

THE RECORDINGS OF ELMER SNOWDEN AND HIS BANDS

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

In 1973 the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors (IAJRC) issued a LP devoted to Elmer Snowden and his recordings. I knew that he was the leader of the early Ellington band somehow, and that he led a couple of other bands. But as I did not like his kind of banjo playing I did not care. The above-named LP changed my attitude drastically. Although I owned the Musical Stevedores on a very old Pirate EP and the Jungle Town Stompers on an equally old Phillips EP, the Jasper Davis then later on a Historical LP, I had not realized that these recordings had to be seen as a coherent body of jazz music. And a very beautiful and rewarding one!

But these recordings only make the second half of this investigation. The first three sessions feature three Elmer Snowden working bands, part of the very famous Washingtonians first – without Duke Ellington here –, then a band Snowden lead when he had left the Ellington band alone – officially called Snowden´s Orchestra as on the photo, but here under Mamie Smith´s name -, and at last the band he fronted at the Nest Club in 1927, miraculously bearing the trombonist´s name.

This personnelo-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: **Leon Abbey**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Leon Abbey*
- 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: (*Leon Abbey*)

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.

ELMER SNOWDEN BANDS

001 PERRY BRADFORD'S JAZZ PHOOLS	New York,	Feb. 1924
unknown, Bubber Miley – tpt; <i>Charlie Irvis</i> – tbn;		
unknown – clt; <i>Otto Hardwick</i> – alt; (<i>Coleman Hawkins</i>) – ten;		
<i>Perry Bradford</i> – pno; <i>Elmer Snowden</i> – bjo; <i>Harry Hull</i> – bbs		
1668-1	Charlestown, South Carolina	Pm 20309, Frog DGF 56
1668-2	Charlestown, South Carolina	Pm 20309, Timeless CBC 1-073
1669-1	Hoola Boola Dance	Pm 20309, Frog DGF 56
1669-3	Hoola Boola Dance	Pm 20309, Timeless CBC 1-073

It seems that we have one of those complete take-overs of bands here that have been mentioned in my earlier articles on the Perry Bradford recordings. Just as Clarence Williams did in January 1926 Bradford obviously engaged part of the Ellington band – Snowden still the leader in early February 1924, but replaced by George Francis later on Feb. 22, 1923 – adding a tenor sax and a tuba player and Bradford himself on piano.

Re trumpet players I would like to follow Scherman/Eriksson assuming Bubber Miley and an unknown colleague who stays very much in the background and obviously plays straight parts. This man is impossible to identify, but certainly is not the exuberant Johnny Dunn as we know him. We hear a trombone player – unlisted by Rust – who very probably is Charlie Irvis stylistically and tonally, although not as distinct as desirable.

On clarinet we hear a musician who might be found with Mamie Smith on her session of August 31, 1926. A clarinet player, who plays in a much more fashionable and modern style than Bushell – he himself denying his presence – or Fuller, who is usually listed for this very

Mamie Smith date, with interesting melodic phrases - unheard of by Fuller – especially in ‘I Once Was Yours’ and a completely different vibrato. On also then we find a sax player with a romantically singing legato style, rather uncommon for this time. When assuming Miley’s and Irvis’ presence, who might be easier to suggest than Otto Hardwick, at this time with the Washingtonians at the Hollywood Club. The style is Hardwick’s, only the tone is a bit harsh but cannot exclude the possibility of Hardwick’s presence.

Contrary to Scherman/Eriksson’s statement the tenor sax player plays on both titles and can easily be heard on the second title unisono with the trumpet in the verse and later behind the prominent alto. As with the trumpet players I am following their assumption of Hawkins on tenor, only that I wonder why he does not solo. But I have to admit that I do not have any better proposal as there were not so many tenor sax players at this time playing in this advanced manner. Hawkins had not been influential that early and consequently there were no other tenor sax players playing in his very own style. The riff the tenorist plays in the last chorus of the first title seems to be ad-libbed and has a distinct Hawkins flavour. Also this player has been left out by Rust.

I hear Bradford’s typical piano tinkling behind the clarinet solo of the first title, avoiding all the bass notes as he mostly does. On the second title he delivers some more essential and supporting playing. I would suggest to listen to the banjo breaks in the verse of the second title. To me this is Elmer Snowden, very different from Mitchell and Speed. And in early February the Washingtonians still were Snowden’s band, Snowden leaving later that month (Dutton, Birth of a Band, Storyville 80-44). The tuba might be Hull as listed in Rust or might even have been Bob Escudero brought over from the Henderson band by Hawkins.

So I am convinced that we have 4/5 of the early Ellington band here, together with some colleagues from other bands.

Notes:

- Rust*2: ‘probably similar to’ Johnny Dunn or June Clark ? (cnt); Jimmy Harrison (tbn); “Smitty” (clt); Herschel Brassfield (clt/alt); Charles Smith (pno); Samuel Speed (bjo).

- Rust*3, *4, *6: Johnny Dunn, Bubber Miley – c; Herb Flemming – tb-dir; ? Garvin Bushell – Herschel Brassfield – cl-as; ? Leroy Tibbs – p; Samuel Speed – bj; ? Harry Hull – bb.

- Schermann/Eriksson: Bubber Miley, unknown (tp); prob Charlie Irvis (tb); poss Garvin Bushell (cl, ss); poss Herschel Brassfield (as); Coleman Hawkins (ts -1,2); Leroy Tibbs (p); Samuel Speed (bj); poss Harry Hull (bb). “Rust lists two trumpets, Johnny Dunn and Bubber Miley. One of them is prominent and is most certainly BM, the other one can be heard faintly in the background and is impossible to identify aurally. The latest edition of Rust doesn’t list the trombonist and tenor sax player, whom we have identified as Charlie Irvis and Coleman Hawkins respectively, the latter audible only in the first title (which, incidentally, has nothing to do with James P. Johnson’s famous composition). An earlier edition of Rust has Herb Flemming as trombonist and leader, but this seems unlikely aurally.”

- Bushell/Tucker p. 159 “I doubt if I was playing clarinet on this session, because at the time I was playing saxophone with Wooding and wouldn’t have taken a clarinet date. That sounds like Brassfield on saxophone. I don’t think Bubber Miley would have been on a date with Johnny Dunn, since by this time he’d established himself down at the Kentucky Club with Ellington.” (Miley joined the Washingtonians at the Hollywood Café (later Kentucky Club) in the fall of 1923! KBR).

I would like to refer the reader/listener to Names & Numbers 70 where I have discussed this session at length with the following result:

“I am convinced that we have 4/5 of the early Ellington band here, together with some colleagues from other bands.”

It has to be added that in February 1924 they still were Elmer Snowden’s Washingtonians at the Hollywood Club in Harlem (Frank Dutton, Storyville 80, p.48), but featuring all of the stalwarts of the early Ellington band of late 1924.

Discernible differences of takes:

1668-1	tpt chorus after bridge: tpt plays 3 identical 2-bar phrases, starts 7 th bar with same phrase, altering melody in bar 8
1668-2	tpt chorus after bridge: tpt plays 3 identical 2-bar phrases, continuing 7 th bar with different melody
1669-1	2 nd verse (after 8-bar intro and 1 st 16-bar verse): bar 3/4 tenor tries to find his part behind alto – silent on first 3 beats
1669-2	2 nd verse (after 8-bar intro and 1 st 16-bar verse): bar 3/4 tenor in harmony with alto throughout

002 MAMIE SMITH	Jazz Hounds	New York,	c. Sep. 1924
Mamie Smith – voc;			
Horace Holmes – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn; Ernie Bullock – clt;			
Leslie A. Hutch Hutchinson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bob Ysaguirre – bbs; Norman Buster – dms, marimba			
31669	Lost Opportunity Blues	Ajax 17058,	Doc DOCD 5360
31670	Good Time Ball	Ajax 17058,	Doc DOCD 5360

The band is obviously taken from Elmer Snowden’s Orchestra of the time (see notes). There is a photo of this band (Snowden’s Orchestra) in Perry Bradford’s ‘Born with the Blues’ on page 102. This photo does not show Percy Glascoe (identification of shown musicians in Storyville 106/150). From that it seems likely that all since listed personnels are settled on a beat copy of this Ajax record in Walter C. Allen’s possession (see notes). My own reference is Document DOCD-5360 and the source record for these titles obviously is not better than Allen’s. So, I have to admit not to be able to discriminate one or two cornets/trumpets, but it sounds like two in the very first bars of ‘Lost Opportunity Blues’. As Horace Holmes remembered the session and named himself as the only cnt I follow his statement. I hear trombone and a clarinet, no discernible saxophone. Whether it is Ernie Bullock (obviously the same man as listed with J.R. Morton’s Red Hot Peppers of March 20, 1930 (?)) – who is on the photo - or Percy Glascoe who cannot be heard very favourably on several Lem Fowler sides in 1925/6, I cannot really distinguish. Comparing this clarinetist here with Glascoe of the Fowler sides I tend to name Bullock! I have nevertheless listed Jackson as alto player here, because I hear a tuba – no bass sax! – and if this is correct, Jackson has to play sax or not be present at all on the session. The bass notes are very sharp cut like from a brass bass, not like those from a bass saxophone (the photo, by the way, shows Jackson doubling on baritone sax, not bass sax, which certainly is more appropriate for an alto player, as alto and baritone are pitched Eb). I have therefore added Ysaguirre on tuba as shown in the photo. Hutchinson was a well acquainted and respected pianist who unfortunately only made two other recordings in 1923 and 1927 (Rust*6). He is heard very favourably here. The drummer can be heard playing the blocks and an occasional cymbal crash, together with some marimba accompaniment in ‘Good Time Ball’.

So, I have to admit not to be able to discriminate one or two cornets/trumpets, but it sounds like two in the very first bars of ‘Lost Opportunity Blues’. I hear trombone and a clarinet, no discernible saxophone. From my knowledge of Jake Frazier’s playing I have to certify his presence here. Whether it is Ernie Bullock (obviously the same man as listed with J.R. Morton’s Red Hot Peppers of March 20, 1930 (?)) – who is on the photo - or Percy Glascoe who cannot be heard very favourably on several Lem Fowler sides in 1925/6, I cannot really distinguish. Comparing this clarinetist here with Glascoe of the Fowler sides I tend to name Bullock! I have nevertheless listed Jackson as alto player here, because I hear a tuba – no bass sax! – and if this is correct, Jackson has to play sax or not be present at all on the session.

‘Hutch’ Hutchinson was a well acquainted and respected pianist who unfortunately only made three other recordings in 1923, 1924 and 1927 (Rust*6). He is heard very favourably here.

Elmer Snowden plays a very strong, yet rudimental rhythm without his later multiple banjo strumming.

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ADDITION 160418: Close inspection of these sides in better condition have shown that there is only one trumpet present – not known whether Aiken or Holmes – and that there is no alto saxophone. The only reed instrument is clarinet. The personnel should thus be corrected!

Notes:

- RR 57-10: "Horace Holmes (*Jazz Music Vol. 15, No. 4*) says that the Elmer Snowden band signed to accompany Mamie Smith. He recalled the two titles on Ajax 17058 but thought they were rejected, and gave the personnel of the Snowden band as: Holmes, cornet; Gene Aiken, trumpet; Jake Frazier, trombone; Ernie Bullock, Percy Glascoe, Alex Jackson, reeds; Leslie Hutchinson, piano; Elmer Snowden, banjo.

- RR 63-12: Walter C. Allen: "Ajax 17058 : no marimba on 31670. Instr. (tpt, tbn, clt, alt, p, bjo, bass sax) agrees pretty much with Horace Holmes' personnel. Bass sax man would be Alex Jackson; Clarinet, Percy Glascoe. My copy is so beat that I cannot tell whether or not two cornets are present, as Holmes claimed."

- BGR*2,*3: Gene Aiken, Horace Holmes, cnts; Jake Frazier, tbn; Percy Glascoe, Ernie Bullock, sax; Leslie A. Hutchinson ("Hutch"), pno; Elmer Snowden, bjo; Alex Jackson, bsx; Norman Buster, dms (1).

- BGR*4: Gus Aiken, Horace Holmes – cnt; Jake Frazier – tbn; Ernie Bullock, Percy Glascoe – clt, sax; Leslie A. Hutchinson (Hutch) – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Alex Jackson – bsx; Norman Buster – dms

- Rust*3: Horace Holmes or Gene Aiken (but hardly both), c; Jake Frazier, tb; Ernie Bullock or Percy Glascoe, as; Alex Jackson, bsx; Leslie A. Hutchinson ("Hutch"), p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Norman Buster, d, marimba (obviously based on W.C. Allen).

- Rust*4,*6: Horace Holmes or Gene Aiken, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Ernie Bullock or Percy Glascoe, as; Alex Jackson, bsx; Leslie A. Hutchinson, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Norman Buster, d, marimba.

- W. Bryant, *AJAX Records (Mainspring Pres, 2013)* list the following personnel "as per Snowden" : Gus Aiken (trumpet), Jake Frazier (trombone), Alex Jackson (bass saxophone), Leslie Hutchinson (piano), Elmer Snowden (banjo). (No mention of alto sax, clarinet and drums! Did Elmer really listen? - KBR)

Structure of tunes:

31669 Lost Opportunity Blues Key of C Ajax 17058
(Intro 4 bars ens)(Verse 20 bars voc – ens)(Bridge 8 bars voc – ens)(Chorus 22 bars voc – ens)

31670 Good Time Ball Key of C Ajax 17058

(Intro 4 bars ens)(Vamp 4 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars AA'AB voc – ens)(A1 chorus 16 bars AA' voc – ens)(A2 chorus 16 bars AA' clt – ens)(A3 chorus 16 bars voc – ens)(Coda 4 bars pno – ens)

003 TE ROY WILLIAMS AND HIS ORCHESTRA

New York,

May 25, 1927

Rex Stewart – cnt; Te Roy Williams – tbn;

Joe Garland – alt, clt; unknown – ten, clt;

Freddie Johnson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bob Ysaguirre – bbs; Walter Johnson – dms;

Teddy Nixon - arr

144214-2 Oh! Malinda

Har 439-H,

Frog DGF 38

144215-3 Lindbergh Hop

Har 439-H,

Frog DGF 38

As you may read below in the notes, this was Elmer Snowden's Nest Club Band. How it came to be re-named after the trombonist is a miracle nobody can explain.

For many years now, the trumpet player on this session has been a matter of discussion, beginning with Walter C. Allen's notice in Storyville 21 (see below). I remember that I assumed this player to be Tommy Ladnier when I first heard these sides on the IAJRC 12 LP. And it is interesting to see that Rust immediately changed his personnel according to Allen's note. Most interesting for me is the note of VJM 169 (see below) which cites a participant of this session – Bob Ysaguirre - claiming it was Rex Stewart, yet. When listening it becomes apparent that the trumpet certainly is not far from Ed Allen, but this certainly is not Allen's tone and vibrato. As I have got to know Rex Stewart's development into a fine trumpet player in the Armstrong mould after Louis' arrival in New York, I would also think that he could be able to play in such a southern style after some years of gigging in Harlem. Accordingly, I would opt for Stewart.

Te Roy Williams was not the bandleader, and it is an unsolved question how he could be put as bandleader on the record label.

Joe Garland was a player of all the saxophones. Performing mostly on tenor sax in later years he was mainly engaged as an alto sax man cum clarinetist in the twenties. I therefore think that he is on alto here and that he is the clarinet soloist (see also Chick Webb's Jungle Band session, where Garland is on alto and clarinet, and not Louis Jordan!). He can be heard in an alto break just after the tenor solo in A3 of 'Oh! Malinda'.

It is definitely known that Prince Robinson arrived at exactly this recording date in Rio de Janeiro as part of the Leon Abbey band (Storyville 73, p.8). Thus, Robinson – who was a tenor player and clarinetist throughout – cannot be present. The tenor solo spots do affirm exactly this fact! But then, who is the tenor player in A3 of the first title? He is a player below Robinson's level! He may also be found playing with the Okeh Melody Stars. At last, it has to be stated that other than Walter Allen's suggestion there only are two reed men on this session! Freddie Johnson is on piano, but I wonder why Rust lists a second pianist who is heard nowhere.

Snowden is the bandleader anyhow, and he plays his banjo in his very own strumming way.

Bob Ysaguirre of early Armand Piron and later Don Redman fame obviously is the tuba player, and Walter Johnson – who later, with Fletcher Henderson, "invented" the modern jazz style of drumming – is heard in his first recording session, playing quite "old-fashioned".

Teddy Nixon, Fletcher Henderson's trombonist of 1923/24, is said to be the arranger of these titles.

Notes:

- Rust*2: ? Rex Stewart – cnt; Te Roy Williams – tbn; Prince Robinson – clt; Joe Garland – clt, ten; Freddie Johnson and another – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bob Ysaguirre – bbs; Walter Johnson - dms

- Rust*3,*4: Ed Allen – c; Re Roy Williams – tb -ldr; Prince Robinson – cl; unknown – cl – as; Joe Garland – cl – ts; Freddie Johnson and another – p; Elmer Snowden – bj; Bob Ysaguirre – bb; Walter Johnson – d.

- IAJRC 12, cover text: Snowden: "Te Roy Williams was my trombone player, who was on notice when this record was made. ... This was my Nest Club Band, and to this day, I can't figure out how his name got on the label."

- Storyville 21, p.112: "In Jazz Information, Vol.2 No.2 there appeared a photo of the Elmer Snowden Orchestra at the Nest Club in '1925'. The personnel was Rex Stewart (cnt), TeRoy Williams (tbn), Joe Garland and Prince Robinson (saxes), Freddie Johnson (pno), Elmer Snowden (bjo), Bob Ysaguirre (bbs) and Walter Johnson (dms). So far so good. But in a copy of Melody Maker in 1942 (?) someone proposed that this personnel applied to the Te Roy Williams recordings on Harmony 439-H: Oh! Malinda (Razaf and Johnson) / Lindbergh Hop (Nixon and Snowden). Since that time, this personnel has come to be accepted by Rust and everyone else, with absolutely no corroboration or foundation, purely as the result of someone's suggestion. It seems time to set the record straight. By this time, even Elmer Snowden believes that this is the correct personnel, probably because someone showed him 'the book'. (But did that someone actually play him the record ???) I have a fine copy of the record, and on listening, the instrumentation appears to be: trumpet, trombone, three clarinets

and saxes, piano, banjo, tuba and drums. The trumpeter, to my ears, is Ed Allen and nothing at all like Rex Stewart. I admit that I am not certain of all the facets of Rex's style, but I do know my Ed Allen from his Clarence Williams work, and Rex never played in that lovely 'singing' style or with that tone. The trombone, apparently, is Te Roy Williams, for obvious reasons. One title being a band original, co-composed by Elmer Snowden, would indicate that his presence on banjo is a distinct possibility, but who 'Nixon' might be, and which particular 'Johnson' wrote 'Oh! Malinda', is something I do not know. Incidentally, is it not strange that as important a Harlem bandleader as Elmer Snowden never recorded under his own name?"

- Rust*6: Ed Allen, c; Te Roy Williams, tbn; Prince Robinson, cl, as; Joe Garland, cl, ts; Freddie Johns, and another, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Bob Ysaguirre, bb; Walter Johnson, d.

- VJM 169-19: "Juan Carlos Lopez (Spain) interviewed Bob Ysaguirre, Te Roy Williams' bass player, who was very insistent that it was Rex Stewart who plays cornet on the Te Roy Williams Harmony session (see Doctor Jazz Mag. #205, June 2009). The interview took place in 1979 together with Al Vollmer. Incidentally Richard Rains notes that 'Oh! Malinda' was recorded for Vocalion – but rejected – seven weeks earlier by ... Rex Stewart & His Orchestra! Coincidence?"

Structure of tunes:

144214-2 Oh Malinda Key of F/Bb/F Harmony 439-H

(Intro 8 bars ens)(A1 chorus 32 bars AABA tpt16, clt8, tpt6, saxes2)(Verse 8 bars tpt – saxes)(A2 Chorus 32 bars AABA saxes16, tbn8, saxes6, tpt2 modulation to Bb)(B1 chorus AABA clts16, pno8, clts6, brass2)(Bridge 2 bars brass modulation to F)(A3 chorus 32 bars AABA ten14, alt2, ens16)(Coda 4 bars ens)

composer credit is: Razaf and Johnson

144215-3 Lindbergh Hop Key of Bb Harmony 439-H

(Intro 4 bars pno - clts)(Verse 1 10 bars AA' clts)(Verse 2 10 bars AA' pno – ens)(A1 chorus 16 bars AA' saxes)(A2 chorus 16 bars AA' tpt)(A3 chorus 16 bars AA' tbn)(Bridge 8 bars ens - tpt and clt breaks)(A4 chorus 16 bars AA' brass - clts)(A5 chorus 16 bars AA' ens tpt lead)(A6 chorus 16 bars AA' clts – brass8, saxes – brass8)(A7 chorus 16 bars AA' ens)(Coda 2 bars bbs – ens)

composer credit is: Snowden and Nixon

004 MUSICAL STEVEDORES

New York,

Jan. 30, 1929

Ward Pinkett – tpt, scat voc; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt;

Cliff Jackson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bud Hicks – bbs; unknown – percussion effects;

unknown - arr

147899-3 Happy Rhythm

Col 14406-D,

Frog DGF 32

147900-3 Honeycomb Harmony

Col 14406-D,

Frog DGF 32

These two titles are not just straight-ahead jazz performances, but they are distinct – and beautiful – little compositions, by all means, in a sense of – for instance – Duke Ellington's creations. Composer credits for both items are "Williams", without any first name. This might have led to the assumption that Spencer Williams, one of the early groups of jazz composers (think of 'Shim-Me-Sha-Wobble'), could be responsible for the authorship – and the piano part here.

For all the years I have listened to these sides – they had been part of a long deleted Swedish EP Pirates 514 – it had been a firm and fixed truth that Louis Metcalfe – he very probably also on the following three sessions – was the trumpet player on these titles. But Storyville 2000, p. 121, reports information as to the possible presence of Ward Pinkett on trumpet and on vocal here. And indeed, if you listen closely and without pre-fixed opinion the trumpet sounds do correspond with what we all know of the brilliant Mr. Pinkett. And we also know that Pinkett could be a fantastic growl-man, what can be heard exemplarily in the second title. There is no second trumpet player!

The trombonist is Henry Hicks, one of the main-stays of the early Mills' Blue Rhythm Band. Born in 1904 he played with the Wilberforce Collegians aka Benny Carter's Savoy Play Boys under Benny Carter's leadership in 1928/9 – which in itself is a great recommendation – and later joined the Mills' Blue Rhythm Band to disappear into oblivion in 1934. He was a first-class hot soloist, and Snowden certainly became aware of his qualities to hire him for the four sessions of early 1929 dealt with here. Further proof of his importance is Jan Evensmo's presenting him in his renowned series of "Solographies" – one among only four trombonists in this series.

On the reed instruments we hear the great Charlie Holmes from Boston, later one of the star soloists of the Luis Russell band. At the time of these recordings, he certainly also was one of the few highly gifted youngsters on the Harlem jazz scene. He plays alto sax, soprano and clarinet on these three issued sessions, and can be assumed on the unissued 'Six Scrambled Eggs' session as well. As to the listed name of Charlie Grimes – who, by the way – is Clarence Grimes with the Musical Stevedores – it has to be added that these Snowden 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 (see Sepia Serenaders, below!).

As said before, Spencer Williams has been assumed as piano player because of the composer credits of both titles. Yet, the piano bass notes with their shifting of the meter are so decidedly and typically of Cliff Jackson that he himself must be listed as pianist. Most of the discographies – including John Collinson's in Storyville 147 – assume or agree in Cliff Jackson's presence as pianist. I myself have to reduce my own assumption a bit because of the lack of Jackson's otherwise so apparent rhythmic strength. Unfortunately, Spencer Williams can only be found two times in the index to Rust*6: as pianist of the 'Six Scrambled Eggs' (see below) and as singer with 'Freddie Johnson - Arthur Briggs and their All-Star Orchestra in Paris, France, July 1933 (and he very probably was in Europe at about this recording date).

This then leaves us without any recorded example of Williams' piano style, and makes comparing impossible.

On banjo, recognizable by his own personal and very busy banjo style with up-and-down strumming, tremolos and trills – as opposed to the strong and plain rhythm playing of for instance a Dave Wilborn or a Buddy Christian – is Elmer Snowden, he himself sometimes the leader of up to five bands at the same time as stated elsewhere.

Bud Hicks is a name only listed once in Rust – for this session – and I am unable to name any band of importance in the Harlem years of which he might have been a member. But he definitely plays with beauty and sensitivity and makes good rhythm. As suggested in Storyville 154 below, you may hear some sort of percussion-strokes on a drum – or a suitcase, or whatever – between the piano solo and the scat vocal (F trio strain) and at the very end of the item. This might have been Mr. Joe Davis himself, who obviously – although not a musician himself – was fond of taking part in the recording sessions he organized.

Notes:

- Rust*2: Louis Metcalfe – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Grimes, Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Cliff Jackson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Edwards – bbs; unknown – scat voc

- Rust*3: Freddie Jenkins, Louis Metcalfe – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Clarence Grimes, Charlie Holmes – clt, sop, alt; Spencer Williams? – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bud Hicks – bbs; two unknown – scat voc

- IAJRC 12, cover text: Snowden: "These sessions were all made around the same time. Some sound like Ted Nixon arrangements. He was my trombone player, and we wrote Lindbergh Hop together. Joe Davis used to throw in so many musicians that I couldn't keep track. We used to call Henry Hicks "Reverend" because he was so quiet. Charlie Holmes sounded a lot like Hodges, but on this record (Happy Rhythm) he sounds like Procope. We called him "Pickles". I used to get \$25.00 a side in those days, and we recorded with all the companies. The toughest one was Edison. We couldn't finish until the record was perfect."

- Rust*4: Freddie Jenkins, Louis Metcalf – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Clarence Grimes, Charlie Holmes – clt, sop, alt; Cliff Jackson – pno-cymbal; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bud Hicks – bbs; scat voc
 - Storyville 147, p.108: Freddie Jenkins, Louis Metcalf, t; Henry Hicks, tb; Clarence Grimes, cl/ss; Charlie Holmes, cl/as; prob Cliff Jackson, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Bud Hicks, bb; 2 unknown, v. John Collinson: “I doubt that Jackson is the pianist on this session, but lacking definite information it is included. Columbia files show that 3 takes of each title were recorded, with the first of each being rejected and the second marked as 2nd choice.”
 - Storyville 154, p.160, Let’s Really Listen: “Brian Williams suggests we listen to ‘Happy Rhythm’ by the Musical Stevedores with reference to the rhythm section in the second half of the side.”
 - Storyville 2000, p.121: “Clarence Grimes says he did not reach New York until 1934 and is thus not the clarinet and soprano player on the Musical Stevedores coupling. Charlie Holmes has identified himself on these sides, playing cl/ss/as and Greely Walton identifies the scat vocalist as Ward Pinkett, who is thus more likely on trumpet than Louis Metcalf, who is currently listed.”
 - Rust*6: Freddie Jenkins, Louis Metcalf – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Clarence Grimes – clt; Charlie Holmes – sop, alt; Cliff Jackson – pno-cymbal; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bud Hicks – bbs; scat voc

Structure of tunes:

147899-3 Happy Rhythm Key of Ab /Db Columbia 14406-D
 (Intro 6 bars ens)(A strain a 16 bars AA ens in part harmony)(B strain b 16 bars AA' tpt)(C strain c 16 bars AB tbn14, ens4)
 (D strain a 16 bars AA clt)(Bridge 4 bars ens modulating to Db)(E trio strain 32 bars AABA tpt16, tbn8, clt6, bjo2)(F trio strain 32 bars AABA pno16, scat-voc8, ens8)(Coda 2 bbs1, perc1)

composer credit is: Williams

147900-3 Honeycomb Harmony Key of Bb /Eb /Bb (Gm) Columbia 14406-D
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(A strain a 16 bars AA clt -acc tpt, tbn)(B strain b 8 bars tpt)(C strain b 8 bars scat-voc6, bbs2)(Bridge 4 bars pno)(D strain c 8+2 bars alt8, bbs/ens2)(E strain a 16+2 bars AA tpt8, clt6, ens 2+2)

composer credit is: Williams

005 SWANEE RIVER STOMPERS

New York, Feb. 19, 1929

Instrumentation and personnel unknown, but possibly similar to sessions 004, 006, 008, 009

Ken Macomber - arr

E-29173 Sunflower Blues Voc test unissued not on LP/CD

E-29174 Windy City Wobble Voc test unissued not on LP/CD

I received an e-mail from Steven Lasker regarding the recordings of the ‘Swanee River Stompers’ with his note: “Additional sessions by an Elmer Snowden group?” This – as might be expected – made me excited. Mr. Lasker’s reference to the Elmer Snowden series of recordings of exactly this first half of 1929 is intriguing and may well hit the truth. If only the owner of the reported test of ‘It Feels So Good’ – session 007) would make his treasure known to connoisseurs! From its sound and notes classification would certainly be possible.

Notes:

- Rust*2, *3: not listed

- Rust*4: Instrumentation and personnel unknown

- Rust*6: Instrumentation and personnel unknown. The Brunswick recording sheet states that this session was held for the Vocalion race series.

- Steven Lasker e-mail 20-12-30: “Vocalion 1M race series “test masters” NY, Feb. 19, 1929. Number of men not noted.. (Both titles) with vocal effects. According to the recording ledgers, both titles were composed by Spencer Williams and arranged by Ken Macomber.”

006 JUNGLE TOWN STOMPERS

New York, Apr. 09, 1929

Ward Pinkett – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt;

Luis Russell – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo, per (2); Henry Bass Edwards - bbs;

(Luis Russell ?) – arr

401797-C African Jungle OK 8686, JSP CD 308

401798-B Slow As Molasses OK 8686, JSP CD 308

As it seems this is the same band as before. With some minor alterations possible.

But first of all: This is the same trumpet player as on the foregoing session, thus very probably Ward Pinkett. If you listen to this player’s staccato playing and occasional trills and compare it with the Morton Red Hot Peppers of June 11, 1928, you will easily see/hear that this is the same person. And this really is a very surprising realization! For all the years of discography Metcalf had been stated as trumpet player here. But after the note in Storyville 2000, p.121 this certainly cannot be retained. It is my suspicion that Luis Russell when being asked recalled titles he simply did not have played on (see Storyville 146, p.46 below). The record label does not say anything about the musicians (L. Wright, OKeh Race Records). And on hearing these titles - with certainly Charlie Holmes on them - he deduced a personnel from his own band, including himself on piano. But I am convinced that we have Pinkett here. It is the same tone, same sound, same vibrato and same staccato as on the Mortons! Apparently, Russell named Metcalf as he was on the Burning Eight sides at the beginning of Russell’s recording career and only 3 months apart from this session. But our trumpet man here does not use Metcalf’s squeezed notes, and he plays with more laziness – not as stressed as Metcalf always does.

On trombone we most probably have Henry Hicks again as stated everywhere, and I do not know anything against it, but I have to observe that everything played by the trombone on these two sides might also be played by Higginbotham, only lacking Higgie’s little tricks and close trills and his exuberant bounce. No wonder that Luis Russell heard Higginbotham here. But should Higgie be “reading his solos”? The alto saxophonist is Charlie Holmes again to my conviction. This alto sound is unmistakable. Only on clarinet he obviously was not as skilled as on his main instrument, and you hear typically reduced clarinet playing as from a saxophonist.

Luis Russell recognized himself as piano player and arranger (see Storyville 146, p.46) which certainly led to this record always being reissued under the Luis Russell flag. Yet, a big and severe doubt may be allowed as to this statement. We have so often come to know of musicians’ distinctly wrong estimations of their own or other’s playing, that I would not be surprised that somebody else is responsible for the piano part here. The short solo on celeste has a bit of Russell’s airy piano style, although not of his usual hasty piano playing, and without any distinct reason to leave him out of consideration I shall certainly keep him in the personnel. The time would be that of the building process of the Russell band: there still was no Red Allen and no Pops Foster. And Russell might have been willing to play for another bandleader and get some additional cash. But the arrangements heard here are not in Russell’s style as shown on his own later recordings, and I therefore would deny his authorship.

On banjo we have Elmer Snowden the bandleader again.

Rust lists Henry Bass Edwards on tuba throughout. Although I know Edwards as a very skilled and proficient tuba player I also know him to display very short and hart-hitting notes I do not hear on these sides. Lacking any distinct tuba features I therefore would leave him listed in the personnel. Russell claimed Bass Moore – his own tuba player at the time – as bass player.

Finally, we hear some sort of drumming (snare-drum, played with brushes) behind the celesta solo. No bass drum, no cymbals. If it was not for the extremely short changing-over from banjo to drum – no beat left out - I would have named Snowden himself as the “drummer”, the more so as there are two bars between the end of drumming and the entrance of the banjo again. And just remember that we also had some very few “drum strokes” on the Musical Stevedores session. So, this might have been Elmer Snowden or rather the organizer of the session, Mr. Joe Davis. I do not see any reason to name Kaiser Marshall as in earlier Rusts. Can you imagine star-drummer Kaiser Marshall playing at a session for only half a chorus and without being member of the band? Oh yes, life happens!

Some people claim to hear a tenor sax and even a second trumpet somewhere on these sides. The second trumpet I would exclude instantly, but there certainly are instances where a tenor sax might be suspected. But there are no distinct tenor parts to be heard - and no solos – and any possible tenor part – together with the alto – is played softly by the trombone (for instance part C in the first title).

Notes:

- Rust*2: Louis Metcalfe – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes – ten; Clarence Williams ? – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Edwards – bbs; unknown – dms

- Rust*3: Louis Metcalf – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes – ten; Luis Russell – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Edwards – bbs; Kaiser Marshall ? – dms (2)

- Rust*4: Louis Metcalf – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes – ten; Luis Russell – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Henry Edwards – bbs; with percussion effect on the second side.

- Storyville 146, p46 (Luis Russell interview by Walter C. Allen): “(I) played OKeh 8686 (*Jungle Town Stompers*). (Luis Russell) didn’t recall the titles until hearing it. Gave identifications of: growl and open solos by Louis Metcalf, trombone by Higgy – reading solos; alto and soprano by Holmes; Johnson, Moore (or Buford?); Luis Russell arrangement, piano and celeste – never saw the latter before and fooled around with it in the studio and used it on the record.”

- 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 ‘Slow As Molasses’ John Snow and Brian Williams offer t/tb/cl/p-cel/bb/d with the drums replaced by banjo on the reverse. They also feel that a second trumpet may be present on ‘African Jungle’ and that a second sax may be present on both sides.”

- Rust*6: Louis Metcalf, t; Henry Hicks, tb; Charlie Holmes, cl, as; Charlie Grimes, ts; Luis Russell, p, cel; Elmer Snowden, bj; Henry Edwards, bb; with percussion effect on the second side.

Structure of tunes:

401797-C *African Jungle* Key of Eb OKeh 8686

(Intro 8 bars ens - bbs)(A strain a 16 bars AA ens)(B strain a 16 bars AA tbn)(C strain a 16 bars AA ens)(D strain a 16 bars AA alt) (Vamp 2 bars alt)(E strain b 20 bars AA’ tpt)(F strain b 18 bars AA” ens)(Coda 8 bars ens – bbs)

composer credit is: Williams; arrangement: possibly Luis Russell

401798-B *Slow As Molasses* Key of Eb (harmony-modified blues) OKeh 8686

(Intro 4 bars ens - pno)(A chorus 1 12 bars ens)(B chorus 2 12 bars growl-tpt)(C chorus 3 12 bars cel8, ens4)(D chorus 4 12 bars tbn) (Vamp 2 bars tbn)(E chorus 5 12 bars clt)(F chorus 6 12 bars ens)(Coda 2 bars ens)

composer credit is: Williams; arrangement: possibly Luis Russell

007 SWANEE RIVER STOMPERS

New York,

Apr. 12, 1929

Ward Pinkett – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt;

unknown – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; unknown - bbs;

‘Georgia Joe’ – voc; Ken Macomber - arr

E-29637

It Feels So Good

Voc unissued, test exists

not on LP/CD

This session is also noted in Steven Lasker’s e-mail “Additional sessions by an Elmer Snowden group?” Mr. Lasker gives the recording date as April 21, but this – against Rust*6 – might be a typo? Again, Mr. Lasker may be correct in assuming an Elmer Snowden recording session here. Only, that I have a hand-scribbled note in my Rust*6: “test exists – Mark Berresford”. If only the owner of this test would make his treasure known to connoisseurs! From its sound and musical content classification of this recording would certainly be possible. Mark Berresford assured me that he had heard the test record and was certain that the band sounded like the above listed bands of sessions 004, 006, and 009.

Notes:

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

- Rust*6: Instrumentation and personnel unknown. The Brunswick recording sheet states that this session was held for the Vocalion race series.

- Steven Lasker e-mail 20-12-30: “Vocalion 15M series rejected NY, Feb. 19, 1929. Number of men not noted. with vocal by Georgia Joe. The right half of the ledger sheet for this session (only the one title was noted) where the composer and copyright data was entered is torn off and missing, but this is without doubt the same ‘It Feels So Good’ as was recorded April 9, 1929 by McKinney’s Cotton Pickers. The DAHR shows its composer as Spencer Williams. The label of the Jasper Davis Harmony (recorded April 23, 1929) shows “Williams” as composer of ‘It Feels So Good’.”

008 SIX SCRAMBLED EGGS

New York,

Apr. 18, 1929

Ward Pinkett – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt;

Spencer Williams – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Ernest Bass Moore – bbs; Paul Barbarin – dms;

Joe Davis – dir; Ken Macomber – arr

51187-2 Magnolia Blues

Vic unissued

not on LP/CD

51188-2 Soft Shoe Shuffle

Vic unissued

not on LP/CD

Unfortunately – and much to my grief – have these two sides been rejected and unissued by the Victor people. And although the Victor vaults have dismissed a whole lot of their own great unissued jazz music in later years, these two sides were not among them, if there perhaps is somebody somewhere who owns them secretly on a test pressing. I’d be very much interested to hear them! It certainly would be interesting where Rust received his information as to the personnel from! And we definitely have to use them with great caution!

Notes:

- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: probably: Louis Metcalfe – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – alt; Spencer Williams – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Moore – bbs; Paul Barbarin – dms; Jasper Davis, Ken Macomber – dir
- Rust, Victor Master Book Vol. 2: Joe Davis – Ken Macomber/ c/ tb/ s/ p/ bj/ bb/ d.

009	GEORGIA GIGOLOS	(Jasper Davis and his Orchestra)	New York,	Apr. 23, 1929
	Louis Metcalf – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, sop, alt;			
	Luis Russell – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; William ‘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
Composer credits: 148465; (Williams); 148468 (Williams)				

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

ADDENDUM 21-11-2024: I still have my doubts as to the trumpet player. But listening to the above listed recordings of the early Luis Russell band causes a re-thinking of my earlier believe this might be Ward Pinkett. I now am convinced that it actually is Metcalf as in all Rusts! (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 ad-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, but also on soprano sax. 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 Stevedores - 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’ chorus A8, which does not leave any room for suggesting this player’s identity. Three names have been suggested so far - Cliff Jackson, Louis Hooper and 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 the player as unknown.

We certainly hear Elmer Snowden with his very own banjo sound. And thinking about the close relation of dates, above, I consider Luis Russell to be the pianist, regarding the thin piano playing on these sides and the very small exposure of the piano in one two-bar break.

The tuba player certainly is William ‘Bass’ Moore, and he may be recognised by his very irregular and varied manner of playing – and his frequent solo spots, not heard often. And this association might possibly the consequence of the supposed presence of Charlie Holmes, here So, this player might be someone else as well.

This Georgia Gigolos session is not as thoroughly arranged as the earlier Elmer Snowden sessions, and thus leave 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.

Structure of tunes:

148465-3	Georgia Gigolo	Key of Eb	Harmony 944-H
(Intro 6 bars ens – WBM bbs)(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA ens 16 - CH alt 8 – ens 8)(Bridge 4 bars CH sop - ens)(Verse 16 bars LM o-tpt 14 - ?LR pno 2)(Chorus 2 32 bars AABA LM voc)(Chorus 3 32 bars AABA HH o-tbn 16 – ens 16)(Coda 2 bars ens)			
148468-2	It Feels So Good	Key of Eb – Ab - Eb (blues)	Harmony 944-H
(Intro 8 bars ens – WBM bbs)(Chorus 1 12 bars ens)(Chorus 2 12 bars LM m-tpt)(Bridge 4 bars modu. Eb to Ab)(Chorus 3 12 bars LM voc)(Chorus 4 12 bars CH clt)(Chorus 5 12 bars HH m-tbn)(Chorus 6 12 bars LM voc 10 – WBM bbs 2)(Bridge 2 bars LM o-tpt mod. Ab to Eb)(abrid. Chorus 7 10 bars LM o-tpt)(abrid. Chorus 8 10 bars ens)			

To sum up: These last three (or four – or even six) sessions definitely represent a coherent body of recorded music in spite of their differing band names. In Snowden’s memory he did put the band(s) together for Joe Davis.

The trumpet player was not Metcalf as hitherto listed, but Ward Pinkett. And – most interestingly – Metcalf is not named by Snowden in his comment on the IAJRC LP cover text. Hicks and Holmes are!

The trombonist was the unfortunately little estimated Henry Hicks, and on the reeds – alto sax and clarinet – we very probably hear the young Charlie Holmes. All three were fantastic players at this time, and Snowden showed great taste to get these men together. I have to state earnestly that in no instance on these three 1929 sessions a second reed man can be heard and distinguished – and no second trumpet player as well. And in Snowden’s comment to these recordings (see IAJRC 12 at the Musical Stevedores notes above) no second reed man or trumpeter is mentioned!

Only on the first session (Musical Stevedores) we do hear Cliff Jackson on piano. On the other sessions the pianist must remain unidentified – I even would like to leave out Luis Russell as such, against his own testimony. ADDENDUM 21-11-2024: I – KBR – contradict: at session 009 I now believe to hear Luis Russell as pianist, together with colleagues of his contemporary band!

Also, the tuba players do not show any sufficient individual traces to identify, and have therefore only to remain assumptions. According to Chilton Spencer Williams worked in Europe 1925 to 1928, and would therefore be no possibility, either.

The arrangements of all these recorded sides constitute a special attraction to the listener. The Musical Stevedores and the Jungle Town Stompers sides are arranged by one man whose identity is not clear. Luis Russell claimed the arrangements of the Jungle Town Stompers as his own. But they definitely do not represent his arrangement manners/style as documented in his later band recordings (three part chords in various rhythmic execution). These arrangements show other elements: four part chords encompassing the tuba, extended use of the sixth, meter shifts in ensemble played breaks (which might hint at Cliff Jackson's possible authorship!?), abridging of chorus structures by inserting the start of a new structure into the last two bars of the foregoing one (as in Duke Ellington's 'Stevedore Stomp' and claimed as novel in A. Hodeir's 'Jazz.- It's Evolution and Essence' for Ellington's 'Concerto For Cootie' in 1956!), playing around with structures and forms, and the frequent interplay of band ensemble and a solo tuba. The Georgia Gigolo sides do show these elements in a less degree, but they also contain the ensemble – tuba interplay and arranged ensemble intros, codas and breaks. Yet, they have more improvisational freedom and more solo work, and the additional vocals by Miss Miles.

After reading Ken Macomber's name among the participants of the Six Scrambled Eggs session in Rust's 'Victor Master Book Vol. 2' I suppose that this man was responsible for all the arrangements of these four/six sessions. He allegedly was a young white arranger at that time, trying to sell his arrangements to the Harlem bands personally by strolling through the Harlem clubs and ballrooms using his beautiful young wife as bait to gain attention. He claimed to have been the author of Charlie Johnson's 'The Boy In The Boat' (which is equally claimed by Benny Waters!) and is listed in Rust*6 as arranger of the Swanee River Stompers (not reissued). Yet, after Elmer Snowden's information above, trombone player Teddy Nixon – of whom we know very little – might have been the arranger of some of these titles, too. Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools, Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds and Te Roy Williams and his Orchestra are recording groups built from Elmer Snowden's bands, or simply are his working bands recorded under a pseudonym.

010 ELMER SNOWDEN AND HIS SMALLS PARADISE BAND

New York, 1932
film "Smash Your Baggage"

Elmer Snowden – ldr, dir;

Leonard Davis, Red Harlan, Roy Eldridge – tpt;

George Washington, Dicky Wells – tbn;

Otto Hardwick, Wayman Carver – alt, clt; Al Sears – ten;

Don Kirkpatrick – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Richard Fulbright – sbs, bbs; Sidney Catlett – dms;

Mabel Scott – voc; The Smalls Paradise Chorus – dance; Smalls Paradise Entertainers

Sequence behind opening credit – unknown tune

unissued

not on LP/CD

Bugle Call Rag

Ristic Special SAC (LP)

Tiger Rag

Ristic Special SAC (LP)

Stop The Sun, Stop The Moon (My Man Is Gone)

Ristic Special SAC (LP)

Concentratin' On You

Ristic Special SAC (LP)

Closing music – unknown tune

Ristic Special SAC (LP)

The Vitaphone short-film 'Smash Your Baggage' may be watched in its entirety on www.youtube! The story: The red-caps of 'Great Central Station' need money to support an ailing colleague in hospital. They organize a dancing and artistic contest to acquire the necessary money. The music is performed by Elmer Snowden's Smalls Paradise Band.

The band was working at Smalls Paradise at this time, but had two additional regular members not playing for filming: Robert Cheek – tpt, and Garvin Bushell – reeds.

Noticeable are: the young Roy Eldridge playing a four-bar trumpet break in 'Bugle Call Rag' (c. 3 years before the start of his recording career – with Teddy Hill band in Feb. 1935), Dicky Wells with a four-bar trombone break in the same tune, Don Kirkpatrick's strong band piano, the swinging bass playing of Dick Fullbright – on strings and on the tuba – and the youthful all-time master of the jazz drums, Sidney Catlett – not yet "Big Sid"!

Not to forget Mabel Scott's dramatic singing and the fantastic dancers and acrobats.

Notes:

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

- K. Stratemann, *Negro Bands on Film, Vol. 1, Big Bands 1928 – 1950: Roy Eldridge, Red Harlan, Leonard Davis -tp; Dicky Wells, George Washington -tb; Otto Hardwicke, Wayman Carver, Al Sears -reeds; Don Kirkpatrick -p; Elmer Snowden -p, -ldr; Dick Fullbright -b; Big Sid Catlett -dm; Mabel Scott -vcl*

Tune Structures:

sequence behind opening credit – unknown tune Key of G (blues changes) film soundtrack

(Chorus 16 bars ens)

Bugle Call Rag Key of Ab

film soundtrack

(Chorus 1 12 bars brass brk 4 – ens 8)(Chorus 2 12 bars RE o-tpt brk 4 – ens 8)(Chorus 3 12 bars DW o-tbn brk 4 – ens 8)(unknown strain 20 bars ens)

Tiger Rag Key of Bb / Eb / Ab (Dancers / Tap Dancers - Acrobates in strains D3 / D4)

film soundtrack

(Strain A 1 16 bars ens)(Strain A 2 16 bars ens)(Strain B 1 16 bars ens – ?WC 2 clt breaks)(Strain B 2 16 bars ens - ?RH tpt break – DK pno break)(unkn. strain 16 bars ens)(Interlude 8 bars double-tempo ens)(Strain D 1 32 bars double-tempo ens)(Strain D 2 32 double-tempo ens)(Strain D 3 32 bars double-tempo saxs 16 – ens 16)(Strain D 4 32 bars double-tempo ens)

Stop The Sun, Stop The Moon (My Man's Gone) Key of Dm (Mabel Scott)

film soundtrack

(1/4 Chorus 8 bars A MS voc – ens)(Chorus 32 bars AABA MS voc – ens)

Concentratin' On You Key of Eb (Rope skippers)

film soundtrack

(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA saxs)(Chorus 2 32 bars AABA saxs)

unknown tune Key of G (Chorus-line / dancers)

film soundtrack

(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA ens)(Chorus 2 32 bars AABA ens – 2 dms breaks in B-part)(Tag 4 bars ens)

011 SEPIA SERENADERS

New York, Dec. 14, 1934

Clarence Grimes – clt;

Cliff Jackson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo;

George Gray – voc (2,3,4)

86446-1

Ridiculous Blues

BB B-5770,

Jazz Oracle BDW 8037

86447-1	Breakin' The Ice	BB B-5782,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8037
86448-1	Dallas Blues	BB B-5803,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8037
86449-1	Baby Brown	BB B-5782,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8037
86450-1	Nameless Blues	BB B-5770,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8037
86451-1	Alligator Crawl	BB B-5803,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8037

Composer credits: 86446 (L. Hooper); 86447 (Canvanough – Weldon – McCarthy); 86448 (Lloyd Garret); 86669 (Alex Hill); 86650 (Spencer Williams); 866651 (Thomas „Fats“ Waller)

This recording session looks like an attempt to cash in on a formula used successfully by Fats Waller and his Rhythm for a couple of months already on the related Victor label. Four of the recorded titles are known from Waller recordings of the time, 'Alligator Crawl' one of his all-time great piano solos. The remaining two titles, 'Ridiculous Blues' and 'Nameless Blues' were used by Bob Fuller on his last trio recording – for Harmony in June 1928, Snowden being the banjo player. But it has to be stated that these sides rank miles behind the ease and swing – and joy – of the Waller band. As with his 'Smalls' Paradise Band' in 'Smash Your Baggage' above, Snowden seems to be in the wrong place with his antiquated banjo strumming along with the modern four-four beat of the rhythm section. This is my own personal taste and opinion. But Snowden may possibly be appraised by other listeners for just these qualities.

But Cliff Jackson with his massive stride style piano is joy to hear. His characteristic use of broken-rhythm (changing the meter in his left-hand rhythm) is very pronounced, and he may be recognised easily by just this very stylistic feature.

The clarinetist: all Rusts list Charlie Grimes for the Jungle Town Stompers and the Georgia Gigolos, and Clarence Grimes for the Musical Stevedores (see above) and the Sepia Serenaders, thus suggesting that both names belong to one identity, playing on these four recording sessions, together with Snowden. Neither Grimes is known to have recorded with any other band. But we have to assume that this person's real name was Clarence, as "Clarence Grimes says he did not reach New York until 1934 and is thus not the clarinet and soprano player on the Musical Stevedores coupling. Charlie Holmes has identified himself on these sides, playing cl/ss/as and Greely Walton identifies the scat vocalist as Ward Pinkett, who is thus more likely on trumpet than Louis Metcalf, who is currently listed." (Storyville 2000, p.121). There is not any notice of a Charlie Grimes anywhere. And, by the way, if you closely listen to the three Snowden recording bands named you will certainly recognise that there is only one reed player on these sides, thus Charlie Holmes who identified himself here.

Clarence Grimes does not seem to be an un-qualified musician, but, unfortunately, he mars the whole sound of the group by his low-pitched playing. I feel unable to say anything favourite about the singer.

I - KBR – am not a friend of banjo-solo strumming. Thus, I feel a bit indisposed to review this very recording session. So, let me start with citing a short sequence from the great Jazz Oracle CD on pianist Cliff Jackson, that includes these Sepia Serenaders sides: "I would suggest that the session was probably organized by the banjoist, Elmer Snowden. Two of the titles are 'Ridiculous Blues' and 'Nameless Blues', obscurities recorded by gas pipe clarinetist Bob Fuller for Harmony in 1928. Snowden played banjo on that occasion and it seems likely that it was he who brought along those two compositions to the Victor studios. Who else would have remembered them in 1934, some six years after the Fuller session?" (Reide Kaiser, booklet to CD BDW 8037).

Oh yes, this is a somewhat crazy kind of music, recorded at the height of the Depression era and at a time when musicians like Roy Eldridge, Teddy Wilson, and Earl Hines came to the fore, bringing new ways to play jazz music for the public.

There is Clarence Grimes on clarinet, at last, with big tone and many notes. As to the listed name of Charlie Grimes – who, by the way, is Clarence Grimes with the Musical Stevedores - it has to be added that the above three sessions are the only sessions in Rust listed for this very musician, and that Clarence Grimes did not arrive in New York earlier than 1934 – as for his own documented statement.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography*, 1948: Clarence Grimes (cl); Cliff Jackson (p); Elmer Snowden (bjo); George Gray (vo)

- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: Clarence Grimes (clt, alt); Cliff Jackson (pno); Elmer Snowden (bjo); George Gray (voc)

- Storyville 2000, p.121: "Clarence Grimes says he did not reach New York until 1934 and is thus not the clarinet and soprano player on the Musical Stevedores coupling. Charlie Holmes has identified himself on these sides, playing cl/ss/as and Greely Walton identifies the scat vocalist as Ward Pinkett, who is thus more likely on trumpet than Louis Metcalf, who is currently listed."

SOURCES:

- Bruce Bastin, *Never Sell A Copyright*, p.26: "In May 1927 two titles were recorded for Harmony under the name of Te Roy Williams & his Orchestra. It was actually Snowden's band; Williams played trombone. Of the session Elmer recalled that *Joe Davis used to throw in so many musicians that I couldn't keep track*, thereby confirming Louis Hooper's reference to Davis's constant experimentation. In January Snowden was recording for Columbia as the Musical Stevedores. In April 1929 he played with some of the group – Louis Metcalf, Henry Hicks, Charlie Grimes, Charlie Holmes and others – recording for Okeh as the Jungle Town Stompers, cutting two Davis-published tunes written by Spencer Williams. That same month he recorded with Jasper Davis & His Orchestra for Harmony with these same musicians and others, - including pianist Cliff Jackson. They cut two more Spencer Williams-written/Joe Davis-published tunes; *Georgia Gigolo* and *It Feels So Good*. The vocalist was Lizzie Miles. No Jasper Davis has ever come to light and since, according to Elmer Snowden, this was a Joe Davis session, it was probably a Jos. Davis Orchestra; the only time his name was used (well, almost) on a record label as a bandleader. As the credit to the 1927 Te Roy Williams session was an error, or at least Snowden couldn't figure out how his name got on the label as it was his own Nest Club Band, it is also possible that Jos. M. Davis somehow became Jasper Davis. Then again, Davis was something of a trickster and might well have been amused by the whole incident."

- Bruce Bastin, *Never Sell A Copyright*, p.275: "Elmer Snowden wrote to Davis in September (1966 – KBR) to state that his Nest Club Band of about September 1924 with Mamie Smith was on Ajax 17058, and that *Lindburgh Hop*, by Te Roy Williams's band on Harmony 439-H, was actually written by Snowden and Ted Nixon (sic). Nixon, like Williams, was a trombonist. It is not possible to confirm the reasons for this inquiry but perhaps some researcher was trying to determine personnel of these early sides; Canadian Jim Kidd was involved in researching the Ajax catalogue and recorded Louis Hooper, Snowden's pianist colleague from those days, in May 1967. Len Kunstadt of *Record Research* magazine was always checking on early personnel, partly for his history of jazz in New York, and he did interview Joe Davis. Davis had a photograph Elmer Snowden presented to him after Snowden's 'rediscovery', autographed *To My First Boss Joe Davis*, as well as a copy of a letter from John Hammond of Columbia Records, dated 2 December 1962, written to one Jack Smith of Scranton, Pennsylvania, which Snowden has presumably given him. In it Hammond states that Snowden: *was the greatest banjo player I ever heard and there are, fortunately, a few recordings to prove it. Back in 1930 he made some records on the Bluebird label, with a group called the "Sepia Serenaders", which are absolutely unique as far as the art of the banjo is concerned.* Hammond went on to say that Snowden's band of 1931 – 1932 at Small's Paradise *actually outswung Henderson's*, so that it was a *tragedy that the band never recorded.* Hammond ends with *I would do anything I can do to promote him today*, which is probably why Jack Smith had written him."

- there are articles on Elmer Snowden in Storyville 16 to 18 and in Storyville 1989/99.

My sincerest thanks to Michael Rader again for persistent advice and help!

K. – B. Rau
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