

,THE RECORDINGS OF ETHEL RIDLEY

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

RIDLEY, Ethel, singer

no personal data accessible

Ridley was a popular star of the Lafayette and Alhambra theatres in Harlem, New York, and held residencies at both venues from 1923 to 1928. She appeared in Irving Miller's "Dinah" in 1923, and performed as part of "The Ebony Trio", together with Joe Sims and James Thomas. (CD booklets to Doc DOCD-5353 and RST-JPCD-1526-2)

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

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.

ETHEL RIDLEY

001 **ETHEL RIDLEY**

Ethel Ridley – voc;

Perry Bradford – pno

81067-4

Liza Johnson's Got Better Bread (Than Old Sally Lee)

New York,

Jun. 09, 1923

81068-3

Here's Your Opportunity Blues

Col A3941,

Document DOCD-5353

Col A3941,

Document DOCD-5353

Perry Bradford with his modest piano faculties plays the accompaniment to Miss Ridley's clear and bluesy rendition. There are no detectable direct reactions to the singing, but Bradford seems to play some sort of piano solo behind the singer, using single bass-notes – no chords - to simple right-hand single-note figures. The singer certainly would have deserved a better and more sensitive player behind her. This seems to be Perry Bradford's first singer accompaniment on record after getting famous with his composition of 'Crazy Blues' and its recording by Mamie Smith. His piano part is simple and uninspiring and does not add to the musical proceedings. Mind his rhythmic insecurity and the un-eventful piano playing.

Miss Ridley is a typical vaudeville singer of her time, with clear diction and a good voice, but little jazz/blues feeling. Surprisingly, she starts her second title with a scat vocal.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: Perry Bradford (p)*

- BGR*2, *3, *4: Perry Bradford, pno.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Perry Bradford -p.

002 ETHEL RIDLEY	Camden, N.J.	Jun. 13, 1923
Ethel Ridley – voc; unknown acc		
Here’s Your Opportunity Blues	Vic test	not on LP/CD
That Thing Called Love	Vic test	not on LP/CD

This session is listed as a trial recording for the Victor label with unknown accompaniment. Thus, nothing can be said about its musical content.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: no accompaniment given

- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: no accompaniment given

003 ETHEL RIDLEY	New York,	Jun. 23, 1923
Ethel Ridley – voc; Leroy Tibbs – pno		
81096-3 Alabama Bound Blues	Col A3965,	RST JPCD-1526-2
81097-2 I Don’t Let No One Man Worry Me	Col A3965,	RST JPCD-1526-2

Miss Ridley again performs with strong and distinct low voice and style. And once more, she starts one of her titles – the second one – with scat singing, this time in falsetto voice.

This is Leroy Tibbs’ first pianistic performance aside from his accompanying work as band pianist on the afore-mentioned Edith and Lena Wilson recordings (except for the un-reissued Maude De Forest couple and the Gulf Coast Seven sides above I do not hear Tibbs on). From these sides we recognise Leroy Tibbs as a well-educated classically trained player on the full-handed side of pianists, with little single-tone melodic lines, but harmonic (vertical) sounds displaying “symphonic” and orchestral thinking of the performer not unlike Joe Steele. His left hand is only faintly that of the Harlem School of pianists, but rather encompassing bass-notes as completion of the right-hand chords/harmonies. In his right hand he mainly plays chordal figures sounding like band arrangements, what may demonstrate that he was a band pianist/arranger above all.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Leroy Tibbs, pno

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Leroy Tibbs -p.

- A. Balfour, CD booklet Document DOCD-5353: “Singers Ethel Ridley and Louise Vant were popular stars of the Lafayette and Alhambra theatres in Harlem. Ridley appeared in Irving Miller’s ‘Dinah’ in 1923, a show which also introduced the world to Bradford’s dance number, ‘The Black Bottom’, and she held residences at both venues from 1923 to 1928 – unfortunately her recording career was shorter and less spectacular than her stage one.”

- S. Tracey, CD booklet RST JPCD-1526-2: “With Joe Sims and James Thomas, Ethel Ridley performed as part of ‘The Ebony Trio’. Seven New York City sessions for Columbia, Victor, and Ajax between 1923 and 1925 yielded 12 recordings, two unissued.”

004 ETHEL RIDLEY Bradford’s Jazz Phoos	New York,	Jun. 26, 1923
Ethel Ridley – voc; unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn; unknown – clt; unknown – ten; Leroy Tibbs – pno; John Mitchell - bjo		
28234-2 Memphis, Tennessee	Vic 19111,	Document DOCD-5353
28235-3 If Anybody Here Wants A Real Kind Mama (Here’s Your Opportunity)	Vic 19111,	Document DOCD-5353

In ‘Memphis, Tennessee’, Miss Ridley again presents a 16-bars scat or syllable vocal which certainly is novel for its time and in a real jazz mode. Very nice.

At this recording date Johnny Dunn was in England (early May until September 1923), as was Herschel Brassfield, and Gus Aiken was in Cuba until late December of that year! So, no one of these champions could have been in the studio! Therefore, Bradford had to hire musicians from other sources than before.

We hear a trumpet player whose identity draws a complete blank. He plays mainly straight but uses very short staccato phrases without variation when answering the singer’s phrases in a Dunn derived style. No name may be attached with any probability.

The trombonist Calvin Jones as suggested by BGR – on what source I do not know – performed in a couple of pit bands in vaudeville, obviously because he had a good musical education and was a reliable reader. His only documented appearance on record is with the Plantation Orchestra recordings in London of December 1926. Lacking any solo appearances, I am unable to detect any reference to our man here and would prefer to list him as unknown. In any case, our man here plays a beautifully sounding and sonorous trombone, and he certainly is a musician of the first class. His style is smooth and very modern for its time. Eugene ‘Bud’ Aiken might be a possibility. Certainly, Bradford might have recruited both men from one of the show bands working in Harlem at the time. Should any reader know the source of this suggestion, please, contact this writer!

There are two reed players, a clarinetist and a tenor sax player. As Garvin Bushell in his book “Jazz from the Beginning” does not mention either Ethel Ridley nor Calvin Jones, he might not have been present on this session. Also, he does not comment on his possible presence on this session. In any case, the clarinet performances on these sides are not in Bushell’s style, but more in a Southern mode. It so seems that we might have to search for the reed players in the same circles as the brass men. An alto cannot be differentiated anywhere on these sides. This then would exclude Bushell’s presence as Bushell only started playing alto in about July 1923, shortly before opening the Nest Club on October 18, 1923 with Sam Wooding’s band. He did not play tenor sax and only used his clarinet very seldom when concentrating on alto (Bushell/Tucker JFTB p. 49 + 159).

The pianist’s abilities are decidedly above Perry Bradford’s, and from what we can differentiate, he may well be Leroy Tibbs with his full-handed two-fisted style as recognised on the above Ethel Ridley session of three days ago.

The banjo player plays in a 6/8 “up and down” style unheard of Sam Speed. His sounds are vaguely familiar, but I am unable to propose a name at the moment. Leroy Vanderveer of the Arthur Gibbs band of the time played a banjo of this kind and perhaps this might be a clue to the origin of the musicians? But also, the banjo tricks and rhythm may be those of John Mitchell.

We seem to have a contingent of one of the many pit-bands of Harlem here only that I am unable to find out their origin. As we have seen rather often now was it common use to hire groups of musicians out of working bands for recording purposes when the recording contract owner had no working band of his own.

I am still hoping to come across a Victor recording band approximately of this date that explains us their descent. The hitherto listed personnels, yet, seem to be pure guess work and seem to be completely wrong.

Notes:

- *Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography 1948: acc by Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools.*
- *Bushell/Tucker, Jazz from the Beginning p 158: no comment by Bushell on this session.*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: prob personal: Johnny Dunn, cnt; Calvin Jones, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt, alt; Herschel Brassfield, ten; Leroy Tibbs, pno; Samuel Speed, bjo.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Gus Aiken -c / Bud Aiken -tb/ Garvin Bushell -cl -as/ ?Ernest Elliott -ts/ Leroy Tibbs -p/ Samuel Speed -bj.*

005	ETHEL RIDLEY	Choo Choo Jazzers	New York,	Feb. 19-Mar. 16, 1925
	Ethel Ridley – voc;			
	Rex Stewart – cnt (1); Bob Fuller – clt (2);			
	Louis Hooper - pno			
31813	Get It Fixed		Ajax 17126,	RST JPCD-1526-2
31814-E	Low Down Daddy Blues		Ajax 17126,	RST JPCD-1526-2

The CD reissue unfortunately uses a rather muddy sounding original. So, it is hard to judge the trumpeter's tone. The vibrato and the phrasing are Rex Stewart's, but the tone is more Metcalf's. Considering the quality of the original I would therefore tend to hear Stewart here. On the second side it is certainly Fuller on clarinet. And Hooper on both sides.

Notes:

- *RR 77-6: not listed.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: no personnel per Hooper.*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: prob Rex Stewart, c (1); Bob Fuller, cl (2); Louis Hooper, p.*
- *Rust*6: Rex Stewart, c (1); Bob Fuller, cl (2); Louis Hooper, p.*

006	ETHEL RIDLEY	Choo Choo Jazzers (1), Memphis Bob	New York,	Mar. 25-Apr. 01, 1925
	Ethel Ridley – voc;			
	unknown accompaniment (1); Memphis Bob (Bob Fuller?) – ukl (2)			
31843	I Ain't Got Much, But What I Got, Oh My		Ajax 17131	not on LP/CD
31844	He Was A Good Man (But He's Dead And Gone)		Ajax 17131	not on LP/CD

This is one of the few vaudeville/blues recordings not reissued in the Document series. It could therefore not be checked and valued. But why should it be Bob Fuller on ukulele, and not Louis Hooper (see Susie Smith session 069 of my Bob Fuller list elsewhere at this website)?

Notes:

- *RR 77-9: not listed.*
- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: no personnel per Hooper*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: instrumentation and personnel unknown (1); Memphis Bob (poss Bob Fuller) - uke*
- *Rust*6: Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p (on 9241)(sic KBR); Elmer Snowden, bj (on 9242)(sic KBR).*