

PERRY BRADFORD AND HIS GANG

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

PERRY BRADFORD AND HIS GANG

When browsing through early numbers of Names & Numbers the other day, I found a most interesting letter from Theo Zwicky of Switzerland, which describes very well what I intend to do: Evaluate all sources published and purchased during my collecting life and relate them to the discographies available. Theo Zwicky, researcher extra-ordinaire of the Territory Bands of the USA as well as the Washboard Rhythm Kings and their affiliates (see his wonderful articles in Storyville magazine) had this to say in N&N 3:

" I always felt that each given personnel should be followed by an abbreviated entry of all the main sources where a personnel came from. This would enable serious collectors/discographers to follow this up. I see so many personnels in Jazz Records and elsewhere that I know are wrong. I've been dropping on too many 'sources' in old magazines where the personnels originated by absolutely unreliable informants and very often being pure speculation. But they have been copied and repeated over and over again. It's still not too late to 'reconstruct' most of the sources of most personnels. This would help immensely to eliminate wrong personnels, I feel. I'm convinced that this would be much more important than to note spelling differences on labels such as Jelly_Roll/Jelly-Roll !"

As I see it, Theo is absolutely right. But, to "reconstruct the sources of most personnels" would take an immense mass of time that I – being in my 70s – simply do not have anymore. And I assume that most people who provided these personnels in the past are not with us anymore. So, what I can do, is to use my audio memory of 55 years of listening to the classic jazz recordings, my experience from musical activity, and relate these properties to my collection of records, books and magazines, and see what can be found and concluded on the many records without documented or ascertained personnels.

Exactly that is what I am trying to do

To conclude my series of articles on the various Perry Bradford recording units trying to find out the actual personnels I still have to tackle the very few recordings under the band name of Perry Bradford and his Gang.

Bradford used this band name only for five recording bands/sessions in 1926/7, one for Columbia and four for Okeh, of which one was never issued.

Of these five recording sessions the first three have never been attributed a possible or even probable personnel in the 6 editions of Rust's 'Jazz Records 1897 – 1942'. Of these the first session is unissued up to now and no test seems to have ever been found. For the last two sessions Rust offered personnels, and they seem to have found their correct state in the last decade as will be discussed below. But the second and third sessions still show blanks in all Rust editions, and these accordingly are the most interesting items to research and to find out. These two issued sessions of April/May 1926, by the way, are the only sides of Bradford's band recordings that have never been reissued anywhere on LP or CD except for the currently still available Timeless and Frog issues!

PERRY BRADFORD AND HIS GANG

Perry Bradford – voc;

unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn;

unknown – clt; unknown – alt;

unknown – pno; unknown – bjo

80001-B So's Your Old Man

80002-A Just Met A Friend From My Home Town

New York,

Apr. 16, 1926

OK unissued

not on LP/CD

OK unissued

not on LP/CD

As the two titles of this session are unissued and obviously no tests have been found, nothing can be said about the musicians and the musical results of the session.

Rust gives an instrumentation, but it is not known whether this is deduced from the instrumentations of the two following sessions or from surviving documentation.

Notes: For this session the following personnels have been listed:

*- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: unknown cnt; tbn; clt; alt; pno; bjo; Perry Bradford vcl*

PERRY BRADFORD AND HIS GANG

Gus Aiken – tpt; unknown (Charlie Green?) – tbn;

New York,

Apr. 21, 1926

unknown – alt; unknown – ten;

Perry Bradford – pno; unknown (*Sam Speede?*) – bjo;

Perry Bradford, Gus Horsley, Bert Howell, unknown - voc quartet

141992-2 Just Met A Friend From My Home Town

Col 14142-D,

Timeless CBC 1-073

141993-1 So's Your Old Man

Col 14142-D,

Timeless CBC 1-073

This really is an unusual recording. Bradford obviously had great interest to feature the present vocal quartet of which he probably was a member. The band certainly is attributed a secondary role in the proceedings and it is to be asked what purpose Bradford pursued in recording exactly these two titles other than cash in on his own latest compositions. The results must have been disappointing, judging alone from the fact that the above mentioned CDs are the only reissues of these titles ever. I assume that sales figures of the original issues must have been diminutive. M. Rader assumes that the unfamiliarity of these two recordings featuring Bradford's singing quartet is implied by collector's lacking estimation.

But these sides certainly are musically rewarding.

The instrumentation definitely is: trumpet, trombone, alto sax, tenor sax, piano and banjo. There certainly is no clarinet as listed in Rust.

The Timeless CD booklet states June Clark as possible trumpet player, but I am sorry to say that there are none of June Clark's characteristics heard here. It seems that June Clark is a favourite guess for unknown trumpeters from the Harlem scene of the mid 1920s for researchers and CD booklet writers, just as shown in my article on 'Lem Fowler's Favorites' elsewhere in this issue. But I confess that I also thought of Clark's presence here when compiling my article on this elusive musician some years ago (see the Frog Blues and Jazz Annual Vol. 4). Yet, the vibrato is different, the tone, the phrasing, the attack. Only the slightly irregular time might be in common with Clark. This trumpeter here certainly knows how to play written parts, and he is able to perform a hot lead part for a dance band. But there certainly were a whole lot of able and hot horn men in Harlem at the time. Without definite commitment I see the possibility of Gus Aiken's presence here, just as on the next item. The stylistic similarity of the trumpet parts played both on this and the following recording – disregarding the identical arrangements – I did not recognize until working on this article.

The rather limited trombonist is difficult to classify as he only delivers simple 'tailgate' glissandos and no melodious trombone part as can be heard on the next item below. But he reminds me of Charlie Green on the Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools of November 02, 1925, half a year earlier, where he performs in the rather crude style which is familiar from many Bessie Smith sides. And we know of him as a heavy drinker who might easily have been in a state a being drunk here. At the time of this recording he was not with Henderson anymore, had also probably just left the June Clark band to hurry home to Omaha because of marital problems. But this is only 'educated' guess-work.

The reed players only play written parts and are therefore impossible to determine. But the tenor sax man reminds me of Albert Happy Caldwell with his strong playing and sharp tone (see my article on 'Lem Fowler's Favorites' in this issue). Again, no definite identification from my side!

Easy to identify is Perry Bradford himself on piano with his right-hand arpeggios. Listen only to his accompaniment to the trumpet chorus in the first title.

To my ears the banjo part is comparable to what I know of Sam Speede, and it might easily be him. Gus Horsley as noted in the CD booklet should be ruled out now as a possibility after Han Enderman's article in N&N 72.

For the names of the four singers I am grateful to Han Enderman, whose statements I am gladly following (see N&N 72 p.18).

The instrumental parts played on this session obviously are identical to those of the following session, and it therefore seems feasible to assume a written arrangement, possibly from Bradford's hand.

Notes: For this session the following personnels have been listed:

- C. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography 1948/1963: Johnny Dunn (c); Garvin Bushell (cl); Perry Bradford (p)*

- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: *unknown cnt; tbn; clt; alt; pno; bjo; Perry Bradford vcl; unknown male quartet vcl*

- *Timeless CD booklet: ? June Clark, t; unknown tb; cl; as; as; p: ? Gus Horsley, bj; unknown vocal quartet, possibly including Bradford.*

PERRY BRADFORD AND HIS GANG

New York,

c. May 10, 1926

Gus Aiken – tpt; Bud Aiken – tbn; unknown – alt;

*Perry Bradford – pno; unknown (*Sam Speede?*) – bjo;*

Perry Bradford, Gus Horsley, Bert Howell, unknown - voc quartet

74164-B So's Your Old Man

OK 8324,

Frog DGF 56

74165-B Just Met A Friend From My Home Town

OK 8324,

Frog DGF 56

With this session we are on safer ground, having identified the brass players as the Aiken brothers – Augustine 'Gus' on trumpet and Eugene 'Gene' on trombone – some years ago, documented in the Frog Blues and Jazz Annual Vol. 3 by our listening group of David Brown, Michael Rader and myself.

Whereas sound quality of the last session – recorded by the Columbia people – is definitely on a great level, it is much worse here. (This may have added to my own being unable to associate the trumpet part with Gus Aiken in the past.)

Gus Aiken's trumpet part is very similar here to the session before, although faster in tempo and more brilliant in execution. Only the recorded sound leaves much to be desired. He is better here musically than on the previous session, probably due to his greater familiarity with these titles, which allows him to play more loosely.

Other than on the record above I feel very confident about the identity of the trombonist. It is Gus Aiken's brother Eugene 'Bud' Aiken, another alumnus of the Jenkins Orphanage of Charleston, SC. When researching Gus Aiken's recording career - as documented in the Frog Blues and Jazz Annual Vol. 3 – it soon became apparent that there was a certain trombone player who astonishingly often played in company with Gus, and this then had to be his brother Eugene, whose cultivated playing on trombone and trumpet became silent suddenly at about this time. Garvin Bushell said about him: "Buddy was never boisterous! ... Buddy played somewhat in the style of Jimmy Harrison." Re Bud Aiken I would like to cite my own words in N&N 72: Bud, a trombonist as well as trumpeter, shows a very remarkable development into a first class trombone player, very modern for his time and obviously under the spell of the future trombone master of swing, Jimmy Harrison. Bud Aiken with his exceptionally modern improvisational style (is) reaching forward into stylistic regions of the 50s and 60s. Exactly this can be heard here on this coupling, and it is unbelievably sad that Eugene 'Bud' Aiken only had a little bit more than a year to live, dying August 21, 1927. I wonder what beautiful things we did not get to hear! A really remarkable musician! The same beautifully developed style of his can be heard on the Laura Smith recording of April 01, 1926! At this time Jimmy Harrison was the trombone sensation in Harlem because of his trumpet derived style on the slide horn. He had listened intensely to the Oliver band in Chicago and transferred Armstrong's manner of playing second part to his mentor Oliver onto his own style. Bud Aiken developed a similar style, yet building on his own skill as a trumpeter.

The alto sax player is almost completely overshadowed by the great brass team. He can be best heard in the introduction and the ensemble verse of "Old Man" and in the coda of "Home Town". As this player is holding long notes most of the time without any jazz phrasing his identity is impossible to assume. There is no clarinet on this session.

On piano we definitely hear Mr. Bradford again, yet mainly pounding rhythm behind the ensemble, with only occasional “tinkle-tinkle-plink” phrasing. Obviously the Okeh people placed the piano at the back of the studio. This position of the piano might prevent Bradford from taking an active singing part in the vocal quartet. But it is very difficult to distinguish whether there are three or four voices singing. The Okeh label only says “Singing” for this record whereas the Columbia label (above) states “incidental singing by Male Quartet”.

Accordingly I could imagine that there are only three men singing.

The banjo player might be the same as on the previous recording, thus perhaps – or probably – Sam Speede. He is much more to the fore here and certainly plays with vigour and virtuosity, delivering a great performance.

The vocal quartet might be assumed to be the same as before – possibly being a trio only?

It is my personal opinion that this is a great record because of the brass team (the Aiken brothers) and the banjo player.

Notes: For this session the following personnels have been listed:

- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: unknown cnt; tbn; clt; alt; pno; bjo; Perry Bradford vcl; unknown male quartet vcl
- Frog CD booklet: unknown cornet, trombone, clarinet, alto sax, piano, banjo, Perry Bradford vocal

PERRY BRADFORD AND HIS GANG

New York, Dec. 1926

Jimmy Wade – tpt; Bill Dover – tbn; Arnett Nelson – clt, alt;
Perry Bradford (or Anthony Spaulding ?) – pno; Stanley Wilson – bjo;

Perry Bradford – voc, hand-clapping, cymbal

74428-A Original Black Bottom Dance

OK 8416, Frog DGF 56

74429-A Kansas City Blues

OK 8416, Frog DGF 56

It is interesting to note that Ralph Gulliver in his great article on Jimmy Wade in Storyville 56 (1975) was not aware of this and the following Perry Bradford recordings as the work of the Wade band.

Comparing these sides to the Georgia Strutters and Bradford Mean Four sides believed to feature the Wade band musicians we certainly find some of the same personnel here.

We hear the somewhat weak and unsecure tone and attack of Jimmy Wade, the no-nonsense and very controlled playing of William Dover – who, by the way, was found good enough to substitute for Benny Morton on a Fletcher Henderson recording session (probably November 19, 1926) – and a rather limited and unswinging clarinet player who might possibly **not** be Arnett Nelson as heard on the Georgia Strutters sides of August and October 1926. Or was it booze?

In the rhythm section we hear a rather unobtrusive and restrained piano that possibly might not be played by Spaulding, as Spaulding plays much more to the fore and swinging as heard in the Georgia Strutters sessions of August and October 1926. What can be heard here is well within Perry Bradford’s own limits of piano playing.

On banjo we certainly have Stanley Wilson, banjo player of the Wade band.

And we have Bradford singing in his inimitable way, and his unsurpassed hand-clapping. And he certainly hits the cymbal as there are no signs of a drummer’s presence elsewhere on these sides.

Notes: For this session the following personnels have been listed:

- C. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography 1948/1963*: Johnny Dunn (c); Garvin Bushell (cl); Perry Bradford (p)

- Rust*2: Bubber Miley (cnt); unknown (tbn); Buster Bailey (clt/alt); Leroy Tibbs? (pno); Gus Horsley (bjo); Perry Bradford (voc)

- Rust*3: Bubber Miley –c; unknown –tb; unknown –cl-as (not Buster Bailey); ? Leroy Tibbs –p; Gus Horsley –bj; unknown –bb; Perry Bradford –v

- Rust*4: Jimmy Wade –c; Bill Dover –tb; unknown –cl-as; Anthony Spaulding –p; Stanley Wilson –bj; unknown –d; Perry Bradford –v

- Rust*6: Jimmy Wade, c; Bill Dover, tb; Arnett Nelson, cl, as; Anthony Spaulding, p; Stanley Wilson, bj; Edwin Jackson, d; P. Bradford, v

- C. Hillman, *Chicago Swingers*, p.75: Jimmy Wade c; William Dover tb; Arnett Nelson cl; Antonio Spaulding p; Stanley Wilson bj;

Edwin Jackson d; Perry Bradford v.

- Frog CD booklet: Perry Bradford (vocal) acc by Jimmy Wade (cornet) Bill Dover (trombone) Arnett Nelson (clarinet, alto sax) Anthony Spaulding (piano) Stanley Wilson (banjo) Edwin Jackson (drums)

PERRY BRADFORD AND HIS GANG

New York, Feb. 16, 1927

Jimmy Wade – tpt; Bill Dover – tbn; Arnett Nelson – clt, alt;

James P. Johnson – pno; Walter Wright – bbs;

Perry Bradford – voc, cymbal

80429-C All That I Had Is Gone

OK 8450, Timeless CBC 1-073

80430-B Lucy Long

OK 8450, Timeless CBC 1-073

Once again we hear Wade on trumpet and Dover on trombone. Arnett Nelson probably is the clarinet and alto man.

On piano we suddenly have James P. Johnson. There seems to have been a change of piano players since the penultimate session – did Spaulding quit and is this the reason for James P. Johnson’s appearance on these sides? I myself hear James P. Johnson on the subsequent recording session by Jimmy Wade’s Club Alabam Orchestra.

On brass bass we have the band’s tuba man, Walter Wright, as heard on the Wade band session of April 5, 1927. We hear the same strong walking bass on the bass horn here, and nothing reminds me of anything recorded by Harry Hull whose name is given by C. Hillman (see below).

There certainly is no banjo player on these sides, and apparently Johnson’s piano comping is enough to propel and swing the band.

The only appearance of anything belonging to a drum set is the single cymbal crash at the end of the first title. As apparent on the Georgia Strutters sessions this might have been performed by Bradford himself and thus Edwin Jackson’s presence can positively be denied.

Notes: For this session the following personnels have been listed:

- *Jazz Information Vol.1 No 19*: “The cornet player on Bradford’s Okeh record of “Lucy Long”, however, is Johnny Dunn, who also recorded with Bradford under the name of the Georgia Strutters, on *Harmony*, and the *Gulf Coast Seven*, on *Columbia*. Besides Dunn these discs, which many of our readers have inquired about, feature Garvin Bushell, clarinet; Brass., Field, drums; and “Speed”, banjo. This information was obtained from Perry Bradford by Dan Qualey of Brooklyn, sponsor of Solo Art Records.”

- C. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography 1948/1963*: Johnny Dunn (c); Garvin Bushell (cl); Perry Bradford (p)

- Rust*2: Bubber Miley (cnt); unknown (tbn); Buster Bailey (clt/alt); Leroy Tibbs? (pno); Gus Horsley (bjo); Perry Bradford (voc)

- Rust*3: Gus Aiken –c; unknown –tb; unknown –cl-as; James P. Johnson –p; unknown –bj; unknown –bb; Perry Bradford –v

- Rust*4: Jimmy Wade –c; Bill Dover –tb; unknown –cl-as; James P. Johnson –p; Stanley Wilson –bj; Walter Wright –bb; Ed Jackson –d;

Perry Bradford –v

- Rust*6: Jimmy Wade, c; Bill Dover, tb; Arnett Nelson, cl, as; James P. Johnson, p; Stanley Wilson, bj; Walter Wright, bb; Edwin Jackson, d; Perry Bradford, v
 - S. Brown, R. Hilbert, James P. Johnson, *A Case of Mistaken Identity*, p.358: Jimmy Wade, cornet; Bill Dover, trombone; unknown clarinet and alto sax; Johnson, piano; Stanley Wilson, banjo; Walter Wright, brass Bass; possibly Ed Jackson, drums; Bradford, vocal
 - C. Hillman, *Chicago Swingers*, p.76: ? Jimmy Wade c; ? William Dover tb; ? Arnett Nelson cl; James P. Johnson p; ? Stanley Wilson bj; ? Harry Hull bb; ? Edwin Jackson d; Perry Bradford v.
 - Timeless CD booklet: Jimmy Wade, c; William Dover, tb; Arnett Nelson, cl, as; James P. Johnson, p; Stanley Wilson, bj; Walter Wright, bb; Perry Bradford, v, occasional cymbal crash

These then are the few recordings under the Perry Bradford and his Gang banner. The two sessions with Jimmy Wade's band personnel certainly are long known, but the two sessions with Gus Aiken found their first reissue with the Frog and Timeless CDs in the last decade. These sessions bring a close to my series on Perry Bradford's recording sessions.

The very beautiful Timeless CD "Perry Bradford A Panorama 1923 - 1927" includes the two titles recorded by the Jimmy Wade band under their own name – not Perry Bradford's name – on April 05, 1927. Because of the proximity of this record to the last two Bradford recordings I would like to draw this record into this discussion as follows:

JIMMY WADE'S CLUB ALABAM ORCHESTRA		New York,	c. Apr. 07, 1927
Jimmy Wade – cnt; Bill Dover – tbn; Clifford "Clarinet" King – clt;			
James P. Johnson – pno; Walter Wright – bbs;			
Perry Bradford – voc, cymbal			
GEX-571	All That I Had Is Gone	Gnt 6105,	Timeless CBC 1-073
GEX-572	Original Black Bottom Dance	Gnt 6105,	Timeless CBC 1-073

This is part of the Jimmy Wade band that played New York's Club Alabam for nearly a year. I would have expected to hear the entire band here as known from the photos – comprising three reeds, three brass and the full rhythm section – but just as with the recordings under Bradford's name we only hear two brass, one clarinet and two rhythm players. Trumpet and trombone are certainly played by Wade and Dover, but the clarinet player certainly is a much smoother player than Nelson, different phrasing and different vibrato, and thus very probably Clifford King! Although Roy Butler might also have been responsible here he certainly was mainly a saxophonist and is therefore not considered being present.

On piano I definitely hear James P. Johnson with his very beautifully chiselled treble piano figures just as on the Original Jazz Hounds recording of March 15, 1927 – three weeks ago. This is Harlem stride piano!

Just like on the last session above we only hear a tuba player providing the rhythm – in collaboration with pianist Johnson, presumably Walter Wright, the regular bassist of the band given in personnels

I do not hear a banjo nor the sounds of a drummer, but only the final cymbal strokes that may certainly come from Bradford himself.

In contrast to the two Perry Bradford Gang recordings above these sides show a much more elegant side of the Wade band, only because of the presence of the clarinet, presumably Clifford King. And it seems that Wade had a better day than usual!

Notes: For this session the following personnels have been listed:

- Rust*2: Jimmy Wade (tpt) dir. unknown group including Perry Bradford (voc)

- Rust*3: Jimmy Wade, Ray Whitsett –t; William Dover –tb; Clifford King –cl –ss –as; Roy Butler –cl –ts; Arnett Nelson –cl –ts; Antonia Spaulding –p; Stanley Wilson –bj –vn; Walter Wright –bb; Edwin Jackson –d; Perry Bradford –v.

- R. Gulliver, Jimmy Wade, *Storyville 56*: Jimmy Wade, tpt; William Dover, tbn; Arnett Nelson, clt; Tony Spaulding, pno; Walter Wright, bbs; Edwin Jackson, dms; Perry Bradford, voc.

- Rust*4: Jimmy Wade –t; William Dover –tb; Arnett Nelson –cl –as; Antonia Spaulding –p; Walter Wright –bb; Edwin Jackson –d; Perry Bradford –v.

- Rust*6: Jimmy Wade, t; William Dover, tb; Arnett Nelson, cl, as; Antonia Spaulding, p; Walter Wright, bb; Stanley Wilson, bj; Edwin Jackson, d; Perry Bradford, v.

- C. Hillman, *Chicago Swingers*, p.77: Jimmy Wade c; William Dover tb; Arnett Nelson cl; Antonio Spaulding p; Stanley Wilson bj; Walter Wright bb; ? Edwin Jackson d; Perry Bradford v.

- Timeless CD booklet: Jimmy Wade, c; William Dover, tb; Arnett Nelson, cl, as; Antonia Spaulding, p; Stanley Wilson, bj; Walter Wright, bb; Perry Bradford, v, occasional cymbal crash

I now hope to have found the reader's interest in trying to bring the Bradford recordings back into focus and find names or possibilities for unknown personnels and sometimes better solutions for obviously wrong listings. Thanks for your attention and sorry for any linguistic inadequacies!

And again my thanks to Michael Rader for his help, advice and services.