THE RECORDINGS OF THE

BLUE RHYTHM ORCHESTRA

A Tentative Personnelo-Discography

The 'BLUE RHYYTHM ORCHESTRA' was a pseudonym on Pathé Actuelle Records for 'June Clark and his Creole Band' – as per the band´s promotional photo (see this web-site´s front page) or 'June Clark and his Creole Stompers' as per the booklet of Columbia´s extraordinary and wonderful LP set 'The Sound of Harlem'. The band played (Ed) Smalls´ Sugar Cane Club' located on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 135th Street in Harlem, New York, most of 1925. They were an immediate success in Harlem in the mid-1920, as their leader June Clark and his companion on trombone, the great Jimmy Harrison, had met a few years ago in Chicago, where they listened intensely to King Oliver´s Creole Jazz Band and tried to copy Oliver´s and Louis Armstrong´s most famous interplay on their cornets. They copied their duet dialogues, Clark imitating Oliver´s role as lead-trumpet player, and Armstrong´s role as second-part player in a New Orleans call-and-response pattern. Their kind of music was so much enthusing and novel for this period of Harlem-Jazz that other musicians crowded into the club only to hear their duets.
The band also recorded in their entirety, but with a slightly alternate personnel, under the pseudonym 'The Gulf Coast Seven' for Perry Bradford on November 05, 1925, also accompanying Bradford – and Clarence Williams - on several blues/vaudeville singer´s recordings with parts of their personnel. Keepnews´ and Grauer´s 'Pictorial History of Jazz' has a photograph of the band under the heading "Perry Bradford, like Clarence Williams, was pianist, publisher and an organizer of record dates." The musicians are the June Clark Creole Stompers/Band, with Clark, Harrison, Charlie Smith, 'Splivy' Escoffery, and – perhaps substituting for Leonard Fields – Eugene Kennedy. Bradford stands in the back, leaning over the piano. Additional members of the working band were Bill Benford on tuba and Joe 'Jazz' Carson on drums.
This was a very exceptional band for their time, and it is hard to accept that they did not find a record company to record them under their true band-name. At least we have to be most happy that they left us their little but most enjoying inheritance in their 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra' and 'The Gulf Coast Seven' sides (see 'The Gulf Coast Seven' elsewhere on this web-site).

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: June Clark
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *June Clark*
- 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: *(June Clark)*

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.

BLUE RHYTHM ORCHESTRA

001 **BLUE RHYTHM ORCHESTRA** New York, Oct. 29, 1925
June Clark – cnt; Jimmy Harrison – tbn;

Buster Bailey – clt; Leonard Fields - alt;
Charlie "Smitty" Smith – pno; Will "Splivy" Escoffery – bjo
106358 Keep Your Temper PA 36364, Per 14545, Frog DGF 73
Composer credit: 106358 (Willie Smith).

Because of the obvious correlation of this and the following session – the only ones under the 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra' name - I have taken my liberty to discuss both sessions together under the following date.
Please, note, that 'Keep Your Temper' on Frog DGF 71 does in fact play the 'Keep Your Temper' of the 'Gulf Coast Seven' session of Nov. 05, 1925. The 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra' 'Keep Your Temper' has then been correctly reissued on Frog DGF 73 as shown here!

002 **BLUE RHYTHM ORCHESTRA** New York, c. Nov. 04, 1925
June Clark – cnt; Jimmy Harrison – tbn;
Buster Bailey – clt; Leonard Fields – alt;
Charlie "Smitty" Smith – pno; Will "Splivy" Escoffery - bjo
106381 Santa Claus Blues PA 36350, Per 14531, Frog DGF 71
106382 Hold ´Er, Deacon PA 36364, Per 14545, Frog DGF 71
Composer credits: 106381 (Straight – Kahn); 106382 (Will C. Skidmore – Marshall Walker)

The quotations below urge us to conclude that the sides of the 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra' are in fact by 'June Clark´s Creole Stompers', augmented by Buster Bailey on clarinet, if this is in fact he. The below mentioned characteristics of the alto player and the piano player are easily recognized on the records, so that the personnel have to be thus:
- June Clark: aurally the cornet player is the same man as on the Gulf Coast Seven and not ---- Thomas or (presumably Big Charlie Thomas), as given in Rust, Jazz Records, all editions. Clark owns a fat tone and a very fiery approach and attack, although sometimes retarding the opening- notes of some phrases (lip trouble? or uncertainty what to play next?), whereas --- Thomas has a lighter tone, uses a more lyrical style with high interval-jumps, very much like Louis Armstrong at that time. Furthermore, Clark owns a rather erratic approach to time/rhythm, which results in a kind of hectic succession of notes.
- Jimmy Harrison: it is most interesting to hear Harrison´s new concept of trombone-playing, like a second cornet as cited below. And mind his tone, vibrato, and attack, completely unlike any other trombone player at that time.
- Buster Bailey: although there is no reliable source for this suggestion known to me, the style seems to be Bailey´s. Bailey is not known to have been a permanent member of the group. There is no soprano-sax as given by all Rust editions to be heard anywhere.
- Leonard Fields: this man´s playing is exactly as cited below in 'Sources'. Mentioning his name at the appropriate places in Tom Lord 'Clarence Williams' p. 146/147 seems quite reasonable! (See my Leonard Fields listing elsewhere on this web-site!)
- Charlie 'Smitty' Smith: Rust and all other discographies list Willie "The Lion" Smith as pianist. This pianist here shows nothing of "The Lion´s" characteristics. The piano-breaks at the end of "Hold ´Er Deacon" with their simple "oom-pah" would exactly apply for "Smitty" Smith as quoted below. Therefore - and because Clark´s piano player at the time is documented as "Smitty" Smith - I think that "Smitty" is much more probable than "The Lion". Maybe "the Lion´s" name was listed in early discographic times, because "Keep Your Temper" is "the Lion´s" tune and "Smitty" was practically unknown!
- Will 'Splivy' Escoffery: Rust and all other discographies list Buddy Christian. To me, Buddy Christian does not seem to be the banjo player on these sides, comparing this man´s style to that more straight-forward approach of Buddy Christian on the Clarence Williams Blue Five or the Gulf Coast Seven session of Nov. 05, 1925 (see below). This man is said to be "Splivy" Escoffery (see below) - as mentioned in 'Jazz Information' No. II/16 of 1941 - as regular member of the June Clark band. He plays in that Ragtime derived banjo style common in Harlem in the early days as opposed to the straight 4/4 "Western" style of Buddy Christian. William "Splivy" Escoffery, who is not listed in Rust 6th ed., may yet be found in the Rust Artist index under "Spivey, -- (bj), having made recordings with Eliza Christmas Lee and with Lavinia Turner in 1921. He even is the same man, who played bjo/gtr in Duke Ellington´s first group at Armstrong High School in Washington DC in 1916, although named William Escoffey here (Lawrence, D. Ellington and his World, p. 12). He is said to be of Portuguese origin.

<u>Notes:</u>
- VJM VLP 5 (LP) Cover text: probably Louis Armstrong and another (cornets); Charlie Irvis (trombone); Buster Bailey (clarinet and soprano saxophone); unknown (alto saxophone); probably Clarence Williams or Dan Parish (piano); Buddy Christian (banjo),
*- Rust*2: June Clark ? (tpt); Jimmy Harrison ? (tbn); Buster Bailey (clt, sop); Prince Robinson (ten); Willie "The Lion" Smith (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo)*
*- Rust*3: ? --- Thomas -c; Jimmy Harrison -tb; Buster Bailey -cl -ss; Don Redman -cl -as; Clarence Williams or Willie "The Lion" Smith -p; Buddy Christian -bj*
*- Rust*4: June Clark or --- Thomas -c; Jimmy Harrison -tb; Buster Bailey -cl -ss; Prince Robinson -ts; Willie "The Lion" Smith -p; Buddy Christian -bj*
*- Rust*6: Charlie Thomas -c; Jimmy Harrison -tb; Buster Bailey -cl -ss -as; Prince Robinson -ts; Willie "The Lion" Smith -p; Buddy Christian -bj*
- Tom Lord, Clarence Williams: June Clark or ---- Thomas (tpt); Jimmy Harrison (tbn); Buster Bailey (clt, sop); Prince Robinson (ten); Willie „The Lion" Smith (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo). „The following sessions (Blue Rhythm Orchestra – KBR) are tempting examples to list as Clarence Williams sessions because of the sound of the group and the fact that all three compositions are owned by CWMPC (Clarence Williams Music Publication Company – KBR).

<u>Tunes Structures:</u>
<u>*Keep Your Temper Key of F / Bb / Eb / Bb Pathé Actuelle, Perfect*</u>
(Intro 8 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 32 bars ABAC alt + ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(B1 Chorus 16 bars AA´ (tbn 6 bars, reeds 2 bars, tbn 7 bars, ens 1 bar))(B2 Chorus 16 bars (clt 6 bars, reeds 2 bars, clt 7 bars, ens 1 bar))(Bridge 4 bars ens)(C1 Chorus 32 bars AA´ (clt 28 bars, ens 4 bars))(Vamp 2 bars ens)(B3 Chorus 16 bars (ens 6 bars, reeds 2 bars, ens 8 bars))
<u>*Santa Claus Blues Key of Eb Pathé Actuelle, Perfect*</u>
(Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 32 bars ABAC tbn + ens, tbn middle break)(B1 Verse 16 bars ens)(A2 Chorus 32 bars alt + ens, alt middle break)(A3 Chorus 32 bars ens, cnt middle break)
<u>*Hold ´er Deacon Key of C Pathé Actuelle, Perfect*</u>
(A1 Chorus 20 bars ens, clt breaks)(B1 Verse 16 bars ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(A2 Chorus 20 bars alt + ens)(A3 Chorus 20 bars ens, ens middle break, bjo breaks)(A4 Chorus 20 bars ens, pno middle break, pno breaks)(A5 Chorus 20 bars ens, tbn middle break, cnt + tbn + alt breaks)

Sources:
- "The Sound of Harlem" Columbia C3L33 LPs, booklet: "Small´s Sugar Cane Club: Pianist Charlie Smith had a band at the Sugar Cane in 1923. Cornetist June Clark took it over and featured Jimmy Harrison, trombone; Benny Carter, C-melody-sax; Jazz Carson, drums; Prince Robinson, sax; Will "Splivy" Escoffery, banjo; and a fellow named "Stone" on clarinet."
- Don Redman/Frank Driggs: Martin Williams, Jazz Panorama: "June Clark and Jimmy Harrison used to have a band uptown at Connor´s on 135th street, and all of us used to practically live in there. June was very good, but he couldn´t read. They used to play some great jazz together. When Jimmy was in Fletcher´s band later on, he was the best around
- Rex Stewart, Boy Meets Horn, p. 65: "Most likely we met at Smalls´ Sugar Cane on Fifth Avenue. That would be about right because I also met Jimmy Harrison and June Clark there. They were the only musicians in town playing "Western" style with the exception of Happy Caldwell, who had grown up under the influence of Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong. …… Hap started teaching me the Western "get-off" style of playing, which had a heavy accented back beat on the second and fourth bars. When you soloed, it was called "taking a Boston".
- "The Sound of Harlem" Columbia C3L33 LPs, booklet: "Bamboo Inn: June Clark´s Creole Stompers: Clark, cornet; Jimmy Harrison, trombone; Len Fields, alto sax; Harrison Jackson, tenor sax; Charlie Smith, piano; Buddy Christian, guitar; Bill Benford, bass; Joe "Jazz" Carson, drums, January 1926."
- "The Sound of Harlem" Columbia C3L33 LPs, booklet: "During the fall of 1925 the most exciting jazz band in Harlem, according to the many musicians who heard it, was June Clark´s Creole Stompers at Ed Small´s Sugar Cane Club (up until October 22nd when Small´s Paradise opened on Seventh Avenue with Charlie Johnson´s band). The main attraction was the brass duo of Clark and trombonist Jimmy Harrison, who modeled their choruses after the two-cornet style of King Oliver and Louis Armstrong."
- Freddie Skerritt, Storyville 95, p.183: „I remember that in the early 'twenties, "Smalls'" was located on the south-west corner of 135th Street and 5th Avenue. Trumpeter June Clark was the band-leader and Leonard Fields (sax) and Jimmy Harris (sic) (trombone) were in the band, but I don´t remember the other names. I do remember that Basie was across the street with a four-piece combo."
- Bobby Booker´s Life Story, Storyville 101, p.176: "Leonard Fields was on alto; I never heard anybody play like him, he was really fast and used to do double and triple tongue work on the saxophone."
- Leslie Carr Looks Back, Storyville 139, p. 28: "We would go to cabarets and dances to hear the better players as Jimmy Harrison, trombone; Leonard Fields, alto sax; ….."
- Count Basie/Albert Murray, Good Morning Blues: "I used to go into Small´s Sugar Cane Club quite often…… They had a piano player that they were just crazy about. His name was Smitty, and he was also known as Fat Smitty. He knew all the songs and all the keys and everything, and he played a lot of comp. No matter how much piano anybody else played, nobody could comp for June and Jimmy like Smitty could. So far as they were concerned, he was it. …. Smitty would just be there with that oompa, oompa, oompa right there behind those cats, laying it on heavy. Oompa, oompa, oompa. That´s what made Smitty so great. That´s why those guys liked to play with Smitty so much. Oompa, oompa, oompa. Beautiful. Just beautiful."

003 **GULF COAST SEVEN** New York, Nov. 05, 1925
June Clark – cnt; Jimmy Harrison – tbn;
Leonard Fields – alt; Harrison Jackson – clt, ten;
Willie 'The Lion' Smith – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; Joe 'Jazz' Carson – dms

141245-4	Santa Claus Blues	Col 14107-D,	Frog DGF 32
141246-3	Keep Your Temper	Col 14107-D,	Frog DGF 32

Composer credits: 141245 (Straight and Kahn); 141246 (Smith)

This recording of the 'Gulf Coast Seven' – a Perry Bradford initiated band recording – actually is 'June Clark´s Creole Band' that also recorded under the name of 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra'.
ADDITION 25-05-25: This recording session causes me a not so small embarrassment in that I just recently discovered a mention of this session in 'The Lion´s' autobiography 'Music on my Mind', co-written by George Hoefer in 1964 (see below). After another close listening I have to state the following: Although Willie 'The Lion' Smith gives Buster Bailey as clarinettist for this session, I am decidedly certain that Bailey is not on it. Although he is the clarinettist on the 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra' sides – Bailey´s presence there is not documented anywhere, but still assumed only, yet rightfully, as I think - this clarinettist of the 'Gulf Coast Seven' lacks a whole lot of Bailey´s brilliant perfection and is of rather medium instrumental capacity. Furthermore, he only plays when the tenor sax is silent and therefore certainly is that same player. (The 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra' sides have no tenor sax! Bailey is known only to have played alto besides his clarinet!) This player´s performance might then well be the documented Harrison Jackson, tenorist of the June Clark band of this time. (He later concluded his musical activities and became a well-known Harlem lawyer.) The other reed-man on alto sax with certainty is Leonard Fields as on the 'Blue Rhythm Band' sides. Trumpet/cornet and trombone without any doubt are June Clark and Jimmy Harrison. Banjoist Buddy Christian might have been a contemporary replacement for Will 'Splivy' Escoffery, banjo man of the 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra', and drummer 'Jazz' Carson of this same band. Leaves the pianist! Willie 'The Lion' declares himself to be the pianist. By comparison with the documented pianist of the 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra', this may well be true. The 'Blue Rhythm Orchestra' pianist plays an 'oompa oompa' rhythm comping throughout, as described by Bill 'Count' Basie (above under 'Sources'). While our pianist here on these sides plays a perpetual and simple four-beat-to-the-bar rhythm with only a few fingers (thumbs and little fingers) on the first title, and a composed bass-line adjusted to the chord-structure of the second title, together with piano parts for the bridges and band parts. As this title is 'The Lion´s' composition, this piano parts most probably is a proof for Willie 'The Lion´s' presence on these sides. I therefore must revoke my claim of the past as it read:
"Again, this recording session decidedly does not include Willie 'The Lion' Smith on piano!" And I continued with the following statements that still are valid for this session, only, that not Charles 'Smitty' Smith is the pianist, but Willie 'The Lion' Smith:
"This session brings us a completely different personnel from all other 'Gulf Coast Seven' sides recorded, far from the Johnny Dunn stable of musicians – we are two years later now! As I have constantly observed during my/our large research project on the recordings of Clarence Williams (N&N 58 – 61) it was common among composers/publishers to hire musicians from working bands for their own units playing and recording their recent compositions/publications. But very seldom did they hire more than two musicians of one distinct band. Often partnerships of trumpet / trombone players were engaged as cited above. Maybe it was not wanted to transpose the distinct sound of a working band on to the recording unit with another leader´s name?! Not so Bradford. He engaged complete bands, even containing the band´s leader as a playing member. So, Bradford hired one of the hottest bands in Harlem of the year 1925, residing at "Smalls´ Sugar Cane Club" on 2212 Fifth Avenue, forerunner of "Smalls´ Paradise". He had a photograph made of this band with himself leaning on the piano ('Pictorial History of Jazz' p. 129 and 'Born with the Blues' p. 147) which obviously was intended as a promotional photo for further use as a Bradford recording unit. So, it seems that Bradford had future-plans with them. But only a handful of records resulted out of this combination, as I have shown in my comprehensive article on June Clark, which will be issued in the FROG Yearbook Vol. 4 later this year. Yet, a most interesting point should appropriately be added here: The band – June Clark´s ! – recorded two titles of their very own repertoire in their own arrangement here. In all other instances of the Gulf Coast Seven output the tunes and titles are Perry Bradford´s!

Although all other sources like Rust etc. list June Clark, cnt; Jimmy Harrison, tbn; Buster Bailey, clt, sop, alt; Prince Robinson, ten; Willie 'The Lion' Smith, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo; Bill Benford, bbs; 'Jazz' Carson, dms in this or other variants, the reader may be assured that my above listed personnel is the right one! The appropriate deduction will be found in the above-mentioned FROG Yearbook Vol. 4, to be issued later this year 2014."

Notes:
- Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography, 1948: personnel unknown
- Carey, McCarthy, Jazz Directory, Vol. 4: "This group is generally considered to be connected with Perry Bradford and/or Johnny Dunn. Others have associated it with the Original Memphis Five. Definite information being lacking we merely give the basic details. It is possible that not all these records are by the same group of artists."
- W.C. Allen, Hendersonia: "On November 5, 1925, Buster Bailey recorded two titles for Columbia with the Gulf Coast Seven, a Clarence Williams recording group; and about this same time, he recorded three titles in two sessions for Pathe/Perfect with a similar band labelled as Blue Rhythm Orchestra."
- D. Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: prob. June Clark, tpt; Jimmy Harrison, tbn; Buster Bailey, Prince Robinson, clt/sax; Willie Smith, p; unknown, d.
*- Rust*2: June Clark (?) (cnt); Jimmy Harrison (tbn); Buster Bailey (clt, alt); Prince Robinson (ten); Willie "The Lion" Smith (pno); unknown (dms)*
*- Rust*3,*4,*6: June Clark -c; Jimmy Harrison -tb; Buster Bailey -cl-ss -as; Prince Robinson -ts; Willie "The Lion" Smith -p; Buddy Christian -bj; ?Bill Benford -bb; "Jazz" Carson -d*
- Willie 'The Lion' Smith/ George Hoefer, Music On My Mind, p. 162: "My first original composition was called 'Keep Your Temper', and on November 5, 1925, Williams set it up for a recording on the old Columbia label. We had a good band with 'The Lion´s' piano, June Clark´s cornet, Jimmy Harrison´s trombone, Buster Bailey´s clarinet, Buddy Christian on guitar, Bill Benford on bass, and Jazz Carson playing drums. They called us the 'Gulf Coast Seven', for no other reason than Williams came from down around the Gulf of Mexico. First we did a tune by Clarence called 'Santy Claus Blues' and then we bore down on 'Keep Your Temper'. The sides came out and I don´t remember ever getting a chance to hear them. I recall damn well I didn´t see any other money besides the regular recording fee at that period. Such things as royalties were unknown in those days for jazz men."

Recorded Tunes:
Santa Claus Blues Key of Eb Columbia
(Intro 4 bars ens)(B1 Verse 16 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 32 bars ABAC tbn + ens, tbn middle break)(A2 Chorus 32 bars alt + ens, alt middle break)(A3 Chorus 32 bars ens, cnt middle break)(C1 ½ Chorus 16 bars AC ens, clt breaks)
Keep Your Temper Key of F / Bb / Eb / Bb Columbia
(Intro 8 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 32 bars ABAC alt + ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(B1 Chorus 16 bars AA´ (tbn 6 bars, reeds 2 bars, tbn 7 bars, ens 1 bar))(B2 Chorus 16 bars (ten 14 bars, ens 2 bars))(Bridge 4 bars ens)(C1 Chorus 32 bars AA´ (clt + ens 28 bars, ens 4 bars))(Vamp 2 bars ens)(B3 Chorus 16 bars (ens 6 bars, clt 2 bars, ens 8 bars))(B4 Chorus 16 bars ens, cnt middle break)

'June Clark and his Creole Band' also recorded in a small number of other groups with Bradford or Clarence Williams (see my June Clark list elsewhere on this web-site).

The front page of my 'Harlem-Fuss' web-site presents a hitherto unknown photo of 'June Clark and his Creole Band' (courtesy of Keith Miller, Toronto, Canada) which shows exactly this Blue Rhythm Orchestra personnel, except for Buster Bailey missing, and Bill Benford, Jazz Joe Carson, and probably Harrison Jackson added, and completing the 'Creole Band' personnel.
Now, just look at the notes below re the personnels as listed in the various editions of Rust and other discographies! That´s what I would call some development!

K.- B. Rau
25-05-2025