

A Case of Serious Misguidance

'Big Charlie' Thomas – or Charlie Gaines?

By Michael Rader and K.-B. Rau

For many dedicated collectors of classic jazz, the trumpet/cornet player 'Big Charlie' Thomas has become a most interesting figure, not because of the mystery of his name, but because of his outstanding and exquisite kind of playing in the Armstrong mode at this time, and also because of his enigmatic appearance and – a year or so later – his disappearance.

For our listener's group 'Big Charlie' Thomas always was a distinct individual, remarkable for his musical style, his elegant phrasing, his effortless embouchure - or 'chops' – and his most imaginative inventiveness. He certainly is one of a few extraordinary "marble-stones" among the top musicians of the Harlem era of jazz, documented on records. Only, that this individual lacked a factual name, the name "Big" Charlie Thomas, conferred by John R. T. Davies on a previously unidentified cornetist, was itself the result of the combination of two clues from different sources. The first was an exhortation of encouragement, presumably to the cornet player, on "Come and Get Me, Papa, Before I Faint" by Margaret Carter, singing with Buddy Christian's Jazz Rippers., "Play it, Big Charlie". The second was Eva Taylor's vague memory of a musician called Thomas as a regular participant in Clarence Williams recording sessions (Storyville 15).

This mysterious man had never been mentioned or documented before anywhere in the literature of jazz or even in the discographies, up to the very moment that Eva Taylor, Clarence Williams' widow, mentioned his name when asked by some British collectors in 1967. In the following years this led to John R.T. Davies' research for this mysterious man, and in 1996 into a Timeless Records CD 'Big Charlie Thomas', comprising John R.T. Davies' recognitions.

We attempted to find documentation about trumpeters/cornetists who might have been identifiable as the man 'Big Charlie' Thomas.

Since Williams seldom – if ever - had a permanent band, he recruited the members of his recording groups from bands active in New York at the time of the recording. These were listed in his fabled "little black books", unfortunately lost and possibly destroyed. Buddy Christian, the leader of the Jazz Rippers, was one of these musicians, so it would be significant to know his whereabouts in late 1925/early 1926.

A further starting point for our search for 'Big Charlie' is the singer, Margaret Carter. There is no evidence of a singer of that name in the contemporary press, so it is presumably a pseudonym. She was possibly a singer with a revue with members of the accompanying band joining her in the studio. It has been suggested by researchers including John R.T. Davies in his notes for the Timeless CD, that Margaret Carter was in fact Margaret Johnson, who recorded several times. However, current majority opinion seems to be that she was not Margaret Carter.

Reminiscences of musicians in New York at the time of 'Big Charlie's' recording activities are another possible source of information. Rex Stewart and Louis Metcalf both provide insights into the musical landscape of Harlem during the period in question, and Happy Caldwell and Buster Bailey are actually presumed to have played with Big Charlie at recording sessions. Stewart and Metcalf both describe "cutting sessions" at the Rhythm Club and Metcalf recalls having learned from sessions with the Creole Jazz Band during a visit by the Jimmie Cooper revue to Chicago. 'Big Charlie' might have picked up Louis' style in a similar situation. For this purpose, we would have to check bands visiting Chicago before the end of 1925. No one answering to 'Big Charlie's' description is remembered as a participant in sessions at the Rhythm Club or other venues, even though Metcalf remembers a name like Harry Smith's, which would have meant next to nothing to the people interviewing Metcalf at the time.

In his notes to the Timeless CD, John R. T. Davies suggests 'Big Charlie' might have been a reed player earlier in career. Rex Stewart actually states that he was asked to play sax in a band of which he was a member, due to previous experience on tenor sax with the Six Musical Spillers. This suggests that "Big Charlie" might have had previous experience with a Spiller-like group, if not with the Spillers themselves; many known and unnamed musicians passed through the ranks of the Spiller groups (cf. R. Lotz: The Musical Spillers, Storyville 152 (1992) pp. 60-70) but we do not firmly suggest that 'Big Charlie' was among them.

In summary, we would prefer to find a previously unknown player combining a number of characteristics:

- A man born prior to about 1890 since Eva Taylor recalled that he was "much older than all of us" (Looking Back with Eva, Storyville 15 (1968) pp. 18-22);
- Experience with vaudeville shows requiring him to be versatile on several instruments;
- Membership of a band, probably with a show, which visited Chicago prior to Louis Armstrong's departure from the city;
- Membership in a band playing in or around New York from late 1925 until the man's disappearance from the recording studios.
- Presumably familiarity with several members of Buddy Christian's Jazz Rippers (Christian himself, Caldwell etc.). One possibility is that the Jazz Rippers were a permanent band at the time, attached to a show where Margaret Carter was singing;
- Alternatively, 'Big Charlie' might have learnt "Western" styles of playing from fellow musicians, like Rex Stewart was taught by Happy Caldwell. In such a case, it would be strange that Caldwell seems not to have remembered the man.
- Unfortunately, it has not been possible to check the membership rolls of Local 802 AFM, which have been donated to an organisation belonging to the New York Public Library, but are not yet available on the Internet, even if they have been digitised.

We did not succeed.

For us listening friends the Timeless CD came as a matter of surprise and confirmation that this elusive musician was not Thomas Morris, Louis Metcalf, or Demas Dean, as he was generally named in the discographies of the time, but an own very distinct separate musician. It thus caused a big deal of astonishment among our group that a well-known and respected British researcher, Richard Rains, used the Frog Blues and Jazz Annual as a platform to destroy this musician's identity, first in Vol. 1 in attributing this player's recordings to a bunch of other namely known players and, second, in Vol. 5, in assigning Charlie Thomas' recordings to the otherwise well-known Charlie Gaines of Philadelphia, presumably falling into the ancient trap of assigning a familiar name to a musician too good to be unknown. Since it was a Charlie, it had to be Charlie Gaines.

Our article is definitely meant to contradict Mr. Rains assumptions, so not to let the unbiased listener draw wrong conclusions from them. Conclusions expressed in Mr. Rains' article are obviously not based on musical evaluations, but on other matters of personal opinion and cannot remain un-contradicted.

We are talking about music here, not the written notes, but the notes played and the resulting sounds. And – above all – not solely about vague reminiscences and resulting assumptions of the author. We observe that Mr. Rains tries to find his solutions in balancing the citations and opinions published so far on this matter, but he does not use the musical material on hand. It is my way of identifying musicians by their musical "foot-print" in the first instance, and this may then be certified, corrected or even excluded by trustworthy documents.

And the music – if we listen - shows:

There are three different and distinct trumpet players on the recordings listed below. We have taken all recordings listed in Mr. Rains' articles in chronological order, except those with undisputed personnels, to furnish them with our own recognitions.

But let us first talk about and describe the musical characteristics of the three listed and esteemed trumpet/cornet players:

- **BIG CHARLIE THOMAS** (or whatever his real name was): He plays his own feather-light and singing style. His lines are very much built after Armstrong, using high interval jumps and the interesting notes of the chords, thus playing vertical, not horizontal lines, but very melodically and singable. "Big Charlie" is a romanticist, playing with a good dose of blues.

His tone is slim and not as powerful and clear as Armstrong's, but a tone with beauty. His quality of tone was what John R.T. Davies described as "*richly sonorous at the bottom, thrillingly light at the top: the manner of his attack and his breaking of his harmonics by changing capacity of his mouth rather than by lip-muscle suggests that he may have been a reed player earlier in his life.*"

He uses a strong and wide vibrato, with the final altitude of the vibrato amplitude often rising upwards uncontrolled at the end of his notes, also called "shake".

His timing: laid-back swinging inner rhythm in his playing, with much off-beat phrasing. Not hasty or urgent. He uses a lot of triplets in his phrases.

His phrasing is just like Armstrong in his Hot Five/Seven days. He sounds like a pupil of Armstrong's, but nobody has any knowledge of where "Big Charlie's" came from nor where he went after his short Harlem period. He uses unfamiliar chord notes in his phrases, just the interesting notes at the time, often the ninths or sixths.

- **CHARLIE GAINES** does not play in a southern style. His style is more rhythmical than melodic. His playing is somewhat quirky and a bit erratic, using long notes where you would not expect them, rather irregular. His playing is not marked by the use of harmonic finesse or elegance. Instead he ad-libs by playing a series of melodically unrelated notes, but varying their rhythmical relations. His general style might still show some influence from Freddie Keppard, who impressed Gaines in his youth.

His tone is not clear, rather veiled. Not, what we'd call a beautiful tone.

Gaines uses a very slow – rather irregular – vibrato, lasting during the whole length of a tone, but increasing in frequency in the middle of a tone's duration, then lowering again (no final vibrato of tone as with 'Big Charlie'). He often starts his notes with a relatively strong vibrato, this then immediately getting slower.

His timing: his notes come on the beat without dragging or being hasty. He displays good rhythmic feeling and drives the band along.

His ad-lib playing is linear, consisting of long phrases with little difference of altitude, mainly staying within a limited range of his trumpet.

He does not play melodically, but more rhythmically, using his notes in rhythmical coherence to relate to the ground-beat. Thus, he very often uses staccato notes. There is no singable or melodic quality in his playing.

- **JUNE CLARK** was an extremely forceful player who would seemingly burst with power and drive. R. Rains correctly detects a "savagery" in his playing.

Clark owns a fat tone, very strong, loud and urgent. Probably resulting from his relationship with Louis Armstrong, he tried to get a similar quality of tone and thus ruined his lip, which caused him to resign from Small's Sugar Cane in late 1925.

He uses a rather irregular slow vibrato, which for me is a crucial criterion of Clark's playing when listening and trying to judge whether it is him or somebody else. And he maintains his vibrato over the whole length of a note. His vibrato starts immediately with the beginning of the tone, not, as very often the case with other trumpet players, being developed out of a straight note, loosening up into a "terminal" vibrato. He always plays just a split second before the beat, thus sounding hectic and erratic. Although this habit prevents his playing from swinging, he nevertheless plays with a lot of drive and fire.

Clark has a lot of Armstrong phrases and licks at his disposal, which caused Joe Turner to remark that Clark was a "carbon copy" of Armstrong. He certainly is not a follower of the early Harlem period Johnny Dunn school of "military" playing, as Bubber Miley was.

His style is more on the New Orleans – Chicago side, which became so much en vogue when Armstrong hit New York in late 1924. This is what Rex Stewart calls "Western Style". June Clark learned this when getting acquainted with King Oliver and Louis Armstrong in Chicago.

With these characterizations in mind we now are equipped to carefully listen to the recordings listed by Mr. Rains - and below - and then make our own decisions! Our advice: Listen chronologically to the items of each individual musician to find a reasoned solution! We suggest to start with the Charlie Gaines titles, then listen to the June Clarks and then finally the 'Big Charlies'. You'll be surprised!

001 SARA MARTIN <i>Clarence Williams' Blue Five</i>		New York,	Nov. 23, 1925
<i>Sara Martin – voc; June Clark – tpt/cnt; Jimmy Harrison – tbn; Leonard Fields - alt; Clarence Williams – pno, voc (1,2); Buddy Christian – bjo</i>			
73773-B	<i>I'm Gonna Hoodoo You</i>	OK 8270,	Doc DOCD-5397
73774-B	<i>Your Going Ain't Giving Me The Blues</i>	OK 8270,	Doc DOCD-5398
73775-B	<i>What More Can A Monkey Woman Do</i>	OK 8270,	Doc DOCD-5398

This session definitely includes June Clark (by his own recollection) and not 'Big Charlie' Thomas as assumed by John R.T. Davies when compiling the Timeless CD (see K-B Rau, JUNE CLARK – The Story of a Forgotten Giant, Frog Blues & Jazz Annual Vol. 4). 'Big Charlie' Thomas is NOT the cornetist here!

002 CLARENCE WILLIAMS' BLUE FIVE		New York,	Dec. 15, 1925
<i>'Big Charlie' Thomas – tpt/cnt; Buster Bailey – clt; Leonard Fields – alt; Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; Eva Taylor - voc</i>			
73837-B	<i>Shake That Thing</i>	OK 8267,	Timeless CBC 1-030
73838-B	<i>Get It Fixed</i>	OK 8267,	Timeless CBC 1-030

This is 'Big Charlie' Thomas' first appearance on record. He displays all his above noted characteristics here. The remaining personnel is commonly accepted (Rust*6), with the exception of the alto player. But his identity is easy to recognize when listening to June Clark's recordings of 1925 (Blue Rhythm Orchestra, Gulf Coast Seven 05-11-25) where he is the documented alto saxophonist with June Clark's Creole Band.

003 MARY STAFFORD		New York,	c. Mar. 30, 1926
<i>Mary Stafford – voc; June Clark – tpt/cnt; Charlie Green – tbn; Leonard Fields – alt; Harrison Jackson – ten, clt; Perry Bradford – pno; (Buddy Christian) – bjo</i>			
106749	<i>Ain't Got Nobody To Grind My Coffee In The Morning</i>	PA 7502, Per 102,	Archeophone 6006
106750	<i>Take Your Finger Off It</i>	PA 7502, Per 102,	Archeophone 6006

The personnel for this and the following sessions has been shown as comprising June Clark and his Creole Band of early 1926 (see K-B Rau, JUNE CLARK – The Story of a Forgotten Giant, Frog Blues & Jazz Annual Vol. 4), and thus does not include Charlie Gaines as assumed in Mr. Rains' article under discussion. Listen to Clark's "savagery in his attack", as rightly noted by the article's author in another place. There is neither Charlie Gaines here nor 'Big Charlie'!

004 **CAROLINE JOHNSON**

New York, c. Mar. 30, 1926
Caroline Johnson (Alta Brown?) – voc; June Clark – tpt/cnt; Charlie Green – tbn; Leonard Fields – alt; Harrison Jackson – clt, ten; Charlie “Smitty” Smith or Perry Bradford – pno; (Buddy Christian) – bjo; Perry Bradford – voc (1)
 106751 *Georgia Grind* PA 7503, Per 103, Doc DOCD-5514
 106752 *Mama Stayed Out The Whole Night Long (But Mama Didn’t Do No Wrong)* PA 7503, Per 103, Doc DOCD-5514
 Same session as before. No Charlie Gaines nor ‘Big Charlie’!

005 **ELVIRA JOHNSON**

Birmingham Darktown Strutters New York, c. Jun. 17, 1926
 Elvira Johnson – voc; Charlie Gaines – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; (*Otto Hardwick*) – sop; *Mike Jackson* – pno; Buddy Christian - bjo
 X-177 *How Could I Be Blue?* Gnt 3337, Document DOCD-5375
 X-178 *Numbers On The Brain* Gnt 3337, Document DOCD-5375

We can apparently be quite sure of Gaines' presence on these two sides as documented in Tom Lord's 'Clarence Williams'. Gaines also provided insights into Williams' modus operandi: Williams had contracts with a steady roster of musicians who were on call for recording sessions, both instrumental and blues accompaniments. I hear Gaines' straight and horizontal approach, more into rhythmic and staccato than melodic playing. He uses a cup mute here. There is no musical relationship to Big Charlie's playing here, but Charlie Gaines' own horizontal phrasing as known.

There is a very agile soprano saxophone player on these sides who phrases much too “jazzy” to be Elliott, judging from everything we have heard from Elliott up to now. This player belongs to a better and more modern class of musicians and resembles in part Buster Bailey of the Clarence Williams Blue Five period. I – KBR - believe that Otto Hardwick would be a well-suited candidate! The more so as he was a band-mate with Irvis at this time and used to double on soprano sax. Elliott may safely be excluded.

006 **BESSIE BROWN**

New York, early Jul. 1926
 Bessie Brown – voc; *Charlie Gaines* – tpt; unknown – tbn; Carmelo Jari – clt; Clarence Williams – pno; *Buddy Christian* - bjo
 6706-1 *What’s The Matter Now?* Ban 1833 not on LP/CD, but held
 6706-3 *What’s The Matter Now?* Or 698, Document DOCD-5456
 6707-1 *How Could I Be Blue?* Or 698 not on LP/CD
 6707-2 *How Could I Be Blue?* Do 3781, Document DOCD-5456
 6707-3 *How Could I Be Blue?* Do 3781 not on LP/CD

Judging from the straight ahead, no-nonsense playing and the temporal correlation with the above recording session, this trumpet player very probably is Charlie Gaines. His style is the known linear and horizontal one as described above.

Notable differences of takes (from T. Lord and KBR):

6706-1 *Bessie Brown’s last sentence: “So, tell me, what’s the matter now, Sweet Daddy; Papa, what’s the matter now.”*
 6706-3: *Bessie Brown’s last sentence: “And tell me, what’s the matter now, cruel Daddy; Honey, what’s the matter now.”*
 6707-1: *this take -1 not reissued, therefore no comment possibly.*
 6707-2: *two-bar clt break before final vocal chorus is played in high register.*
 6707-3: *two-bar clt break before final vocal chorus is played in low register.*

007 **SADIE GREEN**

New York, c. Aug. 1926
 Bessie Brown – voc; *Charlie Gaines* – tpt; unknown – tbn; Carmelo Jari – clt; Clarence Williams – pno; *Buddy Christian* - bjo
 6782-2 *Senorita Mine* Or 716, Document DOCD-5456
 This accompanying band is very probably identical to the above. T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p. 180: “*Charlie Gaines remembers recording ‘Senorita Mine’ with Clarence Williams, according to an interview by Dave Goldenberg. Perhaps he played on the Bessie Brown recording of that composition, although he didn’t recall it when played a tape of it.*” No ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas here.

008 **MARGARET CARTER**

New York, early Aug. 1926
 Margaret Carter – voc; ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – tpt/cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Happy Caldwell – clt; (*George McClennon?*) – clt, alt; Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian - bjo
 107041 *I Want Plenty Grease In My Frying Pan* PA 7511, Timeless CBC 1-030
 107042 *Come Get Me Papa, Before I Faint* PA 7511, Timeless CBC 1-030
 On trumpet/cornet we definitely hear the mysterious ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas with his playing as characterized above. Against any contradiction I am certain of this player’s identity, whatever his actual name might have been. (See K-B Rau, article on Bob Fuller/Happy Caldwell in N&N 82/83.)

009 **BUDDY CHRISTIAN’S JAZZ RIPPERS**

New York, early Aug. 1926
 ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – tpt/cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Happy Caldwell – clt; (*George McClennon*) – clt; Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian - bjo, voc
 107043 *South Rampart Street Blues* PA 8518, Timeless CBC 1-030
 107044 *The Skunk* PA 8518, Timeless CBC 1-030
 This is the same session as the preceding one! Charlie Thomas on trumpet/cornet is certain when hearing his individual style as characterized above.

010 **THOMAS MORRIS AND HIS SEVEN HOT BABIES**

New York, Aug. 17, 1926
 Thomas Morris, Jabbo Smith – tpt; *Geechie Fields* – tbn; Ernest Elliott – alt, clt; *Happy Caldwell* – ten; *Mike Jackson* – pno; (*Buddy Christian*) – bjo; *Bill Benford* – bbs; *Mike Jackson* – voc
 36047-3 *Georgia Grind* Vic 20180, Frog DFG 1
 36048-2 *Ham Gravy* Vic 20179, Frog DFG 1
 36048-3 *Ham Gravy* Vic 20179, Frog DFG 1

This session mostly has been accepted now as including the youthful Jabbo Smith (by his own recollection) and thus does not comprise ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas as assumed by John R.T. Davies.

011 **OKEH MELODY STARS**

New York, Aug. 23, 1926
 June Clark, ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – tpt/cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; unknown – alt, clt; (*Happy Caldwell*) – ten; *Porter Grainger* – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; Clarence Todd – voc
 74310-B *Look Out, Mr. Jazz* OK 8382, Timeless CBC 1-030
 74311-B *A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You* OK 8382 not on LP/CD, but held

Note: The Timeless CD booklet gives matrix-number 74311-A for 'Look Out, Mr. Jazz'. All Rust editions from *3 on give -B take for each title. T. Lord gives takes 74310-B and 74311-A.

This definitely is June Clark here on first trumpet/cornet with his strong tone, his permanent irregular vibrato and his very personal fiery and hasty attack. On second trumpet/cornet – and thus mainly in the background – is our mysterious, but beautifully poetic “Big Charlie” Thomas with his very light and slim tone, wide vibrato and a phrasing very close to Louis Armstrong’s recordings of the time, using wide interval jumps. And I am fairly certain that he leads the band in the out chorus of ‘A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You’. (See K-B Rau, ‘A Case of Inappropriate Modesty’ – The Okeh Melody Stars, N&N 75)

012 BESSIE BROWN		New York,	Aug. – Sep. 1926
Bessie Brown – voc; ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – tpt/cnt; <i>Charlie Irvis</i> – tbn; Bennie Morton – clt; Clarence Williams – pno; unknown – bjo			
6813-1	Nobody But My Baby Is Getting My Love	Ban 1859,	Timeless CBC 1-030
6813-2	Nobody But My Baby Is Getting My Love	Or 771,	Timeless CBC 1-030
6814-2	St. Louis Blues	Ban 1859,	Timeless CBC 1-030
6814-3	St. Louis Blues	Or 756,	Document DOCD-5456

Here again, ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas is unmistakably present, judging from the stylistic elements.

Notable differences of takes (from T. Lord):

6813-1: *first vocal chorus is followed by 14 bars of clarinet and ensemble*
 6813-2: *first vocal chorus is followed by 16 bars of cornet solo*
 6814-1: *B. Brown ends final vocal with: “... die, Hey, Hey.”*
 6814-2: *B. Brown ends final vocal with: “... die.”*

013 ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	Aug. 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc; ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – tpt/cnt; <i>Bob Fuller</i> – clt; <i>Cliff Jackson</i> – pno			
6781-4	Papa, If You Can’t Do Better	Ban 1882,	Timeless CBC 1-030
6781-5	Papa, If You Can’t Do Better	Ban 1882,	Timeless CBC 1-030
6852-2	I’m Saving It All For You	Ban 1882,	Timeless CBC 1-030

‘Big Charlie’ Thomas here again on distinct and individual trumpet or - probably - cornet.

Notable differences of takes:

6781-4: *vamp after intro: Thomas plays 2 two-bar phrases ending with 3 syncopated notes G – G – G each*
 6781-5: *vamp after intro: Thomas plays 2 two-bar phrases ending with 3 syncopated descending notes G – Eb – C each*

014 DIXIE WASHBOARD BAND		New York,	Oct. 21, 1926
‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – tpt/cnt; <i>Prince Robinson</i> – clt, ten; Clarence Williams – pno; Bruce Johnson – wbd; Clarence Todd - voc			
W142852-3	Dark Eyes	Col 14188-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030
W142853-1	Gimme Blues	Col 14188-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030

Our listening-group friend Dave Brown doubts ‘Big Charlie’’s presence on this and the subsequent sessions 015, 016, 017 (see his article ‘A Real Charlie’ on our website www.harlem-fuss.com!) I – KBR - do hear ‘Big Charlie’!

015 DIXIE WASHBOARD BAND		New York,	Oct. 22, 1926
‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – cnt; unknown – tbn; (<i>Prince Robinson</i>) – clt, ten; Clarence Williams – pno; (<i>Leroy Harris</i>) – bjo; Bruce Johnson – wbd; Clarence Todd – voc, (<i>tom tom</i>); Cl. Williams – Cl. Todd – dialogue			
W142856-3	King Of The Zulus	Col 14171-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030
W142857-3	The Zulu Blues	Col 14171-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030

Obviously, a recording companion to session #014, but – although at a later date - generally same as above. (See also our Clarence Williams investigation in N&N 61!)

016 ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	Dec. 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc; ‘ <i>Big Charlie</i> ’ Thomas – tpt/cnt; <i>Cliff Jackson</i> or (<i>Porter Grainger</i> ?) – pno			
107303	Git Goin’	PA 7519,	Document DOCD-5404
107304	Someday You’ll Come Back To Me	PA 7519,	Document DOCD-5404

All editions of Rust have Demas Dean on trumpet for this session, and I did believe him until a couple of months ago! Yet, this trumpet player certainly is not Demas Dean – after several listening sessions of the Savoy Bearcats recordings! I certainly would like to know who started – and published – this assumption. Dean’s playing is rooted in early Harlem style in performing almost exclusively 6/8 rhythms in his phrases – listen to the Savoy Bearcats, where Dean is responsible for all hot trumpet solos, Gilbert Paris being the straight first trumpet man. What we hear on this recording is a beautiful trumpet accompaniment in early Armstrong style, and I – KBR - assign what we hear to the mysterious “Big Charlie” Thomas – perhaps on a bad day – as heard on the sessions above. Style, rhythm, vibrato and phrasing are all his own.

017 JOE SIMS AND CLARENCE WILLIAMS		New York,	c. Jan. 1927
Joe Sims, Clarence Williams – voc duet; ‘Big Charlie’ Thomas – cnt; Fats Waller – pno; <i>Leroy Harris</i> – bjo			
2799-1	What Do You Know About That	Pm 12435,	Timeless CBC 1-030
2799-2	What Do You Know About That	Pm 12435,	JSP 927D
2800-1	Shut Your Mouth	Pm 12435,	JSP 927D
2800-2	Shut Your Mouth	Pm 12435,	Timeless CBC 1-030

There also is a banjo on these beautiful hokum sides, at least on the first title, and nobody has heard it up to now. Again, our listening-companion Dave Brown doubts ‘Big Charlie’’s presence here.

Notable differences of takes:

2799-1: *Spoken introduction, Clarence Williams’ voice: „Yeah, that’s me. Is that you, Joe? I didn’t recognize you, boy, you’re so fat and greasy, I didn’t recognise you.”*
 2799-2: *Spoken introduction, Clarence Williams’ voice: „Yes, that’s me. Who is that? Is that ... ain’t that you, Sims? You know, dis here’s me. Ah, Boy, I didn’t recognize you, I didn’t recognise you.”*
 2800-1: *4-bar vamp (after 4-bar intro): cnt stuffs in bars 2 and 4. Immediately after vamp: Joe Sims’ voice: „Clarence, I got a little secret I want tell to you.”*
 2800-2: *4-bar vamp (after 4-bar intro): cnt plays clean throughout. Immediately after vamp: Joe Sims’ voice: „Clarence, I got a little secret I want tell you.”*

018 LEROY SMITH AND HIS ORCHESTRA		Camden, NJ,	Feb. 23, 1928
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Frank Belt, Charlie Gaines – tpt; Wilbur de Paris – tbn; Emerson Harper, Harold Henson – alt, clt; Stan Peters – ten, clt; Leroy Smith, John Long – vln; Harry Brooks – pno; Sam Speed – bjo; Fred Peters – bbs; Edward Beeler – dms

43428-2	Rhapsody In Blue	Vic 21328,	Frog DGF 8
43429-2	St. Louis Blues	Vic 21328,	Frog DGF 8

The first title, 'Rhapsody In Blue', is a very dexterously condensed version of George Gershwin's piano concertino, without the piano solo part, yet, arranged for a dance band. This title bears no hot solos.

'St. Louis Blues' offers hot solos by Emerson Harper on clarinet, Wilbur de Paris on muted growl trombone, then a trumpet solo – played into the derby hat - on a minor blues chord scheme which we'd attribute to the first trumpet player, Frank Belt, played with a beautiful range. The following trumpet solo – played with a plunger mute – obviously by Charlie Gaines, shows his straight ahead, linear and horizontal style, swinging, bluesy and jazzy.

019 LEROY SMITH AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Camden, NJ, Apr. 02, 1928

Frank Belt, Charlie Gaines – tpt; Wilbur de Paris – tbn; Emerson Harper, Harold Henson – alt, clt; Stan Peters – ten, clt; John Long – vln; Harry Brooks – pno; Sam Speede – bjo; Fred Peters – bbs; Edward Beeler – dms, *vib*

43432	I'm Riding To Glory (With A Glorious Girl)	Vic unissued on 78,	Frog DGF 12
43433-2	I'm A Broken-Hearted Blackbird	Vic 21472,	Frog DGF 8

And again, a very professional and smooth performance. A first-class orchestra – cultivated and expert, yet not as hot as we would have wished. The bell notes at the beginning of the introduction of the first title are played on orchestra bells, the bell like notes after the brass phrases a little later – still in the intro - are probably played by the drummer – or the pianist? - on a xylophone. There might be a flute in the introduction to the second title, which also features a rather strange clarinet solo.

Unfortunately, we do not hear any hot solos in these titles. But I – KBR - love that tuba player.

020 FATS WALLER AND HIS BUDDIES

New York, Mar. 01, 1929

Charlie Gaines – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Arville Harris – clt, ten; Thomas Fats Waller – pno; Eddie Condon – bjo

49760-2	The Minor Drag	Vic V-38050,	Chronological Classics 689
49761-2	Harlem Fuss	Vic V-38050,	Chronological Classics 689

This is one of the all-time classic jazz sessions of Harlem times, known to everyone interested in the music. From Eddie Condon's narration we have a true and dependable documentation of the participating musicians and the circumstances the session was arranged. Apart from that we here have one of the funniest stories about jazz music and musicians. This session then can serve as a best reference for Charlie Gaines' playing, bearing its characteristics as laid-down above.

At the end, please, allow me – KBR - two little quibbles:

- In his article in Frog Annual Vol. 5 Mr. Rains remarks with "satisfaction" that I – KBR – agree with his – Mr. Rains – conclusion that June Clark is the lead trumpeter, but with regret that he – KBR again – persists in his belief that it is the mythical 'Big Charlie Thomas' and not Charlie Gaines who takes those fiery breaks on 'Look Out, Mr. Jazz'. Sorry, Mr. Rains, I still hold my correspondence with a member of your own listener's circle, and with e-mail of 24. Feb. 2007 this unmistakably says that I – KBR - proposed the presence of June Clark as first trumpet on the Okeh Melody Stars, when Jimmy Wade was favoured by your friends.

- I also still hold a list of John R.T. Davies record collection from the years 1967/68, and this clearly shows that John R.T. owned the Elvira Johnson and the Birmingham Darktown Strutters sides (see remarks at very end of Mr. Rains' article). From the same source I also hold an acetate of these sides with a much better sound than that of the Document CD.

And finally: We can only urge everybody interested in classic jazz and its musicians to – first – listen to the music, classify and analyse its components, then compare and – second – to check these recognitions against memoirs and reminiscences of the participants. Then listen again – and again – and then draw conclusions! And: it still is the music that really counts!

And then you will have discovered a very fascinating musical personality in trumpet/comet player 'Big Charlie' Thomas – or whatever his real name was!