

THE RECORDINGS OF J.C. JOHNSON

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

JOHNSON, J.C. piano, vocals, composer Born: Chicago, Ill., 14th September 1896; Died: New York, 27st February, 1981
Attended Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago; played piano from an early age. Moved to New York, made first recording in 1923 accompanying Ethel Waters. Took part in many recording sessions during the 1920s, often accompanying singers, then concentrated on composing and writing for revues. Collaborated on several songs with Fats Waller and Andy Razaf. Served as an ambulance driver during World War II. Resumed composing and wrote part of 'The Jazz Train' (toured Europe with that show in 1955). From the late 1940s onwards was active as a civic leader in Harlem. (John Chilton, Who's Who of Jazz)

"Chicago-born pianist and songwriter named James C. Johnson, with whom he (Andy Razaf – KBR) was now collaborating regularly. Johnson, known as J.C. (to distinguish him from James P.), was, in many ways, Razaf's true alter-ego. A boisterous, salty character with an irrepressible disposition and a pungent, slangy conversational flair that translated into a distinctive lyric writing personality, he had come to New York from Chicago in 1915, intent on making his way in the New York entertainment world as a piano player. Exposure to the brilliance of Harlem piano men quickly had convinced Johnson to abandon his piano ambitions for songwriting, both as lyricist and composer. He'd apparently run across Fats Waller and, in passing, had collaborated with him as early as 1923. Johnson no doubt met Razaf through Waller, and late in 1926 they started songwriting together, while also beginning to perform as a team on radio station WHN, plugging their own songs. (Barry Singer, Black and Blue – The Life and Lyrics of Andy Razaf)

STYLISTICS

STYLE

His style is not that of the famous Harlem Stride school, but not very far from it. The main difference obviously is the reticent left-hand rhythm in contrast to the heavy "oom -pah" of the New York Stride players. So, it might be seen as a middle-way between Western ("Chicago") and Eastern ("New York") styles.

Thus, J.C. – not to mix up with James P. Johnson! – plays a rather academic but tasteful jazz style depending on his musical education and his modest personal approach to the public. His later years were more filled with composing and writing. This certainly is enabled by his advanced technical skills and his superb harmonic knowledge.

He plays with a soft left-hand rhythm which always interacts with the right-hand figures and phrases played. Sometimes in the late 1920s, some slight "oom-pa" as known appears, this always with swing and delicacy.

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: J.C. Johnson

- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *J.C. Johnson*

- 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: (*J.C. Johnson*)

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.

- All recording sessions from the discographies comprising J.C. Johnson with their documented or assumed personnel have been listed. Only discographies or articles in the author's collection have been used.

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.

J.C. JOHNSON

001 **ETHEL WATERS** Long Island City, NY, c. Jun. 1923
 Ethel Waters – voc;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 651- Who'll Get It When I'm Gone? BS 14155, ChronologicalClassics 775
 652- All The Time BS 14155, ChronologicalClassics 775

Miss Waters' accompanist is J.C. Johnson here, pianist from Chicago but living in New York, now. Their combination is very good and of good quality immediately.

It is interesting to note that J.C. Johnson accompanies Ethel Waters on his first recordings. I'd suggest that he was singled out for his harmonic and melodic qualities to fit with Miss Waters' personal melodic and soft style. J.C. Johnson has to diminish his playing tempo on both titles when Miss Waters starts to sing at a slower pace than given by Johnson on piano in the introductions.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*
- BGR*2: J.C. Johnson, pno
- BGR*3,*4: poss Fletcher Henderson, p
- Rust*3,*4,*6: J.C. Johnson -p

002 **ETHEL WATERS** Long Island City, NY, c. Jun. 1923
 Ethel Waters – voc;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 You Can't Do What My Last Man Did BS 14151, ChronologicalClassics 775
 Ethel Sings 'Em BS 14154, ChronologicalClassics 775
 Sweet Man Blues BS 14154, ChronologicalClassics 775

The first title begins with a nice piano introduction which might have inspired James P.'s recording of this same title one month later.

Johnson's rhythm is steady and swinging and always melody related on all three sides. Very nice. And it is incomprehensible that there are no other recordings by J.C. Johnson for the next three years. May this be explained by his obvious modesty?

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: J.C. Johnson, pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: J.C. Johnson -p

003 **MAMIE SMITH** New York, Aug. 27, 1926
 Mamie Smith – voc;
 Thomas Morris – cnt; (Charlie Irvis) – tbn; Bob Fuller – clt;
 Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo
 36069-1 Goin' Crazy With The Blues Vic LPV-534, Doc DOCD 5360
 36069-2 Goin' Crazy With The Blues Vic 20210, Doc DOCD 5360
 36070-1 Sweet Virginia Blues Vic 20233 not on LP/CD
 36070-2 Sweet Virginia Blues Vic 20233, Doc DOCD 5360

These are very beautiful blues cum jazz recordings of the time. Personnel seems to be correct. I only feel uncertain re the presence of Charlie Irvis on trombone. Irvis owns a very distinctive style which cannot be heard here in its entirety. Yet, with repeated listening I get increasingly doubtful as to Irvis' presence! A much less accomplished player – or Irvis on booze?! A much less accomplished player! And it is Caldwell, not Fuller!

The pianist plays the simplest form of accompaniment possible: two hands parallel four/four. In 'Sweet Virginia Blues' he corresponds to the melodic material of the trumpet, but still mainly with two parallel hands. I suggest this to be too simple for a player of J.C. Johnson's quality. Thus: probably Mike Jackson. The more so as Mike Jackson allegedly belonged to the Thomas Morris circle of friends/musicians. But to be honest: what can be heard from the piano could have been played by anyone. There are not any personal and identifiable characteristics to recognize.

DB: Best music so far. Wonderful Tom. I do hear Irvis. Personnel as it is.

Notes:

- RR 57/10: "Brian Rust suggest a personnel of Thomas Morris, cornet; Charlie Irvis, trombone; Bob Fuller, clarinet; Lem Fowler? piano; Buddy Christian, banjo. As matrix bve-36071 is by a Thomas Morris group with the same instrumentation, the presence of Morris at least seems quite reasonable."

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Tom Morris – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Bob Fuller – clt; prob. Mike Jackson or J.C. Johnson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Tom Morris – c; Charlie Irvis – tb; Bob Fuller – cl; Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo

Notable differences of takes:

36069-1: bar 8 of ensemble chorus (chorus 2) tpt middle break (ca. 1:40): tbn enters with growled half note E on second beat
 36069-2: bar 8 of ensemble chorus (chorus 2) tpt middle break (ca. 1:50): tbn enters with clean note low E on fourth beat
 36070: no alternate take reissued, so no comment possible

004 **MAMIE SMITH** New York, Aug. 31, 1926
 Mamie Smith – voc;
 Thomas Morris – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; (Happy Caldwell) – clt;
 Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo
 36081-1 What Have I Done To Make Me Feel This Way ? Vic 20233 not on LP/CD
 36081-2 What Have I Done To Make Me Feel This Way ? Vic 20233, Doc DOCD 5360
 36081-3 What Have I Done To Make Me Feel This Way ? Vic LPV-534, Doc DOCD 5360
 36082-2 I Once Was Yours I'm Somebody Else's Now Vic 20210, Doc DOCD 5360

This seems to be the same personnel as on the former Mamie Smith session with the exception of the clarinet player, who plays in a much more fashionable and modern style than Fuller, with interesting melodic phrases - unheard of by Fuller - especially in 'I Once Was Yours' and a completely different vibrato. Beautiful! Because of the time of recording and of Happy Caldwell's vicinity to the Thomas Morris circle I assume that this might be Caldwell on clarinet here. This clarinetist's style is much more "Western" and Dodds-influenced than Fuller's. Irvis' presence again doubted a little but nearer to Irvis than preceding Mamie Smith session.

The pianist plays strong four-beat two-fisted rhythm like the player at the session before. Unfortunately, he cannot be heard in solo. So, it is impossible to judge whether he could be J.C. Johnson as possibly reported from his own testimony below. But there is nothing to find musically what could point to any distinct musician.

The banjo player may be Christian, but this man here doubles time in 'What Have I Done ...' which elsewhere is unheard of by Christian. So, his presence has to be doubted. But it is his light banjo sound!

DB: Indeed, different clarinet. More fluid but not enough exposed to be able to identify. Trombone sounds here less standard Irvis but my guess is ... (who? K-B).

Notes:

- RR 57 p 11: "J.C. Johnson in the 'Melody Maker' (April 16, 1955) was reported as saying: "I played on records with Mamie, too. 'Been Some Changes Made' was one, I think, and I am sure she made four sides for Victor around '29". Similar comments were made by Albert McCarthy in 'Jazz Monthly'. Presumably J.C. Johnson was referring to the 1926 Victor session, while the 'Been Some Changes Made' session possibly remains to be discovered."

- BGR*4: Tom Morris - cnt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Bob Fuller - clt; prob. Mike Jackson or J.C. Johnson - pno; Buddy Christian - bjo

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Tom Morris - c; Charlie Irvis - tb; Bob Fuller - cl; Mike Jackson - pno; Buddy Christian - bjo

Notable differences of takes:

36081-1: this take not reissued in any form, thus no comment possible

36081-2: first bar of introduction - tpt fourth note D is somewhat fluffed and unclear

36081-3: first bar of introduction - tpt fourth note D is clear and clean

005	ETHEL WATERS	Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra	New York,	Sep. 18, 1926
	Ethel Waters - voc;			
	Thornton G. Brown - tpt;			
	unknown - vln; unknown - vlc;			
	J.C. Johnson - pno;			
	male chorus - voc (1,2)			
	142649-2	I'm Coming, Virginia	Col 14170-D,	Chronological Classics 688
	142649-3	I'm Coming, Virginia	Col 14170-D	not on LP/CD
	142650-3	We Don't Need Each Other Any More	Col 14162-D,	Chronological Classics 688
	<i>Composer credits are: 142649 (Heywood); 142650 (Johnson)</i>			

Again, we have J.C. Johnson here with Ethel Waters. In 'I'm Coming Virginia' he obviously only plays from the score as printed. On the second title he is on his own and plays as we have got to know him from the first two sessions with Ethel Waters above: a solid, skillful and swinging accompaniment. Judging from Ethel Waters recording session of 29 July 1926, where Thornton G. Brown, a renowned trumpet player of the vaudeville show circuit, is among the accompaniment - he is reported to be with Ethel Waters' 'Black Bottom Revue' at the Lafayette Th., NY week 20 Sep. (Ad NYA 11/9/26) - it is most probable that he also is accompanying her on these sides. He may be identified by his very sharp tone, his permanent staccato playing when ad-libbing, and his favoured 6/8th phrasing.

I like the violin arpeggios in the intro of 'I'm Coming Virginia', strong, musical, and not syrupy at all. (Did Anthony Barnett - or anybody else - check these sides for Eddie South's possible presence? The Jimmy Wade band from Chicago was at the Club Alabam for a long period at about this time. Some of the Wade musicians probably recorded with Perry Bradford (Georgia Strutters) and Clarence Williams (Eva Taylor) on 06 August 1926 and Bradford again (Alberta Hunter) on 13 September!).

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*

- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: acc. Choir, tpt, vln, cello, p*

- BGR*2: unknown tpt; unknown vln; unknown cello; prob Pearl Wright, pno; with choir dir by Will Marion Cook (as Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra on first side, 'Novelty Orchestra' on second; or acc by Pearl Wright, pno (3)

- BGR*3: unknown, c; unknown, vn; unknown, vc; prob Pearl Wright, p; choir (Will Marion Cook, dir), v

- BGR*4: Ethel Waters & Her Singing Orchestra (1,2); Ethel Waters Acc Novelty Orchestra (3); unknown, c; unknown, vn; unknown, vc; prob Pearl Wright, p; choir (Will Marion Cook, dir), v

- Rust*3: unknown -t; unknown -vn; unknown -vc; prob Pearl Wright -p; with choir dir by Will Marion Cook (as Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra on first side, 'Novelty Orchestra' on second

- Rust*4,*6: Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra (unknown c; vn; vc; J.C. Johnson -p)

- Storyville 1998, p. 170: Thornton G. Brown: In Ethel Waters' 'Black Bottom Revue' at the Lafayette Th., NY week 20 Sep. (Ad NYA 11/9/26)

Notable differences of takes:

142649 As take -3 has not been reissued, comparison is impossible.

006	ETHEL WATERS		New York,	Sep. 18, 1926
	Ethel Waters - voc;			
	J.C. Johnson - pno;			
	142651-3	My Special Friend Is Back In Town	Col 14182-D,	Chronological Classics 688
	<i>Composer credits are: 142651 (Razaf - Johnson)</i>			

Ethel Waters in her beautiful style of song performance. And J.C. Johnson very adaptable to Ethel's singing, although a bit hurrying in her fast tempo.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*

- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: J.C. Johnson?*

- BGR*2: Pearl Wright, pno (3)

- BGR*3: prob Pearl Wright, p

- BGR*4: J.C. Johnson, p.

- Rust*3: Pearl Wright -p
 - Rust*4,*6: J.C. Johnson -p

007 **CROONING ANDY RAZAF** New York, Nov. 04, 1927
 Andy Razaf – voc;
 J.C. Johnson – pno (1); Eddie King – org (2)
 144956-1 Empty Arms – Dedicated to the Late Florence Mills Col 14265-D not on LP/CD
 144957-2 All The World Is Lonely (For A Little Blackbird) – Dedicated to the Late Florence Mills Col 14265-D not on LP/CD
 Composer credits are: 144956 (Johnson); 144957 (Johnson and Razaf)

Unfortunately, no reissue of these sides is known. A comment is impossible.

Notes:

- D. Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: piano accomp. (1); organ and piano accomp (2)

- Rust*3: not listed

- Rust*4,*6: J.C. Johnson -p; Eddie King -o (2)

- L. Wright, "Fats in Fact", p. 298: Columbia 14265-D has been listed previously as a Fats Waller accompaniment. This not so (sic), and the piano on these sides is by J.C. Johnson plus Eddie King on organ on the second side per Columbia files.

008 **HELEN HUMES** New York, Nov. 26, 1927
 Helen Humes – voc;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 81869-A If Papa Has Outside Lovin' OK 8545, Chronological Classics 892
 81870-C Do What You Did Last Night OK 8545, Chronological Classics 892
 81871-A Everybody Does It Now OK 8529, Chronological Classics 892
 Note: Other titles recorded at this session are without J.C. Johnson.

Helen Humes, singer of the Count Basie band from 1938 to 1941, made this as her second recording session, the first one cut in St. Louis with Lonnie Johnson and De Loise Searcy. This session finds her accompanied by pianist J.C. Johnson, two other titles of this session accompanied by a guitar duet. J.C. Johnson plays a very sensitive and modest accompaniment, stylistically between Western/Chicago and New York styles. Listen to his interplay of left-hand bass figures and his right-hand melodic material.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: J.C. Johnson

- Rust*3,*4,*6: not listed

009 **WILLIE JACKSON** New York, Dec. 12, 1927
 Willie Jackson – voc;
 Russell Procope or (Ernest Elliott?) – clt, alt; J.C. Johnson - pno
 145299-1 Long Time Men Col 14432-D, Doc DOCD-5532
 145400-3 Corn And Bunion Blues Col 14432-D, Doc DOCD-5532
 Composer credits are: 145299 (Johnson); 145400 (Johnson)

The musician's names are not documented on the record labels! I – KBR - followed later issues of Rust and BGR and the CD booklet with my earlier assumption thus: "This is Ernest Elliott as during his earlier years, only that he plays more legato as before, but still antiquated and unswinging. Stylistically out of his time in phrasing, vibrato and rhythm. J.C. Johnson restrains himself very much, possibly out of necessity for not finding an adequate way to correspond to Mr. Elliott's performance."

ADDITION 22-11-2023: I now see – and hear – the possibility of Russell Procope's presence on these sides, because in an extended interview on Russell Procope, executed by Chris Albertson and kept at Rutgers University, Procope recalls that his first recording was with J.C. Johnson. Was it this one, perhaps? In this same interview Procope states that he recorded with Clarence Williams a few times. Re-checking against J.C. Johnson's recordings, this would be the only possibility of Procope's collaboration with Johnson before the Jelly Roll Morton session of Dec. 06, 1928.

This session might then be Russell Procope's first recording session!

Notes:

- D. Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: vocal, saxophone and piano accomp

- BGR*2: unknown clt; unknown alt; unknown pno

- BGR*3,*4: Ernest Elliott, cl, as; J.C. Johnson, p

- Rust*3: unknown cl -as; unknown -p

- Rust*4,*6: Ernest Elliott -cl -as; J.C. Johnson -p

- Document DOCD-5532, booklet: "Willie Jackson, according to a 1966 letter to Jazz Journal from his fellow citizen Edmond Souchon, was a popular attraction in New Orleans at venues like the West End, Spanish Fort and the Palace and Lyric Theatres. He "was very much an 'hombre', Souchon commented (presumably refuting a suggestion that he might not have been), and he continued, "quite a ladies man, too! ... also a fine dancer, and a composer of good blues songs."

- Russell Procope interview, by Chris Albertson and kept at Rutgers University: Procope recalls that his first recording was with J.C. Johnson.

010 **ALICE CLINTON** New York, Apr. 19, 1928
 Alice Clinton – voc;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 GEX-1207-A Do What You Did Last Night Gnt 6501, Document DOCD_5508
 GEX-1208-A (Since You've Been Gone) There's Been Some Changes Made Gnt 6501, Document DOCD_5508

And again, J.C. Johnson's unobtrusive but very musical and adaptable playing. And smoothly swinging.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: J.C. Johnson, pno

- Rust*3,*4,*6: J.C. Johnson, p

011	J.C. JOHNSON	New York,	Jun. 05, 1928
	J.C. Johnson – voc;		
	Anity Rutherford – pno		
	146398-3 Explaining	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
	146399-3 You'll Come Back To Me	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests are known of these sides, nothing can be said about their musical contents.

Anita Rutherford is Thomas 'Fats' Waller's wife.. (They married in 1926.)

Notes:

Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: not listed

012	J.C. JOHNSON	New York,	Jun. 14, 1928
	J.C. Johnson – voc;		
	Anity Rutherford – pno		
	146398-6 Explaining	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
	146399-6 You'll Come Back To Me	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests are known of these sides, nothing can be said about their musical contents.

Anita Rutherford is Thomas 'Fats' Waller's wife.. (They married in 1926.)

Notes:

Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: not listed

013	ROY EVANS	New York,	Jun. 18, 1928
	Roy Evans – voc;		
	J.C. Johnson - pno		
	146553-1 I Ain't Got Nobody	Col 15272-D,	not on LP/CD, but held
	146554-3 Dusky Stevedore	Col 15272-D,	not on LP/CD, but held

J.C. Johnson contributes a fine piano accompaniment to Mr. Evans' somewhat peculiar vocal style – some song singing, some yodeling, but certainly not jazzy, and probably more aimed at the folk music lovers.

Piano playing is essential but restrained, containing Johnson's very nice inter-action of left- and right-hand playing. The lack of any piano solo parts probably show the disregard of the pianist's capability and quality.

Notes:

- Rust*3,*4,*6: J.C. Johnson -p

014	ROY EVANS	New York,	Jun. 20, 1928
	Roy Evans – voc;		
	Garvin Bushell – clt, alt, oboe, bassoon; J.C. Johnson - pno		
	146558-1 How Long Is That Train Been Gone?	Col 2257-D,	Retrieval RTR 79020
	146559-2 Georgia's Always On My Mind	Col 1449-D,	Retrieval RTR 79020

Composer credits are: 146558 (Bradford and Johnson); 146559 (Bradford and Johnson)

The first title starts with a strong clarinet chorus on blues changes by Garvin Bushell in surprising New Orleans style, reminding me very much of Johnny Dodds, after a beautiful first chorus on blues changes by Mr. Johnson in approximation to Harlem Stride piano. Bushell's performance then weakens when accompanying Evans' vocal part on different changes later on.

The second title then has Johnson again in – nearly – Stride style, really individual and convincing. Bushell displays his abilities in accompanying on bassoon (intro), oboe (verse), and alto sax (chorus). His style has distingly developed since his days with the Sam Wooding band.

Notes:

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Garvin Bushell -cl -as; J.C. Johnson -p

015	MARY DIXON	New York,	Jul. 30, 1928
	Mary Dixon – voc;		
	Louis Metcalf – tpt; J.C. Johnson – pno		
	E-27912 Dusky Stevedore	Voc 1199,	Document DOCD-5504
	E-27913 I Can't Give You Anything But Love	Voc 1199,	Document DOCD-5504

This trumpet player may well be Metcalf as assumed for so long now. He displays a fat tone, good technique and phrasing, but there is nothing to unequivocally identify Metcalf from. Yet, searching for an alternative name for this player is useless: there is no! But I am a bit astounded of this trumpeter's soft and tension-less performance. This might have been the consequence of Metcalf's time with Ellington and other high-graded bands and their professional and legitimate delivery. Compared to the trumpeter on Mary Dixon's session of 24 August 1929 below – who very distinctly is Metcalf – there remain doubts as to this musician's identity with Metcalf. This player almost sounds like a white player. It would be interesting to get to know the source for this personnel!

J.C. Johnson hailed from Chicago and – although living in New York for a long time of his life – stylistically did not belong to the group of Harlem Stride pianists. His approach to the keyboard was less rhythmic and swinging, but more bringing his compositional talents to the fore.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, Jazz Directory, Vol. 2: vcl with unknown acc.

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Louis Metcalf, cnt; J.C. Johnson, -pno.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Louis Metcalf -c; J.C. Johnson -p.

016 **GLADYS BENTLEY** New York, Aug. 08, 1928
Gladys Bentley – voc, pno
 401058-B *Ground Hog Blues* OK 8610, Document DOCD-5349
 401059-B *Worried Blues* OK 8610, Document DOCD-5349

Miss Bentley very probably is accompanied by her own piano playing, although listed in later Rusts as by ?J.C. Johnson. It is played in a rather simple style – quite unlike J.C. Johnson's - in rhythmical accordance with her singing, showing a call-response scheme without overlapping. Her performance does not reach Johnson's technically advanced piano-style. This certainly is not J.C. Johnson!

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown, pno.
- Rust*3: unknown -p
- Rust*4,*6: ?J.C. Johnson, p.

017 **ETHEL WATERS** New York, Aug. 20, 1928

Ethel Waters – voc;
 J.C. Johnson – pno (1); James P. Johnson – pno (2,3,4)
 146871-1 *Lonesome Swallow* Col 14411-D, Chronological Classics 688
 146872-2 *Guess Who's In Town* Col 14353-D, Chronological Classics 688
 146873-1 *My Handy Man* Col 14353-D, Chronological Classics 688
 146874-2 *Do What You Did Last Night* Col 14380-D, Chronological Classics 688
Composer credits are: 146871 (Razaf and Johnson); 146872 (Razaf and Johnson); 146873 (Razaf); 146884 (Johnson and Razaf)

In his letter to Theo Zwicky of August 11, 1964 (as published in Storyville 20, p. 62), C. Luckey Roberts – he himself a famous pianist of the early Harlem Stride school – names J.C. Johnson as Ethel Waters' accompanist on the first of these four titles, 'Lonesome Swallow'. And he should have known. When listening, it becomes apparent that in fact J.C. Johnson is only on the first title and the master of Harlem Stride pianists takes over for the subsequent three titles. Why this is so, I do not know. J.C. Johnson plays with great intuition, imagination and taste. Very beautiful and poetically! His presence on this one title of this session has never been noted before.

James P. Johnson – the Master – then performs in his usual Harlem Stride playing with continues left hand "oompa" rhythm on the following three titles. But much stronger and more on the jazz/swing track.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*
- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: J.P. Johnson, p*
- BGR*2: Clarence Williams, pno
- BGR*3,*4: Clarence Williams, p (1,2,3); J.C. Johnson, p (4)
- Rust*3,*4: Clarence Williams -p
- Rust*6: Clarence Williams -p (1,2,3); J.C. Johnson (4)
- Storyville 20, p.62, Theo Zwicky, Johnson J.C. that Is: "There is one thing that has happened, but it will never happen here again. That is ... Ethel Waters doing a J.C. tune 'Lonesome Swallow' and on the opposite side a J.C. tune 'My Baby Sure Knows How To Love' with piano accompaniment by J.C. (no billing) on Columbia 14411-D."

018 **FRANK WALLACE** New York, Aug. 20, 1928

Frank Wallace – voc, gtr;
 Irwin Schloss – vln
 18663 *Drowsy Moonlight* Ed 52387 not on LP/CD ?
 18664 *Swanee Blue Jay* Ed 52387 not on LP/CD ?
Composer credits are: 18663 (Spencer Williams); 18664 (Spencer Williams)

In C. Luckey Roberts' above-mentioned letter to Theo Zwicky, he notes J.C. Johnson's activity as accompanist to Frank Wallace on 'Swanee Blue Jay'. The only note of a possible record of this white folk-singer I have found in the internet under 'Discogs' with the dates given above. I have been unable to get any approach to this disc or any possible reissue of it.

From the listed persons it seems to be unlikely that J.C. Johnson might have been present as pianist. As composer/lyricist Spencer Williams is given for both titles. It so seems that Luckey Roberts remembered falsely. But he adds to his comment (below): "Never any billing"! Does he play piano, yet? Does anybody own this record and would let me have a listen?

Notes:

- Not noted in any jazz discography on hand!
- Storyville 20, p.62, Theo Zwicky, Johnson ... J.C. that Is: "He was the accompanist with Clara Smith on 'Tired Of The Way You Do', with Frank Wallace on 'Swanee Blue Jay' with Roy Evans on 'Dusky Stevedore', (never any billing)."

019 **ETHEL WATERS** New York, Aug. 23, 1928

Ethel Waters – voc;
Clarence Williams – pno (1,2,3); J.C. Johnson – pno (4)
 146881-2 *West End Blues* Col 14365-D, Chronological Classics 688
 146882-2 *Organ Grinder Blues* Col 14365-D, Chronological Classics 688
 146883-2 *Get Up Off Your Knees* Col 14380-D, Chronological Classics 688
 146884-2 *My Baby Sure Knows How To Love* Col 14411-D, Chronological Classics 688
Composer credits are: 146881 (Oliver and Williams); 146882 (Williams); 146883 (Williams); 146884 (Crawford and Rafe)

Clarence William – if this is infact he – really swings this session in a most unexpected way and shows an overseen masterly way to handle the piano. He very often is depreciated because of the simplicity and stiffness of his style. But, listen to him here on the first three tracks, and you certainly will be most astonished about the emphatic beauty of his style. And all this recorded with clearness and good sound.

On the last title we have Mr. J.C. Johnson, and he again in his own inimitable style as heard above. A great session. And: Ethel Waters is a magnificent singer!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*
- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Clarence Williams*
- BGR*2: Clarence Williams, pno
- BGR*3,*4: Clarence Williams, p (1,2,3); J.C. Johnson, p (4)
- Rust*3,*4: Clarence Williams -p
- Rust*6: Clarence Williams -p (1,2,3); J.C. Johnson (4)
- Storyville 20, p.62, Theo Zwicky, Johnson ... J.C. that Is: "There is one thing that has happened, but it will never happen here again. That is ... Ethel Waters doing a J.C. tune 'Lonesome Swallow' and on the opposite side a J.C. tune 'My Baby Sure Knows How To Love' with piano accompaniment by J.C. (no billing) on Columbia 14411-D."

020 **MARTHA COPELAND** New York, Aug. 28, 1928
 Martha Copeland – voc;
Bubber Miley – tpt; **J. C. Johnson** – pno

146923-2	Mama's Well Has Done Gone Dry	Col 14377-D,	Document DOCD-5373
146923-3	Mama's Well Has Done Gone Dry	Col 14377-D	not on LP/CD
146924-3	I Ain't Your, Mr. Fly Rooster	Col 14377-D,	Document DOCD-5373

Composer credits are: 146923 (Razaf); 146924 (Razaf)

Very nice is Miss Copeland's growling scat singing a la Louis in the introduction of the first title. This certainly is not the typical exuberant growl and staccato man Miley on trumpet. But the Columbia files state Bubber Miley's presence on these sides and thus reject the Scherman/Eriksson discography's doubts as to Miley's presence. J.C. Johnson always is a very interesting pianist, coming from Chicago, but being an integral part of the Harlem pianist scene, with great pianistic technique and composing abilities. But he is rather restrained here. A special LP/CD of him had long been thought of by John R.T. Davies, but never realized, unfortunately.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1938: Bubber Miley (c); J.C. Johnson (p)*
- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Fiels: Bubber Miley, cnt; J.C. Johnson, p*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: Bubber Miley, cnt; J. C. Johnson, pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Bubber Miley -c; J.C. Johnson -p.
- Scherman/Eriksson, *Bubber Miley Disco: poss Bubber Miley (tp); J.C. Johnson (p)*. "Miley has been listed on trumpet without reservations in all previous discographies we have seen. In comparison with Miley's playing in Ellington's orchestra during this period, the trumpet man on this session sounds rather anonymous and substandard. We can hear a few Miley's trademarks, but other trumpet players had adopted them, and there is not enough aural evidence to establish his presence definitely."

Notable differences of takes:

146923 As take -3 has not been reissued, comparison is impossible.

021 **GLADYS BENTLEY** New York, Aug. 31, 1928
 Gladys Bentley – voc, pno;
 Eddie Lang - gtr

401092-A	How Long, How Long Blues	OK 8612,	Document DOCD-5349
401093-B	Moanful Wailin' Blues	OK 8612,	Document DOCD-5349

Gladys Bentley was a singer/pianist and male impersonator – as can be recognized by her strong voice – in Harlem in the late 1920s. Miss Bentley very probably is accompanied by her own piano playing, here again (see session 014 above), although listed in later Rusts as by ?J.C. Johnson. This certainly is not J.C. Johnson! Piano playing is rather rudimental, and far from Johnson's abilities. But the OKeh people attached Eddie Lang – star guitarist of the white jazz community of the time – to Gladys Bentley, where he seems to be a bit lost for my taste. On Bentley's subsequent session – without a piano accompanist – Eddie Lang is feeling much more at ease.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown, pno; Eddie Lang, gtr
- Rust*3: unknown p; Eddie Lang -g
- Rust*4,*6: ?J.C. Johnson, p; Eddie Lang, g.

022 **J. C. JOHNSON** New York, Sep. 17, 1928
 J.C. Johnson – voc;
 --- Smith - vln; Porter Grainger – pno

147010-3	Explaining	Col 14361-D	not on LP/CD
147011-2	Good Things Come To Those Who Wait	Col 14361-D	not on LP/CD

Composer credits are: 147010 (Johnson and Razaf); 147011 (Johnson and Razaf)

Nobody cared to reissue this coupling up to now. And even Document's Johnny Parth of Vienna did not include it in his series. He probably knew, why. It, still, would be interesting to have a listen.

The same applies to the below mentioned Gennett recording under Johnson's pseudonym Slim Johnson, of which I do not know whether it would be that same recording – probably not – or a unique Gennett recording.

Notes:

- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: reportedly --- Smith, vln; Porter Grainger, p*
- Storyville 20, p.62, Theo Zwicky, Johnson ... J.C. that Is: "Like most real songwriters, he can't sing, but thought he could. So, he had to have his fling, under his own name on Columbia, and as Slim Johnson on Gennett."

023 **WILLIE JACKSON** New York, Oct. 05, 1928
 Willie Jackson – voc;
 J.C. Johnson – pno; Eddie Lang - gtr

147107-3	How Long – How Long Blues	Col 14366-D,	Document DOCD-5532
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'New Orleans' Willie Jackson – as on session 009 above – together with J.C. Johnson and white guitar star Eddie Lang, who must have been very much estimated by his coloured colleagues in the Harlem scene of the time. And it must have been vice versa, as it seems. Oh, oh, oh, J.C. Johnson is on his left foot when joining Eddie Lang in the introduction on the first title. But from then on, Johnson and Lang harmonize with each other nicely. It is a very smooth and elegant accompaniment on both titles and a joy to hear.

Notes:

- BGR*2: not listed

- BGR*3,*4: *Sonny Porter, v; J.C. Johnson, p; Eddie Lang, g. (These two titles were originally credited to Willie Jackson in the Columbia files; this was subsequently crossed out and the name Sonny Porter substituted. We presume this is the same Willie Jackson as on other Columbias.)*

- Rust*3: ?Clarence Williams -p; Eddie Lang -g

- Rust*4,*6: Eddie Lang, g; J.C. Johnson, p

- Document DOCD-5532, booklet: "Willie Jackson, according to a 1966 letter to Jazz Journal from his fellow citizen Edmond Souchon, was a popular attraction in New Orleans at venues like the West End, Spanish Fort and the Palace and Lyric Theatres. He "was very much an 'hombre', Souchon commented (presumably refuting a suggestion that he might not have been), and he continued, "quite a ladies man, too! ... also a fine dancer, and a composer of good blues songs."

024 MAMIE SMITH

New York,

Oct. 20, 1928

Mamie Smith – voc;

J.C. Johnson – pno

401253-A

There's Been Some Changes Made Since You've Been Gone

OK unissued (test exists)

not on LP/CD

Hopefully this item will find its way onto CD. It certainly will be very interesting listening! (Has anybody heard of it recently? – May 2022) **DB:** Johnson's self-identification here seems solid evidence but odd coincidence that he should be on two consecutive Mamie sessions over two years apart.

Notes:

- RR 37 p 11: "J.C. Johnson in the 'Melody Maker' (April 16, 1955) was reported as saying: "I played on records with Mamie, too. 'Been Some Changes Made' was one, I think, and I am sure she made four sides for Victor around '29". Similar comments were made by Albert McCarthy in 'Jazz Monthly'. Presumably J.C. Johnson was referring to the 1926 Victor session, while the 'Been Some Changes Made' session possibly remains to be discovered."

- VJM 166 p15: "Mark (Berresford – KBR) had heard the test and confirmed it was Mamie Smith singing, but the identity of the pianist remained unknown. Whilst browsing through some old Record Research magazines recently, Mark noted in the 'Mamie Smith' issue (Jan. 1964, p.11) that J.C. Johnson had stated in the Melody Maker of April 16, 1955 that ... (see above!). Thus, we may safely conclude that he was the unknown piano player on the OKeh session and that he is the likeliest candidate for Mamie's 1926 Victors."

- Rust*3,*4: not listed

- Rust*6: unknown - p

- BGR*2,*3,*4: not listed

025 J. C. JOHNSON AND HIS FIVE HOT SPARKS

New York,

c. Feb. 1929

Walter Bennett – tpt; Isaiah Robinson – tbn; (Albert Nicholas ?) – clt, alt;

J. C. Johnson – pno; Charlie Vincento or Bernard Addison – bjo

346

Texas Man

QRS unissued,

Frog DGF 60

347

Crying For You

QRS R-7064,

Frog DGF 60

348

Red-Hot-Hottentot

QRS R-7064,

Frog DGF 60

For many years this extraordinary recording session was limited to two issued sides, *Crying For You* and *Red-Hot-Hottentot*, the latter being one of the all-time hits of Classic Jazz. Davies and Wright in their "The Other Take" expressed their opinion that there might have been a third title for this session when following the rule of QRS recording three sides sessions. And, surprisingly enough, this third title *Texas Man* was released on the late David French's phantastic Frog label in 2005!

- Again, trumpet player Walter Bennett is clearly identified when comparing with the other items discussed. RUST 6* lists him as "possibly", having him listed as Jabbo Smith in earlier issues.

- The trombonist has been assumed to be Roy Palmer in Rust 2*, but had never been identified thereafter. Just recently in VJM 154 John Collinson pointed out, that he had compared this trombonist with the player on the Bennett's Swamplanders. In STORYVILLE 32, p. 80 the Swamplanders' trombonist is named as Isiah Robinson (see below). Collinson concludes that both men are identical and poses the question as to this man's origin. I whole-heartedly agree with him and have therefore named Robinson as a good possibility. More about Robinson at the Bennett's Swamplanders session below.

- The clarinet player. Rust 2* says George James, leaving him unknown in later editions. (G. James did not reach New York until three years later with Louis Armstrong). Omer Simeon has been listed somewhere. And there certainly is some kind of similarity. But, as far as I can find out, Simeon was in Chicago at this time. So, who else? This man here plays a very beautiful clarinet (and alto), very much in the tradition we use to call Creole style. A mature musical personality with a big tone, very fluent, probably Albert system clarinet, pointing to New Orleans! Will New Orleans specialists, please, listen!? (As I have come to acknowledge in my Thomas Morris article in Names & Numbers 49: there seem to be a lot more connections between New Orleans and Harlem in the twenties than we know!) When searching through the ranks of New York/Harlem clarinet players, absolutely nobody comes to mind with this man's characteristics. Furthermore: there seems to have been a group of musicians in Harlem, of caribbean descent, who may have made up part of the personnels dealt with here (see cover text to Collectors Items LP 015). As Davies and Wright said in Storyville 23: "The clarinet/alto saxist on Sparks and Revellers is a jazz musician of the first water, one hell of a musician!" And they are absolutely right! Even more so, when you listen to *Texas Man*, the third title, which had been unknown to Davies and Wright in 1969. The clarinet player is absolutely superb here, and I am unable to understand that such a great musician is unknown or unidentifiable! It is unbelievable, that such a fantastic player should be unknown and remain unknown! But I don't know anybody comparable.

ADDENDUM N&N 53: From Mr. W. Leif of Winterthur, Switzerland comes a letter suggesting Albert Nicholas as clarinet/alto player on the J.C. Johnson's Five Hot Sparks (and the Moonlight Revellers accordingly). Mr. Leif has kept his suggestion for 40 years now and I for my part find this opinion intriguing. (As Nicholas arrived in NYC from his long East Asia tour on Nov. 09, 1928, he certainly was in town as a member of the Luis Russell Band. The first recordings of this band including Nick (under Allen's name) are from July 16, 1929. He might have liked to be asked to record in the meantime by J.C. Johnson, who hailed from Chicago and might have known Nicholas from there.)

- This is J.C. Johnson's record date, and there is nothing to assume, that he is not the piano player, although Mabel Horsey had been named as such on the Biograph LP 12005 and in RUST 3*. To strengthen this fact, I like to point out, that "Lucky" Roberts said in STORYVILLE 20, p. 62 about Johnson: "He did better with his Five Hot Sparks playing RED HOT HOTTENTOT on QRS." So certainly J.C. Johnson.
- RUST 3* names Ikey Robinson as banjo player, RUST 6* names Charlie Vincento. It has to be pointed out, that Vincento was banjo player with Houdini and Clark's Night Owls two years later, and it may very well be him playing here. But in STORYVILLE 2002/3, p. 56, Ikey Robinson said, that "I made a record with J.C. Johnson with a group called the Hottentots". Robinson might have mixed up the group's name with the recorded title here. But I admit, that I do not know who should have precedence here. I know too little of Vincento and what I hear is not what I have learned to expect from Robinson. So I prefer to name them both in italics! But there certainly is some similarity of this player's style to the guitar playing on the Wabash Trio sides, mainly the use of major chord and alternately diminished chord for two measures each. So, can this player here possibly be Addison, who certainly started out on bjo (see photo of Seminole Syncopators!)?

Notes:

- Rust*2,*3: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown vln; Mabel Horsey (pno).
- Rust*4: possibly Walter Bennett -c; J.C. Higginbotham -tb; Darnell Howard -cl,-as; Mabel Horsey, p; Ikey Robinson -bj.
- Rust*6: possibly Walter Bennett -c; unknown -tb; unknown -cl,-as; Mabel Horsey, p; Charlie Vincento -bj.

Tunes:

346 *Texas Man* key of Eb QRS
 (Intro 5 bars (!) ens)(Verse 12 bars ens)(Chorus 1 22 bars AABA' ens)(Chorus 2 clt)(Chorus 3 tbn 4 bars/ clt 2 bars/ tpt 2 bars/ tbn 4 bars/ ens 10 bars)(Chorus 4 alt)(Chorus 5 ens)

347 *Crying For You* key of Eb QRS
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 12 bars ens)(Chorus 2 bjo)(Chorus 3 clt)(Chorus 4 tbn)(Chorus 5 tpt/ ens)

348 *Red-Hot-Hottentot* key of Eb QRS
 (Intro 4 bars ens - tbn)(Chorus 1 32 bars AA' ens / clt)(Vamp 6 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars tbn - clt)(Chorus 2 alt)(Chorus 3 tpt)(Chorus 4 ens)(Coda 4 bars clt - ens)

026 **LONNIE JOHNSON AND SPENCER WILLIAMS**

New York,

Feb. 18, 1929

Lonnie Johnson, Spencer Williams – voc duet;

J.C. Johnson – pno; Lonnie Johnson – gtr

401622-A It Feels So Good – Part 1

OK 8664,

Document DOCD-5066

401623-D It Feels So Good – Part 2

OK 8664,

Document DOCD-5066

These humorous vocal duets of Lonnie Johnson and Spencer Williams were successful in the late 1920s on the "Race" market, and have Lonnie on his ringing blues guitar and a restrained J.C. Johnson on piano accompanying.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: J.C. Johnson, pno*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: Lonnie Johnson, Spencer Williams, voc duet; J.C. Johnson, pno; Lonnie Johnson, gtr
- Rust*3,*4,*6: not listed

027 **WABASH TRIO**

New York,

Mar. 1929

Walter Bennett – tpt;

J. C. Johnson – pno; Bernard Addison – gtr

3382- Hoppin' Round

GG 1711,

Ristic 26 (LP)

3383-A Lone Western Blues

GG 1714,

Frog DGF 73

3383-B Lone Western Blues

GG 1714

not on LP/CD

3384-A Coal Black Blues

GG 1710,

Historical Records 12 (LP)

3384-B Coal Black Blues

GG 1710,

Frog DGF 73

In lack of the original 78 records and without specification of matrix numbers on my LPs, I have designated the two different takes of 'Coal Black Blues' as given here, take -A (presumably!) being the musically less accurate one contained on Historical 12, take -B (presumably), executed with more security, contained on Ristic 26 and later on Frog DGF 73. But: this is MY own personal definition! The case might easily be the other way 'round! Please, be careful! To be on the safe side, I have put the self assigned take numbers in brackets! Laurens Hertzdaal of The Netherlands, author of a very substantial article on the Memphis Jazzers and Levee Syncopators sessions (see below), and who is an expert in Grey Gull recordings, told me in a letter: "It's very difficult to identify different takes with Grey Gull related recordings. The letters A and B in the wax do not refer to the takes used and alternate takes can only be detected by aural comparison. To prevent confusion, I would like to advise to use numbers indicating a different take instead of letters A and B."

This is a very beautiful recording session with a trio comprising trumpet, piano and guitar. For me, this is a very interesting and demanding combination which is seldom heard. I only know of one other record with an instrumentation like this: The Harlem House Rent Stompers, recorded August 28, 1929. Obviously, this combination needs a virtuoso piano player, and you really can hear one on the Wabashes as well as on the Harlems.

- Trumpet player is Walter Bennett, and he seems to have secured his relationship to J.C. Johnson after the very successful recording session of the Hot Sparks.

- Of the piano player Davies and Wright said: "The piano playing is thoroughly competent throughout, and usually exciting when clearly heard. The style is thoroughly New York - based in stride, though not developed in this direction to the level achieved by James P.. There is no doubt in our minds that this is J.C. Johnson himself." I can only agree with their statement, and would only like to point out, that J.C. Johnson was not a native New Yorker but came from Chicago in 1923 (Chilton). Thus, his musical influences might have been different from the ordinary New York pianist?! Be that as it may, I hear a very rewarding and virtuoso player. Dig his introduction to Coal Black Blues and hear what I mean!

- I certainly do not doubt the presence of Bernard Addison here. The introduction to Hoppin' Round is just what I would expect from Addison: strong solo work combining chordal and single-string playing. Yet, on Coal Black Blues the guitarist plays a solo chorus in single-string throughout, which apparently made the Storyville team thinking of Bobby Leecan. Nevertheless, I do think it is Bernard Addison in his formative years. Beautiful. Davies and Wright name him a "top line musician" and are certainly right so.

Notes:

- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: Louis Metcalfe (cnt); J.C. Johnson (pno); Bernard Addison (gtr).

Tunes Structures:

3382- *Hoppin' Round* key of Eb Grey Gull
 (Intro 8 bars gtr 4 bars / pno 4 bars)(Chorus 1 32 bars AB tpt)(Chorus 2 pno)(Chorus 3 gtr)(Chorus 4 ens / pno middle break)

- 3383- *Lone Western Blues* key of Eb *Grey Gull*
 (Intro 8 bars tpt 2 bars / gtr 2 bars / pno 4 bars)(Chorus 1 24 bars AA'BA' ens)(Verse 18 bars pno)(Chorus 2 22 bars AABA' gtr)(1/2
 Chors 3 14 bars BA' ens)
- 3384-(1) *Coal Black Blues* key of Eb *Grey Gull*
 (Intro 12 bars pno)(Vamp 4 bars tpt)(Chorus 1 12 bars blues ens)(Chorus 2 pno)(Chorus 3 gtr)(Chorus 4 ens)
- 3384-(2) *Coal Black Blues* key of Eb *Grey Gull*
 same as 3384-A
- Discernible differences of takes:
 3384-(1) last bar of intro: pno chord on measure 3, then 2 consecutive eighth notes (Bb - C) leading to chorus 1
 3384-(2) last bar of intro: pno chord on measure 3, then quarter pause

028 **LONNIE JOHNSON AND SPENCER WILLIAMS** New York, Mar. 19, 1929
 Lonnie Johnson, Spencer Williams – voc duet;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 401730-A *Death Is On Your Track* OK 8691, Document DOCD-5066

As on session 024, we have Lonnie Johnson and Spencer Williams duetting vocally, but here with alternating positions. J.C. Johnson attributes a piano accompaniment in minor key, solemn and dramatic!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: J.C. Johnson, pno*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: *Lonnie Johnson, Spencer Williams, voc duet; J.C. Johnson, pno*
- Rust*3,*4,*6: not listed

029 **MARY DIXON** New York, Mar. 20, 1929
 Mary Dixon – voc;
 Ed Allen - cnt; J.C. Johnson – pno
 148109-2 *You Can't Sleep In My Bed* Col 14415-D, Document DOCD-5504
 148110-2 *Daddy You Got Ev'rything* Col 14415-D, Document DOCD-5504
Composer credits are: 148109 (Rose); 148110 (Johnson)

Oh yes, this certainly is Ed Allen's delicate delivery. Played with beautiful taste and softness as known from his many recordings with Clarence Williams. Tasteful J.C. Johnson on piano, very much underrated and undeservedly mostly unknown today.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory, Vol. 2: Vcl acc. cor; p.*
- Mahoney, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Poss Joe Smith, cnt; J.C. Johnson, p.*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: *Ed Allen, cnt; J.C. Johnson, p.*
- Rust*3,*4,*6: *Ed Allen, c; J.C. Johnson, p.*

030 **CLARENCE WILLIAMS AND HIS BAND** New York, Apr. 16, 1929
 Frankie Newton – tpt; Ed Cuffee – tbn;
 Albert Socarras - alt, clt; Cecil Scott – ten, clt;
 Don Frye – pno; (Rudolph Williams) – bjo; (Mack Walker) – bbs
 51230-1 *I'm Not Worrying* Vic V-38630, Frog DGF 37
 51231-1 *Touch-Down* Vic V-38630, Frog DGF 37

Newton was identified aurally by KBR a few years ago and this identification has been confirmed by Newton's discographer, Bob Weir. In view of Williams' habit of using groups of musicians from bands resident in Harlem around the times of his recording sessions, the remaining unidentified musicians may well be from the Cecil Scott band, although the straight alto playing is probably Alberto Socarras, a musician probably employed by Williams for his sight-reading skills.

Notes:

- Rust*2: *Ed Allen (cnt); Ed Cuffee (tbn); Buster Bailey, Albert Socarras (?) (clt, alt); Arville Harris or Ben Waters (clt, ten); Clarence Williams (pno); Leroy Harris (bjo); Cyrus St. Clair (bbs)*
- Rust*3,*4,*6: *unknown c; Ed Cuffee -tb; ?Albert Socarras and another -cl -as; ?J.C. Johnson -p; unknown -bj; unknown -bb*
- Tom Lord, *Clarence Williams: unknown (cnt); Ed Cuffee (tbn); prob Albert Socarras and one other (reeds); poss J.C. Johnson (pno); unknown (bjo); unknown (dms); Clarence Williams (dir)*

031 **GEORGIA GIGOLOS** (*Jasper Davis and his Orchestra*) New York, Apr. 23, 1929
 Ward Pinkett – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt;
 unknown – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Ernest Bass Moore – bbs;
 Lizzie Miles – voc
 148465-3 *Georgia Gigolo* Har 944-H, Frog DGF 38
 148468-2 *It Feels So Good* Har 944-H, Frog DGF 38

These sides have formerly always been issued under the name of "Jasper Davis and his Orchestra" (see Rust*6 below).

I have my doubts as to the trumpet player now. He probably is the same as before, thus Ward Pinkett, yet not as distinct as before. He is not Metcalf, but I am unable to name anybody else. (The recorded sound is rather bad, unfortunately, caused by Harmony's un-timely use of the acoustic recording equipment!)

On trombone we certainly have Henry Hicks again, this time more distinct than on the Jungle Town Stompers session. He is a marvellous player, legitimate and id-lib, and his unfamiliarity to the public may only be explained by his sudden disappearance in 1934. He was a player of the future.

Charlie Holmes is the reed player again, on alto and on clarinet, as before. As on the Jungle Town Stompers sides no second alto can be discovered, nor any other saxophone. As to the listed name of Charlie Grimes – who, by the way, is Clarence Grimes with the Musical

Stevadores - it has to be added that these last two sessions are the only sessions in Rust listed for Charlie Grimes, and that Clarence Grimes did not arrive in New York earlier than 1934 – as for his own documented statement.

The piano player does not solo at all, with the exception of two very short breaks – 1 bar each – in ‘It Feels So Good’ A8, which does not leave any room for suggesting this player’s identity. Three names have been suggested so far - Cliff Jackson, Louis Hooper or J.C. Johnson – but I do not see any reason to attribute what can be heard to any of these names, and I would therefore leave him as unknown.

We certainly hear Elmer Snowden with his own banjo sound.

There cannot be detected anything what might identify the tuba player. He may be Bass Moore, but this association might only be the consequence of the supposed presence of Luis Russell musicians. So, he equally might be someone else.

This Georgia Gigolos session is not as thoroughly arranged as the earlier ones, and thus leaves much more room for ad-lib improvisation than before. It also shows the benefit of Lizzie Miles’s presence.

Notes:

- Rust*2: Louis Metcalfe and another – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes? – alt; Cliff Jackson? – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Moore – bbs; Lizzie Miles - voc

- Rust*3: Louis Metcalf and another – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes? – alt; Cliff Jackson? or Louis Hooper (or possibly J.C. Johnson) – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Ernest Moore – bbs; Lizzie Miles - voc

- Rust*4: Louis Metcalf and another – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes – alt; ?J.C. Johnson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Ernest Moore – bbs; Lizzie Miles – voc. (“Jasper Davis” is probably a pseudonym – for whom?)

- Storyville 147, p.109: Louis Metcalf, unknown, c; Henry Hicks, tb; Charlie Holmes, cl/as; Charlie Grimes, as prob Cliff Jackson, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Bass Moore, bb; Lizzie Miles, v. John Collinson: “This session was originally entered in the files as by The Gigolos and 3 takes were made of each title, take -2 of the first and take -1 of the second being rejected with the others as second choices. ... Jasper Davis is thought to be a pseudonym for Joe Davis, who organized the session. Again, I am not convinced of Jackson’s presence here and would welcome the opinion of others.”

- Storyville 152, p80, Let’s Really Listen: “K.B. Rau comments that the instrumentation of the Jungle Town Stompers and Jasper Davis and his Orchestra is not as given in Rust and elsewhere – what do you hear?”

- Storyville 153, p120: “Several readers agree entirely with Rust for both groups. ... For Jasper Davis they hear t/tb/2as/p/bj/bb/v with one sax player switching to cl on the second side. Again they think there is a suspicion of a second trumpet on both sides.”

- BGR*4: Louis Metcalf, unknown – cnt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – alt, clt; Charlie Grimes – alt; poss Cliff Jackson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Moore – bbs

- Rust*6: Louis Metcalf, c; Henry Hicks, tb; Charlie Holmes, cl, ss, as; Charlie Grimes, as; ?J.C. Johnson, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Ernest Moore, bb; Lizzie Miles, v. All issues as Jasper Davis and his Orchestra. Davis was a Harlem bandleader, but the Columbia files list this session under the Georgia Gigolos name, with no indication of Davis’s presence.

- Storyville 2000 p121: Ward Pinkett?

032 **BLIND WILLIE DUNN’S GIN BOTTLE FOUR**

New York,

May 01, 1929

Joe King Oliver – tpt;

J.C. Johnson – pno; Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson – gtr; unknown – perc, effects;

unknown – voc

401842-B Jet Black Blues

OK 8689,

Document DOCD-5066

401843-B Blue Blood Blues

OK 8689,

Document DOCD-5066

Composer credits are: 401842 (Johnson); 401843 (Johnson)

These sides have been – and still are – a matter of serious discussion, but without a decidedly final solution. My own attempt to find out who is performing here is:

Unequivocally, Eddie Lang and Lonnie Johnson are the guitarists, Johnson being the most extending soloist. Chris Smith, in the booklet to Document DOCD-5066, writes: “Best, perhaps, is to note that, of musicians then playing, Lang had the deepest understanding of harmony in jazz, and Johnson the finest technique in blues; to consider the obvious esteem in which each man held the other; and to listen.” This, in short, best depicts the relation of either guitar player on these sides.

The trumpet player has been listed as Joe King Oliver for many years, before Walter C. Allen published the opinions of other American collectors who thought it was Tommy Dorsey. It is known that he also recorded on trumpet in his early years. But these recordings are different from Oliver’s performances, in style, rhythm, and tone, and they lack Oliver’s little insecurities. And it certainly would be a reasonable thought that Dorsey might have had Oliver in his mind when blowing the trumpet – the more so in the late 1920 when Oliver was still around. But, although I have to admit a certain accordance of either musician’s styles, I still intuitively remain with Oliver as horn-man, here.

The composer-credits of both titles are said to be J.C. Johnson - and not Lonnie Johnson. What would be a first reason to accept J.C. Johnson as pianist. A second reason would be Luckey Roberts’ letter as cited below, although we do not know where Roberts got his knowledge from. Clarence Williams’ opinion re this pianist as related in Laurie Wight’s “King” Oliver: “Definitely not (J.C. Johnson – KBR), he couldn’t play that good!” I cannot follow at all when listening to J.C. Johnson on the ‘Wabash Trio’ performances above (session 025). There might have been some jealousy in Clarence Williams’ words as his own capabilities on piano were clearly less.

The drummer (tom-tom and cymbal) and manipulator of effects – bottle, wood-blocks probably is one single person who might even be the vocalist. But we do not have a name for him, although several names have been suggested in earlier years. (We know for certain that he was not Hoagy Carmichael!)

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: similar personnel to: King Oliver (c); Claude Hopkins (p); Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson (g); Hoagy Carmichael (vo)

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory, Vol. 6*: Joe “King” Oliver (cnt); Lonnie Johnson, Eddie Lang (g); unknown (p); two unknown (effects – percussionists)

- Rust*2,*3,*4: King Oliver (cnt); J.C. Johnson (pno); Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson (gtrs); Hoagy Carmichael (perc, voc)

- Rust*6: King Oliver, c; J.C. Johnson, p; Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson, g; Hoagy Carmichael, perc, voc; unknown, perc

- T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.429: Joe Oliver (or possibly Tommy Dorsey)(cnt); unknown or J.C. Johnson (pno); Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson (gtrs); ?Hoagy Carmichael (vcl/percussion)

- WC Allen & B. Rust, L. Wright, “King” Oliver, p.118: ?Tommy Dorsey, t; unknown, p; Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson, g; unknown, v/percussion/effects

- Storyville 20, p.62, Theo Zwicky, Johnson ... J.C. that Is: “He (J.C. Johnson – KBR) recorded with Lonnie Johnson and King Oliver.”

033 **LONNIE JOHNSON AND SPENCER WILLIAMS**

New York,

May 24, 1929

Lonnie Johnson, Spencer Williams – voc duet;
 J.C. Johnson – pno; Lonnie Johnson – gtr
 401981-A It Feels So Good – Part 3
 401982-B It Feels So Good – Part 4

OK 8697, Document DOCD-5067
 OK 8697, Document DOCD-5067

This session is a continuation of session 024 with that same personnel, but new words. J.C. Johnson is very much in the background and often covered by Johnson's guitar, but playing with great taste and imagination.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: J.C. Johnson, pno*
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: Lonnie Johnson, Spencer Williams, voc duet; J.C. Johnson, pno; Lonnie Johnson, gtr
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: not listed

034 **MARY DIXON**

New York, Jun. 20, 1929

Mary Dixon – voc;
 Ernest Elliott – clt; J. C. Johnson – pno
 148725-3 Old Forsaken Blues
 148726-3 All Around Mama

Col 14442-D, Doc DOCD-5504
 Col 14442-D, Doc DOCD-5504

Composer credits are: 148725 (Roberts); 148726 (Cole)

Oh yes, this is Ernest Elliott in person. After ten years of experience and development he still is his dated self. And it is not surprising that at the start of the Swing era these two sides seem to be his last appearance in a recording studio. He had fallen out of his time.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory, Vol. 2: acc. clt; p.*
 - Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000 Series: vocal, clarinet and piano acc*
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: prob Ernest Elliott, clt; J.C. Johnson, pno
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: ? Ernest Elliott - cl; J.C. Johnson - p

035 **MOONLIGHT REVELLERS**

New York, Aug. 1929

Walter Bennett – tpt; *Isaiah Robinson* – tbn;
 (Albert Nicholas ?) – clt, alt (same as Five Hot Sparks);
 J. C. Johnson – pno; *Charlie Vincento* – bjo

3606-A Alabama Shuffle
 3607-A Memphis Stomp
 3607-B Memphis Stomp
 3608- Baby Knows How (Someone To Love Me)

GG 1775, Ristic 26 (LP)
 GG 1786, Ristic 26 (LP)
 VD 1786, not on LP/CD
 GG 1767, Ristic 26 (LP)

The front line of this session is very probably is exactly the same as that one of the Five Hot Sparks. Yet, these recordings here lack a great part of the fire and tension of the former session. Davies and Wright in their article describe the trombonist as "incompetent" because of an overdose of alcohol. I would go one step further and assume that the whole session is marred by alcohol abuse, and I think that the bottle has been passed around extensively. The Storyville team also list an additional guitar player whom I am unable to hear.

Take -B of Memphis Stomp has been reported to exist some few years back, but unfortunately, I missed to write down the source. Sorry!
 Take numbering after RUST 6* (see L. Hertzdahl's letter below!)

- Very probably Walter Bennett, but subdued and unsecure because of the booze?!

- On trombone we hear the same man as on the Hot Sparks, but here very crude and uncertain, for instance in the intro of Memphis Stomp, where he nearly smashes the whole thing. The bottle! But, if the trombonist on the Swamplanders is Robinson, I do not see any reason to deny his presence here.

- The least intoxicated musician on this session is probably the clarinet/alto player, whose identity I urgently would like know. As Davies and Wright write: "... like the earlier reed man (*this one here*) must have been very well known at the time the records were made." Certainly right, but: who knows about these sessions, who remembers them or who has reminisced on them or who did ask the obvious questions at all? This clarinet player really is fantastic, urgent, melodic and technically superb. Listen to his chromatic ascending triplets in the middle break in chorus 3 in *Alabama Shuffle*!

ADDENDUM N&N 53: From Mr. W. Leif of Winterthur, Switzerland comes a letter suggesting Albert Nicholas as clarinet/alto player on the J.C. Johnson's Five Hot Sparks (and the Moonlight Revellers accordingly). Mr. Leif has kept his suggestion for 40 years now and I for my part find this opinion intriguing.

- There is no piano solo on these titles, and therefore Johnson has to be questioned. Assuming alcohol abuse Johnson might have restrained to an accompanying role on the whole session, but nowhere can one hear at least a single attempt to use his virtuosic strains heard as on the two former sessions. So, this man here might be another pianist. Maybe one of the next two sessions?

- No banjo solos here. This man is very fond of playing trills, just as Vincento does on the Houdinis. So, it may be him. Yet, this man is not as profound as the banjo player on the Hot Sparks. RUST 6* does not suggest a name.

Notes:

- Rust*2: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt, alt; unknown ten; J.C. Johnson (?)(pno); unknown bjo.
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown c; unknown tb; ?George James -cl -as; unknown ts; ?J.C. Johnson -p; unknown bj..

Tunes:

3606-A *Alabama Shuffle* key of Eb *Grey Gull*
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AA' ens)(Chorus 2 clt 16 bars / tpt 16 bars)(Chorus 3 ens - clt breaks)(Chorus 4 ens - bjo breaks)(Coda 4 bars ens)

3607-A *Memphis Stomp* key of Eb *Grey Gull*
 (Intro 8 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AA' ens)(Chorus 2 ens 8 bars / clt 8 bars / ens 8 bars / tpt-tbn 8 bars)(Chorus 3 alt 16 bars / tpt 16 bars)(Chorus 4 tbn 8 bars / clt 6 bars / tpt 2 bars / ens 16 bars)

3607-B *Memphis Stomp* *Grey Gull*
 not inspected, but presumably same as 3607-A (exists in possession of Mr. Hertzdahl)

3608- *Baby Knows How (Someone To Love Me)* key of Eb *Grey Gull*
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(Verse 12 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA ens)(Chorus 2 ens middle 8 alt)(Chorus 3 ens middle 8 tbn)(Chorus 4 alt 16 bars / tpt 8 bars / ens 8 bars)(Coda 4 bars ens)

036 **MARY DIXON** New York, Aug. 24, 1929
 Mary Dixon – voc;
 Louis Metcalf – tpt;
 J.C. Johnson – pno; (*Bernard Addison*) - gtr
 148923-1 Black Dog Blues Col 14459-D, Document DOCD-5504
 148924-2 Fire And Thunder Blues Col 14459-D, Document DOCD-5504
Composer credits are: 148923 (Razaf); 148924 (Cole)

This certainly is Metcalf with his own double-time phrasing as heard so often in Ellington's recordings, and his beautiful and big tone. The trio is completed by J.C. Johnson's rhapsodic style, rhythmically more on the Chicago side. The full-bodied guitar is restricted to plain rhythm playing, with the only exception to play a single-string break in the introduction of 'Black Dog Blues'. With regard of the Wabash Trio recordings of J.C. Johnson of this same month and year I opt for the possible – or probable – presence of Bernard Addison.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory, Vol. 2: Acc. cor; p; g.*
- Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000 Series: probably Louis Metcalf, cnt; J.C. Johnson, p; unknown, g*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: *Louis Metcalf, cnt; J.C. Johnson, -pno; unknown gtr.*
- Rust*3,*4,*6: *Louis Metcalf -c; J.C. Johnson -p; unknown g.*

037 **CLARA SMITH** New York, Sep. 04, 1929
 Clara Smith – voc;
 Ed Allen – cnt; Bennie Morton – tbn;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 148970-2 Papa I Don't Need You Now Col 14462-D, Document DOCD-5368
 148971-2 Tired Of The Way You Do Col 14462-D, Document DOCD-5368
 148972 Breath And Reeches Col unissued not on LP/CD

Talking of trombonists: without any doubt, our man here is Green's colleague from the Henderson band, the young Bennie Morton (yes, he wanted his name to be written Bennie!). I have contributed this judgement to Jan Evensmo's and Ola Ronnow's recent Bennie Morton solography on 'Jazz Archeology', and they have written: "We've omitted this session from the first version of this solography, but K.-B. Rau alerted us! Both Rust and Lord list the trombonist as 'unknown' on this session, but he is clearly HBM (Henry Benny Morton, but his real name was Henry Sterling Morton - KBR); listen to his introduction to 'Tired Of The Way You Do'! These are the first recordings where we can hear HBM as a personal voice with his characteristic sound and vibrato." I have nothing to add here. But, listen to Morton's very beautiful and sensitive accompaniment using his very special long lip-trills which he performed as first player in classic jazz, only very few colleagues using short jumping-trills in this period. And Ed Allen is his very own clear, melodic, outstanding and relaxed self.

Following pianist Lucky Roberts' letter to Swiss collector Theo Zwicky we do know that the pianist on this session is J.C. Johnson (see Storyville 20 – 62!). Hitherto I thought that we had James P. Johnson on piano on these sides. And I have to apology for having ignored this most informative letter all the years I've been working on my website! My sincere fault! But now we know (26-05-2022)! And J.C. Johnson is in a great form here and plays beautifully in his own piano style mid-way between Chicago and New York.

A great and very beautiful recording session this. If we only could hear the third title of this session! I'd give a whole lot for this experience!

Notes:

- Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Acc Ed Allen, cnt; unknown, tbn, unknown, p.*
- Rust*3*4: *Ed Allen -c; unknown -tb; James P. Johnson -p*
- Rust*6: *Ed Allen -c; Charlie Green -tb; unknown -p*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: *Ed Allen, cnt; unknown, tbn; poss James P. Johnson, pno*

038 **MARY DIXON** New York, Oct. 31, 1929
 Mary Dixon – voc;
 Ed Allen - cnt; unknown – clt;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 149455-3 Daddy, You're A Low Down Man Col 14532-D, Document DOCD-5504
 149456-3 Unhappy Blues Col 14532-D, Document DOCD-5504
Composer credits are: 149455 (Johnson); 149456 (Johnson)

Very beautiful Ed Allen of Clarence Williams fame undeniably here with his cornet. There is great and very melodic double-fisted piano playing, stylistically certainly by J.C. Johnson.

I very much doubt Socarras' presence. Socarras technically was a much better player, but he played less bluesy than this player here, and his rhythmic approach was less swinging, but stiffer in the kind of the Caribbean players. I would therefore list this player as unknown. I do not know any player possibly being responsible for these clarinet sounds.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory, Vol. 2: Acc. unknown.*
- Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000 Series: acc. cnt; clt; p; reputedly Ed Allen, Alberto Socarras, J.C. Johnson resp.*
- BGR*2,*3,*4: *Ed Allen, cnt; poss Albert Socarras, clt; J.C. Johnson, pno.*
- Rust*3,*4,*6: *Ed Allen, c; ?Albert Socarras, cl; J.C. Johnson, p.*

039 **CLARA SMITH** New York, Dec. 31, 1929
 Clara Smith – voc;
 Ed Allen – cnt; unknown – clt;
 J.C. Johnson – pno
 149632-3 You Can't Stay No More Col 14497-D, Document DOCD-5368
 149633-3 Let's Get Loose Col 14497-D, Document DOCD-5368
Composer credits are: 149632 (Cole); 149633 (Gray)

It is good old Ed Allen from the Clarence Williams circle here again. He plays in his very own relaxed and melodic style and leads the proceedings with a tranquil dominance. To his side plays a nice sounding clarinetist, joking sometimes with some light gas-pipe features. But these do not sound to be ment seriously. Yet, he lacks an ability to develop melodic lines. What he plays sounds nice and easy, but it does not reach further than chord changes. I have no idea who this player might be. I would assume J.C. Johnson to be the pianist out of stylistic reasons (check his left-hand playing!).

Notes:

- Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Acc includes Ed Allen, cnt.
- BGR*2: Ed Allen, cnt; unknown, pno; probably others
- BGR*3,*4: Ed Allen, c; unknown, cl; unknown, p
- Rust*3: Ed Allen -c; unknown -p; ? others
- Rust*4: Ed Allen -c; unknown -p; others unknown
- Rust*6: Ed Allen -c; unknown -cl; unknown -p

040 CLARA SMITH

Clara Smith – voc;

Ed Allen – cnt;

J.C. Johnson - pno

150584 Why Can't You Do It Now?

150585 Lowland Moan

New York,

Aug. 01, 1930

Col unissued

not on LP/CD

Col unissued

not on LP/CD

It really is a pity that no test of this unissued recording has ever come to be known. Thus a comment is not possible.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Ed Allen, cnt; J.C. Johnson, pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Ed Allen -c; J.C. Johnson -p

041 BENNETT'S SWAMPLANDERS

Walter Bennett – tpt; Isaiah Robinson – tbn; Albert Socarras – clt, alt, flt;

J. C. Johnson – pno; unknown – gtr, bjo; unknown – bbs;

J.C. Johnson – voc (2)

150767-2 Big Ben

150768-2 You Can't Be Mine And Somebody Else's Too

150769-2 Jet Black Blues

New York,

Sep. 05, 1930

Col 14557-D,

Frog DGF 32

Col 14557-D,

Frog DGF 32

Col 14662-D,

Frog DGF 32

Composer credits are: 150767 (Johnson); 150768 (Johnson); 150769 (Johnson)

Walter Bennett appears as band leader here.

- On trumpet unequivocally Walter Bennett!

- Isiah "Trombone Ike" Robinson is listed here for the first time, I think. RUST 6* still leaves him unknown. Yet STORYVILLE 32 - December 1979 - bears a remark in "Afterthoughts", that Graham Russell talked to Isiah "Trombone Ike" Robinson, who said that he made the title Big Ben with "Cuban" Bennett.

Now, there are some problems here. First, "Cuban" Bennett is NOT Walter Bennett! Walter Bennett's nickname was "Jock", whereas "Cuban" Bennett, being Benny Carter's cousin, was a highly regarded trumpet player in Harlem in the twenties. But he never recorded, living a restrained life dominated by alcohol, playing little clubs and obviously lacking any ambition. So, Robinson probably got the two Bennetts mixed up. And second: you won't find a trombonist by the name of Isiah Robinson listed anywhere in Harlem. But: when reading Daniel Hardie's 'Exploring Early Jazz' the other day, I came across a Isiah Robinson as member of the Camellia Orchestra of 1917 in New Orleans being lead by Wooden Joe Nicholas. Searching further I found the name in Rose/Souchon 'New Orleans Jazz Family Album'. Listed here is Isiah (sic) "Big Ike" Robinson as member of several bands, working with Chris Kelly until the latter's death in 1927, having retired in 1937. Halas, there is no mention of him having made trip(s) to New York. But, if we consider him as the possible trombonist, he must have stayed in Harlem for some time, or, alternately, must have made several trips to be recorded with the Hot Sparks (Feb. 1929), the Swamplanders (September 1930)) and possibly the Revellers (August 1929). This New Orleans trombone player was apparently known under two nicknames: "Trombone Ike" and "Big Ike", respectively.

But this trombone player's style here reminds me very much of a New Orleans man, and it is therefore not surprising, that Davies and Wright say, that "both tone and style are very like those of Roy Palmer. However, it seems unlikely that Palmer would have been on the East coast at the time." So, Robinson is a very interesting and likely possibility, and it should be kept in mind, that he, Robinson, as a New Orleans musician, must have had some intimate knowledge of little-known Harlem musicians (naming "Cuban" (!) Bennett) that he probably can only have gathered in Harlem himself!

- Who else could have played a flute like that in Harlem of the late twenties? So, for a long time now, Socarras has been listed as the reed man here. Citing Davies / Wright article: "The Swamplanders clarinet/sax is also a fine musician, but is possessed neither of the same attack nor of the same warmth of tone displaying traits associated with classical training; the story is quite different, though, when he takes to flute on *You Can't Be Mine* and ripples his way through with incredible technique, beautiful tone, and a wonderful sense of music which goes so far beyond the reed work that in spite of reconciliation between reed and flute styles we are inclined to the belief that this may not be the same man." Yet, certainly he is, and the reader is referred to an excellent article on Alberto Socarras in STORYVILLE 90. Re his traits of classical training: it is this feature that obviously makes his time so wooden and unswinging. He had not grown up in jazz surroundings in Cuba.

- On piano J. C. Johnson seems to be undisputed. He also seems to be the vocalist on *You Can't Be Mine*, which is his own composition. In my ears this is a great song, which has been undeservedly little recorded, except for Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Fats Waller in one of his Yacht Club broadcasts. Luckey Roberts in his above-mentioned letter says: "Like most real songwriters, he can't sing, but thought he could. So, he had to have his fling, under his own name on Columbia, and as Slim Johnson on Gennett." OK, but I certainly have heard worse vocals.

- Bernard Addison has been formerly listed as guitarist. This man here plays banjo at least in the first title. I am unable to decide what he plays on the other two titles: maybe some sort of dobroe or any kind of banjo-guitar hybrid? I do not question Addison's identity here. It has been questioned if Addison played banjo at all. He did, as can be seen in a photo of the Seminole Syncopators on the cover of Collector's Items LP 006. ADDITION: In Storyville 78/235 L. Wright says that: "Addison being played these sides he disclaimed his presence saying only that it was "nice work". So, the guitar player's identity remains unknown!

- Last the tuba player. Davies/Wright say: "Also a fine musician is the brass bass player on the Swamplanders who may well be none other than Cyrus St. Clair whose fullness of tone and delicately precise attack have made him - in our book at least - one of the finest, if not THE finest, performer of all time on this instrument." As much as I would like to follow two experts as these two, I am completely unable to do so

here. What they say about St. Clair is absolutely right in my eyes, but this man here does not have a beautiful cloudy tone like St. Clair, and he does not play rhythmically assured as St. Clair does, and in the middle break of chorus 1 of *Big Ben* he nearly makes the rhythm collapse. I would leave this man listed as unknown.

Notes:

- *D. Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: instrumental group, possibly a J.C. Johnson unit.*

- *Rust*2: Louis Metcalfe (tpt); J.C. Higginbotham (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt); J.C. Johnson (pno); Bernard Addison (?) (gtr); unknown (bbs); unknown (vcl).*

- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Walter Bennett -t; unknown -tb; Albert Socarras -cl -f; J.C. Johnson -p; Bernard Addison -g; unknown -bb; unknown -v.*

Tunes:

150767-2 *Big Ben* *key of Eb* *Columbia*

(Intro 8 bars tpt / alt)(Chorus 1 32 bars AA' ens)(Verse 16 bars alt)(Chorus 2 tpt)(Chorus 3 clt)(Chorus 4 tbn 14 bars / ens 18 bars)(Coda 2 bars clt)

150768-2 *You Can't Be Mine And Somebody Else's Too* *key of F* *Columbia*

(Intro 8 bars flt)(Verse 10 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AA' flt - tpt)(Chorus 2 voc - flt)(Chorus 3 tpt 24 bars / ens 8 bars)

150769-2 *Jet Black Blues* *key of Eb* *Columbia*

(Chorus 1 12 bars blues ens)(Chorus 2 ens)(Chorus 3 tbn)(Chorus 4 clt)(Chorus 5 tpt - ens)

042 **CLARA SMITH**

New York,

Sep. 09, 1930

Clara Smith – voc;

unknown – tpt;

J.C. Johnson - pno

150685-7 *Lowland Moan*

Col 14580-D,

Document DOCD-5369

150783-3 *Woman To Woman*

Col 14580-D,

Document DOCD-5369

Composer credits are: 150685 (-); 150783 (-)

Now, this really is a crazy recording: Ed Allen is documented by the Columbia files, but this trumpeter is a different man! No doubt. This man plays in a more modern and seasonable trumpet style, using rhythm and vibrato different from Henry 'Red' Allen. He likes to play augmented fifths on dominant chords which you would never hear from Ed Allen (compare sessions 035/036/037). He might be found in the ranks of the big bands of this time, but I am unable to attribute a name. The pianist might well be J.C. Johnson as listed. But do we really know?

Notes:

- *Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Files: Ed Allen, cnt; J.C. Johnson, p.*

- *BGR*2: Ed Allen, cnt; J.C. Johnson, pno. "The cornet sounds most unlike Ed Allen for this date, despite the file evidence."*

- *BGR*3: Ed Allen, cnt; J.C. Johnson, pno. "The cornet sounds most unlike Ed Allen for this date, despite the file evidence for naming him."*

- *BGR*4: Ed Allen, c; J.C. Johnson, p. "The cornet sounds most unlike Ed Allen on this session, though he is named in the Columbia files."*

- *Rust*3: The recording files state that the accompaniment for the next (this one – KBR) session is the same as on the last, but the cornet does not sound like Ed Allen.*

- *Rust*4,*6: unknown c, p (not as last above)*

K.-B. Rau

13-05-2022

30-05-2022

15-01-2024