

THE RECORDINGS OF LENA HENRY

An Annotated Tentative Name-Discography

No biographical details known.

LENA HENRY

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| LENA HENRY | New York, | Aug. 22, 1924 |
| Lena Henry – voc; | | |
| <i>Cecil Benjamin</i> -clt; John Montague – pno | | |
| 13594 Consolation Blues | Voc 14873, | Document DOCD-5513 |
| 13596 Low Down Despondent Blues | Voc 14873, | Document DOCD-5513 |

Although we do not hear Rex Stewart on these two sides, they may be the first documented recordings of bandleader John Montague, Stewart's employer at this time.

Montague is heard with a "plodding piano accompaniment" (Dr. David Evans, booklet to Doc. DOCD-5513), or better rather solid, but uneventful piano style founded in ragtime and early Harlem stride as common in New York at the time. We know his name from Stewart's recollections in 'Boy Meets Horn' (see above).

The more interesting player on these sides is the clarinetist. He was listed and named in Rust*2/*3 as Rudy Powell until 1981 when Storyville 98 brought a letter from Frank Owens relating Rudy Powell's statement, that he did not learn to play the clarinet until 1932. From then on the clarinetist firmed under "unknown". From at last 1991 on – publication of 'Boy Meets Horn' - it could have been known that a player with the name of Cecil Benjamin would have been a good choice for the clarinet chair on these sides. Rex Stewart remembered him fondly in 'Boy Meets Horn' as clarinetist of the Montague band. His clarinet style is mid-way between Western style – even showing distinct and clear Johnny Dodds elements – and the way early Eastern players like Ernest Elliott or Percy Glascoe played. But Benjamin – assumed that he is this player – owns much more flexibility in his style, better intonation, wider vibrato and more blues and jazz than the aforementioned clarinetists. He certainly is some sort of discovery here! Rudy Powell's misidentification for these sides might be explained by Benjamin's sharp and "*rasping tone ... geared, like his restless, angular phrasing, to generating heat*", as Humphrey Lyttleton characterized Powell's likewise clarinet work.

Notes:

- Rust*3,*4: Rudy Powell -cl; John Montagu -p
- BGR*2: Rudy Powell, clt; John Montagu, pno
- Storyville 98 p.68, F. Owens: "It was not until 1932, when he (Rudy Powell – KBR) was playing in Rex Stewart's Empire Ballroom Orchestra that Rex and Edgar Sampson convinced him that he should learn to play the clarinet."
- BGR*3,*4: unknown, cl; John Montagu, p
- Rust*6: unknown cl; John Montagu, p
- Rex Stewart, *Boy Meets Horn*, p. 46: see above

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| LENA HENRY | New York, | Sep. 15, 1924 |
| Lena Henry – voc; | | |
| Rex Stewart – cnt; | | |
| John Montague – pno; unknown - whistle | | |
| 13695 Family Skeleton Blues | Voc 14902, | Document DOCD-5513 |
| 13697 Sinful Blues | Voc 14902, | Document DOCD-5513 |

Again, Rex Stewart is exactly in Miley's style, with short growl phrases, Dunn-like double-timing, and staccato phrasing. This would mean that Stewart must have listened carefully to Johnny Dunn as well as to Miley, displaying ragtime derived staccato phrases, triplet military phrases and the occasional growl and double-time, as he sounds more like Miley than like Dunn, although he does not acknowledge any Miley influence in his "Boy Meets Horn". There is no sign of his later inclination to Louis Armstrong's trumpet style as yet. On piano we hear Johnny Montague, again, of whose band Stewart wrote in highest praise for their togetherness.

Notes:

- Rex Stewart, *Jazz Masters of the 30s*, p.132!
- BGR*2,*3: Rex Stewart, cnt; John Montagu, pno.
- BGR*4: Rex Stewart, cnt; John Montagu, pno, unknown, effects
- Rust*6: Rex Stewart, c; John Montague, p.
- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen have left this item out of their *Bubber Miley Discography!*

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| LENA HENRY | New York, | Sep. 25, 1924 |
| Lena Henry – voc; | | |

Cecil Benjamin – clt;

John Montague – pno; unknown – train effects (1), whistle (2)

13762 Freight Train Blues

Voc 14910,

Document DOCD-5513

13764 Ghost Walkin' Blues

Voc 14910,

Document DOCD-5513

According to the above recordings we certainly hear the same clarinetist here, in my opinion the said Cecil Benjamin, clarinetist of the Montague band. He does not display a Western flourishing ensemble style here, but rather a clarinet style of early Harlem manner, a trumpet Mode, containing fashionable freak elements.

Notes:

- Rust*3,*4: Rudy Powell -cl -as; John Montagu -p

- BGR*2: Rudy Powell, clt, alt; John Montagu, pno

- BGR*3: unknown, cl, as; John Montagu, p. "The unknown clarinetist on two of the above sessions has often been listed as Rudy Powell, who, however, has stated that he did not take up the clarinet until 1932."

- BGR*4: unknown, cl; John Montagu, p; unknown, effects. "The unknown clarinetist on two of the above sessions has often been listed as Rudy Powell, who, however, has stated that he did not take up the clarinet until 1932."

- Rust*6: unknown cl, as; John Montagu, p

K.-B. Rau

09-01-2019