

GEORGIA STRUTTERS

An Annotated Tentative Personelo - Discography

GEORGIA STRUTTERS

Nearing the end of my still ongoing re-assessing and re-evaluating of the many Perry Bradford organized band recordings and vocal accompaniments it is the Georgia Strutters now, a Bradford recording unit the name of which he used for only three sessions for Harmony, Columbia's cheap subsidiary record label. The Harmony label was used to cash in on the still established acoustical recording devices, although this process had long been abandoned by the mother label, Columbia, in favour of the electrical recording methods.

A couple of well-known bands recorded for Harmony, mostly using pseudonyms, such as the Fletcher Henderson band using the name 'The Dixie Stompers'.

It seems that Columbia did not want to continue Perry Bradford's recording sessions under the names of the Original Jazz Hounds, the Gulf Coast Seven – although there still is one late session by this name in October 1928 – or even Perry Bradford's Gang, but to place him into the cheap department of Race records.

Most recent and most easily accessible CD releases have been listed after each original record release number.

GEORGIA STRUTTERS

Jimmy Wade – cnt; William Dover – tbn; Arnett Nelson – clt, alt;
Anthony Spaulding – pno; Stanley Wilson – bjo;

Perry Bradford – voc, *cymbal*

142512-2 Everybody Mess Aroun'

142513-3 Georgia Grind

New York,

Aug. 06, 1926

Har 231-H,

Timeless CBC 1-073

Har 231-H,

Timeless CBC 1-073

In 1974 Ralph Gulliver published a comprehensive article in *Storyville* 56 on Chicago trumpet player and band-leader Jimmy Wade. I have to admit that this name did not mean anything to me at the time, but from that time on the name Jimmy Wade emerged increasingly often in the publications, not only concerning the Chicago scene, but also on Harlem jazz life. Gulliver reports that the Wade band gained a contract to play the very popular Club Alabam in Harlem for ten weeks. Obviously the management of the club liked the band and their performances and extended their stay to nearly a year, June 1926 to April 1927.

As could have been expected, there was some thorough attempt to hire Wade's men away for recording purposes or even to lure them out of Wade's band. The two most prominent coloured music publishers cum band contractors at the time – Clarence Williams and Perry Bradford – were most busy to use Wade's musicians for their own interests. Interestingly, Gulliver is only faintly aware of these proceedings in his article in *Storyville*, and Walter C. Allen in his admirable and extraordinary "Hendersonia" only reports the Wade band's trombonist William Dover's possible association with the Fletcher Henderson band for a recording session (possibly November 19, 1926).

But we have to thank Christopher Hillman's and Richard Rains' - and possibly other's - big ears that we today know of the Wade band's activities under Bradford's and Williams' respective names. Our listening group's attempts to find out the participations of Wade's men with Clarence Williams had been rather unsatisfying (see our Clarence Williams Part 2 disco in N&N 58 for any sessions possibly – or probably – comprising Wade men).

As can be seen from the notes below did it take 6 editions of Rust's "Jazz and Ragtime Records 1897 – 1942" to at last attribute the appropriate personnels comprising Wade band members to the proper Bradford recording sessions.

The above listed personnel thus comes from Chris Hillman's "Chicago Swingers" of 2010, and nothing has to be added, only that Hillman himself is not absolutely certain of Arnett Nelson's presence since the Wade band "had another talented reed player in Clifford "Clarinet" King who is also known to have recorded in such circumstances, so evaluation is not entirely straightforward unless clear-cut solos are available for study" (Hillman, *Chicago Swingers*, p.71).

But again it is interesting to note how Rust and other early discographers were stricken with attributing any unknown musician's playing to a very limited number of musicians then generally known, and not to attempt a sincere evaluation of other possibilities.

We hear a competent band swinging in "western" fashion as contrary to the New York or "eastern" way. As Hillman/Rains stated do we hear with great certainty the no-nonsense trumpet of Jimmy Wade supported by the sober trombone of William Dover and the faintly Daddsish clarinet of Arnett Nelson. The alto solo in the first title does not fit to the clarinet style and is played more in a way as known from Paul "Stump" Evans. Listen to the queer vibrato on the alto. But this discrepancy might result from the influence Evans may have exercised on Nelson when they both were band-mates in the Chicago days of the Wade band only a year ago. It certainly shows Nelson's ability to absorb or copy other musician's styles.

Wade's playing can be identified by his tone, time and occasional insecurities he displays, as well as his somewhat "sour" tone. Spaulding plays a surprisingly driving piano not in the New York stride style, but maybe in a style coming from Teddy Weatherford, the Wade band's original pianist, even Mortonish parts being heard. Stanley Wilson then is logically the banjo player who displays strong four-to-the-bar rhythmic playing and single-string or arpeggiated solo spots in breaks and stop-time parts, very tasteful. At the end of the first title two cymbal strokes can be heard. They may be played by Edwin Jackson the Wade band's drummer. But, as there are no other drum parts recognizable, the cymbal "player" might even have been Bradford himself – to pay union scale for two cymbal hits only would certainly have been improbable!

And: it is Perry Bradford again (see the other Perry Bradford recordings) with his unique non-expert and amateurish singing style.

Notes:

- Rust*2: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt, alt; Willie The Lion Smith ? pno; Gus Horsley bjo; Perry Bradford vcl
 - Rust*3,*4: Bubber Miley –c; unknown –tb; Herschel Brassfield –cl –as; Mike Jackson –p; Gus Horsley –bj; Perry Bradford –v. A cymbal is heard at the end of the first title.
 - Rust*6: probably Jimmy Wade, c; William Dover, tb; Arnett Nelson, cl, as; Antonia Spaulding, p; Stanley Wilson, bj; a cymbal is heard at the end of the first title.
 - C. Hillman, *Chicago Swingers*, p.74: Jimmy Wade c; William Dover tb; Arnett Nelson cl; Antonio Spaulding p; Stanley Wilson bj; Perry Bradford v.

GEORGIA STRUTTERS

New York, Oct. 21, 1926

Jimmy Wade – cnt; William Dover – tbn; Arnett Nelson – clt;
 Anthony Spaulding – pno; Stanley Wilson – bjo;
 Perry Bradford – voc

142854-3	Wasn't It Nice ?	Har 311-H,	Timeless CBC 1-073
142855-3	Original Black Bottom Dance	Har 311-H,	Timeless CBC 1-073

The same band as before can be heard on this coupling here. And the notes to the above titles apply to this record, too. Only that the clarinet player – Arnett Nelson – shies away from excursions to the alto saxophone, and he certainly is right so. He is a much more convincing player on clarinet. There are absolutely no drum or cymbal sounds on these two titles, so that there is no need to consider or question as to Edwin Jackson or Perry Bradford himself.

Notes:

- Rust*2: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt, alt; Willie The Lion Smith ? pno; Gus Horsley bjo; Perry Bradford vcl
 - Rust*3,*4: Bubber Miley –c; unknown –tb; Herschel Brassfield –cl –as; Mike Jackson –p; Gus Horsley –bj; Perry Bradford –v
 - Rust*6: probably Jimmy Wade, c; William Dover, tb; Arnett Nelson, cl, as; Antonia Spaulding, p; Stanley Wilson, bj.
 - C. Hillman, *Chicago Swingers*, p.75: Jimmy Wade c; William Dover tb; Arnett Nelson cl; Antonio Spaulding p; Stanley Wilson bj; Perry Bradford v.

Two more recording sessions for Perry Bradford with this above personnel will be listed in the forthcoming article on Perry Bradford and his Gang recordings in Names & Numbers.

GEORGIA STRUTTERS

New York, May 23, 1927

Tommy Ladnier – tpt; Jimmy Harrison – tbn;
 Edgar Sampson – alt, clt, vln; unknown (*Happy Caldwell*) – ten, clt;
 James P. Johnson – pno; Harry Hull – bbs;
 Perry Bradford – voc, cymbal

144202-3	Rock, Jenny, Rock	Har 468-H,	Timeless CBC 1-073
144202-4	Rock, Jenny, Rock	Har unissued	not on LP/CD
144203-1	It's Right Here For You	Har unissued	not on LP/CD
144203-3	It's Right Here For You	Har 468-H,	Timeless CBC 1-073

Storyville 31 in 1970 carried a very interesting letter by Chris Hillman – "Discographical double takes" – which contained the following passages: "*Recently I came to hear the six titles by the Georgia Strutters. These are spread over three sessions, of which the first two feature Bubber Miley (sic!) in a typical Perry Bradford group and the last has a different man, listed in the new edition of Jazz Records as Jabbo Smith. Aurally this is wide of the mark, and I am indebted to Richard Rains for his suggestion that it is in fact Tommy Ladnier, a suggestion with which I entirely agree. Although the performance of the tunes in a typical Bradford manner (sic) would tend to mask Ladnier's strong individual style all the trademarks are there to be heard if one listens carefully. The titles are 'Rock, Jenny Rock' and 'It's Right Here For You' – made in May 1927, a time one would automatically tend to look for Ladnier's presence among the unidentified cornet players – especially when, as here, the band also included Jimmy Harrison.*"

And there certainly is nothing to add, except that this very important – and easy to verify – statement did not find its way into the Rust editions up to the present! (This, by the way, is my own reason not to trust anything anymore listed in Rust!) From my own listening experience and my audio memory I do not doubt Ladnier's presence at all. Dan Vernhettes in his great book "Traveling Blues" on Ladnier's life (p.125) is not as final as I am, but he ends his chapter on this recording thus: "*All this said, Tommy Ladnier can neither be excluded nor included as the cornetist (sic) at this Georgia Strutters session. Suffice to say, it is more likely that he is playing than that there should be anybody else.*" Given that Bradford only hired first-class musicians for this session, I have to ask if there could have been any other top trumpet player in Harlem, unknown and unnoted, and so much into Ladnier's style just out of the blue? Certainly not! So, I myself definitely stick to Ladnier! By the way: he played trumpet when with Henderson. (Dan Qualey of Brooklyn, sponsor of Solo Art Records, received this information from Perry Bradford (*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.*")

There is no doubt as to Harrison's presence, and the discs are right on that matter. And certainly, Harrison's very personal style is easy to recognize, his unique vibrato, his phrasing derived from listening to the Oliver/Armstrong band in 1923, together with his companion June Clark, absolutely new to trombone jazz playing of the twenties. (It is therefore not surprising that Henderson immediately hired Harrison for his band in late 1926 away from Billy Fowler although he had no written parts for him. There were no parts for a second trombone in the arrangements of the time, and, as Benny Morton or Charlie Green were not fired in favour of Harrison's sole presence, they stick to playing the arranged parts and Harrison played ad-lib parts, what can easily be heard on the recordings. Yet, in January 1927 Don Redman was at

hand with a new arrangement of 'Some Of These Days' which comprised one chorus for the trombones in two-part harmony, and this might well be seen as the beginning of the trombone section in jazz big bands.)

The reed players have been listed as Edgar Sampson and Herschel Brassfield. There certainly is nothing to object Sampson's presence, if alone because of his doubling on violin, which fits perfectly with other examples of his playing. His clarinet or alto style definitely is not as developed as can be heard with the Charlie Johnson band later on and – probably with Clarence Williams in December 1929 (*Zonky, You've Got To Be Modernistic*) or even later with Chick Webb.

The problem is the tenor player who is listed as Herschel Brassfield. We only have rather secure knowledge of this man playing with Johnny Dunn's band in 1922/23, where he plays alto in a rhapsodic singing style, something in the kind of Otto Hardwick of the Ellington band. He played with Ford Dabney and later Will Vodery's Plantation Band, an organization with which he made an UK trip in 1923, together with Johnny Dunn. Brassfield later migrated to the West Coast joining Curtis Mosby's Dixieland Blue Blowers, with whom he can be found on a photo of c.1925 and presumably heard on a test pressing of the band which can be found on the Jazz Oracle CD BDW 8003. Later than this date nothing is known of his whereabouts. According to this – and the fact that he played alto on his recordings – I see no reason to hear Brassfield as the tenor cum clarinet man on this Georgia Strutters session. Instead I would opt for the well-known, but little listed, band-mate with Edgar Sampson in the Arthur Gibbs Orchestra that played the Savoy and the Arcadia Ballrooms from mid 1927 to mid 1928, when part of this band were taken over by Charlie Johnson. His name was Albert Happy Caldwell, and he was a very prominent tenor sax player in Harlem at the time. What can be heard of him in these two titles is – in my opinion – absolutely compatible with other recordings of his known.

From March 1927 on Bradford's favoured piano player for his band recordings was James P. (Price) Johnson, the so-called "Father of Stride Piano". Johnson's pianistic skills were definitely much more developed and expert than Bradford's, and so it is not surprising that Bradford used Johnson on his later recordings, the more so as Johnson was not able to gain public fame and distinction as would have been due. When Johnson was able to record a band under his own name in 1929, he was grateful and decent enough to appoint Bradford as singer. He also used Bradford in this capacity in the Johnson's Jazzers coupling in September 1927. Bradford himself did not record as pianist any more from October 1926 on. Under these circumstances it is very strange but interesting to note that all editions of Rust have Willie The Lion Smith as pianist, the more so, as nothing stylistically hints to Smith, no broken tenths, no airy melodic phrases, but everything heard is compatible with Johnson's playing of the time. I therefore do not see any reason not to list James P. Johnson as the most probable pianist on this date. And I herewith revoke emphatically my suggestion in VJM 143 that the pianist might be Bradford himself! (Of all The Lion Smith's nine recording dates prior to 1934 listed in Rust and subsequently in John Collinson's Tentative Listing of Smith's recordings beginning in Storyville 132 I have only been able to appoint two sessions to The Lion – the Mamie Smith sessions of Feb. 14, 1920 and Aug. 10, 1920 – with a relative certainty, another one with strong reservation – Cl. Williams Aug. 07, 1933, see N&N 61 p.16. All other six recording sessions listed do not contain Willie The Lion!)

Rust lists Gus Horsley on banjo in all his editions, although with a question mark from edition 3 on. Han Enderman also lists him with question mark for this session in his very interesting and well-founded article on this musician in N&N 72. From this article I have to receive that Horsley's activity as banjo player is at least in question if not most improbable, and I have to admit that from Rust I never did question Horsley as banjoist. But Enderman is certainly right in his deductions. Luckily I am not forced to judge Horsley's or any other banjo player's presence on these sides, because there is no such! The listener certainly will be impossible to hear any banjo sounds! The more amazing it is how Johnson (?) on piano drives the band along like nobody's business.

Lacking any substantiated characteristics of Harry Hull's tuba style at the time, I can say nothing about his presence here, only, that he obviously had some connexion to James P. Johnson who might well have brought him to the studio. The source of his being listed is unknown to me. But, if my thesis re the presence of Happy Caldwell on this session is right, there might also be the possibility of Billy Taylor being the tuba man, as he was with the Arthur Gibbs band as well as Edgar Sampson and Caldwell.

Well, this then leaves to find out the drummer. And I am afraid that again there is none, because the singular cymbal crashes at the very ends of both titles could have been and probably were provided by the band leader/organizer and singer Perry Bradford himself.

Order of solos:

Rock, Jenny, Rock: Ladnier – Bradford voc /Johnson and Ladnier in background – Caldwell clt – Harrison – Caldwell ten.

It's Right Here For You: Bradford voc /Johnson pno – Sampson vln – Harrison – Sampson alt – Ladnier – Johnson coda.

Notes:

*Rust*2:* Bubber Miley cnt; Jimmy Harrison tbn; same unknown clt; Edgar Sampson alt, vln; Ben Waters ? ten; Willie The Lion Smith pno; Gus Horsley bjo; unknown bbs; unknown dms; Perry Bradford vcl

- *Rust*3,*4,*6:* Jabbo Smith, c; Jimmy Harrison, tb; Herschel Brassfield, cl; Edgar Sampson, as, vn; Willie The Lion Smith, p; ? Gus Horsley, bj; ? Harry Hull, bb; unknown, d; Perry Bradford, v

- *Storyville 31 p. 32, Chris Hillman (1970):* "Recently I came to hear the six titles by the Georgia Strutters. These are spread over three sessions, of which the first two feature Bubber Miley (sic! – KBR) in a typical Perry Bradford group and the last has a different man, listed in the new edition of *Jazz Records* (Rust*3 – KBR) as Jabbo Smith. Aurally this identification is wide of the mark, and I am indebted to Richard Rains for his suggestion that it is in fact Ladnier, a suggestion with which I entirely agree. Although the performance of the tunes in a typical Bradford manner would tend to mask Ladnier's strong individual style all the trademarks are there to be heard of one listens carefully. The titles are 'Rock, Jenny Rock' and 'It's Right Here For You' – made in May 1927, a time one would automatically tend to look for Ladnier's presence among the unidentified cornet players – especially when, as here, the band also included Jimmy Harrison."

Well, these then are the Georgia Strutters recordings under Perry Bradford aegis, and again they are an integral part of what we know of small band Harlem jazz. Which only leaves the Perry Bradford and his Gang sides of which the listener/reader will read and hear in – hopefully so – the next number of Names & Numbers.