jackson and after repeated listening I would name Hooper as pianist. I think to hear Hooper here with his flat left hand (no oom-pah) and his use of blues/boogie devices.

Notes:

- *RR 77-6: not listed*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: no personnel per Hooper.*
- *BGR\*4: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *Rust\*6: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *Scherman/Eriksson/Anderby/Wallen, Bubber Miley Disco: Bubber Miley (tp); Bob Fuller (cl); Cliff Jackson (p)*

004-2	<b>HELEN GROSS</b> Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Jun. 21-26, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;		
	<i>Louis Metcalf</i> – tpt; unknown - pno		
31613	What'll I Do?	Ajax 17049,	Document DOCD-5477

"What'll I Do?" might possibly be accompanied by different musicians. Yet, the trumpet player seems to be Metcalf. Piano shows no personal traces. No clarinet here. This tune is not a waltz, but has a four-four rhythm.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*
- *RR 77-6: not listed*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: no personnel per Hooper.*
- *BGR\*4: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *Rust\*6: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *Storyville 146, J. Collinson: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, p.*

004-3	<b>HELEN GROSS</b> Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Jun. 21-26, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;		
	Bob Fuller - clt; <i>Louis Hooper</i> - pno		
31616	Neglected Blues	Ajax 17071,	Document DOCD-5477
31620	Conjure Man Blues	Ajax 17082	not on LP/CD

Bob Fuller OK. Again, I do not hear anything reminding of Cliff Jackson and would name Hooper as pianist (see Bryant, Ajax Records!). The second title is not available on CD and could therefore not be checked.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: unknown clt; p; bj.*
- *RR 86-6: Bob Fuller, cl; unidentified, p.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p (first title); no personnel (second title)*
- *BGR\*4: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *Rust\*6: Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, p.*

005	<b>HELEN GROSS</b> Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Jul. 11-24, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;		
	<i>Louis Metcalf</i> - tpt; <i>Cliff Jackson</i> – pno		
31633	If You Can't Ride Slow And Easy	Ajax 17077,	Document DOCD-5477

This is the same trumpet as on 010-1, 011, 012, thus Louis Metcalf. I cannot find any undeniable elements of Cliff Jackson's piano playing which is marked by his very strong rhythm and his frequent changing of the meter. Yet, after repeated listening and comparing this player's style to that of the suddenly surfaced name of Mike Jackson, Cliff might in fact be the pianist, yet with a youthful style of his.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*
- *RR 86-6: acc by cnt & p.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper): Louis Metcalfe, c; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *BGR\*4: Louis Metcalf; c; Cliff Jackson, p.*

- Rust\*6: *Louis Metcalf, c; Cliff Jackson, p.*

006	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Aug. 16-27, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	Louis Metcalf - tpt; <i>Mike Jackson</i> – pno;			
	unknown male voice - speech			
31649		Ticket Agent, Ease Your Window Down	Ajax 17060,	Document DOCD-5477

This probably is the same trumpet as before on 010-1, 011, 012, 013, thus Louis Metcalf. But individual traces are not as easy to recognize as before. In my ears this definitely is not Cliff Jackson on piano. Instead, I found a remark in W. Bryant, Ajax Records, for Ajax 17060 that Mike Jackson is supposed to be the pianist. This statement is listed as “per Hooper”. In this publication this remark is attributed to the flip-side of this recording, thus Rosa Henderson’s ‘Hard-Hearted Hammah’, but is said to be wrongly placed and should belong to ‘Ticket Agent, Ease Your Window Down’. The pianist heard here likes to double the beat with his right hand while playing on-the-beat chordal four/four rhythm with his left hand. He shows a tendency to play melodic strains in a slight sixth/eighth phrasing. Rust\*6 lists this title under Ajax 17050!

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*  
 - *RR 86-6: Louis Metcalf, cnt; prob Cliff Jackson, pno.*  
 - *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: no personnel per Hooper*  
 - *BGR\*4: Louis Metcalf, c; Cliff Jackson, p; unknown male speech*  
 - *Rust\*6: Louis Metcalf, c; Cliff Jackson, p. (as personnel for session. But after the title ‘Ticket Agent ...’ Rust shows – cBM, meaning that Bubber Miley would be playing)*

007	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Aug. 16-27, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	Bob Fuller - clt;			
	<i>L. Hooper</i> - pno; unknown - dms			
31651		Chicago Monkey Man Blues	Ajax 17062	not on LP/CD
31654		These Dogs Of Mine	Ajax 17062	not on LP/CD

Document’s CD booklet says that both titles “remain undiscovered”. Accordingly I was unable to listen and judge. But as BGR\*4 gives a drummer in their personnel – very extraordinary with these Ajax recording sessions – someone might yet own this recording.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*  
 - *RR 86-6: not listed*  
 - *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: no personnel per Hooper*  
 - *BGR\*4: Bob Fuller, cl; prob Louis Hooper, p; unknown d.*  
 - *Rust\*6: Bob Fuller, cl; ? Louis Hooper, p, unknown d.*

008	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Aug. 16-27, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	unknown ( <i>Ernest Elliott</i> ?) – clt;			
	<i>(Sterling Conaway)</i> – uke (1); unknown – kazoo (1);			
	<i>(Porter Grainger)</i> – pno (2); unknown – speech, effects (2)			
31682		Death Letter Blues	Ajax 17067,	Document DOCD-5477
31684		Crap Shootin’ Blues	Ajax 17067,	Document DOCD-5477

The titles have personnels as given above.

‘Death Letter Blues’ has a rather stiff clarinet player and ukulele and kazoo players. To identify Sterling Conaway as ukulele player is beyond my possibilities and his presence has to be questioned. I know him as a very busy banjo player in the Clef Club tradition – with many chords and glissandos – what can not be detected here. The ukulele accompaniment is far too sober and simple to be seen as by Conaway. What is the source of his name here?

Porter Grainger is not easy to be recognized and identified, and thus I have to question the reason for his being named. Fuller - if it is he -very stiff and uncreative here. Is this really Fuller on these sides? Only, if he wanted to be particularly simple on these sides.

Concludingly I would like to accentuate my opinion that almost none of the hitherto listed musicians are present: this clarinetist is much too primitive to be Fuller, Conaway plays in a very different manner, and only the pianist might be as named. After hearing session 028 I see the possibility of Ernest Elliott’s presence on these two sessions.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: unknown clt; p; bj.*  
 - *RR 77-6, 86-6: not listed*  
 - *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: no personnel per Hooper*  
 - *BGR\*4: Bob Fuller, cl; prob Porter Grainger, p (2); unknown chimes & whistle(2); unknown kazoo (1); Sterling Conaway, uke (1); two unknown males, speech (2)*  
 - *Rust\*6: Bob Fuller, cl; ? Porter Grainger, p; unknown chimes, whistle, kazoo where used; Sterling Conaway, uke (1); two unknown males, speech (2)*

009	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Sep. 18-22, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	unknown ( <i>Ernest Elliott</i> ?) - clt; unknown - pno			
31700		Bloody Razor Blues	Ajax 17071,	Document DOCD-5477
31701		Bloody Razor Blues	Ajax 17071	not on LP/CD

Same clarinet player as on session 024 and thus too primitive to be Fuller? He may possibly be Ernest Elliott. I hear some similarities to Elliott, but he very often starts his phrases with upward slurs to the first note. This is not here – except for the very last note of matrix 31700. On the other side the “sour” sound is apparent as is the very simple rhythm – he never plays eight notes, only quarter and half notes. This then would be hints to Elliott.

Also, the pianist is not Hooper. Piano playing reminds me of Clarence Williams!

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: unknown clt; p; bj.*
- *RR 77-6, 86-6: Bob Fuller, clt; Louis Hooper, pno.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bob Fuller, clarinet; Louis Hooper, piano.*
- *BGR\*4: Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *Rust\*6: Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*

010	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Kansas City Five	New York,	Oct. 28, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	<i>Bubber Miley</i> – tpt; <i>Charlie Irvis</i> – tbn; unknown – clt;			
	unknown – pno; unknown - bjo			
9813-A	Undertaker’s Blues		Ed unissued	not on LP/CD
9813-B	Undertaker’s Blues		Ed unissued	not on LP/CD
9813-C	Undertaker’s Blues		Ed unissued,	Document DOCD-5477

As this side seems to have been made on the same date as the session of Rosa Henderson (Edison Oct. 28, 1924), the same personnel is assumed to be responsible. My remarks as to the brass player’s state of consciousness as before may therefore be considered. (Can this be a reason for rejecting this ‘Undertaker’s Blues’ by the Edison company?) It is certainly Irvis on trombone (see trombone phrase at 3:14 min) as well as Miley on trumpet. The banjo player sounds too dry for Snowden. The bell player might be anyone, particularly the singer herself, but probably not Joe Davis as he was not on the Edison bill.

Notes:

- *BGR\*4: unknown, c; prob Jake Frazier, tb; prob Bob Fuller, cl; prob Louis Hooper, p; prob Elmer Snowden, bj, unknown, chimes.*
- *Rust\*6: ? Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p; ? Elmer Snowden, bj.*
- *Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Jake Frazier (tb), Bob Fuller (cl), Louis Hooper (p), Elmer Snowden (bj). “For the above Rosa Henderson/Helen Gross session, Dixon-Godrich have unknown (tp) and a “prob” before all the other musicians on the Rosa Henderson and before Frazier on the Gross title. Rust has ?BM (tp) and no reservation about the identity of the others. To our ears, it is definitely B. Miley on trumpet, and all the other musicians listed above are most certainly also present. Undertaker’s Blues, which B. Miley recorded ahain with Rosa Henderson the following month, is an early example of a blues in a minor key. Also, it is interesting to note in both versions the quotation from Frédéric Chopin’s “Funeral March” from Sonata No. 2, Opus 35, in B-flat minor, which Miley used later in his composition “Black And Tan Fantasy”, first recorded with Duke Ellington April 7, 1927.”*
- *VJM 175-14, B. Hitchens, Choo Choo Jazzers: unknown (t); prob Charlie Irvis (tb); poss Bob Fuller (cl); Louis Hooper (p); Elmer Snowden (bj); ?Joe Davis (chimes)*

011	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Nov. 23- Dec. 03, 1924
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	Rex Stewart – cnt; ( <i>Herb Gregory</i> ?) – tbn (1,2); Bob Fuller – clt (3);			
	Louis Hooper – pno			
31755	Last Journey Blues		Ajax 17090,	Document DOCD-5477
31757	Bitter Feelin’ Blues		Ajax 17086,	Document DOCD-5477
31759	Workin’ Woman’s Blues		Ajax 17133,	Document DOCD-5477

I feel certain for Rex Stewart, Bob Fuller and Louis Hooper. But I do not think that this is Jake Frazier here on trombone. This is a different player stylistically. I do not know this man from any other recordings and can therefore not attribute a name. But I would like the reader /listener to consider that Rex Stewart had a drinking and trombone playing buddy named Herb Gregory with whom he used to spend his days and go jamming. These trumpet/trombone partnerships were common in Harlem at the time. Unfortunately we do not have any documented example of Gregory’s playing – we even do not know if he ever recorded at all – but this might possibly be this man.

Notes:

- *RR 86-6: Rex Stewart, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Louis Hooper, pno. Bob Fuller, clt for Frazier on 31759.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Rex Stewart, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *BGR\*4: Rex Stewart, c; Jake Frazier, tb (1,2); Bob Fuller, cl (3); Louis Hooper, p.*
- *Rust\*6: RexStewart, c (1,2);Jake Frazier, tb (1,2); Bob Fuller, cl (3); Louis Hooper, p. ( Stewart plays on all three titles!)*

012	<b>HELEN GROSS</b>	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Mar. 25-Apr. 01, 1925
	Helen Gross – voc;			
	<i>(Thomas Morris)</i> – tpt; ( <i>Jake Frazier</i> ?) – tbn;			
	Louis Hooper – pno;			
	unknown - speech			
31840-E	Dark Man (You Ain’t Gonna Darken My Life)		Ajax 17133,	Document DOCD-5477

I certainly do not believe that this unsecure trumpet/cornet player is Rex Stewart. This player’s tone is not as sharp and brilliant as Stewart’s, and the playing lacks Stewart’s “high atmospheric” pressure. Stewart was much more into Louis Armstrong’s style at this time (see session 094)! Guessing intuitively, I would opt for Thomas Morris.

Although Jake Frazier is not one of the most accomplished trombonists in the Harlem period, he is not as simple or primitive as this trombonist. At least he owns a distinct style which cannot be detected here. Or was it just booze ?

Louis Hooper probably is the pianist.

Notes:

- *RR 86-6: Rex Stewart, Jake Frazier, Louis Hooper.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Rex Stewart, cornet; Jake Frazier, trombone; Louis Hooper, piano.*
- *BGR\*4: Rex Stewart, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p; unknown male, sp.*

- Rust\*6: *Rex Stewart, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p.*

K.-B. Rau  
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