

THE RECORDINGS OF MARY STAFFORD

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

STAFFORD, Mary, singer no biographical details found
 Drummer George Stafford's sister was the vocaliste Mary Stafford. A 1921 report suggests that Mary Stafford's real name was Annie Burns (from the Ozarks), this could, of course, mean that her brother also adopted the name Stafford for professional reasons.
(J. Chilton, Who's Who of Jazz)

MARY STAFFORD

001	MARY STAFFORD her Jazz Band	New York,	Jan. 05, 1921
	Mary Stafford – voc;		
	Charlie Gaines – tpt; Earl Granstaff – tbn;		
	Ben Whitted – clt; Nelson Kincaid – alt;		
	Charlie Johnson – pno		
79628-3	Royal Garden Blues	Col A3365,	Archeophone 6006
79629-1	Crazy Blues	Col A3365,	Archeophone 6006

Having started my listening duties with the second session below, which – according to Ch. Gaines statement – definitely had been recorded with him on trumpet – I listened to this first session a bit later, but have to report that the musicians obviously are identical to those of the next session, but without the violin. In the IAJRC article (see below) Gaines told about Freddie Keppard's presence in Philadelphia a couple of years earlier, and that he had been taught "a lot" by him. (Incidentally, in his article on Gaines in Storyville 68 - by the same author – we are told that: "*We all tried to sound like him but he was a stuck-up kind of guy and wouldn't show you anything* (Gaines)" Be that as it may, but it can certainly be assumed that Keppard left a lot of influence in Philly when he left town, especially on a young promising trumpet player.

In 'Royal Garden Blues' at the end of the first strain B you can hear the trumpet with some "laughing" device at c. 1:22 min, which is also known from Keppard in Doc Cook's 'So This Is Venice' of some years later. So, this might have been some of the lot that Gaines learnt from Keppard?

The names of the other participating musicians are known from Bradford's recollection: Earl Granstaff as a forceful and functional harmonic trombonist without ambition to solo, Ben Whitted (not Whittet – KBR) - as the always dependable reed man in Charlie Johnson's band for nearly two decades – on tasteful clarinet playing chordal arpeggios most of the time, and – as Bradford calls him – "the old reliable sax-shark (who gave the record a big lift)" - Nelson Kincaid, who plays strong harmonic middle parts.

The second title is dominated by Nelson Kincaid's strong alto sax in the accompaniment – the rest of the band staying in the background. And we hear astonishingly strong and reliable piano comping from Charlie Johnson. He leads the whole procedure from the piano stool.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Addington Major or Charlie Gaines, cnt; Ben Whittet, clt; Grandstaffe, tbn; Nelson Kincaid, alt; Charlie Johnson, pno
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: Addington Major or Charlie Gaines - c; Earl Granstaff – tb; Nelson Kincaid - Ben Whittet, - cl -as; Charlie Johnson, pno

002	MARY STAFFORD her Jazz Band	New York,	Mar. 07, 1921
	Mary Stafford – voc;		
	Charlie Gaines – tpt; Earl Granstaff – tbn;		
	Ben Whitted – clt; Nelson Kincaid – alt; George Breen – vln;		
	Charlie Johnson – pno		
79775-2	I'm Gonna Jazz My Way Right Straight Thru Paradise	Col A3390,	Archeophone 6006
79776-3	Down Where They Play The Blues	Col A3390,	Archeophone 6006

According to Charlie Gaines own statement did he record "I'm Gonna Jazz My Way Right Straight Thru Paradise" (IAJRC Vol.10, No.2). What can be heard of Gaines is an ad-lib introduction in the first title with accented triplet phrasing in Johnny Dunn style, the remaining parts played straight from an arrangement, falling into triplets again at the very end of the tune. Gaines' playing in the second title also seems to be following arranged parts, with frequent triplets phrasing again as before, as well as a lot of grace notes. So, at this early time Gaines certainly is a strong follower of Johnny Dunn's predominant model.

His musician colleagues are the same as in the session before. Yet, they have added a violinist in George Breen as it was the use in those days. But was it an advantage or a benefit? I wonder.

For these two sessions Rust and BGR list Addington Major as alternate trumpet player, but Major owns a rather straight and simple (subdued?) style as heard in Mamie Smith's recording sessions of August 10 and September 12, 1920, and can thus be neglected here!.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: *Addington Major* or *Charlie Gaines*, cnt; *Ben Whitted*, clt; *Grandstaffe*, tbn; *Nelson Kincaid*, alt; *George Breen*, vln; *Charlie Johnson*, pno
 - Rust*3,*4: *Addington Major* or *Charlie Gaines* - c; *Earl Granstaff* - tb; *Nelson Kincaid* - *Ben Whitted*, - cl -as; *George Breen* - vn; *Charlie Johnson*, pno

003	MARY STAFFORD her Jazz Band	New York,	May 06, 1921
	Mary Stafford – voc;		
	Charlie Gaines – tpt; Earl Granstaff – tbn;		
	Ben Whitted – clt; <i>unknown – ten (if at all)</i> ;		
	Charlie Johnson – pno		
79826-2	If You Don't Want Me, Send Me To My Ma	Col A3418,	Archeophone 6006
79827-2	Strut Miss Lizzie	Col A3418,	Archeophone 6006

In IAJRC Gaines recounts that five recording sessions followed. This would probably mean that any of these Mary Stafford sessions had been accompanied by the Charlie Johnson band of the day. And certainly does this session feature the same band with Charlie Gaines on trumpet as before. In the introduction to the first title Gaines delivers some “peppery” growl tones as he might have learned from Keppard, together with a lot of his Dunn derived triplet phrasing in the further course of the tune. The coda shows his use of grace notes as a melodic device. Trombonist and clarinetist certainly are the same as before again, but they have left out Nelson Kincaid. The discographies still list a second reed man – perhaps on tenor sax, but I feel unable to discover any. Maybe, there is a tenor player very soft in the middle ground, but intuitively I would deny this. Also, I can't hear a brass bass/tuba.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: *unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown clt/alt or perhaps ten; unknown pno; unknown bbs*
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: *unknown c; unknown tb; unknown cl -as; ? unknown cl -ts; unknown p; unknown bb*

004	MARY STAFFORD her Jazz Band	New York,	May 24, 1921
	Mary Stafford – voc;		
	Charlie Gaines – tpt; Earl Granstaff – tbn;		
	<i>Ben Whitted</i> – clt; <i>unknown – ten</i> ;		
	Charlie Johnson – pno; John Warren - bbs		
79857-2	Wild Weeping Blues	Col A3426,	Archeophone 6006
79858-3	I've Lost My Heart To The Meanest Girl In Town	Col A3426,	Archeophone 6006

This certainly again is the Johnson band as related by Perry Bradford. I hear Charlie Gaines and Earl Granstaff as before. But I have slight doubts on Whitted's presence on clarinet here as this player plays shrieky at times, what Whitted did not before, and he uses trills what Whitted neither did on the previous 6 titles. Other instances, yet, seem to show Whitted. Maybe he was instructed to play more “fashionable”? A tenor sax playing middle parts can distinctly be detected now, for instance in the third bar of the introduction of ‘Wild Weeping Blues’.

A tuba can be heard faintly in the background (see second title at 2:04 min) and might thus be John Warren as shown in the well-known band photo in ‘A Pictorial History of Jazz’, p.108. (This photo, by the way, shows exactly this Charlie Johnson band of 1920/21 – with some additional musicians - and not the one of the late '20s as given!)

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: *unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown clt/alt or perhaps ten; unknown pno; unknown bbs*
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: *unknown c; unknown tb; unknown cl -as; ? unknown cl -ts; unknown p; unknown bb*

005	MARY STAFFORD <i>The Palm Beach Four</i>	New York,	c. late Jun. 1921
	Mary Stafford – voc;		
	perhaps: <i>Jas Woodson; Arthur Porter; Snippy Mason; Richard Cooper</i>		
79919	Shuffle Along Medley No. 1 (Bandana Days / Gypsy Blues / I'm Just Wild About Harry)	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

Notes:

- BGR*4: *acc. unknown*
 - Rust*6: *no personnel*
 - VJM 158 p 15 (*Billboard* 9 July 1921)

006	MARY STAFFORD her Jazz Band	New York,	Sep. 27, 1921
	Mary Stafford – voc;		
	<i>Addington Major</i> – tpt; Earl Granstaff – tbn;		
	<i>Ben Whitted</i> – clt; <i>unknown – alt</i> ;		
	Charlie Johnson – pno		
80001-3	Arkansas Blues	Col A3493,	Archeophone 6006
80002-3	Down Home Blues	Col A3511,	Archeophone 6006
80006-2	Blind Man Blues	Col A3493,	Archeophone 6006

This trumpet player is not as aggressive and assured as Charlie Gaines on the previous sessions, and I assume him to be Addington Major, if not somebody else. Yet, we have to keep in mind, that Gaines in his interview/article possibly said that “five more recording sessions followed”. As this sentence is not stated to be direct speech, it might also mean that the interviewer took this statement from his discography, supposing that Gaines was present on all these six sessions by Mary Stafford. But, if Gaines stated this to his interviewer, it would necessarily be him on this and the next session, too. But I hear distinct differences in trumpet playing on these two last sessions. Granstaff seems to be right. The clarinetist is a bit shrieky again, and therefore not necessarily Whitted. There seems to be an alto sax playing the middle parts, and can be heard together with the trumpet in ‘Down Home Blues’ chromatically in the breaks in the middle of the first and third blues choruses. Obviously Charlie Johnson leads from the piano.

Notes:

- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown c; unknown tb; unknown cl –as; ? unknown cl –ts; unknown p; unknown bb
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown clt/alt or perhaps ten; unknown pno; unknown bbs

007 **MARY STAFFORD** her Jazz Band New York, Nov. 03, 1921
 Mary Stafford – voc;
Addington Major – tpt; Earl Granstaff – tbn;
Ben Whitted – clt; unknown – ten;
 Charlie Johnson – pno
 80047-2 Monday Morning Blues Col A3511, Archeophone 6006

The overall sound suddenly is different, but this may be caused by a different recording studio as the band still seems to be the same. The same problem re the trumpet player arises, and I think it is not Gaines. Trombonist and clarinetist appear the same as on the previous session, but here we have a prominent tenor sax player whose name must remain unknown as in the fourth session. Johnson again on piano.

Notes:

- Rust*3,*4: unknown c; unknown tb; unknown cl –as; ? unknown cl –ts; unknown p; unknown bb
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown clt/alt or perhaps ten; unknown pno; unknown bbs

008 **MARY STAFFORD** New York, c. Mar. 30,
 1926
 Mary Stafford – voc;
June Clark – cnt; *Charlie Green* – tbn;
Leonard Fields – alt; *Harrison Jackson* – clt;
Charlie "Smitty" Smith – pno; unknown – bjo
 106749 Ain't Got Nobody To Grind My Coffee In The Morning PA 7502, Per 102, Archeophone 6006
 106750 Take Your Finger Off It PA 7502, Per 102, Archeophone 6006

All Clark's characteristics clearly audible !

For me this sounds very, very much like Green with his gruff tone and playing on the Hendersons and Bessies.

Although Len Fields comes to mind, this is possibly not him, this man here lacking part of Fields' "correct" and singing style and tone. On the other hand he plays a lot of chordal arpeggios, which could suggest Fields. I am not certain at all but dare to name Fields because of his still belonging to the band.

The clt playing is far off Buster Bailey's style (Bailey was much more virtuoso !), but typical for a saxophonist's clarinet playing.

Furthermore it is rather pedestrian and reminds of the clt playing on the Gulf Coast Seven. So Harrison Jackson comes to mind, who still was a member of Clark's Creole Stompers.

There are little recognizable and attributable characteristics of this pno player, except for some ninth chords, which are also used in some prearranged ensemble parts. (see next session of Caroline Johnson).

No recognizable characteristics re banjo.

Notes:

- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown c; unknown tb; Buster Bailey –cl; unknown p; unknown bj
 - BGR*2: unknown cnt; tbn; pno; bjo; Buster Bailey, clt
 - BGR*3: unknown, c; unknown, tb; Buster Bailey, cl; unknown, p; unknown, bj
 - BGR*4: unknown, c; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; unknown, p; unknown, bj

SOURCES

Perry Bradford, *Born with the Blues*, p. 153: "Barron's was the hottest spot in Harlem and catered to all Broadway's biggest "ofay" stars and Harlem's big-shot gamblers, because the working class couldn't stand those prohibition prices. That made Barron's the most logical place to get a cross-section of views and mixed opinions, the best barometer understanding of how a record would sell in white and colored sections all over the country.

It was right down Mary Stafford's (sic) alley, because she had been featuring "Crazy Blues" and "It's Right Here For You" nightly and the nightlifers were tipping just like their money had grown on trees. When Mr. Harris requested "Crazy Blues" she thought it was just another reuest, so Mary shouted the song, by going from table to table until she nearly collapsed. Then the customers started hand-clapping in unison, "We want 'It's Right Here For You.' As this was her money song, Charlie Johnson sent Mary off again on "It's Right Here For You" as an encore.

This song happened to be the biggest cabaret and stage-song in the country at that time. Every burlesque show was featuring it and Jeanette Adair was goulng 'em in Ed Wynn's *Grab Bag* show – a Broadway production. Charlie Johnson saw how they were raining money on the floor for Mary, so he told Mattie Hite, "Go out there and help Mary, because we don't want to lose none of that gold." I happened to be in Barron's at that time, but didn't know who Mr. Harris was.

The following morning Mary Stafford (sic) was yanked downtown post-haste to Columbia Studio, which was located at 59th Street and Broadway, and she recorded "Crazy Blues" and Clarence Williams' song "Royal Garden Blues." As Charlie Johnson's jazzband was playing at Barron's and made the audition with Mary, his band cut the record with her; because Mr. Harris wanted them to de "Crazy Blues" just the same as though she was entertaining guests – with no changes.

Mary made a great record, because she couldn't miss with this hot band of great stars sending her. She had Major on cornet; Ben Whitted was the clarinet man; Granstaff (who worked in vaudeville with George Davis) was th sliding trombone guy; Kincaid, the old reliable sax-shark (who gave the record a big lift); George Breen, with his violin, was added to make the record sound like Mamie's "Crazy Blues" record. Charlie Johnson, a sensational musician, was directing and playing the piano.

Mary had a low contralto voice which made her record sound deeper than Mamie's. But here's a secret I've never revealed before. No singer or jazz band could have topped Mamie's record of "Crazy Blues," for I made it my business to leave out 24 bars when we printed the sheet music."

K.-B. Rau
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