

THE RECORDINGS OF HELEN GROSS

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - 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."

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: **Helen Gross**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Helen Gross*
- 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: (*Helen Gross*)

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.

The following statements and the resulting list of recordings only reflect the opinion of this writer/listener and are open to discussion. More so, discussion is eagerly invited. Corrections, amendments and controversial opinions are much appreciated.

HELEN GROSS

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|---|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 001 HELEN GROSS | Choo Choo Jazzers | New York, | Apr. 09-23, 1924 |
| Helen Gross – voc; | | | |
| <i>Thomas Morris</i> – cnt; <i>Bob Fuller</i> – clt, <i>alt</i> ; | | | |
| 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.*

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|---|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 002 HELEN GROSS | Choo Choo Jazzers | New York, | May 18-26, 1924 |
| Helen Gross - voc | | | |
| Bob Fuller - clt; <i>Louis Hooper</i> - pno | | | |

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|-------|---|-------------|--------------------|
| 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*

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|-------|---|-------------|--------------------|
| 003 | HELEN GROSS 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*

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|-------|--|-------------|--------------------|
| 004-1 | HELEN GROSS Choo Choo Jazzers | New York, | Jun. 21-26, 1924 |
| | Helen Gross – voc; | | |
| | Louis Metcalf – tpt; Bob Fuller - clt; | | |
| | Louis Hooper - 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)*

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|-------|--------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 004-2 | HELEN GROSS Choo Choo Jazzers | New York, | Jun. 21-26, 1924 |
| | Helen Gross – voc; | | |
| | Louis Metcalf – 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.*

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|-------|--------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 004-3 | HELEN GROSS Choo Choo Jazzers | New York, | Jun. 21-26, 1924 |
| | Helen Gross – voc; | | |
| | Bob Fuller - clt; Louis Hooper - 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.*

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

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

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|-----|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 007 | HELEN GROSS Choo Choo Jazzers Helen Gross – voc; Bob Fuller - clt; <i>L. Hooper</i> - pno; unknown - dms 31651 | Chicago Monkey Man Blues | New York, Ajax 17062 | Aug. 16-27, 1924 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.*

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|-----|--|---------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 008 | HELEN GROSS Choo Choo Jazzers 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 | New York, Ajax 17067, | Aug. 16-27, 1924 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)*

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|-------|--|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 009 | HELEN GROSS | 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.*

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|--------|---|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 010 | HELEN GROSS | 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 again 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)*

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|-------|---|-----------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 011 | HELEN GROSS | 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: Rex Stewart, c (1,2); Jake Frazier, tb (1,2); Bob Fuller, cl (3); Louis Hooper, p. (Stewart plays on all three titles!)

012 **HELEN GROSS** Choo Choo Jazzers New York, Mar. 25-Apr. 01, 1925
 Helen Gross – voc;
 (Thomas Morris) – tpt; (Jake Frazier ?) – 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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