

# THE RECORDINGS OF LAURA SMITH

## An Annotated Tentative Name-Discography

SMITH, Laura, singer

From Indianapolis. Toured in South, Mid-West And East in early 1920s, sometimes with her 'Ginger Pep Workers' group. Got as far West As Houston in late 1922. July 1924 Washington D.C., Baltimore. Oct. 1924 rehearsing in New York City. Toured Pittsburg (band included Robert Taylor, cnt; Wilton Crawley, clt; Grace Barnett, pno/ldr; Ernest Session, dms), Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago. Oct. 1925 to New York. 1926 living in Baltimore. Wife of Slim Jones, comedian. Later toured Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles (Dec. 1929), where she died in Feb. 1932. (Tom Lord, Clarence Williams)

### LAURA SMITH

001	<b>LAURA SMITH</b>	Clarence Williams' Harmonizers	New York,	c. Aug. 01, 1924
	Laura Smith – voc;			
	Thomas Morris – cnt; <i>John Mayfield</i> – tbn; Ernest Elliott -clt;			
	Clarence Williams – pno; <i>Buddy Christian</i> – bjo			
72719-B		Texas Moaner Blues	OK 8157,	Document DOCD-5429
72720-B		I'm Gonna Get Myself A Real Man	OK 8186,	Document DOCD-5429
72721-B		Has Anybody Seen My Man?	OK 8157,	Document DOCD-5429

Morris and Williams are obvious. The banjo might be a bit too heavy to be Christian. But the trombonist very certainly is not Charlie Irvis with his legato trombone but could rather be John Mayfield of the early Clarence Williams stable with his simple staccato style. There is little clarinet to hear, but the square quarter tone phrasing and the downward smear in bar four of the introduction of 'Has Anybody Seen My Man?' are typically Elliott and seem to be proof of his presence.

#### Notes:

- *Storyville 15*: Thomas Morris (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo)  
 - *BGR \*2, \*3, \*4*: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ernest Elliott, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo  
 - *Lord, Clarence Williams p97*: Thomas Morris (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo) "There is agreement on the personnel with the exception of the clarinet. TKD lists Buster Bailey, however Bailey was not in New York, and aural evidence suggests Elliott."  
 - *Rust \*3, \*4, \*6* Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ernest Elliott, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo

002	<b>LAURA SMITH</b>		New York,	c. Oct. 10, 1924
	Laura Smith – voc;			
	<b>Clarence Williams</b> – pno			
72895-B		My Best Friend Stole My Man And Gone	OK 8186,	Document DOCD-5429
72896-B		Two-Faced Woman Blues	OK 8169,	Document DOCD-5429

Clarence Williams as accompanist is documented on the OKeh record label, and it is stylistically unmistakably he.

#### Notes:

- *BGR\*2, \*3, \*4*: Clarence Williams - pno  
 - *Lord, Clarence Williams, p. 105*: Clarence Williams (pno)  
 - *Rust\*3, \*4, \*6*: Clarence Williams - pno

003	<b>LAURA SMITH</b>	Clarence Williams Harmonizers / Instrumental Trio	New York,	c. Oct. 11, 1924
	Laura Smith – voc;			
	unknown – clt; Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian– bjo			
72897-B		I Can Always Tell When My Man Don't Want Me 'Round	OK 8169,	Document DOCD-5429
72898-B		Lake Pontchartrain Blues	OK 8179,	Document DOCD-1005
72899-B		Gravier Street Blues	OK 8179,	Document DOCD-1005

It is unmistakably Clarence Williams here on piano – and he is listed as leader of the accompanying trio.

Crucial characteristics of Elliott's playing and style cannot be detected here, and from what can be heard I would deny his presence on this session. The clarinetist plays in a harmonically and rhythmically simple style different from Elliott's. But: I also feel unable to find any elements of the great Lorenzo Tio's style and would therefore also exclude him from possibility as expressed in Rust\*4 and \*6. This clarinetist is much too square rhythmically than would be expected from Tio! And: there is no cornet on the second and third titles as listed in the Storyville series Vol. 16.

Notes:

- Storyville 16: Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo); Thomas Morris (cnt) added on second and third titles.  
 - BGR\*2\*3\*4: Ernest Elliott – clt; Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian– bjo  
 - Rust\*3: Ernest Elliott – cl; Clarence Williams – p; Buddy Christian – bj; with Tom Morris -c (2,3)  
 - Rust\*4,\*6: ? Lorenzo Tio – cl; Clarence Williams – p; Buddy Christian – bj  
 - Lord, Clarence William p 105: Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo) “While these dates are not exact, it is interesting to mention that the Chicago Defender for October 11, 1924 mentions that Ernest Elliott, “clarinet and saxophone expert is featured with the big time act ‘Frisco’”, in Chicago.

004 LAURA SMITH		New York,	Oct. 01, 1925
Laura Smith – voc;			
unknown, unknown – vln; unknown - gtr			
73663-B	Face To Face	OK 8252,	Document DOCD-5429
73664-B	Take Me Home, Heavenly Father, With Thee	OK 8252,	Document DOCD-5429

The record label only names an Instrumental Trio as accompanying group. Apparently present are two violinists playing straight – without improvising – throughout, and a guitarist playing simple chordal accompaniment, without playing a permanent beat in the first title. Nothing can be said about these musicians, except that the guitarist could well be Buddy Christian sound-wise. But, are there really two violins present?

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: two unknowns – vln; unknown - gtr  
 - Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: two unknowns – vln; unknown - gtr

005 LAURA SMITH	Perry Bradford’s Mean Four	New York,	Oct. 03, 1925
unknown – har; unknown – vln;			
Perry Bradford – pno; unknown - gtr			
73678-A	Lucy Long	OK 8366,	Document DOCD-5429
73679-B	Disgusted Blues	OK 8246,	Document DOCD-5429
73680-A	Humming Blues	OK 8246,	Document DOCD-5429
73681-A	Cool Can Blues	OK 8366,	Document DOCD-5429

After his recordings for OKeh with Mamie Smith in 1920, for Columbia with Edith Wilson and Johnny Dunn in 1921 and later with the Gulf Coast Seven and Original Jazz Hounds, and an interlude with Paramount – the ‘Jazz Phools’ – Bradford had the chance to record for OKeh again accompanying a handful of vaudeville/blues singers, starting in 1925 with this session. This is his first session under this name, supporting singer Laura Smith. Quite different from all his other accompanying bands he chose an instrumentation of violin, harmonica, guitar and – probably his own – piano. Comparing this session with all his other ones, this one is most unusual and might have been intended for another market in the blues business of the time.

Coming from the jazz side I feel unable to comment on the musicians performing here. Maybe there is a blues collector with sufficient knowledge of the rural instruments used here – and their players - to comment on the participating musicians? All I can say is that the piano performance is well within Perry Bradford’s range and possibility.

As for the second violinist listed in BGR\*4: I hear two melody players on all titles – harmonica and violin – but on the first title the violin plays in the same range as the harmonica throughout and might therefore have been led to the assumption that there is a second violin.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3: unknown hca; unknown vln; unknown vln/gtr; presumably Perry Bradford, pno.  
 - BGR\*4: unknown h; unknown vn; poss second unknown vn-1; unknown g; presumably Perry Bradford p.  
 - Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: unknown h; unknown vn; unknown vn , g; ? Perry Bradford p.

006 LAURA SMITH	Perry Bradford’s Mean Four	New York,	Apr. 01, 1926
Laura Smith – voc;			
Gus Aiken – tpt; Bud Aiken – tbn; unknown – clt;			
Perry Bradford - pno			
74083-A	I’ll Get Even With You	OK 8316,	Document DOCD-5353
74084-A	If You Don’t Like It	OK 8316,	Document DOCD-5353

After a short excursion into PA territory Perry Bradford’s Mean Four are with OKeh again accompanying Laura Smith (see my pieces on Gus Aiken and Perry Bradford’s Mean Four elsewhere on this website!). We hear some familiar sounds in the persons of the ‘master’ himself together with brothers Gus and Bud Aiken. The only ‘unknown’ is the clarinet player.

Gus Aiken on trumpet is very assured now, and his brother Bud, a trombonist as well as trumpeter, shows a very remarkable development into a first-class trombone player, very modern for his time and obviously in the spell of the future trombone master of swing, Jimmy Harrison. Bud Aiken with his exceptionally modern improvisational style – reaching forward into stylistic regions of the 50s and 60s – will be heard and listed again on the hitherto unidentified recording session of Perry Bradford and his Gang of May 1926 in one of the next volumes of Names&Numbers.

The clarinet player is not at all incompetent, but can stylistically not be identified. Bradford clearly is at the piano.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3: no personnel  
 - BGR\*4: unknown c; unknown tb; unknown cl; presumably Perry Bradford p  
 - Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Rust does not list a personnel here, thus possibly indicating that the personnel of the preceding session (L. Smith, Oct. 03, 1925 – see above – the har-vln-gtr-pno personnel!) should apply to this session, too.

007 LAURA SMITH		New York,	May 28, 1926
Laura Smith – voc;			
Clarence Williams – pno			
80045-B	Jackass Blues	OK 8331,	Document DOCD- 5429

80046-B Them Has Been Blues OK 8331, Document DOCD- 5429

Clarence Williams as accompanist is documented on the OKeh record label, and it is stylistically unmistakably he.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Clarence Williams - pno
- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Clarence Williams - pno

008 LAURA SMITH Her Wild Cats New York, c. Jan. 15, 1927  
 Laura Smith – voc;  
 Edwin Swayze – tpt; Bob Fuller – clt;  
 (Cliff Jackson) – pno  
 107313 I’m Goin’ To Have Seven Years’ Bad Luck PA 7520, Document DOCD-5429  
 107314 When A ‘Gator Hollers (Folks Say Sign O’ Rain) PA 7520, Document DOCD-5429

As a pleasant surprise, I found Edwin Swayze (sic) who was touring in the East with the show Bamville Dandies at this time. Comparison with Edwin Swayze reveals strong similarities stylistically, and I am convinced that the trumpet player here is Edwin “King” Swayze. (Compare the Sammy Lewis OK 8285 and Sammy Lewis and his Bamville Syncopators Vocalions and The Levee Serenaders !) Swayze himself is remembered by colleagues as “a terrific trumpeter whose idol was King Oliver – not Louis as most of us were trying to sound like” (Arcadia 2008 cover text). For Swayze’s correct name see Storyville 78, p. 230. (See “A Case of Pleasant Surprises” on this website!) This seems to be the same personnel as on Rosa Henderson’s Vocalion session of July 02, 1926, although the pianist does not play Cliff Jackson’s typical licks (broken rhythm or shifting of meter) and may therefore possibly be somebody else, yet a strong stride piano player – not Mike Jackson who plays a very different right hand (see “A Case of Pleasant Surprises” on this website!).

Notes:

- BGR\*2: poss Thomas Morris, cnt; poss Bob Fuller, clt; poss Mike Jackson, pno.
- BGR\*3,\*4: prob Thomas Morris, cnt; prob Bob Fuller, clt; prob Mike Jackson, pno.
- Rust\*3,\*4: ? Tom Morris, c; ? Bob Fuller, cl; ? Mike Jackson, p.
- Rust\*6: unknown, c; unknown cl; unknown p.

009 LAURA SMITH New York, c. Jan. 1927  
 Laura Smith – voc;  
 unknown (Mike Jackson) – pno; unknown (Buddy Christian) - gtr  
 107427-B I’m Gonna Kill Myself PA 7525, Document DOCD-5429  
 107428-B If You Don’t Do It Like I Want It Done (I’ll Get Somebody Else) PA 7525, Document DOCD-5429

Both accompanists are unknown. But stylistically I dare opt for Mike Jackson on piano and Buddy Christian on guitar. This is supported by my own personal aural memory only.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: unknown, pno; unknown, gtr
- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: unknown, p; unknown, g

010 LAURA SMITH New York, c. Jan. 26, 1927  
 Laura Smith – voc;  
 unknown – cms; unknown – vln; unknown – kazoo;  
 unknown - pno  
 7074-2 Gonna Put You Right In Jail Ban 1977, Document DOCD-5429

The esteemed reader/listener might pardon my admission that I have no idea who the musicians playing here might be. I hear some snippets I think to know from Mike Jackson, but this pianist is much more extrovert than what I know of Jackson. I think that the saxophone played here is of the c-melody-sax variety.

Notes:

- BGR\*2: unknown, kazoo; unknown, alt; unknown, pno
- BGR\*3,\*4: unknown, vn; unknown, as; unknown, p
- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: unknown, kazoo; unknown, alt; unknown, pno

011 LAURA SMITH New York, Feb. 07, 1927  
 Laura Smith – voc;  
 unknown – tpt; unknown – pno  
 80400-B My Man Just Won’t Don’t OK 8445, Document DOCD-5429  
 80401-B Hatefull Blues OK 8445, Document DOCD-5429

I have to admit that both players do not ring a bell in my aural memory, only that the trumpeter belongs to the group of “rhapsodic” players like Joe Smith of Fletcher Henderson’s band (the Henderson band was in Detroit at the Graystone Ballroom for two weeks from January 25, but: who knows?). (A player with a similar style was Harry Smith!)

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: unknown, tpt; unknown, pno
- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: unknown, tpt; unknown, pno

012 LAURA SMITH / SARA LAWRENCE New York, Feb. 25, 1927  
 Laura Smith – voc;  
 Thomas Morris – tpt, voc injections; Mike Jackson – pno  
 7130-2 Don’t You Leave Me Here Ban 1977, Document DOCD-5429  
 813-2 Don’t You Leave Me Here Or 894, Document DOCD-5461

The esteemed reader/listener should know that my (KBR's) foremost interest belongs to Charlie Johnson and his Paradise Band. Having this in mind it should not be astonishing that I think to have "downloaded" the very few individual stylistic features of Charlie Johnson's pianistic style as audible from Johnson's recordings in my memory.

Thus I was very much surprised a couple of years ago – when hearing this first title by Laura Smith (Ban 1977) for the first time on Selmerphone SHN-4032 – to intuitively recognize Charlie Johnson's piano style on this title. Thomas Morris on trumpet/cornet was easily identifiable – with the help of Richard Rains in his article on Sara Lawrence in Storyville 153. Here Rains said: "If Mike Jackson is the pianist on Laura Smith's 'Don't You Leave Me Here', who on earth was Lukie Johnson?" My own immediate answer was: Lukie Johnson must be a pseudonym for bandleader/pianist Charlie Johnson. And in this respect it is most interesting to note that on this same day – February 25, 1927 – Thomas Morris is assumed to have recorded within the ranks of the Charlie Johnson Orchestra, although he was not a member of the band, as far as is known. And this would have been most improbable as Morris' technical abilities were much beyond the demands of a band like Charlie Johnson's. But what the pianist played reminded me very much of what I knew of Charlie Johnson's piano style.

Only after the reissue of the two Sara Lawrence Oriole 894 titles on Document DOCD-5461 it became apparent that the pianist on all three titles has to be seen as identical, and he furthermore is addressed as 'Mike' by Miss Smith on 'If You Don't Like My Potatoes'. This is definitely one person, and this person's style compared to what Charlie Johnson plays behind the singer in his own recording of this title definitely excludes Charlie Johnson's presence. (Johnson plays much stronger and more daring – sometimes even reaching into strange chordal sequences – than the assumed Mike Jackson.) Thomas Morris is said to have maintained a close relationship to pianist Mike Jackson, a musician of the lesser known bunch of Harlem Stride pianists. And what we do hear on these sides pianistically would easily fit into the picture I have of Mike Jackson with his unobtrusive, light and sober pianistic style.

Consequently and regrettably I had to depart from my pet idea that Charlie Johnson might have been the pianist on these sides.

The Oriole issue is as by Sara Lawrence! And there is no naming of 'Lukie Johnson' elsewhere in the discographies or other jazz literature.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3: as by Sara Lawrence: reportedly Tommy Ladnier, c; James P. Johnson, p

- BGR\*4: Tom Morris, cnt; Lukie Johnson, pno; unknown male voc. "Oriole 894, which show the control numbers indicated, as by 'Sara Lawrence'. These performances are aurally by Laura Smith and 813-2 appears to be an alternative take of matrix 7130. Although the singer calls the pianist 'Mike', it is believed that he is in fact Lukie Johnson."

- Rust\*3,\*4: ? Tommy Ladnier, c; James P. Johnson, p

- Rust\*6: Tom Morris, cnt; Lukie Johnson, pno

013	<b>LAURA SMITH</b>	Perry Bradford's Mean Four	New York,	Mar. 09, 1927
		Personnel and instrumentation unknown, but possibly comprising James P. Johnson – pno		
80510		Home (Cradle Of Happiness)	OK unissued	not on LP/CD
80511		If Anybody Here Wants A Real Kind Mama (Here's Your Opportunity)	OK unissued	not on LP/CD

As these titles are unissued and no tests seem to have been found nothing can be said about musical contents or personnel.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: instrumentation and personnel unknown

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: instrumentation and personnel unknown

014	<b>LAURA SMITH</b>		Chicago,	Jun. 07, 1927
		Laura Smith – voc;		
		<b>Clarence M. Jones</b> – pno		
38651-1		Lonesome Refugee	Vic 20775,	Document DOCD-5431
38652-3		The Mississippi Blues	Vic 20775,	Document DOCD-5431
38653-2		Fightin' Blues	Vic 20945,	Document DOCD-5431
38654-2		Red River Blues	Vic 20945,	Document DOCD-5431

Laura Smith is accompanied here by famous Chicago pianist and band leader Clarence M. Jones, as documented on the record labels.

Jones is reputed for his fine legitimate musicianship and his band leading at the Owl Theater in Chicago. He recorded under his own name with his Wonder Orchestra and his Sock Four.

These sides were made in Chicago! Beautiful and sensitive recordings these.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Clarence M. Jones, pno

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Clarence Jones - pno

015	<b>LAURA BRYANT</b>	Clarence Williams and his Orchestra	Long Island City,	c. Jan. 1929
		Laura Bryant (Laura Smith) – voc;		
		Ed Allen – cnt; Arville Harris – clt;		
		Clarence Williams – pno; unknown – dentist drill noises		
322-A		Dentist Chair Blues Part 1	QRS R-7055,	Frog DGF 49
323-		Dentist Chair Blues Part 2	QRS R-7055,	Doc DOCD-5376
323-A		Dentist Chair Blues Part 2	QRS R-7055,	Frog DGF 49
324-		Saturday Night Jag	Pm 12870 test,	Frog DGF 49
324-A		Saturday Night Jag	Pm 12870,	Frog DGF 49

These sides are recorded very probably by Laura Smith using the pseudonym Laura Bryant (see Storyville 1996/97, p.227 and Storyville 1998/99, p. 170) as an "amalgam of her stage and real names" (L. Wright).

These titles have been tackled in our team's Clarence Williams investigation a couple of years ago (see elsewhere on this website). The team opinion here favours Harris as clarinetist, although Elliott is suggested as an alternative on account of the blue playing.

Yet, intensive listening very soon proofs Arville Harris' presence on these sides. Not any of Elliott's characteristics, but playing that we are accustomed from Harris.

Ed Allen and Clarence Williams are their reliable selves, and the dentist is a virtuoso on the drill!

Notes:

- *Storyville 24*: "The (Storyville – KBR) Team's opinion here favours Harris, although Elliott is suggested as an alternative on account of the blue playing."

- BGR\*2: Ed Allen – cnt; Prince Robinson – clt; Clarence Williams – pno

- BGR\*3,\*4: Ed Allen, c; prob Ernest Elliott, cl; Clarence Williams, p

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Ed Allen, c; Ernest Elliott, cl; Clarence Williams, p

- *Storyville 1998 p 170*: Laura Bryant (nee Loretta Bryant) is most probably identical to Laura Smith

Notable differences of takes (from Lord p.274):

323- : "Um – Hum. Oh Lord. I ever get out o' here, I betcha I won't come back here no more."

323-A: "Uhhh. I ever get outa here, I never come back no more. MmMMM."

324- : Intro clt starts marking the beat, starts playing ad-lib in second half of second bar

324-A: Intro clt starts on second beat of third bar (no marking the beat earlier)

*Note: Laura Bryant (nee Loretta Bryant) is most probably identical to Laura Smith (St. 1998-170)!*

Acc. band to Laura Smith, Chicago June 1929 (St. 1996 p 229):

Gus Aiken, Johnny Biggs – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn;

Herbert Waters, Floyd Blakemore – alt; James Bradley – ten;

Jack Simms – pno; Ernest Meyers – bjo; William Burrell – bbs; Clifton Drake - dms

K.-B. Rau

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