

THE RECORDINGS OF JOE STEELE AND HIS ORCHESTRA

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

STEELE, 'Joe' Joseph A., pianist Born: c. 1900; died: New York City, 5th February, 1964
Also known as 'Professor'. Graduate of the New England Conservatory. Worked (and recorded) with the Savoy Bearcats (1926). With Henri Saparo's Band at Bamboo Inn, New York (1927), then led own band in New York during the late 1920s. Toured with Pike Davis Orchestra for 'Rhapsody in Black' show (1931-32), then worked mainly with Chick Webb from 1932 until 1936.

JOE STEELE AND HIS ORCHESTRA

001 JOE STEELE AND HIS ORCHESTRA		New York,	Jun. 04, 1929
Wendell Cully, Ward Pinkett – tpt; Jimmy Archey – tbn;			
Bobby Holmes – alt, clt; E. Eugene Mikell – alt, clt, bar; Trenton Harris – ten, clt;			
Joe Steele – pno; Percy Richardson – bjo; Frank Smith – bbs; Gerald Hobson – dms;			
Benny Carter - arr			
53808-1 Coal-Yard Shuffle		Vic V-38066,	Frog DGF 8
53808-2 Coal-Yard Shuffle		Vic unissued on 78,	Frog DGF 12
53809-1 Top And Bottom		Vic V-38066,	Frog DGF 8
53809-2 Top And Bottom		Vic unissued on 78,	Frog DGF 12

Note: Composer credits are: 53808 (Joe Steele), 53809 (F. Eugene Mikell)

Storyville 1998-9 carries a beautiful and most interesting interview with Gene Mikell by Peter Carr and Al Vollmer which tackles these sides. And nothing more you need to know to enjoy this music to the full. Both tunes have arrangements by Benny Carter – 22 years of age at the time – showing his early use of augmented chords.

Bandleader Joe Steele shines with two 8-bar piano solos in his semi-classical style, encompassing great technique and inventiveness and imagination, but not so much suited for swinging and driving big band music. His nickname 'Professor' certainly was not un-justified. His most complex solo spots certainly are settled beforehand.

There is much hot soloing by – above all – Ward Pinkett (almost all tpt solos), and Jimmy Archey, Gene Mikell, and Bobby Holmes (6 bars only). Pinkett and Holmes – Bobby, not Charlie! – were not regular members of the band.

But Joe Garland definitely is not on this session!

Notes:

- Storyville 56-80: "Peter Carr says that Freddie White, the banjo player on the Savoy Bearcats sides, and who is now working as a pianist at Saronac Lake, New York, told him that the banjo player on the Joe Steele Victor is Percy Richardson."

- Storyville 80-80: "Gene Mikell told Peter Carr that he is the baritone sax on the Joe Steele Victor. Bobby Holmes rather than Charlie (to whom he was not related) is the alto, tenor sax is Trenton Harris and the trumpets Ward Pinkett and Wendell Culley. Both tunes are Benny Carter arrangements. Gene Mikell, and several other musicians have commented that not only did Bobby and Charlie share their surname, but that their sound was so alike that both were frequently misidentified even by their closest friends when heard broadcasting – a sort of amusement to them both!"

- Rust*2: Ward Pinkett, Jack Wilson or Langston Curl (tpt); James Archey (tbn); Charlie Holmes (alt); F. Eugene Mikell (ten); Harry Carney (bar); Joe Steele (pno, ldr); unknown (bjo); Frank Smith (bbs); unknown (dms).

- Rust*3: Ward Pinkett, Jack Wilson or Langston Curl -t; James Archey -tb; Charlie Holmes -cl -ss -as; F. Eugene Mikell -ts; Joe Garland -bar; Joe Steele -p -ldr; unknown -bj; Frank Smith -bb; Gerald Hobson -d.

- Rust*4,*6: Ward Pinkett, Jack Wilson or Langston Curl, t; James Archey, tb; Charlie Holmes, cl, ss, as; F. Eugene Mikell, ts; Joe Garland, bar; Joe Steele, p, dir; Percy Richardson, bj; Frank Smith, bb; Gerald Hobson, d.

Tunes structures:

Coal-Yard Shuffle Key of Bb / C Victor
(Intro 4 bars ens)(Strain A1 32 bars AA' ens)(Tag 2 bars ens)(Strain B 16 bars AB ens)(Strain A2 32 bars AA' ens 8 – FEM bar 8 – ens 8 – FEM bar 8)(Strain A3 32 bars AA' ens 8 – WP o-tpt 8 – ens 8 – WP o-tpt 8)(Strain A4 32 bars AA' JS pno 8 – ens 8 – BH alt

6 – ens 2)(Tag 2 bars ens modulation)(Strain A5 32 bars AA' JA o-tbn 8 – saxes 8 – ens 16)

Top And Bottom Key of F / C / F

Victor

(Intro 8 bars WP o-tpt + ens)(Strain A1 16 bars AABA WP o-tpt + ens)(Interlude 8 bars WP o-tpt + ens modulation)(Strain B1 16 bars AA' saxes 8 – ens 8)(Strain A2 16 bars AABA JS pno 8 – WC m-tpt 8)(Interlude 8 bars ens 5 – WP o-tpt 3)(Strain A3 16 bars AABA JA o-tbn 8 – FEM bar 4 – ens 4)(Tag 2 bars ens)

Notable differences of takes:

- 53808-1: WP first 8-bar o-tpt solo: tpt plays jumping trills in bars 1 and 6
 53808-2: WP first 8-bar o-tpt solo: tpt plays jumping trills in bars 5 and 8
 53809-1: Pace c. 100 bpm / ?WC m-tpt solo after pno solo starts with: 3 quarter-notes a, eighth-note a, dotted eighth-note bb, sixteenth-note f, 2 quarter-notes d
 53809-2: Pace c. 134 bpm / ?WC m-tpt solo after pno solo starts with: 2 quarter-notes d, half-note d, dotted-eighth-note d, sixteenth-note c, quarter-note bb

K.-B. Rau
 26.01.2020