

# THE BAND FROM PARADISE

## CHARLIE JOHNSON

### Curriculum Vitae

#### CURRICULUM VITAE

Eric Thacker, THE ESSENTIAL JAZZ RECORDS, Vol. 1 RAGTIME TO SWING, p. 178 : These two discs (RCA (F) Black & White Vol. 70/71 'Charlie Johnson, Cecil and Lloyd Scott') capture the seething vitality of Harlem in a time of transitional experiment which achieved art largely because its creative spirits were not encumbered by high-faluting artistic principles."

#### 1891

Albert McCarthy, BIG BAND JAZZ, p.41 : Pianist **Charlie Johnson**, born in Philadelphia on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1891, first came to New York when he was in his early twenties and worked as a trombonist with a number of orchestras. He then moved to Atlantic City, switched to piano as his main instrument and, probably from early in 1919, led his own bands in that city. Trombonist **Jimmy Harrison** worked with him there around this time, and trumpeter **Charlie Gaines** about a year later. In October 1925, Johnson arrived in New York to open at Small's Paradise, where he led the resident group until he gave up full time bandleading in 1938. It was common for the Johnson band to play a summer season in Atlantic City when Small's closed for a few months. Sometimes, in New York, it worked the club and a theatre simultaneously.

#### 1912

Willie The Lion Smith, MUSIC ON MY MIND The Memoirs of an American Pianist, p.40 : "I met (ca. 1912) the late **Charlie Johnson** from New York City playing in the swank Dunlop Hotel, a white establishment on the boardwalk. He was a good trial horse (a performer who served to warm the bench until the main attraction took over). His big reputation was made later with a jazz band that included such all-time jazz stars as **Jimmy Harrison**, the trombonist, and **Sidney de Paris**, a trumpeter. For over a decade Johnson led the house band at Ed Smalls's Paradise Club in Harlem during the wintertime and moved to Rafe Weloff's Paradise Caf  at Egg Harbor for the summer. At Atlantic City they called Johnson's band "The He-Be-Ge-Bees." (---- Heebie-Jeebies !!!!!!!)

#### 1914

James P. Johnson in M. Williams : JAZZ PANORAMA p. 54: "In the summer of 1914, I went for a visit to Atlantic City and heard **Eubie Blake** (who composed *Shuffle Along* later) , one of the foremost pianists of all time. He was playing at the Belmont, and **Charles Johnson** was playing at the Boat House, both all-night joints."

#### 1917

Sam Wooding in Chip Deffaa, VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE, p.6: **Charlie Johnson** proved to be a great help and inspiration. According to (Sam) Wooding, Johnson was about the first pianist he heard who was playing what would today be considered jazz rather than ragtime – although Wooding says at the time they were calling it swing. .... " **Charlie Johnson** was a piano player from Boston. I met him in 1917. Charlie used to tell me a lot of things, even when I was with Josephine Berkeley. And he's the first one that I heard play like the people, like they're playing now. Well, Percy Adams from Philadelphia, he used to play swing, but he would play mostly dance music. Charlie was three or four years older than me, and I took him as a big brother. I used to go and sit in on his job. **Charlie Johnson** became the greatest in Atlantic City as a cabaret piano player. **James P. Johnson** didn't come to Atlantic City, and neither did **Willie "The Lion" Smith.**" ..... Wooding continues : " Charlie didn't have a band then. He didn't begin leading a band until after I left out of New York for Europe in '25, when he started at Small's Paradise in Harlem." (Johnson actually had begun his bandleading career a few years earlier in Atlantic City, starting with smaller outfits.) ..... "Charlie was a lot of help, Wooding stresses, not just musically, but personally."

#### 1919

- L. Bjorn / J. Gallert, BEFORE MOTOWN p. 20: New York bandleader **Charlie Johnson** remembered hearing **Harrison** on tour in 1919: "Jimmy couldn't read a note of music at the time, but he could play in any key as if he were singing through his horn instead of blowing it."

**Hank Duncan** also recalled his entertaining skills: "Oh-h man! He could really play. And he was a great showman. He was the first to play his instrument as he lay on his back manipulating the slide with his foot, and he would sometimes jump on the piano to blow."

## 1920

STORYVILLE 68 p. 45: "**Charlie Gaines** left the Taylor outfit in 1920 for **Charlie Johnson's Orchestra** at the Paradise Theatre on Illinois Avenue in Atlantic City. "The Paradise wasn't a dance place; it had this elaborate vaudeville revue with all these colourful costumes and stage scenes. The stars were two girl singers named **Mattie Hite** and **Mary Stafford**. Nobody's heard of them today, but the chorus had **Bessie Smith** and there was a back-up act called "the Two Ethels", which had **Ethel Waters**. I don't remember who the other Ethel was. We also had a female impersonator called **Frankie "Half-Pint" Jackson**....." A few months after **Mamie Smith's** first record session, **Mary Stafford** wangled a contract from Columbia Records and took Charlie and some of the other members of the band to New York in January 1921 to make records with her. "..... I think we made six records with her. ...." Charlie (Gaines) stayed with Johnson for almost two years, leaving in 1921 to accept an offer from **Sam Wooding** ....."

THEO ZWICKY Collection, band photo of early Chas. Johnson band, Atlantic City, 1919-20: **Charlie Gaines** – tpt; **Bill 'Slide' Stanley** – tbn; **Earl Walton** – vln, sax; **Charlie Johnson** – pno; **Sterling Conaway** – banjoline; **Dick Cernard** – bjo; **John Warren** – bbs; **George Stafford** – dms.

## 1921

Russ Shor, Charlie Gaines "Philly's Maestro" IAJRC 10-2, p.6: "**Gaines**, now a jazzman, got an offer in 1920 from **Charlie Johnson**, leader of a band in the Paradise Theatre in Atlantic City. It was a big time job. The Paradise was a Black and Tan club – featuring black entertainment playing to a whites only clientel. The shows featured elaborate dance revues with "30 or more" chorus girls and went from 9 p.m. to 6 in the morning. "**Mary Stafford** was the star of the show," he recalls, "but they had another act there called "The Two Ethels" – one of those Ethels was **Ethel Waters**." .....

While backing **Mary Stafford** at the Paradise, **Gaines** got his first recording session.

"**Mamie Smith** was the rage then so Columbia Records came down and signed up Mary as competition. For the first session she took me and six other guys from the band and we drove up to New York to make two sides. Recording was hard work in those days. We had to blow into this big acoustical horn – they didn't have microphones in those days – and I mean we had to blow LOUD; doin' it over and over again until the technicians got it right.

Charlie still has one of the records he made that day with Stafford "I'm Gonna Jazz My Way Thru Paradise", and still plays to it on occasion "as a warmup before a job." .....

Five more recording sessions followed; then several job offers.

**Fletcher Henderson** was recruiting his first permanent band around 1922, Gaines said, and he needed a good trumpet. At the same time **Sam Wooding** was searching for musicians to take on a European tour. He refused both."

Perry Bradford, BORN WITH THE BLUES, p. 154: "The following morning **Mary Stafford** was yanked downtown post-haste to Columbia Studio, which was located at 59<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway, and she recorded "Crazy Blues" and Clarence Williams' song "Royal Garden Blues". As **Charlie Johnson's** Jazzband was playing at Barron's and made the audition with **Mary (Stafford)**, his band cut the record with her.

Mary made a great record, because she couldn't miss with this hot band of great stars sending her. She had **Major** on cornet; **Ben Whitted** was the clarinet man; **Granstaff** (who worked in vaudeville with George Davis) was the sliding trombone guy; **Kincaid**, the old reliable sax-shark (who gave the record a big lift); **George Breen**, with his violin, was added to make the record sound like Mamie's "Crazy Blues" record. **Charlie Johnson**, a sensational musician, was directing and playing the piano.

## 1921 / 1922

Ethel Waters, HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW, p.134: "After the week end I was invited to sing at Rafe's Paradise, a big club with mostly white patrons. .... Some first-class headliners played the Paradise that summer: **Frankie Jackson** and **Edna Winston**, **Mary Stafford**, **Matty Hite**, **Izzy Ringgold**, and the superb **Charlie Johnson** was the man at the piano. Show business is a small world, and Harry Waters, my uncle, turned out to be the mandolin player in the band at Rafe's Paradise."

Ethel Waters in Shapiro / Hentoff, HEAR ME TALKIN' TO YA, p. 177: "Men like him (*James P. Johnson*), **Willie "The Lion" Smith**, and **Charlie Johnson** could make you sing until your tonsils fell out. Because you wanted to sing. They stirred you into joy and wild exstasy. They could make you cry. And you'd do anything and work until you dropped for such musicians."

STORYVILLE 1996-7, p. 219: "**Frankie Jaxon** spent his winters in Chicago and the summers in Atlantic City for a number of years where he headed the entertainment at the Paradise Gardens. In the *Defender* of 8 July 1922 he wrote that he and the other entertainers sent regards. He named his colleagues as "**Bess Smith**, **Bertha Hicks**, **Gertie Brown**, **Mae Olden**, **Justine McKinney**, **Elmer Hilliard**, **Helen Lee**, **Wary Stafford** and **Charles Johnson** (all sic). This appeared to tie in with the photo in *Pictorial History of Jazz*, p. 108, except that that is suggested as being in the late 1920s, with Frankie Jaxon, Bessie Smith and Edgar Sampson identified for certain. In his biography of Bessie, Chris Albertson confirms that she was at the Paradise in the summer of 1922 and a date late in the decade seems very unlikely as by then she was a well established star in her own right and unlikely to be accepting this sort of engagement. So far so good, but if the photo is from the summer of 1922, Mary Stafford is one of the other ladies, but the violinist is hardly likely to be Sampson as he would have been not quite fifteen years old at the time. A comparison with other photos also suggests that this is not Sampson."

## 1924

Doc Cheatham, I GUESS I'LL GET THE PAPERS AND GO HOME, p. 10: "... Someone told me that the bandleader **Charlie Johnson** was in town (*1924 Atlantic City*), and he needed a saxophone player. I could play the C-melody pretty well by that time, so I was hired to

play saxophone at the Paradise club with Charlie Johnson's Orchestra. I played the first set which was for dancing, and it went well. They liked me a lot until they put the show music in front of me. I couldn't read a note of it, and he fired me right away. Charlie never hired me again. In his later years he became a beggar and a drunk and I remember giving him money at times."

## 1925

Albert McCarthy, *BIG BAND JAZZ*, p.41 : **Johnson** himself was an exceptionally amiable man who, though he was no great musician, had an ear for talent and enjoyed leading an outstanding band. It appears that he was an inveterate gambler and was sometimes away from the bandstand, following his hunches. In addition, he was fond of more than the occasional drink; one of the advantages of this weakness, as far as musicians were concerned, was that he sometimes paid them their weekly salary twice. The relationship between owner, bandleader and musicians at Small's was an unusually happy one, and several musicians who played there recount their experiences with nostalgia. For a while during the early depression years, the band was cut down in size, although it was back to normal by 1935.

*CHICAGO DEFENDER* Jan. 24, 1925 : "**Charles Johnson's** band from the "Nest" broadcast over the radio again this week."

Circa February 1925: Recording session for Emerson

Laurie Wright in *STORYVILLE* 77/190-191: *article on the Johnson band foto.*

Sonny Greer in Stanley Dance, *THE WORLD OF DUKE ELLINGTON*, p.67 : "We hadn't had a bass player, because of space, but now we stole a good one – "**Bass" Edwards** - out of **Charlie Johnson's** band. He was a big guy with blinker lights in the bell of his sousaphone, and he'd call for four or five choruses, just like a trumpet player, and play all of them different, with the red and green lights twinkling over his head.

Willie The Lion Smith in *MUSIC ON MY MIND* The Memoirs of an American Pianist, p. 135 : **Edwin A. Smalls**, a former elevator boy from South Carolina, who, on October 22, 1925, moved his site of operations from the Sugar Cane Club on Fifth Avenue to 2294 Seventh Avenue and renamed it the Paradise, which was billed as "The Hottest Place in Town".

B. Singer, *BLACK AND BLUE* The Life And Lyrics Of Andy Razaf, p.174 : Smalls .... had nurtured the Paradise into one of Harlem's most successful nightclub features. A large room, with capacity for nearly 1.500, a superb dance band – perhaps Harlem's finest in a genuine jazz sense, led by pianist **Charlie Johnson** ....

*VARIETY* February 17, 1926 in Charters / Kunstadt, *JAZZ A History of the New York Scene*, p.194 : The only place visited where whites were found was at Small's, a cellar dance place, nicely and pleasantly equipped, with a colored orchestra (*Charlie Johnson's*) that seemed to be the incentive for a number of whites from downtown, all in evening clothes, to dance. .... Johnson's band is hot and it makes them dance. Any price charged to go on the floor for the whites would not be too much for that band.

Charters / Kunstadt, *JAZZ A History of the New York Scene*, p.194 : Small's Paradise, at 2294 Seventh Avenue, was a new club. It had been open only three months when he (*Variety's reporter*) dropped in. It was a large place, nearly 1500 people crowding in for the grand opening on October 22, 1925. **Charlie Johnson's** band had been working in Atlantic City for several seasons and had been very popular there. He played the piano, his other musicians came and went with considerable frequency.

Jabbo Smith in W. Balliett, *56 PORTRAITS IN JAZZ*, p. 65: "..... I went back to Atlantic City and met **Charlie Johnson**, and he said he wanted me. It was 1925, and **Charlie Johnson** had the best band in New York. It had **Sidney de Paris**, who was my idol. I liked the way he blew his horn and the way he used mutes. I never acquired his style, but he influenced me. **Johnson** also had **Benny Carter** and **Edgar Sampson** and **Charlie Irvis** and the great drummer **George Stafford**. I had a pretty good notion of myself and what I wanted to be paid, so I told Charlie I had to have a hundred dollars a week, which was practically unheard of then. He offered me sixty-five and tips, but I said no, so he said all right, a hundred, and he'd keep the tips. .... **Charlie Johnson** had a location band – Smalls' Paradise in Harlem in the winter and a similar place in Atlantic City in the summer. We had a lot of contests with visiting bands. We always won."

## 1925 / 1926

Laurie Wright in *STORYVILLE* 89 p.200 : ..... **Whitted** had a place in Atlantic City and when the band played at the Paradise Club there for three months every year, **Benny** (*Waters*) always stayed with him. The Paradise Club was a large Cabaret with a resident band and show (speciality acts, chorus, etc.) with a cast of around 30 people. **Benny** (*Waters*) had joined **Charlie Johnson** in Atlantic City in late 1925 or early 1926 on the recommendation of a violin player. Definitely in the band when he joined were **Charlie** and **Bobby Johnson**, **Cyrus St. Clair**, **Ben Whitted** and **George Stafford**. Probably present was **Charlie Irvis**, but Benny is not certain of this. Benny had heard **Jabbo Smith** play and told Charlie about him, with the result that Charlie later went to hear him and hired him. Benny is present on *all four* Victor recording dates and, in fact, most of the arrangements are his! Much of the band's arranging was shared by the two Bens (three for a time, when **Carter** was with them) with **Whitted** specialising in working up arrangements based on famous solos from other band's records – Bix's in *Singing The Blues*, for instance, and the band became famous for this sort of thing as well as original material scored by Benny and others.

Benny was an alto player when he joined the band, but because Charlie needed a tenor soloist he reluctantly switched to tenor and was featured almost exclusively on that, seldom, if ever, soloed on clarinet.

Charlie never used more than three reeds, but often augmented the brass to three trumpets and two trombones, and some players were in and out of the band several times .....

Jabbo Smith, liner notes to LP 'JABBO SMITH – Hidden Treasures, Vol. 2': "In the winter of 1925 **Charlie Johnson** asked me to join his band at the Paradise restaurant in Atlantic City. Charlie was paying \$65 a week, you know, and I couldn't go for it, boom boom boom, 'cause I done promised mama I'd make \$100, and the people tell me I'm good. I tell Charlie and he say, man, you get tips!' I say, 'No, I can't go for that, I want \$100.' And Charlie, he say, 'The only way I can pay you \$100 is I have to take your tips.' I say, 'I don't care, just give me \$100 and you keep the tips.' And sure enough, that's the way it worked. That's what I wanted, that's what I got, and it didn't worry me at all.

In 1926 I went to New York with Charlie to play at **Small's Paradise**. I just turned 17 and was playing with one of the best bands in the country. The rhythm section was Charlie and **Bobby Johnson**, **Cyrus St. Clair** and **George Stafford**; I was in the front line with **Leonard Davis**, **Sidney de Paris**, **Ben Waters**, **Charlie Irvis**, **Jimmy Harrison** and **Benny Carter**. I was hot and word got around. I had to prove myself.

So we opened up and then I was playing these different horns. See, I had a trombone, I had this euphonium, I had a short pocket cornet and I had this 52-inch coach horn. I had all these things lined up on the stand, and derbies and caps and everything ... tambourines, you know, I'd play this for effects.

So here come all these trumpet players, six o'clock in the morning when everything gets kinda mellow, everybody done got off, all them cats come to get me. I'm saying when they all came down there that morning after I got through my routine, all them cats commenced putting up their horns. **Tom Laddner**, he try it, but it made me feel pretty good when the cats admit it to themselves, 'Yeah man, he the best!'

In November 1927 **Duke Ellington** asked me to record 'Black And Tan Fantasy' with him and his band; then he asked me to stay with them. Well, at the time **Fletcher Henderson** and **Charlie Johnson** were the big boys, you know. Duke was a small boy, reputation-wise. Duke wanted me, but he wasn't paying enough money, see. He only offered me \$90. Well, by then I was getting a hundred and a half, so, I mean, it didn't make no sense for me. Plus the Charlie Johnson band, we were like brothers, you know, and I'm the youngest in the band and everybody looking after me. I twas fabulous there. I was seventeen then. That same year I recorded with the Johnson band, and **Benny Carter** did the arrangements.

Well, during those days musicians like to cut each other, you know, like to stick you. I mean, in the first place they put music up in front of you, and at that time, if you missed a note with Charlie Johnson, it cost you a quarter, if you missed, you understand.

Chip Deffaa, VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE, p. 196: (*Jabbo*) **Smith** knew he had arrived, though, when he was asked to join **Charlie Johnson's** Paradise Ten, which was working in Atlantic City in the summer of 1925. (If Smith's recollection that he joined Johnson's band in 1925 is correct, he would not even have been seventeen years of age; conceivably, he may have joined the band in 1926, when he would have been seventeen. He thinks he was with Johnson for about two years, and it is certain that he left in 1928.) The band was based in New York, at Small's Paradise in Harlem, and it was "big time." He was the youngest member of the Paradise Ten and a most promising hot soloist who played pocket cornet, coach horn, euphonium, trombone, and xylophone – and even occasionally beat a tambourine – in addition to trumpet. **Sidney de Paris** was the featured trumpeter, but he left when the band went to New York in the fall and Smith took over that spot. Others in the band when Smith joined included **George Stafford** (drums), **Bobby Johnson** (banjo), and **Benny Waters** (alto sax). **Benny Carter** and **Edgar Sampson**, both of whom played sax and wrote arrangements, were hired on a bit after Smith was. .... Johnson's band didn't carry its own vocalists but provided music for shows at both the Harlem and Atlantic City venues. Such entertainers as **Mary Stafford** (a big name at that time), **Mattie Hite** (known for her risqué songs), and a man named **Jazzbo** would go from table to table, singing and collecting tips, which they split with the band. (Smith also remembers **Ethel Waters** among those entertained at one time.) Johnson initially proposed paying Smith 65 Dollars a week, like the others in the band, adding that the young trumpeter would most likely make another 35 Dollars a week in tips. Instead, Smith agreed to work for 100 Dollars a week (Which was eventually upped to 150 Dollars), with Johnson keeping his share of the tips.

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 31: "I joined **Charlie Johnson** in Atlantic City. We had a 10 piece band including **Bobby Johnson** (banjo), **Ben Whitted** (saxo alto), **Cy St-Clair** (sousaphone).

It was a great band. Other members were **Cliff Brazington** (tp), **Gus Aiken** (tp), **Charlie Irvis** (tb). I do not remember who were the other saxophones. I lent a guy my alto and I played his tenor but can't remember his name ...

Charlie played piano. He was always out there listening to the band. He was often drunk and telling the public how great the band was! There never was another piano player. That's where **Bobby Johnson** came in. He was a helluva banjo player and later on, guitar player. He could read anything, any trumpet, trombone or saxophone part and play the correct harmony. He was from Boston and studied up there. Charlie wasn't playing much with the band. He would take a few choruses but not often. What he could do very well, was play for girl singers. He could play in any key. That was important. If a girl came in drunk and she couldn't make a note, he would play half a tone below.

Benny Waters in Hank O'Neal, THE GHOSTS OF HARLEM, p. 91: "... I didn't come to New York to stay until I joined **Charlie Johnson** in 1925. ... We opened at Small's Paradise in the fall of 1925 and were the house band there until I left. I think Charlie may have continued there after I left, but I'm not sure. It was hard work at Small's because the shows changed all the time; a show would last a few months, maybe three or four, and then we'd have another show. I remember one of the most popular shows was written by **Jimmy Johnson**; it was the show that featured "Charleston", and they based the whole show around that song. I had the privilege of writing the arrangement for that song. Charlie's band and his shows were very popular; that's why he stayed at Small's for so many years. Other clubs tried to get him to leave. The Cotton Club wanted the band, but they wouldn't pay Charlie as much as he was getting at Small's and they wouldn't let him run the show. The Cotton Club had more prestige than Small's, but Charlie liked to run things and they wouldn't let him do that at the Cotton Club. ... (*Small's Paradise* – *KBR*) was just a club; there were no fancy decorations like the Cotton Club. Just a stage for the shows, but there were a lot of people in the shows, sometimes as many as thirty-five or forty – singers, dancers, comedians, acrobats. The shows of Small's specialized in talent, all kinds of talent. **Bojangles (Bill Robinson)** worked there, and so did **Ethel Waters**. We really had the talent. I remember **Bill Bailey** worked at Small's when he was young. Small's charged an admission; if you paid it, you could come in and stay as long as you wanted, but most people only stayed for one show because the shows were all inditcal. The people came and went, and we were packed all the time, even on Monday nights. That's why the Cotton Club wanted Charlie: Small's was always full. Like I said, we specialized in entertainment. The Cotton Club dancers were prettier than our girls, but we had much better dancers. The girls at the Cotton Club were all dressed up in those fancy costumes – much fancier than our girls – but we could outdance them any time. The main thing, though, was that the band was great. Charlie always had a great band, even in Atlantic City before **Benny Carter** joined. We also had other fine arrangers – **Edgar Sampson** wrote for the band. He wrote great arrangements, and it was very sad about him, what happened to him. While I was spending all that time drinking whiskey, smoking cigarettes, chasing girls, and doing everything, Edgar was like an angel, almost like a preacher, and he didn't have to chase those chicks, the chicks liked him. I don't know what happened, but things changed, and

he had such a bad time before he died. ... We were always working somewhere. Sometimes we'd go out of town to play a dance, and we played at the Lafayette Theater. We made records in Camden (New Jersey), and once, I remember, we made records in the daytime. Played at Small's all night until three or four in the morning and then played a breakfast dance somewhere, probably the Lenox Club, the place they called the Breakfast Club. ... Well, people sometimes jammed at Small's at the end of the evening. There wasn't any jamming at the Cotton Club, but you could jam at Small's. By the end of the night wed all be tired or drunk, and we'd be happy to have someone come up there and play, to give us a little rest."

Benny Waters, *THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE*, p. 35 : "I recall very well one time when a big tall guy came into Small's, I don't know his name. He had the roughest tone but no-one could play the blues like he did. I had been with the band only for a short time and he came in and asked me for my horn, taking it at the same time. He played some "gutbucket" blues, people stopped dancing and came up around him. Even **Ed Small** poked his head out of the office.

The next day I stopped at the Small's Paradise in the afternoon for something and I heard the band playing. I knew right away something funny was going on because I always knew when rehearsals were scheduled and I was never late but nobody had told me anything. That guy was there rehearsing with the band to take my job, I felt that. **Bobby Johnson** had charge of that rehearsal. But happily for me the guy couldn't read at all.

I stood outside in the hall and they didn't see me while all this was going on. Bobby was very diplomatic with him. He said that he didn't think **Charlie Johnson** would be satisfied as we had a book full of arrangements and that was the end of that.

I went to work that night, not drunk, but I had been drinking and was mad as hell ... I did my work like I always did, then we went afterwards to the "High Hat", a bar near the "Small's Paradise". I went to the end of the bar and didn't associate with the others. I stayed there for a long time and eventually **Bobby Johnson** came down to me. He was always a diplomat and he asked me what was the matter. I was drunk by then. - "Don't you know?" I said, you Cats, were trying to pull a fast one on me ... -

Bobby blamed Charlie and Charlie blamed him but I was happy to give them two weeks notice. Then Charlie offered me a raise. We made up and it was then that I started playing in a "gutbucket" style. I don't play it often, only when I feel like it, but I know how to do it. I learnt how to do it just enough for my own protection! You don't have to have a good tone to play good gutbucket; if you have a rough tone, it comes out naturally. If a guy plays with a soft tone, his "gutbucket" tone has to be forced.

Mark Tucker, *ELLINGTON The Early Years*, p. 202 : .... were steady members, as was second (? *KBR*) trumpeter **Louis Metcalf**, who had joined early in the fall of 1926 out of **Charlie Johnson's** band."

Benny Waters in Peter Vacher, *SOLOISTS AND SIDEMEN American Jazz Stories*, p. 136 : "I started out playing alto, and tenor was wished on me when I was playing in **Charlie Johnson's** band at Small's Paradise, New York, in the mid-twenties. I was playing alto but he had this cat playing tenor who wasn't making things too good and we changed over."

Benny Waters in Chip Deffaa, *VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE*, p.28 : "In the '20s, I was real well established, because I was working in **Charlie Johnson's** band, see ? And we were recording for Victor, and that was the biggest thing in that period. For a Negro band to record for Victor Records then was quite an asset, because Victor was prestigious. They were so cranky about Negroes working back then." Same, p. 31 : **Waters** got a job working with banjo player **Bobby Johnson**, who would later be musical director of **Charlie Johnson's** band. Same, p. 32/33 : In the summer, the band often played at an Atlantic City cabaret, the Paradise. Most of the year, however, was spent at Small's Paradise, at 2294 Seventh Avenue in Manhattan. Small's had a capacity of 1500 and caught on with the public immediately upon its opening in the fall of 1925. People knew they'd have a good time there. It was more than just the music - the whole atmosphere was hot and festive: waiters doing the Charleston; Monday morning breakfast dances. A fantasy world in the midst of Harlem. .... The show changed every few months with Johnson overseeing the hiring and firing of the talent, not just the musicians in his band. .... Johnson's band did not have a strong stylistic identity of its own, although Waters notes that it sometimes did the "doo-wah, doo-wah" with muted brass that later became identified with Glenn Miller (and he wonders if Miller might have gotten it from Johnson). The band played music for the shows as well as music for dancing; and, as was common in the mid-1920s, it played a goodly number of stock charts, or arrangements - often undistinguished - furnished by the music publishers. Members of Johnson's band also contributed some arrangements. **Benny Carter**, for example, wrote many during his tenure (1926-28); it was the start of his career as an arranger, which continues to this day. Waters and trumpeter **Jabbo Smith** sometimes improvised arrangements on an informal basis. After Carter left the band, Johnson commissioned Waters to write two arrangements per week, which he did for the next couple of years, in addition to arranging music for the shows.

Jim Haskins, *THE COTTON CLUB*, p.37 : "Other clubs opened, all based on the successful Cotton Club idea, some with variations on the theme. Small's Paradise, at 2291/2 Seventh Avenue, staged a gala opening in the fall of 1925. The large cellar was packed with 1,500 people that evening. Small's also catered to the tastes of the white downtowners. It stayed open later than the Cotton Club and most other clubs, and its specialty was early-morning breakfast for all-night revelers. The waiters at Small's, copying those of some other clubs, did the Charleston while balancing full trays of bad whiskey. Unlike the Cotton Club, Small's admitted black patrons, although its prices successfully shielded the white downtowners from the "colored rabble. Small's flourished. Many of the others that opened around the same time did not."

Benny Waters, *THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE*, p. 31 : "We played the same place on Atlantic City every time we went there, the same place where we joined the band, the Paradise Club. I joined in the summertimes. We were often there for three or four months in the summer, that was the season there.

Atlantic City was fantastic. They didn't have any doors on the cabarets. You could stay out until ten in the morning listening to the shows. I've seen myself leaving the Paradise and go about five different places and come out of the cabarets at the same time as the kids were going to school. That was the same in New York too. ....

Our show didn't finish until four a.m. By the time we were out of there, it was five, and by the time they had cleaned up, it was time for the people to come in for their coffee. The bar was open all day.

We worked long hours but there was a law that we should have stopped at about three. In New York though, if someone came in with some money, they could have a show whatever the time. Many times at "Small's Paradise", someone would come in and pay for the whole show. I remember one guy who came in and said that he would give 20 dollars to everyone in the show and there were no more than four people in the audience and we did the whole show !

When I started in Atlantic City, we were playing for a show. The setting was like in a theatre, the same thing in "Small's Paradise". Each summer we played for different artists. I remember one because I arranged for her, **Doris Rowbotham**. Then we had **Chuck & Chuckles**, **Mary Stafford**, teams like that.

We had girl singers. They would go from table to table. People would give them money – tips – and they would steal it! **Bobby Johnson** who was the band's director knew this. He saw what was happening. They should have brought the money back and divided it equally between them and the musicians who were playing but they didn't want to do that. So one time a girl put the money up in her stocking. Bobby saw her and after that, he followed every singer around with his guitar to protect our money.

I could read and knew I was as good, if not better than any of the guys I joined but I couldn't play jazz like they did, but I wasn't hired for that. They had guys who could do that. Basically we didn't play jazz, we played for the show and we played arrangements, swinging songs, more like **Count Basie** than **Duke**. We had ballads, slow songs, etc. The records that we made show quite well what we did but not everything because we had so much variety. The reason was that **Charlie Johnson** didn't arrange himself so he had to rely on others. Our arrangements had different sounds but they were all good.

It wasn't a band that was typed that you would recognize and say "That's **Charlie Johnson**" because Charlie would buy anything if a guy came with an arrangement. He had money."

Tom Lord, CLARENCE WILLIAMS p.153 : Also apparently about this time, Clarence began using members of the **Charlie Johnson** orchestra in his recording sessions. **Ben Whittet** (clt/alt), **Cyrus St. Clair** (bbs), and later **Ben Waters** (clt/ten) came from the Johnson Orchestra." ("This time" means late '25 and early '26 - KBR)

## 1926

W.C. Allen, HENDERSONIA, p.170 : Benny (*Morton*) recently recalled to John Chilton that Green had failed to show up for a Sunday gig, so Fletcher (*Henderson*) offered the spot to **George Washington**, then with the **Charlie Johnson** band.

Benny Carter in Hank O'Neal, THE GHOSTS OF HARLEM, p. 161: "I also worked with other big bands after I broke up this band (*Wilberforce Colleagians* – KBR). I worked with **Charlie Johnson** at Small's Paradise; my friend **Ben Whittet** (*sic*) was also in the band at the time. It was a good band. I made some records with it, some of my first. Charlie was a darling man, he was a fun guy, and while the band was often very good, Charlie might have had more success, if he'd not had so many good times. He enjoyed his band more than anybody. I'm sure it was worth all the work just to have his own band – he enjoyed it so much."

Chip Deffaa, VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE, p. 197 : "**Johnson's** band had a greater importance, in its day, than might be inferred from the relatively small number of records it made. Johnson was not a good businessman, and he didn't get the band the amount of exposure, on records or on radio, that he should have. Like **King Oliver** and **Sam Wooding**, he reportedly turned down an opportunity to go into the Cotton Club, an offer that **Duke Ellington** eventually accepted. Still, **Johnson** was an established big band leader whose group of musicians reigned supreme at of the most desirable locations in New York City. Plenty of fans considered Johnson's their favorite band, and (*Jabbo*) **Smith** couldn't have asked for a better spot in the mid-1920s than to be its featured trumpeter. He reiterates that **Charlie Johnson** and **Fletcher Henderson** had the two top bands then, that at the time **Ellington** wasn't even in their league. (*Jabbo*) **Smith** recalls : "I joined up with **Charlie Johnson** in '25 (1926 ! KBR). We were in Atlantic City, and we came to New York. We worked in the Paradise in Atlantic City, and we worked in the Paradise in New York, Small's Paradise. So every year, we'd just go for one and go for the other, you know." The Paradise in Atlantic City, which was run by whites, and Small's Paradise in Harlem, run by **Ed Smalls**, who was black, were not connected. In the parlance of the day, the clubs were "black and tan." Both had racially mixed audiences, although whites predominated; and both were located in black neighborhoods, although they were geared toward the white trade. Small's's, a large place with tables and booths as well as a dance floor, was one of *the* places to go in New York. Audiences came for the shows and the overall atmosphere, not just to dance or listen to the band. But it was the band that drew so many musicians to the club. They'd sit in whenever they could, trying to make an impression, to "cut" in."

Rex Stewart, JAZZ MASTERS OF THE THIRTIES, p.171: "When next I heard about him (*Benny Carter* – KBR), we were playing in Newark, New Jersey, with a fellow named **Bobby Brown**, who had rescued both **Happy** (*Caldwell* – KBR) and me from Asbury Park. Brown had a good group, was ambitious, and always travelled to New York to hear the latest in music and musicians. After one such jaunt, he returned raving about some guy who played with **Charlie Johnson** at Ed Small's new place called Small's Paradise. To hear Brown tell it, this alto sax man was the greatest since high-button shoes, and his name was **Benny Carter**! Happy looked at me, and I looked at Happy. We both thought the same thing. Is he kidding? We'd known Carter for some time, and he'd never baked beans for us, not real Boston style (in the early days, taking a solo chorus was termed "taking a Boston" and/or "getting off"). Anyway, Happy and I had our curiosity aroused, and on our night off, we visited Small's. I felt right at home, since I had not only worked for Ed at his Sugar Cane but also was on close terms with him, since I had roomed at his home on 137<sup>th</sup> Street. There was a small section right next to the bandstand where the musicians used to congregate and listen to the band without having to pay the usual tariff for drinks, which was great with us.

Johnson's band was in fine form and really rocking the joint. Everybody, that is, except Carter, who was leaning in his chair against the railing of the bandstand with his eyes closed. He didn't even see us at first. I remember turning my head to Happy and then hearing a cascade of notes in a brief alto saxophone solo that was unbelievable. Sure enough, it was Benny Carter. Bobby Brown had not exaggerated a bit. Benny was truly outstanding, although it was hard to believe that he was in a musical climate that produced such stalwarts as **Eugene Fields** (*Leonard* ? – KBR), **Ben Whitted**, **Fess Edmonds** (*Williams* ? – KBR) – all formidable exponents of the alto for their time. There were also the great **Carmelito Jejo** (*Carmello Jari* – KBR), who played like greased lightning, and among the younger lads there was competition from **Harvey Boone**, **Lester Boone** (no relation), **Johnny Hodges**, **Charlie Holmes**, **Pete Brown**, and **Edgar Sampson**. But Benny Carter was the boss!

That night, after we'd had our ears opened, **George Stafford**, the drummer, remarked, "Benny sure sleeps a lot on the stand, but he always comes in at the right places for his solos."

"I never saw anything like it," **Johnson** echoed.

Louis Metcalf in Record Research 46 p. 6: "I can say that **Charlie Johnson**, upon hearing of my leave from **Johnny Hudgins**, came after me and made me an offer to join his fine band. I accepted and joined him at Small's Paradise as third trumpet. Stepping stone to more

experience. This was in February of 1926. Personnel of band, as far as I can recall, were: **Louie Metcalf, Len Davis, Sidney de Paris**, trumpets; **Ben Whitted, Ben Waters** and **Benny Carter** (later replaced by **Edgar Sampson**), reeds; **Jimmy Harrison**, trombone; **Cy St. Clair**, tuba; **Bobby Johnson**, guitar; **George Stafford**, drums and **Charlie Johnson**, piano and leader. I think I stayed with the Johnson band about 6 months” (*brass players of this period certainly different!*)

Harry Carney in Stanley Dance, *THE WORLD OF DUKE ELLINGTON*, p.74 : “.... But there were quite a few other growling trumpet players, of course. In the **Charlie Johnson** band, besides **Sidney de Paris, Jabbo Smith** used to do a wonderful job growling, as well as fanning with a derby.

Barclay Draper in Peter Carr, *JIMMY ARCHEY*, p.28 : ”This was in late 1926. We were at Smalls, too, in the summer. Every year when **Charlie Johnson** went from Smalls to the Paradise Theater in Atlantic City, (*Willie*) **Gant** always went in his place.” Same, p. 62 : “**Jimmy (Archey)** told Swiss jazz lover Johnny Simmen that he also worked at one time with **Charlie Johnson**. This statement was corroborated by trumpeter **Henry Goodwin**, who said the date was in Atlantic City and by **Leslie Carr**, who said he played with **Johnson** at Smalls Paradise.”

Louis Metcalf in Record Research 46 p. 7: “I had a short term after it to be a leader, too, as I got a chance to front **Charlie Johnson**’s No. 2 band and we played many social gigs. This was my first leading turn. (*Only mention anywhere of a Charlie Johnson No. 2 band!*)

## 1927

Chip Deffaa, *VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE*, p. 197 : **Johnson**’s first recording session was for the Emerson label, early in 1925 (before **Smith** joined); he didn’t record again until February 25, 1927, when he made “Paradise Wobble,” “Birmingham Black Bottom” (both of which include **Smith** solos), and “Don’t You Leave Me Here” for Victor. A vocalist named **Monette Moore** was used on those sides, but she wasn’t a regular with the band. (**Smith** doesn’t remember any black bands that had female singers on their payrolls in those days.)

February 25, 1927 : Recording session for Victor

Garvin Bushell, *JAZZ FROM THE BEGINNING*, p.73: “I went to Smalls’ (*after coming back to NY with Sam Wooding in summer 1927*) and heard **Benny Carter** – I hadn’t heard him since 1922, when he was a kid, trying to play. **Charlie Johnson** had a tremendous band there, and Benny was making a lot of his arrangements.”

Charlie Holmes in Stanley Dance, *THE WORLD OF SWING*, p. 251 :”I had never heard of **Benny** then, but he was working with Charlie Johnson. **Harry Carney** and I went down to Smalls’s, like two farmers, you know. We walked up to the bandstand and we knew one of the fellows, the tenor player, **Benny Waters**. “Hi, Benny!” we said. “Hi” said all three saxophone players. Besides **Benny Carter**, the third one was **Ben Whitted**, who also played clarinet. **Benny Waters** introduced us to all the musicians, and we had a big time there that night, we two kids from Boston.”

Benny Waters, *THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE*, p. 38 : “**Charlie** was a nice guy, too nice if anything. The things the guys in the band used to do is unbelievable. You could do almost anything, drink on the bandstand but we didn’t have a drunken band. Charlie himself used to get drunk but he wasn’t on the bandstand anyway. **Bobby Johnson** used to drink after work. He was the straw boss, the guy who used to look after the band. **Billy Taylor** didn’t drink much at all. **Cy St-Clair** used to get a little high sometimes. **Sidney de Paris** was very sedate, **Leonard Davis** didn’t drink much either. I would drink quite a lot but not on the bandstand. I was never drunk there. I took my job very seriously, was never late, doing my work. And remember I was playing clarinet and you can’t play that if you’re drunk like you can play the saxophone. I was playing tenor sax and clarinet. I only played the clarinet parts, no solos, but we had a lot of clarinet parts. **Ben Whitted** was the clarinet soloist with the band. I took all the tenor sax solos and any alto sax is **Benny Carter**. I don’t know why Benny only played such a short solo on his arrangement of “Charleston Is The Best Dance”. The way he could play, he should have taken two choruses.

**Benny Carter** was a very talented man, the best I ever worked with. He was always a great musician. He was younger and playing everything that came in his mind. Later on, as he got more matured, he got more set in his ways. Not me though ! I’m playing more now (*c. 1984*) than I was then.

Benny was a nice guy. He was quiet but he liked to laugh and he liked to have fun, but don’t mess with him, he could get pretty rough ..... Don’t hurt him, he didn’t take any stuff !

**Ben Whitted** was O.K. His trouble was a little jealousy that musicians have at time, but he was a pretty regular guy apart from that. The only argument that I remember Ben (*Whitted*) and I got into was when someone brought in a stock arrangement. The first part was high.

Benny Waters, *THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE*, p. 42 : “The three wild ones in the band were **Bobby Johnson, George Stafford** (drs) and myself, Charlie also but I don’t remember anyone drinking than I did.

Charlie used to get drunk and he would stay in the back, talking about the band, “just listen to that band, just listen to that band, just listen to it....” It’s true that he had a good band. You can tell by listening to the records. I wish we had recorded **Benny Carter**’s arrangements of “I’m Coming, Virginia”. They said it was fantastic, and also they said, it wasn’t effective.... But it wasn’t supposed to be effective, it was supposed to be a sweet thing.

We had his “Blues In My Heart” in the book too. It wasn’t exactly a hit then, but he composed several numbers that were hits. A lot of guys did blues but he composed a boogie that was recorded by some white girl star.

**Benny Carter** made an arrangement on “Santag” (I think that was what it was called). It was a number that we never played properly. We never did learn to play it ! It was the hardest song, the hardest music I’ve seen in my life. Benny was crowding all his knowledge into one song, something hard and different. We tried it, rehearsed it but never came out right.

But “Rapsody In Blue” we did play. That was hard too. It took us about two weeks to get it. Benny had made that arrangement on that too.

Berger, Berger, Patrick, BENNY CARTER, p.42: „As an established musician **Carter** played in a few of these clubs but mainly at Small’s Paradise, which a reporter for *Variety* described in 1929 as rougher than Connie’s Inn or the Cotton Club. **Charlie Johnson’s** band, he observed, “appeals to the low-down in both races.” The reporter thought the show not nearly so good as those at the other two clubs, but called Johnson’s “one of the greatest and most provocative dance bands in the country.”

p. 58: “**Charlie Johnson**, a pianist, was for years in Atlantic City, until he started a long engagement at Small’s Paradise in October 1925, one of Harlem’s three most famous clubs of the decade, along with Connie’s Inn and the Cotton Club. Unlike the other two, Small’s catered to a black clientele, but was also a favorite of those downtown whites who were a little more adventurous. The *New Yorker* described it variously for its sophisticated readers, in 1926, as the “aristocrat of Harlem, and 90 percent black in clientele”; as the “high point of Harlem, where whites and blacks meet on equal terms”; and as “Harlem’s swellest night club,” with hot music and a “rowdy atmosphere.” Also in the Johnson band were Carter’s close friend **Jimmy Harrison** and two reedmen with whom Carter formed a section called “the three Bennys” – himself, **Ben Whitted** and **Benny Waters**.”

Same, p. 59: “Between engagements with **Charlie Johnson**, Carter joined the **Billy Fowler** band in April 1926.”

Bill Coleman, TRUMPET STORY, p. 51: “I had been told about a cabaret called Small’s Paradise. . . . . The band playing there was led by the pianist **Charlie Johnson**. The show started. **Charlie Johnson** left the piano and I never saw him anymore that night. But what a band! It had been quite some time back when I had heard **Fletcher Henderson**. Now here I was listening to an orchestra that was in the same class as Fletcher’s and I had never heard of it before! There was an outstanding trumpet player who played fast, clean as a whistle, and used a derby, which he waved over the bell of the instrument to get an open horn wa-wa effect. I was told his name was **Jabbo Smith**. I had not heard **Louis Armstrong** in person and I couldn’t see how he could be better than this man.

**Cecil (Scott)** pointed to an alto sax player and told me that it was **Benny Carter**, one of the best in the business and a fine arranger also. But Benny didn’t kill himself blowing that night. He wore a shade on his forehead to keep the bright light from shining in his eyes. The banjo player was very good, as were the rest of the rhythm section. It was surprising how the band swung without the pianist. The drummer, **George Stafford**, was another outstanding personality, especially during the floor show, when there were fast numbers that the girls danced, and the finale.”

Barney Bigard, WITH LOUIS AND THE DUKE, p. 42 : “After I had been at the Nest for a couple of weeks this guy that was the main man at Small’s Paradise (*Ch. Johnson*) he wanted me to leave **Russell** and go with him. I wouldn’t do it.” (*c. Oct. 1927*)

Gunther Schuller, EARLY JAZZ, p.269 / 270: Another band was coming on strong. “**Charlie Johnson’s** Paradise Band in its time was regarded by many as highly as **Duke Ellington’s**. In a sense the band, located at Small’s Paradise, a Harlem night club, was Duke’s closest competitor, for he also provided show music and jungle tableaux for the white patrons from downtown. Through Johnson’s band passed a host of fine musicians; **Jimmy Harrison**, **Jabbo Smith**, **Benny Carter**, trumpeter **Sidney de Paris**, tuba players **Cyrus St. Clair** and **Billy Taylor**, and the remarkable band drummer **George Stafford**. Yet while Ellington was able to thrive in this milieu, Johnson’s band did not survive. It did not have the necessary precision and arranger’s skills to compete with the likes of **Henderson** or **McKinney’s Cotton Pickers**, nor did it have a leader with the creative talents and discipline of an Ellington. Much of the band’s playing was ragged (for example, the trumpet duet on *Hot Tempered Blues*) or lack-luster (*Harlem Drag* and *Hot Bones And Rice*). The band aspired to emulate **Redman’s** arranging devices, but usually could not carry them off. An exception is a rather well-executed saxophone ensemble chorus on *The Charleston Is The Best Dance After All*, as arranged and led by **Benny Carter**. The soloist reacted diversely to the band. Some like **Harrison** and **Sidney de Paris** (in his superb talking plunger solos on *Boy In The Boat*) reacted well. On the other hand, **Jabbo Smith’s** playing with the band is not on a level with his own Rhythm Aces recordings.

Actually, Johnson’s band was at its best when it could indulge in free-wheeling collective improvisations, unhampered by compositional disciplines or other considerations. There exist several such examples in the band’s recorded work, the most exciting of which are the last two choruses of *Hot Tempered Blues*. Here the band swings and rocks in a manner way ahead of its time, especially in the final climactic, collectively improvised chorus. In its all-out abandon, it stops just this side of cacophony, a triumph of the art of ensemble improvisation.

Benny Carter in Gary Giddins, WEATHER BIRD, p. 153 : " ... I was playing with an orchestra then, **Charlie Johnson’s** Orchestra. We played some stock arrangements, quite a number of them actually." Question: Who else arranged for Charlie Johnson ? "**Benny Waters**. You know there were three saxophone players all of whom were named Benny - **Benny Whittet**, **Benny Waters**, and **Benny Carter**. Benny Waters did quite a bit of the arranging, and then I did some."

Bill Coleman, TRUMPET STORY, p.51: **Mack Walker** (bass player of the Cecil Scott band – KBR) and I were roommates and we started getting acquainted with Harlem from 125<sup>th</sup> Street up to the Savoy and Lenox Avenue over to 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which had an elevated railway, the first I had seen. Although the streets were dirty, the city itself was very exciting and I had great pleasure taking in the sites. I had been told about a cabaret called Small’s Paradise (sic – KBR), so Cecil took Mac and methere during the week when we were waiting to play the New Year’s holidays at the Savoy. We went quite early as Cecil said the first show was always the best to see.

The band playing was was led by the pianist **Charlie Johnson**. The show started. Charlie Johnson left the piano and I never saw him any more that night. But what a band! It had been quite some time back when I had heard **Fletcher Henderson**. Now here I was listening to an orchestra that was in the same class as Fletcher’s and I had never heard of it before! There was an outstanding trumpet player who played fast, clean as a whistle, and used a derby, which he waved over the bell of the instrument to get an open horn wa-wa effect. I was told his name was **Jabbo Smith**. I had not heard **Louis Armstrong** in person and I couldn’t see how he could be better than this man.

Cecil pointed out an alto sax player and told me that it was **Benny Carter**, one of the best in the business and a fine arranger also. But Benny didn’t kill himself blowing that night. He wore a shade on his forehead to keep the bright light from shining in his eyes. The banjo player was very good, as were the rest of the rhythm section. It was surprising how the band swung without the pianist. The drummer, **George Stafford**, was another outstanding personality, especially during the floor show, when there were fast numbers that the girls danced, and the finale.

It was my first time to see a floor show, which was not much different from shows in theaters. The girls were beautiful and the comedians funny. The finale was really something to see: when the last girl had gone on the floor, the band kept playing the fast number and the waiters came on, twirling their trays, spinning them on their fingers, then on pencils, then tossing them back and forth to each other. These were the regular size trays that were used in big hotels and were quite heavy.

Charlie Johnson came back to the piano only when the band played the last number of the night. I did not know if he was a good pianist or not because he didn’t take any solos, but he had the secong-best orchestra that I had heard in person.



1928

Chip Deffaa, VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE, p. 197 : (*Jabbo*) **Smith** also recorded with **Johnson**'s band at its next Victor session on January 24, 1928, which produced "Hot Tempered Blues," "Charleston Is The Best Dance After All," and "You Ain't The One" (with **Monette Moore** on vocals), the last two arranged by **Benny Carter**.

"I mean, **Charlie Johnson** ... and me were like brothers." In fact, he felt all the members of the band were like brothers and notes: "I was the youngest guy there. So they'd look after me." He got other offers to leave Johnson's band, but he turned them down. He was happy being there.

At Smalls's, the band went on at nine and played until six the next morning. **Smith** was frequently two or three hours late. **Ed Smalls** made allowances for him, not just because he was a good player, but because Smalls liked him.

No one doubted that **Smith** was a great trumpeter, but **Johnson** had to wonder whether having him in the Paradise Ten was worth the aggravation. He finally called a band meeting – the main purpose of which, or so it seemed to **Smith**, was to chew him out – and told **Smith** that if he didn't shape up he would be replaced. (**Sidney de Paris** was in town, **Johnson** noted; he had been excellent in the band before and could be excellent in it again.) **Smith**, who had thought the members of this band were brothers, smarted at being chastised. He quit the Paradise Ten and was replaced by **Sidney de Paris**."

January 24, 1928 : Recording session for Victor

Benny Waters in Eddie Determeyer, RHYTHM IS OUR BUSINESS, p.213 : "I could arrange. I made six of those arrangements with **Charlie Johnson**'s band, released on Victor. **Benny Carter** made two and I made the rest."

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 33 : "I started to arrange after **Benny Carter** left. I took the same contract that Benny had had. **Benny** had beautiful saxophone arrangements but I made mine more brassy, as I found that people liked that more.

**Jimmy Harrison** used to sing a little bit and **Jabbo Smith** too but nobody in the saxophone section sang. I believe that one of the reasons **Jabbo** left was that he wanted to sing more. Of course we had **Monette Moore** and she went with us in Atlantic City sometimes. I had joined the band before **Jabbo** and he quit before I did.

Down in Atlantic City, we used to go on the beach nearly every morning and have a beach party with whiskey and gin. After hours you would see people from all the clubs on the beach. They would all know each other and would drink with each other.

We had our characters in the band. **Sidney de Paris** and another trumpet player got into an argument in New York. They hit each other with their instruments and broke them. Neither could play the next night, that was on account of jealousy. There's jealousy in all the bands.

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 101 (interview): "(A) I made a whole gang of arrangements for the band, I came to New York with, **Charlie Johnson**'s band. Those records can be bought today on RCA Victor label. (Q) *And you made the band's arrangements for the RCA Victor session?* (A) Yes, most of them. **Benny Carter** arranged two and a white arranger made one. (Q) *Can you remember the first one that was recorded?* (A) Yes, it was my song "Harlem Drag". I still get royalties from it, no much, but it comes in every year. (Q) *When was it?* (A) In 1926. (sic) (Q) *Did you enjoy life in the Charlie Johnson band?* (A) Oh yes, it was the first big band I worked with; it was a good band. (Q) *And the kind of players you had .... Like Jabbo Smith!* (A) Well, yes, but **Jabbo** came in later (sic). We had a lot of other good guys : **Sidney de Paris, Dicky Wells, Benny Carter, Edgar Sampson, Cyrus St-Clair**. We had some great guys like that. **Jabbo** didn't make **Charlie Johnson**, Charlie Johnson made **Jabbo** ! He didn't influence the band. He was no asset to the band; we had trumpet players in the band that played as well or better. (Q) *Well, Sidney de Paris for instance?* (A) Yes, **Sidney de Paris** was a better jazzman for many people than **Jabbo**. But **Jabbo** was young and ambitious and he broke his contract with **Charlie Johnson**. He went to Chicago at the Regal Theater to the **Louis Armstrong**'s place because **Joe Glaser** had a bigger job for **Louis**, and it was an asset for **Jabbo** to come there and replace **Louis**. **Charlie Johnson** was kind of soft hearted, so he said, well let him go ... **Jabbo** was no asset to us, we had guys like **Jimmy Harrison**, one of the world's greatest trombone players.

Laurie Wright in *STORYVILLE* 2002-3 p. 223 : **Benny Waters** said that the arrangement of 41641 (*Hot Tempered Blues*) was by himself. Note that the Victor Master book quotes 3 saxes and violin for this date so the replacement of **Whitted** by **Sampson** is questionable. The book lists 11 men for the first three dates but only 10 for that of 8 May 1929, so who is missing ?

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 38 : "We used to play a lot of stock arrangements and there were lots of passages where they would have to change to clarinet. That was just another reason why it was so important to be able to read in those days. A guy came down to the band once. He could play good saxophone. He was supposed to be taking someone's place but we couldn't use him as he couldn't play clarinet.

On **Charlie Johnson**'s recording of "You Ain't The One", you will hear **Benny Carter, Ben Whitted** and me playing a whole 32 bars chorus of clarinet ensemble, three part harmony. Even now, after all these years, it sounds beautiful. It was **Benny Carter**'s arrangement. He made the clarinet parts, played the melody, the lead and we played the harmony. It was arranged well and we could all play clarinet.

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 57 : "**Jabbo Smith** and I made a lot of head arrangements for **Charlie Johnson** that were better than a lot of the arrangements that **Charlie** had at that time. We got no money for it. We were just ambitious and keen to try out our ideas, and we would stick little solos in there for ourselves.

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 31 : "**Charlie** didn't arrange. The band was full of arrangers : **Billy Taylor, Jimmy Harrison** did a little bit; **Ben Whitted** did most of the arranging at that time. I could arrange a little bit after I got established in there. Then **Charlie** would hire **Benny Carter** and **Edgar Sampson**. He arranged and **George Washington** did some arrangements also. I took **Benny**'s place in arranging after he left the band.

There was a guy called (*Ted*) **Nixon** who used to play with **Fletcher Henderson** and **Charlie** also bought arrangements from him. I never did like them, they were a little bit too crowded for me. Later on, **Charlie** bought arrangements from **Ken Macomber**, the white arranger and from another guy who was selling photocopies of arrangements all over New York. That's who we bought "Rhapsody In Blue" from.

He had everybody in New York playing the same arrangement. We had two arrangements of "Rhapsody In Blue", that one and one from **Benny Carter**.

(Letter from Keith Nichols to the author : "**Benny Waters** told me that *THE BOY IN THE BOAT* was arranged by a white arranger – Ken Macomber. Apparently he went round all the black bands trying to sell his charts. He had a very attracted wife, who he would send in first to chat up the band guys – then he would go in with the arrangements !" About this topic, see also : *Personal Reminiscences*)

Kaiser Marshall in Shapiro / Hentoff, HEAR ME TALKIN' TO YA, p. 211: " Well, **Jimmy (Harrison)** had a one-year contract with **Charlie** (Johnson). So, at that time **Fletcher** wanted him and had to buy his contract in order to get him. .... Well, from **Fletcher, Jimmy** went back to **Charlie Johnson**, then back to **Fletcher**, and to **Chick Webb**, where he spent his last days."

Benny Waters in Albert McCarthy, BIG BAND JAZZ, p.42 : "**Ken McComber**, the white arranger, used to do some work for us. Anyone who made a good arrangement was in the book. If **Charlie** liked it, he would buy it there at rehearsal. He was making so much money."

Chip Deffaa, VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE, p. 36 : **Waters** remembers a bus tour with the **Charlie Johnson** band through the South, from Georgia to Texas. He and **Jabbo** would pick marijuana, growing wild in the fields, whenever the bus stopped and then let it dry out in the back of the bus.

Same, p. 37 : He recalls one time when the band drove down to Camden, New Jersey (a couple of hours away), to record during the day, then put in a full night at Smalls's (until about 4 o'clock), and then played a breakfast dance until nine."

Same, p.38 : In the late 1920s, Waters gave every appearance of being an up-and-coming arranger. He arranged such **Charlie Johnson** recordings as "Walk That Thing", "Harlem Drag," and the classic "Boy In The Boat," with its slightly sinister, late-night feel, as well as music for the shows at Smalls's.

Same, p.39 : Playing live each night in **Charlie Johnson**'s band was **Waters**'s main activity, of course. Because **Johnson** felt that working live was the main thing, he didn't push much to get his band on record or on radio, which was a miscalculation. Apparently, he didn't realize how important those media were to building and maintaining a group's reputation. His band, which was riding high in 1926, through 1929, gradually fell behind, in terms of fame and popularity, as other bands courted – and reaped the benefits of – record and radio exposure.

**Waters** nonetheless wants the status of **Johnson**'s band in its peak years to be clearly understood. It was, he asserts, "a great band from the beginning. .... **Waters** is quick to stress that **Charlie Johnson**'s name was big before **Ellington**'s. "Many prizes we won over **Duke Ellington**," he says. "We used to have battles of the bands."

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 42 : "One time we were touring the south, **Jabbo Smith** and I used to stop the bus to pick grass. It was summertime. I remember it was hot because we would put the Marijuana leaves in the back of the bus and in two or three hours they would dry out because the sun was so hot. This must have been one summer we didn't go to Atlantic City, we toured all around the south, we went to Texas, we toured Georgia also but it wasn't a long tour because Charlie didn't have the contacts for those long tours like some of other bands did. It lasted maybe a couple of weeks.

Now and then we had some changes in the band. I recall that for a certain length of times, we had famous musicians who substituted such as **Roy Eldridge, Charly Shavers, Red Allen**. We had **Bill Coleman** and **Franck Newton** also. **Bob Shoffner** worked with us and I remember another guy from New-Orleans called **Albert Snaer**. He was a first trumpet too but he used to play choruses along with other guys as well.

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 40 : "We played at many dances too with **Charlie**. I remember one particular time. We played the college dance at William's College. That's in Massachusetts. There were about six bands sometimes at these college dances, white and coloured. This time there were only two coloured bands, **Fletcher Henderson** was the other one. We all raved about that because we had better success than they had and everyone came to our place and listen to us.

Usually in these dances people would go around and listen to all the bands but especially the one who was most popular. There were lots of white bands. We worked with **Casa Loma**'s band often. **Fletcher Henderson** and **Charlie Johnson** were favorite for college dances. We played many famous colleges : Cornell, Harvard, William's College, Yale, etc ...

We didn't alternate sets when there were two or more bands at a college dance; they had different places called guest houses. Down the hill was so and so and in another part of the campus, another band, like that, all over the campus. For instance we would be playing in one part, Fletcher in another part and Casa Loma in a different place also. We were all playing at the same time. The place where the band was the most attractive was full and the place where the band had less success was empty. It was as simple as that, you couldn't hear one from the others, the campus being very large. We did a whole lot of that sort of thing.

We were still working at "Small's Paradise" at this time. Sometimes we would go out for a few days and we got someone in our place for those days. At other times we did the college dances at the end of the season in Atlantic City, just before we went back to New York. This was generally in September. This was the start of the semester at college too.

We didn't travel by bus with Charlie. Almost everybody had a car. I rode with **Jimmy Harrison** who was the greatest driver. He taught me a lot of things, I've never forgotten them. Jimmy was a nice guy. He wasn't too much after the chicks, he had a nice little wife. She was a friend of my wife before they married. I never saw him drunk.

I didn't know anyone in that band that was truly sober except **Edgar Sampson**. He didn't drink a thing. I used to room with him on tour.

We shared the same room with two beds. I was drinknig, I was drunk all the time but not him. Then I quit drinking, and he started ! I was doing fine, just the opposite of what he was doing.... And he died young (1973 !). But he had it made then. He had a little job on his own, playing tenor sax and violin. He was playing good tenor, smooth like he was. He was a quiet kind of guy. His playing on violin was pretty too and I have no idea how many thousand dollars he was making out of his songs. He belonged to ASCAP and when you are a member for a certain time you are supposed to get a certain sum for as long as you live.

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 43 : "Going back to **Charlie Johnson**'s band we never had a girl singer with us on tour. **Monette Moore** came a few times in Atlantic City and of course she recorded with us. We never even took a singer to college dances and we certainly could have used a singer there. Those guys would have like to see a woman out front singing.

**Edgar Sampson** and I used to play, walking around the floor with his saxophone down my back and my saxophone down his back. We walked around the floor dancing, but it wasn't dancing, we were walking in time and playing at the same time and we also did something else as well that hadn't been done, I would finger his saxophone and he would finger mine. We had all kinds of tricks but it was entertaining.

I wouldn't be surprised if **Glenn Miller** didn't get some of his ideas from us because we were one of the first bands to do that "Doo Wah Doo Waah" with mutes. **Charlie Johnson** loved that stuff and we had the guys to do it. Later, Glenn Miller made it in real high class manner at the Paramount Theater. He had a whole brass section with two or three trombones and three trumpets, maybe more ... a big band. They had the lights down on the stage and they had phosphorus on the mutes and on all the horns and that's all you could see, just that and nothing else; it was fantastic. But it was the same principle, we were doing it years before.

W. C. Allen, HENDERSONIA, p.221 : "And on Sunday, May 6 (1928), the Savoy Ballroom staged one of its famous "jazz wars" with SIX bands to play – **Lloyd Scott, Chick Webb, Alex Jackson, Charlie Johnson, Fess Williams,** and **Fletcher Henderson!** All I can say is "WOW!" **Lloyd Scott** (Shapiro and Hentoff, 1955, p.158) says his band was the winner at a South Sea Island Ball over the **Henderson** and **Charlie Johnson** bands – possibly this same date."

Gene Krupa in Bert Korall, DRUMMIN' MEN The Heartbeat of Jazz, p. 59 : "What else do I remember ? **George Stafford** was frightening drummers by the dozen with the **Charlie Johnson** band at Smalls' Paradise. What a show drummer ! .....

Cozy Cole in Stanley Dance, THE WORLD OF SWING, p. 29 : "Another very good drummer then was **George Stafford** with **Charlie Johnson**. .... **George Stafford** was really the one that brought out the hi-hat cymbal. It used to be on two pieces of board with a strap on them, on the floor. He was the first I ever saw. "

Charters / Kunstadt, JAZZ A History of the New York Scene, p.204 : At Small's, **Charlie Johnson** was leading one of the best bands in Harlem, but his own lack of business ability was holding them back. They didn't begin broadcasting until 1929, and the program featured the variety entertainment rather than the band. But **Charlie Johnson's** Paradise band, in a handful of Victor recordings, left behind an impressive picture of the music he played at Small's for over six years. One recording, "The Boy In The Boat," recorded on September 19, 1928, and released on Victor 21712, is perhaps the finest recording made by any of the Harlem bands, from Connie's Inn to the Cotton Club, in the late twenties.

Johnson had a fluctuating personnel (NO!), but the band that made the September 1928 recording date included most of the men who were regularly associated with the band. **Leonard Davis** and **Sidney DeParis** played trumpets; **Jimmy Harrison**, trombone; **Ben Whittet, Edgar Sampson,** and **Ben Waters**, reeds; **Johnson** at the piano; **Bobby Johnson**, banjo; **Cy St. Clair**, tuba; and **George Stafford**, drums. "The Boy In The Boat" arrangement is a beautifully contrasted grouping of ensemble passages against solo passages by **Jimmy Harrison** and **Sidney DeParis**. DeParis was easily the finest growl trumpet man of the twenties, perhaps the finest in jazz, and he does a series of three solos during the recording, the first alternating phrases with **Ben Whittet's** clarinet, the second with vocal interjections by one of the band, and the third, at the climax of the record, an expressive realization of the melodic material he had roughly sketched out in his first choruses. The tune is taken at a slow, relaxed tempo, the fine tuba of **St. Clair** dominating the rhythm section. Between the excellent arrangement, the trombone solo of **Jimmy Harrison**, the passages for clarinet trio, and the moving work by **DeParis**, the record is a stunning achievement, in many ways summing up the best of the music of this colorful and vital period in Harlem's musical life." Same, p.207 : "The Cotton Club had a slick theatricalism, but they couldn't equal the somber introspection of **Charlie Johnson's** band."

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 34 : "I worked at Small's Paradise exclusively for **Charlie Johnson** until the early 30s and it was a hard job. They changed the show every three months or so. We had to rehearse all the music as we kept getting new people. The chorus girls remained there all the time. It was the stars who changed. To work at Small's Paradise, no matter who it was, to get into the show, you had to go via **Charlie Johnson**. He was paid for that. He was the one who choose the talents, it was his work. If Charlie said "No", you didn't work. **Ed Smalls**, the owner of the place, gave him that authority.

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 39 : "We often played the "Lafayette" with **Charlie Johnson**. That didn't affect what we were doing at "Small's". All we used to do was to get a band in our place for the first act since the "Lafayette" show was over at eleven. We were playing and working pretty hard like when we did recordings. We went down to Camden, New Jersey, during the day and went back to "Small's Paradise" to play the same night. We went by car because we all had cars by then. I will never forget one particular day when we did three things. Early in the morning we went down to Camden. We recorded all day and by the time we got back and ate, it was time to go to "Small's". Then after that, at 4 a.m., we had to go and play a breakfast dance that lasted until nine in the morning. I remember all that because I was not just tired, I was cold as well and I got myself a boilermaker – when you want to get drunk fast, you get a shot of gin and a big glass of beer and you chase the gin with beer. If you don't have much time, that's the sure way to get drunk fast. Then on top of that, I had half a pint of Bourbon and just before I went on the bandstand I drank all that as well. And according to everyone, I was blowing like hell.

W. C. Allen, HENDERSONIA, p. 177 : "**Harrison** came to New York around 1923-24 with trumpeter **June Clark**, and later played with the bands of **Elmer Snowden** .... and more recently with **Charlie Johnson**. **Henderson** in fact bought Jimmy's contract from Johnson."

September 19, 1928 : Recording session for Victor

Bill Coleman, TRUMPET STORY, p. 58 : "I also met **Sidney De Paris** that I had known in Crawfordville, Indiana, when I was six years old. I called him "Gabriel" and he called me "Crawfordville". We were happy to meet again and told each other our experiences. He was now playing with **Charlie Johnson's** band and had come to the Savoy during a break. His brother **Wilbur** was still in Philly. Sidney was surprised to see that I was playing trumpet with the **Scott** brothers, and he was happy about it. He told me about some changes in **Charlie Johnson's** band : **Jabbo Smith** had left, Sidney and **Leonard Davis** had been hired, and **Edgar Sampson** had taken **Benny Carter's** place.

When I spoke of hearing **Charlie Johnson's** orchestra for the first time, I forgot to mention that **Jimmy Harrison**, the great trombonist, was in the band. But the night I heard him, I don't remember him having any solos. Jimmy was not in good health and I noticed that he held a hand on his stomach when he was not playing. He had now been replaced by **George Washington**, which made three musicians of the **Arthur Gibbs** orchestra to join **Charlie Johnson** after the **Scott** band went into the Savoy. **Jimmy Harrison** died in 1931."

John Chilton, **BILLIE'S BLUES** The Billie Holiday Story, p. 31 : In later years, **Billie** spoke of her early musical inexperience, and how it led to a quick rejection from the big Harlem cabaret club Small's Paradise, where she had applied for the job of singing with **Charlie Johnson's** band. "At Ed Small's ... I went there, I was about thirteen, and I'll never forget it. **Myra Johnson** got me the audition. I was all ready to sing, and this cat asked me, "What key you singing in?" I said "I don't know man, you just play." They shot me out of there so fast, it wasn't even funny".

Donald Clarke, **WISHING ON THE MOON** The Life and Times of Billie Holliday, p. 66 / 67 : " ... recordings in this market were made with small groups or just solo piano, but these of **Monette's** (*Moore*) were with **Charlie Johnson's** Paradise Ten, the house band at Smalls' Paradise.

This club, at 2294 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, had started in 1925 and was still going decades later. (**Ed Smalls** had sold out to run a liquor store; the Paradise in the 1960s was operated by basketball star Wilt "The Stilt" Chamberlain.) In its heyday Smalls' was a high-class spot, like the Cotton Club; he encouraged the band to park their cars in front on slow nights to make the place look busy. The Paradise had waiters who could do the Charleston while balancing a tray of drinks; unlike the Cotton Club, the Paradise admitted blacks, if they could afford it; and unlike the Cotton Club, the Paradise had no radio wire for broadcasts; **Johnson** later regretted that he never had a chance to become as famous as **Duke Ellington**.

**Johnson's** band was a very good band, and **Billie** (*Holiday*) probably knew **Monette's** records with it. "You Ain't The One", for example, made in 1928, was a rhythm novelty in the demotic style that had grown out of the "coon song", a combination of ragtime and black vaudeville that had big influence on the songs of our century."

Benny Waters, **THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE**, p. 33 : "I did two arrangements a week for maybe two years or so. I was paid for that, union scale or maybe a little more. Then I got tired of it. But I made a lot of arrangements for nothing. I did one on "Body And Soul" for three saxophones, just for me. We had five hundred or more numbers in all. **Charlie** used to call the tunes by numbers. We had two books and we could play all the numbers in each book. That wasn't that hard because everyone in the band could read. In fact one of the hardest arrangements in the book was the first one I did. It was "Somebody Stole My Girl". I wanted to make an impression on **Charlie** and I didn't make him pay for it...."

Jay Smith, Len Guttridge, **JACK TEAGARDEN**, p. 69 : "The **Pollack** boys would go straight from work at the Park Central picking up wives or girl friends *en route*. The first stop might be Small's Paradise to hear **Charlie Johnson's** band and Willie Jackson perform *Golf Playin' Papa*, a monologue spiced with *ad lib* obscenities, or Connie's Inn to hear **Louis Armstrong** heading the *Hot Chocolates* revue.

## 1929

M. Berger, E. Berger, J. Patrick, **BENNY CARTER**, p.42 : "As an established musician Carter played in a few of these clubs but mainly at Small's Paradise, which a reporter for *Variety* described in 1929 as rougher than Connie's Inn or the Cotton Club. **Charlie Johnson's** band, he observed, "appeals to the low-down in both races." The reporter thought the show not nearly so good as those at the other two clubs, but called Johnson's "one of the greatest and most provocative dance bands in the country."

W. C. Allen, **HENDERSONIA**, p. 227 : „Princeton's house-party weekend, May 3-4, 1929, was a swinging affair, with these well-known bands featured at some of the clubs : ..... **Charlie Johnson's** Small's Paradise Orch. at Court Club; ....." Same, p.228 : "This may be the occasion that **Benny Waters** later recalled, "when there were four bands on the campus, **Fletcher Henderson**, the **Dorsey Brothers**, the **Memphis Five**, and us (i.e. Charlie Johnson). Each band moved around and that day our band was the most popular. Our place was packed .... "

May 08, 1929 : Recording session for Victor

A. McCarthy, **BIG BAND JAZZ**, p. 42 : ..... The last two sessions certainly prove that the **Johnson** of that period was a very good one and it is a pity that it did not record again. Its failure to do so van probably be attributed to the onset of the depression, a few months after the session. By the time the recording companies were once more fully active, the swing era was under way and the Johnson band was nearing the end of its existence.

*SAVOY promotion* in Charters / Kunstadt, **JAZZ** A History of the New York Scene, p.198 : The Savoy Ballroom on Wednesday night, May 8<sup>th</sup> (1929), is again about to do the unusual and is leading the way for the first inter-sectional battle of music ever held between the south and the north ..... **Fess Williams** and his Royal Flush Orchestra, **Charlie Johnson** and his Small's Paradise Orchestra, and **Duke Ellington** and his Cotton Club Orchestra are ready to do or die in the defense of their city, and have their musical bars in readiness with which to smite.

Rex Stewart, **JAZZ MASTERS OF THE 30s**, p.46 : "It was an Easter Monday morning breakfast dance at Rockland Palace, Harlem's biggest dance hall. **Jabbo** was staring in **Charlie Johnson's** band from Small's Paradise, but **Don Redman's** band, featuring **Satch**, from Connie's Inn was the top attraction. It was a beautiful sight – no flower garden could compete with the beauty of the girl's bonnets. There was also intense factionalism in the air, because no one from Charleston, S.C., would concede Armstrong's superiority over their hometown boy, Jabbo. We musicians tried to tell the Charlestonians that while Jabbo was great, Louis was King. We needn't have bothered. For weeks before the dance, arguments raged, bets were made, and, finally, the great moment came.

I rushed up from Roseland, as soon as the last note was played, intending to get a front-row view of the battle. But when I entered the hall, I found that more than a hundred musicians had beaten me to any choice spot, so I pulled out my horn and got on the stand with **Charlie's** band. Nobody said anything, which figured, because I always sat in with anybody around town in those days.

Jabbo was standing out in front, and I'll say this, he was *blowing* – really coming on like the angel Gabriel himself. Everytime he'd fan that brass derby on a high F or G, Altis, his buddy from Small's, would yell, "Play it, Jabbo! Go ahead, Rice!" (Everybody from Charleston called each other Rice. It was the hometown nickname.) "Who needs Louis?" he yelled, "You can blow him down anytime." Although there were only about a hundred or so of the South Carolina contingent in the crowd of some 2,000, these people created a real uproar for their idol. When Johnson's set ended with Jabbo soaring above the rhythm and the crowd noise, everybody gave them a big hand. I could tell from the broad grin on Jabbo's face that he felt that once and for all he'd shown Satchmo who was king!

*(This is a very obscure story, because Armstrong left Henderson – and New York – in early November 1925 and Jabbo Smith joined Johnson in December that same year. Redman did not have a band of his own then. Louis hit New York again in early 1929, but at that time Jabbo was no longer with the Johnson band. Also, Don Redman was leader of the McKinney's Cotton Pickers in Detroit in 1929, but he had worked with Louis on the last Hot Five sides late in 1928 in Chicago! Rex Stewart probably was with Henderson at the Roseland Ballroom at that time – which would date this event somewhere into 1929, a year that Jabbo spent in Chicago.)*

John E. Hasse, *BEYOND CATEGORY The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington*, p.113 : "**Johnson's** suffered from poor promotion: he recorded only fourteen pieces, and after the beginning of the depression in 1929, he never recorded again. Both **Henderson** and **Johnson** sorely needed a canny agent-promoter-publicist-manager like **Irving Mills**. If they had been able to link up with such a person, their careers might have turned out to be more successful."

Chip Deffaa, *VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE*, p.82 : "**John Hammond** recalled being fortunate enough in his youth "to hear **Bix** (*Beiderbecke*) sit in with **Charlie Johnson's** Orchestra at Small's Paradise" ..... (**Benny Waters**, who plays in **Charlie Johnson's** orchestra in those years does not recall **Beiderbecke** ever sitting in with the band.)"

### 1930s

Warren Vaché, Sr. *CRAZY FINGERS Claude Hopkins' Life in Jazz*, p.3 : As the decade of the 1920s began, the best-known bands in Harlem were those of **Duke Ellington**, **Fletcher Henderson**, **Don Redman**, **Chick Webb**, and **Luis Russell**. They played the best clubs and halls like the Cotton Club, Connie's Inn, the Savoy Ballroom, and the Roseland Ballroom, and they rated quite a bit of airtime. **Jimmie Lunceford** and **Claude Hopkins** were yet to be heard from.

*(Apart from the fact, that this statement applies to the 1930s, not the 1920s, there still is one very important name missing : that of Charlie Johnson. Although all the musicians of the era emphasize the quality and importance of the Johnson band, it is characteristic, that this band did not acquire common knowledge.)*

### 1930

Benny Waters, *THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE*, p. 34 : "The best show we had, the one that stayed the longest, was "Kitchen Mechanics". This show was staged, the dancing was staged. **James P. Johnson** wrote all the music. Some of the numbers, you may have heard of. The most popular was the "Charleston". I had the privilege of writing the first arrangement.

The whole show was built around the Charleston. It was an exceptionally good show but the maximum it could run in a cabaret was six months.

The same girls who had been there for years changed their routine for this show. One person was dressed like a cook in a big white hat. The chorus girls had little white aprons and caps, like they were maids. Everything appertained to a kitchen. The show lasted two hours at least and we were on twice a night. I between the show, we played for dancing and sometimes people came in at closing time and gave us extra money to play the show again."

Dicky Wells, *THE NIGHT PEOPLE*, p.15 ff: "After my first experience of working with Benny, I think I must have gone to **Charlie Johnson**, following **George Washington**. George had good tone and control, like **Jack Teagarden**. **Charlie** had a wonderful drummer named **George Stafford**. He had a special beat that we called "shovel-in' coal." He died of TB. Then there were **Sidney de Paris** and **Leonard Davis**, trumpets; **Bobby Johnson** on banjo and **Billy Taylor** on bass; **Ben Whitted**, **Ben Waters** and **Edgar Sampson** were the saxes, and they were soon joined by **Benny Carter**. Charlie played piano, but the band often had to work without him. **Charlie** had the job at Small's and it was a good job for pay. **Charlie** used to be like **Chick** (*Webb*). He liked to stick his chest out and tell how much he was paying you, and all that. He liked to pay you as much as he possibly could. **Chick** went hungry a lot just to keep his band in music. He would live on hamburgers so he could buy arrangements. It just began to pay off for him when – God bless him! – he had to leave.

We used to call **Charlie** "Fess" (for Professor) . If a guy didn't know music, he was the more likely to be called "Fess." (You dig why **Benny Carter** was called "King"?) Well, Charlie loved to leave the piano and come out front to start his band, so much so that if only one cat had arrived he would still come out front and start him off, smiling as if the entire band were there. He was the most down-to-earth leader – nothing fancy, just a plain man – like my favorite bandleader, the one that's older than water! And both of them were King Cursors. What words! But only in a joking way. Anyway, Fess would count, stomp his feet and use arm motions all at once to start the band. One time he was out front trying to start it when **Bobby Johnson** suddenly yelled, "Fess, you got the introduction!" And that was on the air, too. Charlie's was one of the funniest bands I ever was in. **Billy Taylor**, the bass player, had a big alarm clock. I saw it sitting there when I joined the band. He'd have it set for 12 o'clock, his supper time. The band would be playing and this alarm clock would go off! That was the time he wanted to eat! **Smalls** usually never noticed these things, but one night it went off when he happened to be standing by the band stand.

"What the hell is going on here?" he wanted to know.

So Charlie explained. He didn't worry. He didn't care. We just went on playing, but flies were beginning to gather in the corner where Billy was eating his sardines. "Girls" he called them.

"I got a can of "girls" back there, Charlie," he'd say. "Lend me your opener." .....

I remember when Clyde Beatty's "Bring 'Em Back Alive" show came out, and the guys would argue about which was the most vicious animal in the jungle. **George Stafford** said the tiger was the worst, the most vicious killer, and Billy would say the lion was. So the band

would be playing one of these fast numbers and George would stop playing and pull out a great, big placard he'd got from Madison Square Garden, right on the band-stand.

"Look at that, man," he'd say, pointing at a tiger, "there ain't no way in the world a lion can whip this rascal!"

All the time, the band would be playing. Another night they would be arguing about prizefighters and a guy would quit right in the middle of his solo to get in the argument.

Now, **Sidney De Paris** and **Leonard Davis**, the two trumpet players, weren't speaking. There seemed to be something like there was with Lester (Young) and Hershel (Evans) in Basie's band. The guys liked each other, but there seemed to be a little something that made them want to play more than the other. These two guys were both terrific, but though they were sitting side by side for several years, they wouldn't speak. They were good friends, though, deep down under.

**Benny Carter** would have the waiter to bring his lunch around one o'clock in the morning. He'd have on a pair of dark glasses that he'd put up high on his forehead when he was playing. **Charlie Johnson** gambled a lot and he'd often be upstairs gambling, maybe winning four or five thousand dollars one night and losing it all the next. So Benny would have the waiter come, and he would set this big tray down, and Benny would pull the glasses down over his eyes and start eating. Then he'd get drowsy and fall asleep – all this on the stand. Sometimes Charlie would come back and catch him, and say:

"Wake up over there – eating on my job!"

"It won't happen again, Fess," Benny would say. "You have my word of honor. I respect you, and I wouldn't do a thing like this on your job. I don't know what came over me, Charlie."

The next night the same thing – here comes this waiter!

One night, the tenor player didn't show up, and that was when you couldn't get musicians easily. So Charlie sent **Leonard Davis** to the Rhythm Club to bring a tenor player back. When Leonard came back he had got a drummer.

"Man, I can't play no saxophone", this cat was saying.

"Oh, come on, man," Leonard was saying, "just sit there and hold the horn and make the money. Charlie ain't going to be here. He'll be upstairs gambling."

Well, we were broadcasting and this guy was sitting down to "play." Then, later, the show comes on, and Leonard says to him:

"Look, at this spot here, when the boy comes out to dance, to do this African thing, that's when you go out and take the drums and shout "Ooh-wa-wa-wa-wa!"

So we see this cat coming through the brass section, and we say, "Where the hell is he going?"

And he's standing out by the gate where the show comes on when Charlie sees him.

"What's that guy doing out there, man?" he asks.

"I don't know," says Leonard.

The boy is looking around, all anxious. He don't know what to do. He comes back with the drums and waves to us from the door. He didn't want that job for any money. Oh, it was a crazy house!

Charlie himself was a swell guy. Pay night, there'd be a line around the booth, and Charlie would sometimes be high and pay you twice.

"I see you guys ducking back, getting in the back of the line," he'd say. "What's happening there?"

Sometimes a guy would hold out his hand with his head turned away and maybe get an extra envelope. And that didn't just happen when Charlie had won at gambling. The place was terrific and it had a high payroll. At one time, I think Charlie was getting around fifteen hundred for himself. Bobby was kind of his right-hand man and later he started paying off.

One night, Charlie told us:

"Mr. Smalls is going to have a meeting. He wants all you guys in the office."

So we go to the office, and I was worrying, because I had just got there, and the money was pretty good, and I wondered whether I was going to be fired.

"There ain't enough cars upstairs," he said. "I want cars outside to make this place really look like something. Anybody want anything, see Sampson the secretary."

The guys got cars. I think **Sidney** got a Cadillac. **Jimmy Harrison** had had a Dodge just before I got there. That was the kind of job it was. So the next night the people couldn't get in for the cars sitting around outside.

"How we going to pay you back, boss?" the guys asked.

"Any way you want," Ed said, "twenty-five, fifteen, ten dollars a week."

Then I remember **Billy Taylor** buying his son a train. We'd hit at 10 o'clock, and come 12 o'clock there'd still be no Billy. He'd be at home playing with his train.

"Charlie, I don't feel good," another guy would say.

"Well, go home," Charlie would say.

**George Stafford** would go home and get his chick, come back and take a ringside seat, and just sit a-looking, and us with no drummer. That sort of thing went on for a year and a half, I know, but I got there a little late, although from what I heard it had been going on all the time.

Smalls did terrific business. They reserved the seats by the year. You'd see a party come in every Friday or Saturday to the same table. You couldn't get room down to the place weekends. And all the waiters danced with their trays, and put on a little show all by themselves. There were ten of them, and two of them sang. Some of them own the Rhythm Club now.

Charlie's band used to swing. It used to hang **Duke** every time they caught him. Duke had only about seven pieces then, but he had more finesse, of course. Charlie's was a little like Fletcher's band. The cats didn't know they had a boss, but they could pull it out when they had to.

**Fletcher (Henderson)** didn't actually want to be a boss. He was something like **Buck Clayton** on my third trip to Europe. Buck didn't want to be a boss, but he expected everybody to act right. Those guys of Charlie's, they did everything, and Smalls' was like home.

When we played a theater like the Lafayette, Charlie would always figure out some different way of presentation. Once we had a chocolate box, a great, big chocolate box on stage, and the band was inside it. When we played the opening, the lid would lift up, and there we'd be, inside, playing. We were called Chocolate Dandies, and I know sometimes we nearly melted away, it was so hot in there."

Same, p.21: "We'd be playing a show at Small's with **Charlie Johnson** – a two-hour or an hour-and-a-half show – and ofays would come from downtown, like **Tommy** and **Jimmy Dorsey** (Jimmy with his clarinet in his pocket), **Benny Goodman** and **Jack Teagarden**, and those guys, and sometimes they'd play our dance sets for maybe a couple of hours. Just sit and jam. And we go to Hooper's and have a little session, or go to a place called Ed Wynn's and get some chili, hot-dogs or hamburgers. Then we'd go back and play the show, and then maybe walk around the street again. It was really a wonderful thing. Musicians from out of town all used to want to come to Harlem and go to Smalls'. That was after he moved from Fifth Avenue, and most of the guys used to come there to hear **Charlie Johnson** and see the big shows. **Ethel Waters** was there before I came. Smalls' moved over to Seventh about a year after I arrived in New York.

Same, p.36: "That didn't apply so much to bands in the early days like **Charlie Johnson's**, **Duke's** and **Fletcher's**. They played the hardcore music, but each of them had a different thing, so that you didn't know what to expect, whereas with a house band you always know what is going to happen."

Rex Stewart, *JAZZ MASTERS OF THE 30's*, p.163: "When **Catlett** arrived in New York City, several of us musicians had just finished roller skating as a pastime, and everybody had gone in for bicycle riding. I remember how drummer **George Stafford** had all of the

cats drooling when he bought an English bike. Assembling for our customary morning outing in front of Small's Paradise one early June day, we were all surprised when Big Sid spurted around the corner, coattails flying and all grins. Up until then, he had not joined the bike riders. But there he was in all his glory with his new bicycle. True, it was not a British Spordster complete with gear shift, but we could tell it was a premium wheel, and Sid was proud of it.

The setting was too perfect to avoid the good-natured rivalry that existed in those days. Here were two of Harlem's top drummers, one a veteran and the other a newcomer, so the air was charged with excitement as **Stafford** said to **Catlett**, "That's a pretty machine you've got there, Sid. How about a race around the block? Let's see which bike is the fastest."

They agreed to race three times around the block and the loser was to buy drinks for the gang. They started off, and George was leading all of way until the very last time around when he made the mistake of turning his head to wave at the bunch and ran smack into a laundry truck. Luckily for him, the bundles of clothes absorbed the shock, and no bones were broken. But Sid won the race.

Later, Sid told us that he really didn't want to race George, because the difference in ages amounted to a handicap in his favor, even though George's bicycle had gears and his did not."

### 1931

W. C. Allen, HENDERSONIA, p. 257 : „The band (*Fl. Henderson*) was starting to have some personnel problems. **Harvey Boone** left around June (1931), joining the **Charlie Johnson** band.”

Bill Coleman, TRUMPET STORY, p. 74 : “**Dicky Wells** was playing with **Charlie Johnson**, who left Small's Paradise in 1931. Charlie asked **Frankie Newton** and myself to join his band. I accepted because Charlie was better known than (**Bobby**) **Neal** and the salary would be better also. The members of Charlie's band were: **Ben Whitted** and **Harvey Boone** (alto saxes), **Benny Waters** (who did many of the arrangements, tenor sax), **Bobby Johnson** (guitar), **Dell Thomas** (bass), **George Stafford** (drums), **Dicky Wells** (trombone) and **Leonard “Ham” Davis**, **Frankie Newton** and myself on trumpets. When we went on tour, **Sidney De Paris** was added, which made four trumpets and gave the brass section an even bigger sound and more punch than it had before. For my money, **Charlie Johnson** had a band that was second only to **Fletcher Henderson's** and he had given Fletcher some tough battles before I joined.”

Ibid., p. 75 : “It was summer in 1931 when Charlie landed a job playing at a big swimming pool called the Lido, which was at 146<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was a pleasant job, because it was not too hot during the night and, as we played near the pool, which had no roof, we could not play after midnight. So I went to the Savoy at times. **Charlie Johnson** had not changed his habit of playing the first number and then disappearing until it was time to play the last number. But he got hooked when the band played a week at the Lafayette Theater. The name of the show for that week was “Chocolate Drops” and we were in a big stage built like a box of candy. We had to enter this set from the basement by climbing up some steps. When the band was seated before the show started, the top of the box was closed and slowly opened when we started to play the opening number. The piano was in the right hand side of the box and Charlie had to go in first. There was no way for him to get out, and it was the joke of the week because it was the first time that he had ever been in a position where he was obliged to stay at the piano until the end of a show or dance.

One of the attraction numbers that we played that week was an arrangement of ‘Ding Dong Daddy’, which I sang, and the trumpets played in three-part harmony, exactly as Louis Armstrong played it. It made a hit with the audience, stage hands, and chorus girls.

The Harlem Opera House on 125th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues had been a burlesque show place but it was turned into a theatre that showed movies and had stage shows. **Charlie Johnson** and the orchestra were engaged to play a week there. On the bill was a magician who had a trick stool. He would invite someone to come on stage to sit on it after he had performed some other magic tricks with them. When someone sat on this stool, the legs would flop down leaving the person sitting flat on their fanny. The musicians had a crap game every show and **Charlie Johnson** lost most of the time. We had four shows a day. When 15 minutes was called before the next show went on, the band would be backstage with Charlie explaining why he had lost or what he should have done to win. The guys would maneuver him to the collapsible stool of the magician, which was always at a certain place, and Charlie would sit down on it every time because he would be so busy trying to get over a point. This was our backstage attraction.

But the highlight of the show for me that week was that we were accompanying the one and only Queen of the Blues, **Bessie Smith**. Bessie was not as popular as she had been, but to me she was singing better than she had ever done. I found out that she could sing other types of songs as well as she could sing blues. One of the songs in her repertoire was ‘Someone Stole Gabriel's Horn’, which she swung out of this world and which the whole band enjoyed hearing her more than any of the blues numbers.

**Charlie Johnson** didn't get much work after the Harlem Opera House date and the band finally broke up. He never had a regular band after that. Later he went into a dancing school job, which surprised everybody because he had been the laziest piano player in New York and was never known to stay at the piano longer than ten minutes when he had a big band, except for the week in the Lafayette Theater when he was boxed in.”

### 1932

Peter Carr, YOU DON'T KNOW ME BUT ..... George Winfield's Story, p. 21 : “The *International Musician* of January 1932 lists the personnel of the band (*Eubie Blake's*) as mentioned above. There was no mention of **Blake** and I know you want to know where Blake was ..... . Nate Nazarro, Buck and Bubble's manager, did not agree to release Eubie, so they made a compromise by sending **Eubie** to Philadelphia with **Charlie Johnson's** band, as he knew the show, and Holstein was sent to Washington.”

John Chilton, RIDE, RED, RIDE The Life of Henry “Red” Allen, p.68 : “Red spent most of late 1932 and early 1933 playing in **Charlie Johnson's** Band, whose home base was at Small's Paradise on 135<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue. Unfortunately Red did not record with this group. The band's usual schedule at Small's was a two-show routine: one at thirty minutes past midnight, and another two hours later. .... While working at Small's Paradise, Red was heard by the composer **Patrick “Spike” Hughes**. Hughes wrote a glowing account of the experiences in the *Melody Maker* of April 1933: To Small's Paradise to hear **Charlie Johnson's** Band. The one and only **Henry Allen** (Junior) on trumpet and **Chu Berry** on tenor saxophone. Red is one of the very best trumpet players in the world. His star performances are “Body And Soul”, “Ain't Misbehavin'” and a long series of breaks on Hoagy Carmichael's “Thanksgiving”.

Ibid, p. 72 : “**Henderson** hired Red (*Allen*) ..... . The pay was \$ 90 per week, more than he had been earning with **Luis Russell** or **Charlie Johnson**.”

John Chilton, ROY ELDRIDGE Little Jazz Giant, p. 51 / 52 : “Happily Roy wasn’t thrown out of work: the management at Smalls’, observing Roy’s popularity night after night, made it clear to the incoming bandleader **Charlie Johnson** that they expected him to find a place for **Eldridge** within his line-up. He agreed to their request with alacrity. .... The audience at Smalls’ Paradise always responded to Roy’s playing, but, for social rather than musical reasons, Roy didn’t greatly enjoy his “transfer” to **Charlie Johnson**’s band. He sensed that Johnson’s musicians didn’t like having a youngster transplanted into what was already a successful outfit. Roy could never prove it, but he felt that a friend of Johnson’s trumpeter **Sid De Paris** went to the management at Small’s and complained that Roy was playing too many high notes.”

Benny Waters in Chip Deffaa, VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE, p.40 : “New York’s nightlife began to subside after the stock market crashed in the fall of 1929. People didn’t have as much money to spend at places like Smalls’s, and things only got worse in 1930-32. By then, **Charlie Johnson**’s band no longer enjoyed the prominence it once had; nor did Smalls’s Paradise, which had lost some of its cachet.”

In ‘New Orleans Music’ Vol. 6 No.6, p.29, Charlie Crump, record review of FROG DGF 8 : “When he was over here with the Worlds Greatest Jazz Band, **Eddie Miller** told me: “When I was with Ben Pollack (1931 – 1933 – KBR) we used to go to Harlem after we had finished work, but we didn’t go to see **Henderson or Ellington**. We used to go to a place called the **Paradise Club** where they had the hottest band in Harlem.” (The band in question was that of Charlie Johnson. This for a recommendation and estimation - KBR.)

AMSTERDAM NEWS Aug. 31, 1932 advert. : 3. – 5. 9. 32 Renaissance Ballroom NYC : Charlie Johnson and his Victor Recording Orchestra – Kaiser & Reynolds’ Bostonians - Maurice Hubbard’s Georgia Stompers

AMSTERDAM NEWS Nov. 09, 1932 advert. : 18.11.32 Brooklyn Labor Lyceum – Un Nuit De Cabaret : Charlie Johnson and show from Small’s Paradise – Santo Domingo Serenaders

AMSTERDAM NEWS Nov. 23, 1932 advert. : 4. 12. 32 Brooklin Academy of Music and/or Small’s Paradise – Lincoln Settlement Benefit : Charlie Johnson’s Orchestra – Cab Calloway Band – Don Redman Band - Mills Brothers

AMSTERDAM NEWS Dec. 14, 1932 advert. : 15. 12. 32 Savoy Ballroom – Benefit Breakfast Dance : 12 bands – Charlie Johnson – Cab Calloway – Claude Hopkins – Don Redman – Luis Russell – Blue Rhythm Boys – Teddy Hill - Fess Williams -. San Domingans – Turner’s Arcadians – Vernon Andrade – Charlie Skeets

### 1933

Jan. 1933 Advertisement in ????: Small’s Paradise featuring **Charlie Johnson**’s Hot Syncopators (Hoffmann)

Dan Morgenstern, LIVING WITH JAZZ, p. 295 : The reedman, **Ben Whitted**, is the least known of the batch, and, according to **Autrey**, the eldest. He was the lead alto and clarinet of the Johnson band, had recorded with **Clarence Williams** and **Eubie Blake**, and according to the trumpeter, was terribly nearsighted and wore such thick glasses that he “looked like Cyclops.”

John Hammond in MELODY MAKER of Feb. 1933 : “**Charlie Johnson**’s orchestra at Small’s Paradise has, at least temporarily, two very fine acquisitions: **Henry Allen, Jr.**, third trumpet, and **Leon Berry**, who left **Benny Carter** for a couple of weeks, on tenor. But even with all the fine soloists, this group is nowhere near **Elmer Snowden**’s now disbanded outfit of last year .... The bass player, **Billy Taylor**, from **McKinney’s Cotton Pickers**, is great, and so are many others in the band.”

Spike Hughes, SECOND MOVEMENT, p. 256 : “Small’s Paradise was a more intimate place altogether, and better suited to the conversations of a love-affair than the Savoy. The clientèle at the tables of Small’s Paradise was largely white, but the food was excellent, the liquor was drinkable and the nights spent there had a warm, romantic atmosphere of their own. I had first been to Small’s with John (Hammond) to hear the band which featured a couple of outstanding soloists, a fine red-headed Negro trumpet-player called **Henry Allen, Jr.** (“red” Allen was very much a family man and insisted on the “Jr.”), and a charming tenor saxophonist called **Leon Berry**, who, on account of his slight facial resemblance to Chu Chin Chow, was known as “Choo”. Like nearly every Harlem musician, these two players never seemed to go to bed or tire of making music. Proceedings at Small’s Paradise began at 9 p.m.; the orchestra played until closing time at 3.30 a.m. and accompanied a couple of floor shows in the ordinary course of an evening’s business. .... Small’s had many things in its favour – an intimate atmosphere, an exciting band and the fact that it was the only well-known Harlem night *Lokal* actually owned by Negroes.”

Spike Hughes in AMERICAN NEWS, MELODY MAKER, April 1933 : “Thence uptown to Small’s Paradise to hear **Charlie Johnson**’s band – or more strictly, to hear one or two of his individual players. The Johnson aggregation (that glorious word which appears on Harlem posters) includes the one and only **Henry Allen, Jr.**, one of the very best trumpet players in the world, and Mr. **Leon Berry**, more commonly known as “Choo”. (One of the greatest problems in Harlem is to learn anybody’s real name.)

Henry Allen’s playing has never been heard to real advantage on record, at least not on records which have been released in England. His star performances are “Body And Soul”, “Ain’t Misbehavin’” and a long series of breaks in Hoagy Carmichaels’ “Thanksgiving”. .... Small’s also boasts of McKinney’s late tuba player, **Billy Taylor**. Until I heard this gent’s velvety tone and beautiful legato, I had always considered sousaphones a pernicious invention. Now I am almost tempted to take it up myself.” .....

At Small’s, for instance, the band starts at nine, plays sessions of three or four numbers with an interval of perhaps two minutes between each group, accompanies two express floor shows which last half-an-hour without a moments’ break, and finally knock off at 3.30 a.m., when the individual musicians as often as not will go on to a nearby gin-mill and sit in with the resident band until it is nearly breakfast time.”



Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 49 : “In the period when we weren’t working at “Small’s” with **Charlie Johnson**, from the time he disbanded, around 1932, I also worked Louis Metcalf and a lot of those guys.

### 1934

W. C. Allen, HENDERSONIA, p. 291 : „Back in New York in early 1934, the band (*Fl. Henderson*) auditioned for a job at the Cafe de Paris on Broadway, along with **Charlie Johnson** and **Don Redman**. ..... And it was Redman who landed there, not Henderson.”

Eddy Determeyer, RHYTHM IS OUR BUSINESS, p.213 : **Charlie Johnson**’s band was better than all those bands, but not better than Jimmie (*Lunceford !*)” To his mind (*B. Waters*), Johnson and Lunceford were a match for each other – in the strictly musical sense. The latter’s entertainment gave him the edge. ....

.... “I could arrange (*Waters*). I made six of those arrangements with **Charlie Johnson**’s band, released on Victor. **Benny Carter** made two and I made the rest.”

### 1936

Chip Deffaa, VOICES OF THE JAZZ AGE, p.42 : “**Charlie Johnson** took **Waters** back into his big band, which was playing once again at Smalls’s Paradise, in 1936-37. Waters was happy to be back, although the peak years for the club and the band had clearly passed. Still, it was great, after the scruffy dancing schools, to be working in a place where a young **Buddy Rich** was likely to drop by and sit in on drums, .....

Since the opening was for an alto, not a tenor player, Waters joined Johnson on alto sax .....

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 49 : “As the depression came to an end, **Charlie Johnson** called the band together again. He still had the regular ten : **Ben Whitted**, **George Stafford**, me. The only thing was that I was on alto instead of tenor. I do not recall the name of the tenor man.

### 1937

Herbie “Cat” Cowens in David Griffith, HOT JAZZ From Harlem To Storyville , p.236 : “In the summer of 1937, I worked with **Charlie Johnson**’s Original Paradise Orchestra at the Paradise Club, North Illinois and Baltic Avenues in Atlantic City. Trumpeter **Henry Goodwin** was also with us in that band, as was **Leonard Davis**, trumpet; **Sidney De Paris**, trumpet; **Ben Whitted**, alto saxophone; and **Benny Waters**, tenor saxophone. I don’t remember us having a night off.”

Benny Waters, THE KEY TO A JAZZY LIFE, p. 39 : “**Ben Whitted** was O.K. His trouble was a little jealousy that musicians have at time, but he was a pretty regular guy apart from that. The only argument that I remember Ben and I got into was when someone brought in a stock arrangement. The first part was high. I was playing alto-sax – this was during my second period with the band – we had another tenor sax player. I was playing third alto and Ben was first alto. The high part was hard to control and he gave that to me. The good parts in the range, he had kept that for himself .... So that’s where we argued but I didn’t argue too much with him though. I went straight to the source, I went to **Charlie Johnson** himself. I said that I was supposed to be playing third alto and I would play third alto and nothing else. I was not going to have someone giving me the hard parts and keeping the easy parts for themselves. So that was straighten (*sic*) out. You have to stand up for yourself.

### 1938

Clyde Bernhardt, I REMEMBER, p.137: ...”.When we (*Edgar Hayes band*) returned from Europe in May of 1938 ..... But **Rudy Powell**, **R.H. Horton** and **Henry Goodwin** all went over to **Charlie Johnson**’s Orchestra.”

p.148: “After Edgar left for the coast (*ca. Sept. 1942*), **George Wilson**, who was in Fats Waller’s band, heard I was at liberty and got me to fill in when he went with **Charlie Johnson** to Atlantic City.”

### 1946

Barclay Draper in David Griffith, HOT JAZZ From Harlem To Storyville , p.206 : “..... I was around 45 years of age (*c. 1946*). ..... I stayed at the Tango Palace for about four years. We had **Sonny** (?) and myself on trumpets, **Henry Jameson** on alto saxophone, **Theodore Daley** on tenor saxophone, **Charlie Johnson** was the piano player, and “**Slim**” **Mathis** on drums.”

### 1959

Doc Cheatham, I GUESS I’LL GET THE PAPERS AND GO HOME, p. 10: “..... Charlie never hired me again. In his later years he became a beggar and a drunk and I remember giving him money at times.”

Albert McCarthy, BIG BAND JAZZ, p.41 : “In the post-Small’s years, **Johnson** undertook a variety of gigs but his health deteriorated and he died in a Harlem hospital at the age of sixty-eight on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1959.”

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 B. Singer, BLACK AND BLUE The Life And Lyrics Of Andy Razaf  
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 Dicky Wells, THE NIGHT PEOPLE  
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THE MUSICIANS

		Chilton	other sources
Aiken, Gus	tpt	5-1929 / 1930	briefly 1930
Aiken, Bud Alexander, Alec	tbn, tpt alt, clt		Feb. 1925 (Storyv.)(tbn), fall 1925 (tpt) Nov. 1925
Allen, Henry "Red"	tpt	1932 – 1933	fall 1932 – c. Feb. 04, 1933 (Hoffmann)
Anderson, Edward "Andy"	tpt	briefly 1929 - 1930	
Archey, Jimmy	tbn		? (Archey 62)
Autrey, Herman	tpt	late 1933 - 1934	
Barnes, Billy	alt, clt		Feb. 1925
Bernhardt, Clyde	tbn		1934 ? (C. Bernh.)
Berry, Leon "Chu"	ten, clt	1932 - 1933	
Boone, Harvey	alt, clt		
Brazzington, Cliff	tpt		Dec. 1925
Britton, Joe	tbn	1936	
Caldwell, Albert "Happy"	ten, clt	1929	
Carr, Leslie	alt, clt		? (Archey, 62)
Carter, Benny	alt, clt, arr	1927 - 1928	1-1926 – 4-1926 / late 1926 – 2-1928 (Carter II,5/6)
Coleman, Bill	tpt	1930	2-1931 - ? (Coleman 74)
Davis, Leonard	tpt	1928 - 1929	from summer 1928 on
De Paris, Sidney	tpt	1926 – 1927 / 1928 – 1931 / 1937 - 1938	
Edwards, Henry "Bass"	bbs	1923 - 1925	
Eldridge, Roy	tpt	1931 ?	1932
Flood, Bernard	tpt	1936 - 1937	
Gaines, Charlie	tpt	before 1930 occasionaly	
Gibbs, Eddie	bjo, gtr	?	
Goodwin, Henry (sub)	tpt	c. 1935 – 1936	5-1938 (C. Bernh.)
Harrell, Elmer	ten, clt		Nov. 1925
Harris, Elmer (Harold ??)	ten, clt		Feb. 1925
Harrison, Jimmy	tbn, voc	1928	
Hartman, Regis	tbn.		Nov. 1925
Holland, Red (Harlan?)	tpt		c. 1933 ? (Storyv. 85)
Horton, Robert	tbn	c. 1930	5-1938 (C. Bernh.)
Irvis, Charlie	tbn	Jun. 1926 - 1928	
Johnson, Bobby	bjo, gtr		1921 – c. 1931 / 1936
Jones, Reunald	tpt	?	early 30's
McRae, Teddy	ten	1927	early 30's
Metcalf, Louis	tpt	Feb. – Aug.1926	
Moore, Alton "Slim"	tbn	1939	1938

Morris, Thomas	tpt		
Newton, Frankie	tpt	c. 1930 / c. 9-1933 – early 1936	1932 – 1933 (B. Weir)
Pinkett, Ward	tpt	1926	
Powell, Rudy	alt, clt		5-1938 (C. Bernh.)
Roane, Kenneth	tpt		c. 1932
Rutledge, Leroy	tpt		Feb. 1925 – Nov. 1925 (at least)
St. Clair, Cyrus	bbs	1926 – 1931	Nov. 1925 - ??
Sampson, Edgar	alt, clt, vln	1928 - 1930	
Saunders, Charlie	tpt		Feb. 1925
Shavers, Charlie (sub)	tpt		
Shoffner, Bob (sub)	tpt		
Smith, Cladys “Jabbo”	tpt	1925 - 1928	
Snaer, Albert (sub)	tpt		
Stevenson, George	tbn	1932 - 1933	
Taylor, Billy	bbs, sbs	1927 – 1929 / 1932 - 1933	
Thigpen, George	tpt		1932 (Hendersonia)
Washington, George	tbn	1928 - ?	
Waters, Benny	ten, alt, clt, arr	1925 – 1932	1925 – 1932 / 1936 – 1937 (1939 Hendersonia)
Wells, Dicky	tbn	1933 ( <i>sic</i> )	1930 - ? (Night People)
Whitted, Ben	alt, clt, arr		1921 – 1936 (?)
Wilson, George	tbn		1942 (C. Bernh.)

**THE BAND PERSONNEL** (still developing !!!!)

<b>Feb. 1925</b> <i>(Rec. Em / foto)</i>	<b>Nov. 1925</b> <i>(Orch. World 11/25)</i>	<b>Dec. 1925</b> <i>(J. Smith / Balliett, B. Waters)</i>
Charlie Johnson's <i>Paradise</i> (?) Orchestra (Nest Club !)	Charlie Johnson's Original Paradise Band	
Leroy Rutledge Charlie Saunders	Leroy Rutledge Bud Aiken	Cliff Brazzington Bud Aiken
Bud Aiken	Regis Hartman	Charlie Irvis
Ben Whitted Billy Barnes Elmer Harris / Harold	Ben Whitted Alec Alexander Elmer Harrell	Ben Whitted Ben Waters Elmer Harrell (?)
Charlie Johnson Bobby Johnson Henry Bass Edwards George Stafford	Charlie Johnson Bobby Johnson Cyrus St. Clair George Stafford	Charlie Johnson Bobby Johnson Cyrus St. Clair George Stafford
	Monette Moore	

<b>Jan. 1926</b>	<b>Feb. 1926</b>	<b>May 1926</b> <i>(Hendersonia p. 170)</i>	<b>Aug. 1926</b> <i>(Storyv. 80/51)</i>	<b>Nov. 1926</b>
Ward Pinkett Cladys Jabbo Smith	Louis Metcalf	Louis Metcalf Cladys Jabbo Smith	Louis Metcalf Cladys Jabbo Smith	(Metcalf out) Cladys Jabbo Smith
Charlie Irvis (?)		George Washington	Charlie Irvis	Jimmy Harrison
Ben Whitted Benny Carter Ben Waters	(Carter out)		Benny Carter	
Charlie Johnson Bobby Johnson Cyrus St. Clair George Stafford				

<b>Feb. 1927</b> <i>(Rec. Vic Feb. 25, 1927)</i>	<b>summer 1927</b>	<b>Dec. 1927</b> <i>(Bill Coleman p. 51)</i>
Charlie Johnson's Original Paradise Ten		
unknown (Cliff Brazzington ?) Cladys Jabbo Smith (Thomas Morris)		Cladys Jabbo Smith
Charlie Irvis		
Ben Whitted Benny Carter Ben Waters	Ted McRae (?)	
Charlie Johnson Bobby Johnson Cyrus St. Clair George Stafford		Charlie Johnson Cyrus St. Clair George Stafford
Monette Moore		

**Jan. 1928***(Rec. Vic Jan. 24, 1928)*Charlie Johnson's Paradise  
Ten*Sidney de Paris* (not *Leonard Davis*)  
Cladys Jabbo Smith

Charlie Irvis

Ben Whitted  
Benny Carter  
Ben WatersCharlie Johnson  
Bobby Johnson  
Cyrus St. Clair  
George StaffordEdgar Sampson vln  
Monette Moore**Sep. 1928***(Rec. Vic Sep. 19, 1928)*Charlie Johnson and his  
Paradise BandLeonard Davis  
Sidney de Paris

Jimmy Harrison

Ben Whitted  
Edgar Sampson  
Ben WatersCharlie Johnson  
Bobby Johnson  
Cyrus St. Clair  
George Stafford**Jan. 1929***(Waters p.38)*

Ed Anderson

Happy Caldwell  
(5 months sub for Waters)**May 1929***(Rec. Vic May 08, 1929)*Charlie Johnson And His  
OrchestraLeonard Davis  
Sidney de Paris

George Washington

Ben Whitted  
Edgar Sampson  
Ben WatersCharlie Johnson  
Bobby Johnson  
Billy Taylor  
George Stafford**Jan. 1930***(Lord, Cl- Williams p. 547)*

Kenneth Roane (?)

**May 1930**Bud Aiken (?)  
Andy Anderson (?)  
Sidney de Paris (?)  
Robert Horton**Sep. 1930**

Roy Eldridge (?)

**Feb. 1931***(Bill Coleman p. 74)*

Leonard Davis  
 Bill Coleman  
 Frank Newton  
 Sidney de Paris (for tour only)  
 Dicky Wells

Ben Whitted  
 Harvey Boone  
 Ben Waters

Charlie Johnson  
 Bobby Johnson  
 Dell Thomas  
 George Stafford

**June 1931***(B. Col. p. 74/ Hendersonia p.257) (Lord. Cl Williams p. 527)*

Leonard Davis  
 Bill Coleman  
 Frank Newton

Dicky Wells

Ben Whitted  
 Harvey Boone  
 Ben Waters

Charlie Johnson  
 Bobby Johnson  
 Dell Thomas  
 George Stafford

**Oct. 1931***(Lord. Cl Williams p. 527)*

Charlie Green (in Boston)

**early 1932**

Ben Waters

**1932**

George Thigpen  
 Roy Eldridge (after Elmer Snowden band)

**late 1932**

Frank Newton (?) (B. Weir)  
 Henry Red Allen

Chu Berry

Billy Taylor

**early 1933***(booklet Sound of Harlem)*

Frank Newton (?) (B. Weir)  
 Henry Red Allen

Chu Berry

Charlie Johnson  
 Bernard Addison  
 Billy Taylor  
 George Stafford

Mabel Scott (St. 2002/127)

**Sep. 1933***(J. Chilton)*

Frank Newton

**late 1933**

Frank Newton  
 Herman Autrey

**early 1934**

Frank Newton  
 Herman Autrey

**1935**

Frank Newton

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1936	May 1936 (Melody Maker My 9 <sup>th</sup> ,1936)	late 1936
Frank Newton	Gus McClung Frankie Newton Henry Goodwin	
	Joe Britton	
	Ben Whitted Clarence Frederick Ben Williams	Ben Waters (alt !)
	Charlie Johnson Bobby Johnson Lewis Thompson George Stafford	

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1937	summer 1937 (Herbie Cat Cowens, p. 236)
	Charlie Johnson's Original Paradise Orchestra
	Leonard Davis Sidney De Paris Henry Goodwin
Ben Waters	Ben Whitted Benny Waters
	Charlie Johnson
	Herbie Cat Cowens

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