

THE RECORDINGS OF THE TEXAS BLUES DESTROYERS

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

The Texas Blues Destroyers were not a working band, nor were they one of the bands which recorded with varying personnels for busy pianists or musicians/publishers/composers to bring their home-work to the public. They were just a recording duet of trumpet player Bubber Miley and pianist Arthur Ray with an extremely unusual instrumentation, which probably had been assembled for vaudeville and/or theatre performances, assumably following a casual co-work of both players. As their recordings were made in September/October of 1924 only, it is believed that their combination was not of any endurance. Bubber Miley had joined the Ellington band in September 1923 at the age of 20 (TDWAW), and Arthur Ray was bandleader/pianist at Clara Smith's Theatrical Club in Harlem West 134th Street in the fall of 1924 (Allen, Hendersonia). But somehow they must have met and decided to perform as a duet. The results are listed below. Very little is known of pianist/ bandleader/composer Arthur Ray (see Allen, Hendersonia), whereas Bubber Miley was just starting his stardom as a member of the Duke Ellington Orchestra, which ended too early in tragical conditions.

This personnel-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: **Texas Blues Destroyers**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Texas Blues Destroyers*
- 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: (*Texas Blues Destroyers*)

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.

TEXAS BLUES DESTROYERS

Because of the obvious correlation of this and the following sessions – the only ones under the 'Texas Blues Destroyers' name - I have taken my liberty to discuss all sessions together at the bottom of my list.

001 **TEXAS BLUES DESTROYERS**
Bubber Miley – tpt; Arthur Ray – *pac* or *har*
31687 Lenox Avenue Shuffle
31688 Down In The Mouth Blues

New York, Sep. 18-22, 1924
Ajax 17065, Jazz Archives No.131 159252
Ajax 17065, Jazz Archives No.131 159252

This coupling is part of the French CD issue as stated. This CD also contains the Vocalion variety of this record, yet without a clear and unequivocal marking of the original labels. I have tried to identify these by comparison with EP Rarities 11. The Ajax pair then are items 5 and 6 on the CD (not declared as such.).

See below for comment and discussion!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: Bubber Miley (c); Arthur Ray (harmonium)* (Vocalion masters are very different from the others which were probably made on another date.)

- RR 77-6, 86-6: not listed

- W. Bryant, *Ajax Records: Bubber Miley, cornet; Arthur Ray, organ.*

- Rust*2,*3: *Bubber Miley (cnt); Arthur Ray (reed-organ).*

- Rust*4: *Bubber Miley -c; Arthur Ray -or.*

- Rust*6: *Bubber Miley, c; Arthur Ray, reed-or.*

- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, *Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Arthur Ray (harmonium, org).* "According to some discographers, Arthur Ray plays accordion on the above Texas Blues Destroyers session(s), but it is undoubtedly an organ!"

Tune Structures:

31687: *Lenox Avenue Shuffle Key of Eb* *Ajax*
 (Intro 8 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA ens)(Chorus 2 32 bars AABA pac/har)(Chorus 3 24 bars ABA ens)(Tag 2 bars ens)

31688: *Down In The Mouth Blues Key of Eb* *Ajax*
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 12 bars blues ens)(Chorus 2 12 bars ens)(Minor Strain 16 bars ens)(Chorus 3 12 bars pac/har)(Coda 4 bars ens)

002 TEXAS BLUES DESTROYERS

New York, c. Oct. 05, 1924

Bubber Miley – tpt; Arthur Ray – pac or har

105588 Down In The Mouth Blues

PA 036160, Per 14341, Frog DGF 71

105589 Lenox Avenue Shuffle

PA 036160, Per 14341, Frog DGF 71

See below for comment and discussion!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: Bubber Miley (c); Arthur Ray (harmonium)* (Vocalion masters are very different from the others which were probably made on another date.)

- Rust*2,*3: *Bubber Miley (cnt); Arthur Ray (reed-organ).*

- Rust*4: *Bubber Miley -c; Arthur Ray -or.*

- Rust*6: *Bubber Miley, c; Arthur Ray, reed-or.*

- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, *Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Arthur Ray (harmonium, org).* "According to some discographers, Arthur Ray plays accordion on the above Texas Blues Destroyers session(s), but it is undoubtedly an organ!"

Notes:

- Bob Hitchens, *Choo Choo Jazzers Revisited, VJM 180*

Tune Structures:

105588: *Down In The Mouth Blues Key of Eb* *PA/Perfect*
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 12 bars blues ens)(Chorus 2 12 bars ens)(Minor Strain 1 16 bars ens)(Minor Strain 2 16 bars pac/har – m-tpt)(Chorus 3 12 bars ens)

105589: *Lenox Avenue Shuffle Key of Eb* *PA/Perfect*
 (Intro 8 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA ens)(Chorus 2 32 bars AABA pac/har)
 (3/4 Chorus 3 24 bars ABA ens)(Tag 2 bars ens)

003 TEXAS BLUES DESTROYERS

New York, Oct. 07, 1924

Bubber Miley – tpt; Arthur Ray – pac or har

13878/79/80 Down In The Mouth Blues

Br unissued not on LP/CD

13881/82/83 Lenox Avenue Shuffle

Br unissued not on LP/CD

This recording session has first been reported in VJM 180 (2018). It is interesting that the Brunswick file card states organ as Ray's instrument. So, there might still be some cause for discussion!

See below for comment and discussion!

Notes:

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

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

- Bob Hitchens, *Choo Choo Jazzers Revisited, VJM 180*

004 TEXAS BLUES DESTROYERS

New York, c. Oct. 07, 1924

Bubber Miley – tpt; Arthur Ray – pac or har

13832 Lenox Avenue Shuffle

Voc 14913, Jazz Archives No.131 159252

13834 Down In The Mouth Blues

Voc 14913, Jazz Archives No.131 159252

Composer credits of 'Lenox Avenue Shuffle' and 'Down In The Mouth Blues' are: Ray/Miley

The Vocalion labels list "organ and cornet" as instruments used.

This coupling is part of the French CD issue as stated. This CD also contains the Ajax variety of this record, yet without a clear and unequivocal marking of the original labels. I have tried to identify these by comparison with EP Rarities 11. The Vocalion pair then are items 1 and 2 on the CD (not declared as such.).

See below for comment and discussion!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: Bubber Miley (c); Arthur Ray (harmonium)* (Vocalion masters are very different from the others which were probably made on another date.)

- Rust*2,*3: *Bubber Miley (cnt)*; *Arthur Ray (reed-organ)*.

- Rust*4: *Bubber Miley -c*; *Arthur Ray -or*.

- Rust*6: *Bubber Miley, c*; *Arthur Ray, reed-or*.

- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, *Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Arthur Ray (harmonium, org)*. "According to some discographers, Arthur Ray plays accordion on the above Texas Blues Destroyers session(s), but it is undoubtedly an organ!"

Tune Structures:

13832: *Lenox Avenue Shuffle* Key of Eb Vocalion
(Intro 8 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 32 bars AABA ens)(Chorus 2 32 bars AABA pac/har)
(3/4 Chorus 3 24 bars ABA ens)(Tag 2 bars ens)

13834: *Down In The Mouth Blues* Key of Eb Vocalion
(Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 12 bars ens)(Chorus 2 12 bars ens)(Minor Strain 16 bars ens)(Bridge 4 bars pac/har)(Chorus 3 12 bars ens)

- Brian Rust and his friends initiated to list treble brass instruments by the period of their being recorded. Thus, any trumpet or cornet before 1925 was 'cornet' and afterwards it was 'trumpet'. This was absurdly generalised in all Rusts, with one of the very few exceptions of Armstrong in the Henderson band playing 'c' while his companions played 't' in 1924. But I believe, that the use of a cornet or trumpet in the early 1910/20s depended mainly on the musician's origin – coming from regions with French cultural basis (The South) it was often a cornet (*cornet à piston*), or from regions with English or maybe German cultural basis (The North) it even more often was a trumpet.

- Bubber Miley hailed from South Carolina and played cornet early in his career (J. Chilton). From 1923 on, he worked with the Elmer Snowden band and consecutively with Ellington in New York, and I imagine that a bandleader like Ellington was eager to lead a band of top-rank musicians using top-rank instruments and hip garments. And even the early Harlem bands of 1920 have trumpets being played – with very few exceptions – Joe Smith and Rex Stewart, for instance. Thus, I would strongly suggest that Miley played trumpet on these sides. I just listened to the Vocalions on CD – and loud (!), and was unable to deny a trumpet in favour of a cornet. (Rust used to list 'cornet' for almost all trumpet players earlier than 1925. Thus, we cannot rely on his statements in this context!)

- There is unsolved controversy over the question whether an organ – or rather reed-organ/pump-organ/harmonium (har)(which is different from a church-organ in the manner of sound-generation) or an (piano)accordion (pac) was used by Mr. Ray. I checked 'Wikipedia' for harmonium, accordion, bandoneon, concertina, and Styrian button-harmonica, and saw that an accordion has bass-buttons that are coupled with others to produce chords. This fact contradicted my assumption that it must be an accordion because of the lack of chords in the left hand. A harmonium player would certainly have played chords with his left hand. And so does an accordion player, if he wants to. Now, with my find of the bandoneon, I must state that there is an instrument – as well as the concertina, by the way – which can only play single notes in the bass part. One point in favour of the accordion or bandoneon may be found in the first three beats of the middle-eight of Chorus 2 of the Ajax version of 'Lenox Avenue Shuffle' where Mr. Ray exactly does what Mr. Hall in Storyville 1998-99 (below) describes as: "The bellows on an accordion, however, can give surges of air which can be used to affect the expression and phrasing of the music." By the way, both instruments, the accordion and the harmonium, produce their tones in the same way by making air passing a 'free-reed' of thin flexible metal. So, the sound of a harmonium might well be very similar to the sound of an accordion. The more so, as with trumpet and cornet, in acoustically recorded music. And remember, "Ajax advertised a 'squeeze-box' player in their Chicago Defender advertisement of 7 Feb. 1925 (see below).

- Could you imagine two musicians install a reed-organ/harmonium in three (four) different phono-studios – with transportation by car (or horse-drawn wagon?) – and carrying the not so light-weight instrument possibly in upper floors of a large building for two items each – and for very little fee? I cannot! And: I found Mr. Ray playing single-note bass parts when listening some years ago, assuming his instrument to be a piano-accordion. In fact, there are very few spots where there seem to be some multi-note passages in the bass part. But: the Brunswick file-card states that A. Ray's instrument is an organ. As I'm not a collector of 78s and do not know much of the recording process, I am not informed of the organisation of studios and whether there were studios used by different companies on a lease basis. Can it be that all three (four) companies used the same studio? Or, that all the contemporary studios had a harmonium among their utensils?

- Now you know! There is no unequivocal answer so far! If I'd made my choice, it would be the accordion (pac). Now, you make your own choice, but, please, listen!

SOURCES:

Storyville 1996-97, p. 247 (728): "When Ajax advertised 17065 by the Texas Blues Destroyers in the Defender (7 Feb 25) a line drawing showing a cornet player and a musician with a small 'Squeeze-box' was used. This latter seems a much more likely candidate for the reed instrument than the organ currently listed as presumably the instrument was carried from studio to studio, but does anyone feel competent to identify it aurally? Incidentally, the group name seems as odd choice as neither musician hailed from Texas."

Storyville 1998-99, p. 130: Reg Hall, Croydon: "With reference to Afterthoughts 728: Texas Blues Destroyers in Storyville 1996-97. I've listened again to Rarities RA11EP. I hadn't heard it for a long time as it has never captured my interest. Without any doubt the reed instrument is a piano-accordion, and I base that judgement on the sound of the reeds and the style of playing. A harmonium depends on a flow of air passing reeds selected by the keys. The air flow is pumped by the feet, and provided the air pressure is constant it has no bearing on the character of the music. The bellows on an accordion, however, can give surges of air which can be used to affect the expression and phrasing of the music. The keyboard of a harmonium is the same as that of a piano, so a harmonium player can play a piano-style bass. An accordion has single buttons on the bass side that each provide either a single note, a major chord, a minor chord and perhaps a seventh chord and a diminished chord depending on the size of the instrument. Arthur Ray has mastered the single notes in the bass but not the pre-set chords and his phrasing is coloured by his use of the bellows."

Storyville 1998-99, p.115 (735): "Alberta Hunter and Ray's Dreamland Orchestra on Black Swan 2019 is universally listed as a Fletcher Henderson item. However, the artist credit and the presence of a squeeze-box, apparently in the same hands as heard on the Texas Blues Destroyers couplings of 1924, might suggest otherwise." (I tried to find Mr. Ray's 'squeeze box' in the early Alberta Hunter sides, but in vain, up to now - KBR)

Storyville 148, p.160 (643): "In 'Never Sell a Copyright', Bruce Bastin has commented how things didn't 'just happen' and that artists worked jobs and record dates because of who they knew and where they were, so it was with some interest that I note that Margaret Johnson appeared at the Regent Theatre, Baltimore for the week beginning 29 December 1924 accompanied by Arthur Ray, a demonstrator for the Joe Davis Publishing House ..."

Wikipedia.org/wiki/pump organ: *“The pump organ is a type of free-reed organ that generates sound as air flows past a vibrating piece of thin metal in a frame. The piece of metal is called a reed. Specific types of pump organ include the reed organ, harmonium, and melodeon. The idea for the free reed was imported from China through Russia after 1750, and the first Western free-reed instrument was made in 1780 in Denmark.”*

Wikipedia.org/wiki/accordion: *“Accordions are a family of box-shaped musical instruments of the bellows-driven free reed aerophone type (producing sound as air flows past a reed in a frame). The essential characteristic of the accordion is to combine in one instrument a melody section, also called the discant, usually on the right-hand manual, with an accompaniment or Basso continuo functionality on the left hand. The musician normally plays the melody on buttons or keys on the right-hand side (referred to as the manual), and the accompaniment on bass or pre-set chord buttons on the left-hand side. ... The accordion belongs to the free-reed aerophone family. Other instruments in this family include the concertina, harmonica, and bandoneon. The concertina and bandoneon do not have the melody-accompaniment duality. The harmonicon is also related and, while having the discant vs. melody dualism, tries to make it less pronounced. The Harmonium and American reed organ are in the same family, but are typically larger than an accordion and sit on a surface or the floor.”*

My sincerest thanks to my good friend Michael Rader for significant help, as so often, and to Phil Melick, West Virginia, USA, for impetus!

K.- B. Rau
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