

THE RECORDINGS OF BENNETT'S SWAMPLANDERS

An Annotated Tentative Personello-Discography

WALTER A. „Jock“ BENNETT (trumpet)

Reportedly from Pittsfield, Mass., or Chicago. An older man, knew FH from New York days. Reportedly recorded with J.C. Johnson (Feb/29), Bennett's Swamplanders (Sep/30), Wilmoth Houdini (1931). Played with Fats Pichon (1931); Allie Ross (1931); Savoy Bearcats (1932-33); Eli Rice (1934-37). Joined Fletcher Henderson c Sep/42 to c June/43; played lead horn, high notes, was "tremendous" according to fellow musicians; doubled on piano. Believed to be deceased; not listed in 1961 Local 802 Directory. (W.C. Allen, Hendersonia)

The three sides of 'Bennett's Swamplanders' unfortunately are the only recordings bearing Walter Bennett's name. For other recordings of this delightful trumpet player see 'Bennett, Walter' elsewhere on this website!

This personello-discography is based on RUST, JAZZ AND RAGTIME RECORDS 1897 - 1942.

Personnels 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: **Bennett's Swamplanders**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Bennett's Swamplanders*
- 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: (*Bennett's Swamplanders*)

When feeling certain without a musician's documented presence, I have not refrained from altering Rust's statements without using italics.

In any case, my statements are open to discussion and I would appreciate any contribution - pro or contra!

As always in my discographies on this website I have written recording sessions with their headings, dates, titles and names of musicians in italics, whenever I am convinced that the eponymous musician of this discography is not part of the accompanying group of this session!

Documented names of musicians if known – in recording ledgers or on record labels – are listed in bold letters.

This discography still is - and will certainly be - a work in progress for a long time, if not eternally. Yet, on the way to a definite discography of all jazz recordings before 1942 - which certainly will never be possible - it is intended to fill some gaps that have not been treated before.

BENNETT'S SWAMPLANDERS

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Walter Bennett – tpt; Isaiah 'Big Ike' 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

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

New York,

Sep. 05, 1930

Col 14557-D,

Frog DGF 32

Col 14557-D,

Frog DGF 32

Col 14662-D,

Frog DGF 32

Walter Bennett appears as band leader here, and these recordings should be regarded as reference for all his other recordings (see 'Walter Bennett' elsewhere on this website!).

- On trumpet unequivocally Walter Bennett!

- Isaiah "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 (sic – KBR) "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 an Isiah (sic – KBR) Robinson as member of the Camellia Orchestra of 1917 in New Orleans being led by Wooden Joe Nicholas. Searching further I found the name in Rose/Souchon '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 un-swinging. 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.

- Bernard Addison has been formerly listed as guitarist. This man here plays banjo at least in the first and second title. I am unable to decide what he plays on the third title: 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 disclaimed his presence saying only that it was *"nice work"*. So, the banjo/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)