

# THE RECORDINGS OF 'THE BAND FROM PARADISE' CHARLIE JOHNSON AND HIS PARADISE ORCHESTRA

## An Annotated Tentative Name-Discography

If the dedicated collector of Classic Jazz were asked to name the most important bands of the Harlem period, the answer would certainly be : Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Luis Russell. That's OK, but very probably the name of Charlie Johnson would not be cited. And this is peculiar because the Johnson band, as we know them from their records, is in no way of lesser quality than the bands mentioned before. On the contrary, this band was capable of delivering jazz of the hottest kind, was the equal to the Ellington band when it came to growl soloing, always included a row of hot musicians of the highest order, and was famed among Harlem musicians for their phantastic performances.

Only that only a small number of collectors do know the band at all and would be inclined to reckon them among the best.

If you, the collector, would like to know more about this great but grossly under-rated band of the twenties, and were to put an inquiry to the Institute of Jazz Studies, the only material you would receive would be a photocopy of an article in an unnamed newspaper of December 11, 1937 on four pianists with the surname of Johnson. Then there would be a snippet of the Hoefler notes - hand-written - naming the Johnson band personnel of Sept. 19, 1928, and that Charlie Johnson stated that he had broadcasted from Smalls' Paradise. That's all. In no way close to the mass of material that is on hand for the Henderson band or the Ellington orchestra.

What is the reason?

Charlie Johnson, the band leader, was by all accounts a very nice guy and a very unassuming person. He certainly was not one of the piano stars in Harlem, but he had a very good and personal relation to Edwin A. Smalls, owner of the famous night club SMALLS' PARADISE, who employed him and his band for more than ten years. Ed Smalls supplied them with a steady and firm engagement and good salaries. This certainly was a big and warm cushion for the leader and his musicians, while other musicians had to struggle for their income every day.

But this, obviously, also made Charlie Johnson careless and unambitious, resulting in the small number of only 12 recordings made commercially in the times the band existed. He very probably did not see the need for becoming well known through the medium of recording. It is known that after playing the first number in the evening he usually preferred to leave the bandstand and go to gamble upstairs in the same building. He is said to have spent the whole playing time there gambling only to come back to play the last number of the evening with his band.

So, it really is not astonishing that we only have so few examples of the band's musical powers. Of the 12 commercial recordings 10 come from the Victor vaults - luckily today being increased by 10 alternate takes of the cited 10 titles - and 2 recordings by the elusive label Emerson, certainly not in every collector's possession. In recent years the two sides of a Marathon 7" recording under the name of Jackson's Southern Stompers have seemingly been identified as by the Johnson band, making the number of genuine Johnson recordings 14. This against c. 100 of Ellington band recordings and c. 110 of Henderson band recordings in the same space of time.

And, accordingly, there remain a number of questions concerning the band personnels. This article is aimed to compile and present everything that is known today of the Charlie Johnson band recordings.

### THE DISCOGRAPHY

Charlie Johnson and his band recorded 12 titles as the accompanying band with singer Mary Stafford in 1921. These recordings are not dealt with here. It might be of interest, that Mary Stafford was sister of Johnson's long-lasting drummer George Stafford, one of the little known but most important musicians of early jazz.

This personnelo-discography is based on RUST, JAZZ AND RAGTIME RECORDS 1897 - 1942.

Personnels are taken from this source, but modified in the light of earlier or subsequent research or on the strength of my own listening, discussed with our listening group or other interested collectors.

- Documented, most certain and aurally absolutely obvious identifications are listed thus: Charlie Johnson
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Charlie Johnson*
- Not attributable identifications – although the musician in question might be an otherwise well-known person – are listed thus: unknown
- If a possible identification for an otherwise unknown musician is suggested by the author without the possibility to prove the factual evidence, it is listed thus: (*Charlie Johnson*)

When feeling certain without a musician's documented presence, I have not refrained from altering Rust's statements without using italics. In any case, my statements are open to discussion and I would appreciate any contribution - pro or contra!

This discography still is - and will certainly be - a work in progress for a long time, if not eternally. Yet, on the way to a definite discography of all jazz recordings before 1942 - which certainly will never be possible - it is intended to fill some gaps that have not been treated before.

## CHARLIE JOHNSON

001 **CHARLIE JOHNSON'S PARADISE ORCHESTRA** New York, c. Feb. 1925  
 Leroy Rutledge, Charlie Saunders – tpt; Bud Aiken – tbn;  
 Ben Whitted, Billie Barnes – alt, clt; Elmer Harrold – ten, clt;  
 Charlie Johnson – pno; Bobby Johnson – bjo; Henry "Bass" Edwards – bbs; George Stafford – dms  
 2623- Don't Forget You'll Regret Day By Day Em 10854, Hot'n Sweet (F) FDC 5110  
 2624-1 Meddlin' With The Blues Em 10856, Hot'n Sweet (F) FDC 5110

In early 1925 the Johnson band played the NEST CLUB on 169 West 133<sup>rd</sup> Street. The only two existing photographs of the Johnson band were probably taken as publicity photos for advertising their engagement at this venue (see Driggs, Lewine, 'Black Beauty, White Heat' p. 133. The band photo on the advertising sheet is a different photo to that in the middle of the page). Another source dates these photos as possibly from 1923. The personnel shown on these two photos has been identified by a couple of Harlem musicians in 1978 (see 'Storyville' 75, 77 and 82) with the exception of the trombone player, who nevertheless is Bud Aiken as by comparison with a photo of Snowden's Orchestra in Perry Bradford 'Born with The Blues' p. 102, where Aiken, who also played trumpet, is shown third from left. According to the testimony of the musicians who identified the band members of the photos, this is the personnel of the first Johnson recording session. (The hitherto generally listed personnel for this session, as in Rust\*6, is the Johnson band personnel at the opening of SMALLS' PARADISE in October 1925 as listed in 'Orchestra World' of November 1925 and does thus not apply to this session.) "Don't Forget You'll Regret" uses the same arrangement as the Henderson band of Oct. 13, 1924, thus probably a stock arrangement, only that Don Redman in the Henderson recording transposed the saxophone section behind the trombone in A2 to a clarinet section. "Meddlin' With the Blues" might be an arrangement by Charlie Johnson himself or one of his colleagues, as it does not have an identifiable melody as with commercial stock arrangements. It is just a compilation of several different devices: the then fashionable minor strain as in Henderson's "The Gouge of Armour Avenue" and the chordal arpeggios at the end of the tune, which certainly come from a pianist's mind. As this tune has not been recorded by any other band, it certainly is a Johnson original.

### Notes:

- *Delaunay, New Hot Discography 1948: Probably the same personnel as session of Jan. 24, 1928: Jabbo Smith, Sidney De Paris, Cliff Brazzington - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - clt; Benny Carter - alt; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - gtr; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Jazz Directory Vol. Five 1955: Probably similar personnel as session of Jan. 24, 1928: Jabbo Smith, Sidney De Paris, Cliff Brazzington - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - clt; Benny Carter - alt; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Rust\*2: Probably: Jabbo Smith, Sidney De Paris - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - alt, clt; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: Gus Aiken, Leroy Rutledge - tpt; Regis Hartman - tbn; Ben Whitted, Alec Alexander - alt, clt; Elmer Harrell - ten, clt, vln; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Storyville 35-185: Gus Aiken, Leroy Rutledge, tpt; Regis Hartman, tbn; Ben Whitted, Alec Alexander, alt, clt; Elmer Harrell, ten, clt, vln; Charlie Johnson, pno; Bobby Johnson, bjo; Cyrus St. Clair, bbs; George Stafford, dms*

### Tunes Structures:

2623-2 *Don't Forget You'll Regret Day By Day* Key of Ab Emerson  
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 32 bars AA' ens)(A2 Chorus 32 bars tbn + reeds)(B1 Verse 16 bars AA' ens)(A3 Chorus 32 bars ens + hot tpt)

arrangement: prob. stock arrangement / composer credit is:

2624-1 *Meddlin' With The Blues* Key of Ab / Db / Db m Emerson  
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 12 bars ens)(A2 Chorus 12 bars reeds)(A3 Chorus 12 bars tpt)(A4 Chorus 12 bars tpt)(B1 Chorus 16 bars ens)(B2 Chorus 16 bars ens)(Bridge 6 bars ens)(C1 Chorus (Db minor) 12 bars ten)(C2 Chorus (Db minor) 12 bars ens)(Coda 6 bars reeds)

arrangement: Charlie Johnson ? / composer credit is:

002 **CHARLIE JOHNSON'S ORIGINAL PARADISE TEN** New York, Feb. 25, 1927  
 unknown, Cladys Jabbo Smith, Thomas Morris – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;  
 Ben Whitted, Benny Carter – alt, clt; Benny Waters – ten, clt;  
 Charlie Johnson – pno; Bobby Johnson – bjo; Cyrus St. Clair – bbs; George Stafford – dms;  
 Monette Moore – voc  
 38115-1 Paradise Wobble Vic 20551, Frog DGF 8  
 38116-1 Birmingham Black Bottom Vic 20551, Frog DGF 8  
 38116-2 Birmingham Black Bottom Vic test, Frog DGF 12

38117-1	Don't You Leave Me Here	Vic 20653,	Frog DGF 8
38117-3	Don't You Leave Me Here	Vic test,	Frog DGF 12

The personnel is established as given with the exception of the first trumpet player. Rust's 'Victor Master Book Vol. 2' gives three cnt/tpt. After year-long repeated listening I am unable to hear three trumpet/cornet players. Jabbo Smith joined the band most probably in late 1926 as a replacement for Sidney de Paris, who stayed behind in Atlantic City when the band changed over to NYC, as they usually did when the summer season was over. So, de Paris can be disregarded for this session. All solos – except for "Don't You Leave Me Here" – are by Jabbo Smith. It probably is Thomas Morris soloing in this latter tune. Morris' presence has been suggested by Richard Rains in 'Storyville 153'. So, there might be the possibility that the Johnson band was temporarily without a first trumpet, and Morris had been hired as a sub (the trumpet lead in "Birmingham Black Bottom" chorus B1 certainly sounds like Morris). But then the listing in the 'Victor Master Book' would have to be wrong. In this respect it has to be borne in mind that it was most uncommon at the time to have three trumpets in a big band. Two were the rule. The great exception was the Henderson band, which had three trumpets since Armstrong had been engaged. From then on, Redman certainly wrote for three trumpets, and after Armstrong's return to Chicago, writing for two trumpets – plus trombone – certainly would have been a musical relapse.

Or they had a lead trumpet player (the very enigmatic Cliff Brazzington has been listed at the time also with the Ellington band) and Morris was added for some other reason, maybe because he provided the arrangement of "Birmingham Black Bottom", which looks rather related in structure and general conception to Morris' own "Ham Gravy" as recorded by Morris' Hot Babies. In return Morris could have been allowed to solo in the unarranged free ensemble of "Don't You Leave Me Here". This then would explain the cited three trumpets/cornets. Yet only two trumpets can be heard in the brass section in chorus A1 of "Paradise Wobble".

Benny Carter was a member of the Johnson band throughout 1927 (Berger, Berger, Patrick 'Benny Carter'), joining – for the second time – in late 1926 and staying until February 1928. He allegedly started arranging with Charlie Johnson, and I can well imagine that "Paradise Wobble" might be one of his first recorded – or even authored – arrangements. (The Berger book names his possibly first recorded arrangement as "P.D.Q. Blues" by Fletcher Henderson. Yet this arrangement definitely sounds as though it was written by a white arranger with its whole-tone parts and is not related to anything Carter has arranged later.)

Alas, Carter cannot be heard in solo in this session. This is the period the Johnson saxophon section was named "The Three Bens" – Whitted, Carter and Waters. Whitted, by the way, was always responsible for the clarinet solos.

McCarthy 'Big Band Jazz' denies Morris' presence on this session and attributes the plunger solos in "Don't You Leave Me Here" to Sidney de Paris. Carter's presence is denied as well.

Richard Rains in 'Storyville' 153 is certainly correct in stating that it is Morris here despite "...Jabbo Smith's assertion when listening to Birmingham Black Bottom, 'That's Ham'". It is believed that Leonard Davis did not join the Johnson Band until some time in 1928." (Davis left the Arthur Gibbs band to join Johnson in summer 1928.)

"Paradise Wobble" is a heavily arranged 12 bar blues. The arrangement is complex, much more so than the two other titles of this session.

And I suggest this to be one of the earliest arrangements of Benny Carter on record – if not the very earliest. Appropriate and even great soloing by Jabbo Smith and Ben Whitted. (Re Ben Whitted: please, forget all nominations of Whitted in former discographies on Clarence Williams! They are completely wrong and out of place and pure unsubstantiated speculation without documented background!)

"Birmingham Black Bottom" is akin remarkably in structure and thematic material to Thomas Morris' "Ham Gravy" and I speculate whether this tune was contributed to this session by Morris himself, if he really is one of the trumpets. On the other hand, this number is a real swinger – very advanced for early 1927 – and perfectly shows the Johnson band abilities.

"Don't You Leave Me Here" is the very well-known Morton tune, here played unarranged in free ensemble with solo contributions by Monette Moore, then 18-year-old Jabbo Smith, and Charlie Irvis. Great functional ensemble playing here without turning chaotic.

#### Notes:

- Delaunay, *New Hot Discography 1948*: Jabbo Smith, Sidney De Paris - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - clt; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - gr; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc

- *Jazz Directory Vol. Five 1955*: Probably similar personnel as session of Jan. 24, 1928: Jabbo Smith, Sidney De Paris - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - clt; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms, Monette Moore - voc

- Rust\*2: Jabbo Smith, Sidney De Paris, Cliff Brazzington - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - alt, clt; Benny Carter (?) - ten; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc

- Rust\*3: Jabbo Smith, Leonard Davis, Thomas Morris - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Benny Carter - alt, sop, clt, arr; Ben Whitted - alt, clt; Elmer Harrell - ten, clt; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc

- *Storyville 35-185*: Jabbo Smith, Leonard Davis, Tom Morris, tpt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Benny Carter, Ben Whitted, alt, clt; Elmer Harrell, ten, clt; Charlie Johnson, pno; Bobby Johnson, bjo; Cyrus St. Clair, bbs; George Stafford, dms; Monette Moore, vcl

- Rust\*6: Jabbo Smith, Leonard Davis, Thomas Morris - tpt; Charlie Irvis - alt, sop, clt, arr; Ben Whitted - alt, clt; Benny Waters - ten, clt, arr; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc

- Rust, *The Victor Master Book Vol. 2*: 3 c (tp ?) / tb / 3 s / p / bj / bb / d; vocalist: Monette Moore

#### Tunes Structures:

38115-1 *Paradise Wobble* Key of Eb Victor  
 (Intro 8 bars ens - tpt - clt)(A1 Chorus 12 bars blues ens)(A2 Chorus 12 bars Irvis tbn + saxes)(A3 Chorus 12 bars ens breaks bjo - Smith tpt 8 bars)(A4 Chorus 12 bars Smith tpt)(A5 Chorus 12 bars saxes - ens)(A6 Chorus 12 bars Moore voc + Smith tpt obligato)(A7 Chorus 12 bars Moore voc + Smith tpt obligato)(A8 Chorus 12 bars Whitted clt - ens)(A9 Chorus 12 bars brass)(A10 Chorus 12 bars ens)

arrangement: Benny Carter? / composer credit is: F. Johnson - T. Morris

38116-1 *Birmingham Black Bottom* Key of Ab / Eb / Ab Victor  
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 12 bars saxes - ens)(A2 Chorus 12 bars saxes - ens)(A3 Chorus 12 bars brass)(A4 Chorus 12 bars Moore voc - ens)(A5 Chorus 12 bars Smith tpt)(A6 Chorus 12 bars Moore voc - ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(B1 Chorus 16 bars AA ens - Morris (?) tpt lead, middle break Smith tpt)(B2 Chorus 16 bars bjo - middle break Waters ten)(Bridge 4 bars ens + cymbals)(A7 Chorus 12 bars ens + Smith tpt lead)(Coda 6 bars ens + Smith tpt lead)

38116-2 *Birmingham Black Bottom* Key of Ab / Eb / Ab Victor  
 same as 38116-1

arrangement: Thomas Morris? / composer credit is: F. Johnson - T. Morris

38117-1 *Don't You Leave Me Here* Key of Bb Victor  
 (Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 16 bars AA ens)(B1 Verse 16 bars ens)(A2 Chorus 16 bars Moore + Whitted clt obligato)(A3 Chorus 16 bars Morris tpt)(A4 Chorus 16 bars Irvis tbn)(A5 Chorus 16 bars Moore + Johnson pno obligato)(A6 Chorus 16 bars ens)

38117-3 *Don't You Leave Me Here* Key of Bb Victor  
 same as 38117-1

Discernible differences of takes:

38116-1	2nd bar of coda: two trombone notes and banjo
38116-2	2nd bar of coda: two trombone notes and banjo plus two heavy drumbeats and cymbal
38117-1	2nd half of vocal: "Hear that bell a-ringin', hear that whistle sound".
38117-3	2nd half of vocal: "Hear that whistle blow, hear that whistle sound".

See my article on the Charlie Johnson band in Names & Numbers 57 and elsewhere on this web-site. The frequently listed enigmatic Cliff Brazzington seems to be a real person and might be the first trumpet player. He is said to have been with the Ellington band in 1926. If so, he seems to be playing on *Paradise Wobble* only.

003 CHARLIE JOHNSON'S PARADISE TEN	New York,	Jan. 24, 1928
<i>Sidney de Paris</i> , Cladys Jabbo Smith – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;		
Ben Whitted, Benny Carter – alt, clt; Ben Waters – ten, clt; Edgar Sampson – vln;		
Charlie Johnson – pno; Bobby Johnson – bjo; Cyrus St. Clair – bbs; George Stafford – dms;		
Monette Moore – voc (1,2);		
Benny Carter – arr (1,2,3,4); Ben Waters – arr (5,6)		
41639-1	You Ain't The One	Vic test, Frog DGF 12
41639-2	You Ain't The One	Vic 21247, Frog DGF 8
41640-1	Charleston Is The Best Dance After All	Vic 21491, Frog DGF 8
41640-2	Charleston Is The Best Dance After All	Vic test, Frog DGF 12
41641-1	Hot Tempered Blues	Vic test, Frog DGF 12
41641-2	Hot Tempered Blues	Vic 21247, Frog DGF 8

Now, here we have the Johnson band in full flight. With the extra attraction of Benny Carter's definitely first (see "Paradise Wobble" above) recorded arrangements, together with his first recorded solo efforts, straight on the way to later heights.

Trumpet soloing is definitely by Jabbo Smith on the first two titles, by another man on the third title, who may be, but is not necessarily Sidney de Paris. Jabbo Smith told Chip Deffaa ("Voices of The Jazz Age") that he left the band because of being accused of bad behaviour, and that de Paris was his successor. This would mean, that Smith would not have been in the band together with de Paris. So, the first trumpet player's identity has to be questioned, just as in the session of February 25, 1927.

"You Ain't The One" has a typical Carter reed chorus, this time on clarinets. It is not easy to play and Carter's colleagues struggle along in three-part harmony, Carter playing lead. Very advanced and interesting modulations in the bridges show Carter's early mastership. We hear Edgar Sampson with his violin accompanying Monette Moore's vocal chorus. Sampson has always been listed as saxophonist/violinist in this session, but it has to be kept in mind that he still was a member of Arthur Gibbs' band until summer 1928, when he together with Leonard Davis changed over to the Johnson band. Ben Waters in his book "The Key to A Jazzy Life" said that the Johnson band sometimes had more than two trumpets, but never more than three saxes. So, I think, that Charlie Johnson added Sampson only as violinist in this session, just for the thrill of it, maybe being impressed by this young man's possibilities. The "Victor Master Book" has three saxes and a violin. We never hear four reeds at the same time, which in 1928 certainly would have been extremely uncommon.

"Charleston Is The Best Dance After All" again have a Carter reed chorus, this time on saxophones. At the end of this saxophone chorus we hear Charlie Johnson's piano playing into the trumpet break, which seems to be proof of Johnson's carelessness.

"Hot Tempered Blues" is Ben Waters' arrangement with his typical bluesy clarinet writing. Then in chorus A4 we hear a trumpet player, who sounds very much like Thomas Morris in his phrasing in take -1, only that he has much better embouchure than Morris had (G. Bushell said about Thomas Morris: "He had some great ideas, but no lip – it just splattered all over the place"). This man here plays assured, with a controlled vibrato/shake and some funny phrases in take -2 which may yet come from de Paris's art of preaching on his horn (see "The Boy In The Boat" of the next session). Beautiful bluesy four-string violin by Sampson and phantastic free collective improvisation by the whole band in the last two choruses, in Gunther Schuller's words: "Here the band swings and rocks in a manner way ahead of its time, especially in the final, climactic improvised chorus. In its all-out abandon, it stops just this side of cacophony, a triumph of the art of ensemble improvisation" (Schuller 'Early Jazz').

Notes:

- *Delaunay, New Hot Discography 1948: Jabbo Smith, Sidney De Paris, Cliff Brazzington - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - clt; Benny Carter - alt; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - gtr; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc*

- *Jazz Directory Vol. Five 1955: Probably similar personnel as session of Jan. 24, 1928: Jabbo Smith, Cliff Brazzington - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Edgar Sampson - alt, clt, vln; Benny Carter - alt; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc*

- *Rust\*2: Jabbo Smith, Leonard Davis, Cliff Brazzington - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Ben Whitted - alt, clt; Benny Carter - alt; Edgar Sampson - alt, vln; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc*

- *Rust\*3: Jabbo Smith, Leonard Davis - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Benny Carter - alt, sop, clt, arr; Edgar Sampson - alt, vln; Elmer Harrell - ten, clt; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc*

- *Storyville 35-185: Jabbo Smith, Leonard Davis, tpt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Benny Carter, alt, clt; Edgar Sampson, vln, alt; Elmer Harrell, ten, clt; Charlie Johnson, pno; Bobby Johnson, bjo; Cyrus St. Clair, bbs; George Stafford, dms; Monette Moore, vcl*

- *Rust\*6: Jabbo Smith, Leonard Davis - tpt; Charlie Irvis - tbn; Benny Carter - alt, sop, clt, arr; Edgar Sampson - alt, vln; Benny Waters - ten, clt, arr; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms; Monette Moore - voc*

- *Rust, The Victor Master Book Vol. 2: 2 t / tb / 3 s / vn / p / bj / bb / d; vocalist: Monette Moore*

Tunes Structures:

41639-1 You Ain't The One Key of C / Eb / F / Eb Victor

(Intro 6 bars ens – Carter alt)(A1 Chorus 32 bars AA' ens)(A2 Chorus 32 bars Moore voc + Sampson vln obligato)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(B1 Verse 12 bars ens)(A3 Chorus 32 bars / Waters ten + brass 16, Irvis tbn 16)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(A4 Chorus 32 bars clts)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(A5 Chorus 32 bars / J. Smith tpt 16, ens 16)(Coda 2 bars ens)

41639-2 You Ain't The One Key of C / Eb / F / Eb Victor

same as 41639-1

arrangement: Benny Carter / composer credit is: Chas. Johnson - Arthur Porter

41640-1 Charleston Is The Best Dance After All Key of F Victor

(Intro 6 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 32 bars AABA ens)(Bridge 2 bars\* ens)(B1 Verse 20 bars ens / ens 8, saxes 8, ens 4)

(A2 Chorus 32 bars saxes in harmony)(A3 Chorus 32 bars J. Smith tpt 16, B. Carter alt 8, J. Smith tpt 6, ens 2)  
(Bridge 2 bars\* ens)(A4 Chorus 32 bars ens /ens 14, C. Johnson pno 2, Ch. Irvis 6, ens 10)(Coda 2 bars bbs - ens)  
41640-2 Charleston Is The Best Dance After All Key of F

Victor

same as 41640-1

arrangement: Benny Carter / composer credit is: G. Johnson - A. Porter

(\* this bridge actually consists of four bars, two of which are the last two bars of the previous chorus. This same device has been called "an unprecedented practice in the history of jazz arrangements" by Andre Hodeir in his book *JAZZ, IT'S EVOLUTION AND ESSENCE*, only that he discusses Ellington's "Concerto For Cootie" of March 1940. Ellington had used this same device in his "Stevadore Stomp", but never as early as Carter does here. So, who is the originator of this little beautiful trick?)

41641-1 Hot Tempered Blues Key of Bb

Victor

(Intro 8 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 12 bars blues tpts in harmony)(A2 Chorus 12 bars Irvis tbn)(A3 Chorus 12 bars E. Samp-son vln - clts background riff)(A4 Chorus 12 bars S. de Paris(?) tpt)(B1 Verse 16 bars AA clts)(A5 Chorus 12 bars ens riff)(A6 Chorus 12 bars ens ad lib)(Coda 2 bars ens)

41641-2 Hot Tempered Blues ey of Bb

Victor

same as 41641-1

arrangement: Benny Waters / composer credit is: Chas. Johnson - Arthur Porter

#### Discernible differences of takes:

41639-1 Intro: first trumpet plays chromatic downward sequence with 3 times: 1 quarter note, 2 eighth notes (second note downward jump), 1 quarter note in chromatic sequence again, band playing even chromatic sequence

41639-2 Intro: first trumpet plays even chromatic downward sequence together with band

41640-1 pno plays into tpt break at end of Chorus A2 and stops abruptly

41640-2 pno silent in tpt break at end of Chorus A2, foot thumping instead

41641-1 tbn enters for solo in first bar of A2, no Whitted clt in A5

41641-2 tbn enters for solo 3 beats before A2, Whitted clt over ens in A5

#### 004 CHARLIE JOHNSON AND HIS PARADISE BAND

New York,

Sep. 19, 1928

Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris – tpt; Jimmy Harrison – tbn, voc exhortations (2,3);

Ben Whitted, Edgar Sampson – alt, clt; Ben Waters – ten, clt;

Charlie Johnson – pno; Bobby Johnson – bjo; Cyrus St. Clair – bbs; George Stafford – dms;

Ben Waters – arr (2,3,4,5,6); possibly Ken Macomber – arr (2,3)

47530 Gettin' Away From Me

Vic unissued

not on LP/CD

47531-1 The Boy In The Boat

BB B10248,

Frog DGF 12

47531-2 The Boy In The Boat

Vic 21712,

Frog DGF 8

47532-1 Walk That Thing

Vic test,

Frog DGF 12

47532-2 Walk That Thing

Vic 21712,

Frog DGF 8

47532-3 Walk That Thing

BB B10248,

Frog DGF 12

Every time the Johnson band was in the studio, the Victor people restricted the band's output to three titles. Even more so, they rejected one of these few titles on this and the last Victor session. Can it be that the band was so undisciplined or unrehearsed? Just think of Victor's attempt to use Eddie Condon to bring a rehearsed Fats Waller band to the studio!

So, the first title had been rejected. For what reason I dare to ask? For me, this session marks the climax of the whole Charlie Johnson output. "The Boy In The Boat" certainly is one of the greatest recordings in classic jazz, "Walk That Thing" is a phantastic early swinger. What then might have been the cause for the failure of "Gettin' Away From Me"? I'd certainly give a lot would somebody offer me a test pressing!

At least we can be certain now of the whole personnel. Leonard Davis had come over from Arthur Gibbs. He had stayed with Gibbs from summer 1927 until summer 1928. Before Gibbs he had played with Edgar Hayes and his Symphonic Harmonists at the Alhambra Theatre from 1926 until summer 1927. Now with Johnson he teamed with Sidney de Paris, one of the real great growl and hot trumpeters, for me much more impressiv than Bubber Miley with the Duke. I can only wonder what the Duke could have made with de Paris in his band. (Did he ever try to hire him?). Where Miley was stuck in his Johnny-Dunn influenced triplets and rather stiff phrasing, de Paris owns a phantastic looseness which enables him really to preach and talk on his trumpet. And then we have Harrison, one of the greatest stylists and giants of classic jazz. What a wealth of brass players!

On saxophones the always reliable Ben Whitted, with Johnson from the early twenties on. He always played the clarinet solos with the band and was responsible for arranging the hits of the day. Reportedly he did arrange Louis Armstrong's solos harmonized for the brass. Young and promising Edgar Sampson had also come over from Arthur Gibbs as steady member of the band. It is interesting to note, that Sampson, as a steady member of the band now, dno longer plays the violin on Johnson band recordings. Ben Waters and the rhythm section were the back-bones of the whole aggregation.

"The Boy In The Boat" has been called "the black diamond of early jazz" somewhere in a book the title of which I am unable to recall. But listen to the row of solos: first Harrison, then de Paris with a call-and-response pattern, first with Whitted, then with Harrison's voice. De Paris here is absolutely equivalent with everything Cootie or Tricky Sam could do. The answering voice is unmistakably Harrison. And then listen to the great but unsung George Stafford using some recent devices for drummers, a choked high-hat in take -1 and a hand-high-hat in take -2. This recording is absolutely phantastic, only that take -2 is very slight degree better to my taste.

The arrangement must be Ben Water's. When the author of this little article played this very title at the Breda Jazz Festival in 1972, the door opened and in walked Benny Waters, immediately shouting into the room "Hey, that's my arrangement!" On the other hand he told pianist Keith Nichols, that the arrangement was Ken Macomber's, who as a young white arranger made the rounds through Harlem trying to sell his arrangements, using his beautiful young wife as bait to gain attention. Stylistically the arrangement is pure Waters! Fats Waller's "Squeeze Me" was originally titled "The Boy In The Boat" just as this "The Boy In The Boat" here was recorded as "The Rock" (STORYVILLE 35). "Walk That Thing" is not as outweighed, but it nevertheless has beautiful soloing by Whitted on clarinet, de Paris on C1 (strain C / verse II) and probably Davis on D1 (Verse III / strain D). But the peak is Harrison's solos in all three takes, take -2 the least perfect. As takes -1 and -3 are very similar in Harrison's solo and take -2 differing mostly in the breaks, the recording order might originally have been take -2, take -1 and take -3. And then St.Clair's majestic tuba breaks in the last chorus, together with Bobby Johnson's banjo breaks and Stafford's drum artistics: phantastic!

#### Notes:

- Delaunay, *New Hot Discography 1948: Leonard Davis, Sidney De Paris (tp); Jimmy Harrison (tb); Ben Whittet (cl); Edgar Sampson (as & v); Ben Waters (ts); Charlie Johnson (p); Bobby Johnson (g); Cyrus St. Clair (b); George Stafford (dm)*

- Jazz Directory Vol. Five 1955: Leonard Davis, Sidney De Paris (tpt); Jimmy Harrison (tbn); Ben Whitted (clt); Edgar Sampson (alt, vln); Ben Waters (ten); Charlie Johnson (p); Bobby Johnson (bj); Cyrus St. Clair (tu); George Stafford (d)  
 - Rust\*2: Sidney de Paris (tpt); Jimmy Harrison (tbn); Ben Whitted (clt, alt); Edgar Sampson (alt); Ben Waters (clt, ten); Charlie Johnson (pno); Bobby Johnson (bjo); Cyrus St. Clair (bbs); George Stafford (dms)  
 - Rust\*3,\*4: Leonard Davis -Sidney de Paris -t; Jimmy Harrison -tb; Ben Whitted -cl -as; Edgar Sampson -cl -as -vn; Ben Waters -cl -ts; Charlie Johnson -p -ldr; Bobby Johnson -bj; Cyrus St. Clair -bb; George Stafford -d; unknown male exhortations where marked  
 - Rust, The Victor Master Book Vol. 2: 2 t / tb / 3 s / p / bj / bb / d.  
 - Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris, t; Jimmy Harrison, tb; Ben Whitted, cl, as; Edgar Sampson, cl, as, vn; Ben Waters, cl, ts, a; Charlie Johnson, p, dir; Bobby Johnson, bj; Cyrus St. Clair, bb; George Stafford, d; unknown male exhortations where marked  
 - Storyville 35-185: Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris, tpt; Jimmy Harrison, tbn; Ben Whitted, Edgar Sampson, clt, alt; Ben Waters, ten, clt; Charlie Johnson, pno; Bobby Johnson, bjo; Cyrus St. Clair, bbs; George Stafford, dms

Tunes Structures:

47530 *Gettin' Away From Me* Victor  
 unissued  
 47531-1 *The Boy In The Boat* Key of Gm (Bb) Victor, Bluebird  
 (Intro 12 bars ens)(A1 Verse I 16 bars clts in harmony - brass)(B1 Chorus 16 bars AA' Harrison tbn - clts riff)(C1 Verse II (Vamp ?) 11 bars (!) clts in harmony /clts 7, ens 4)(D1 Chorus 12 bars De Paris tpt - Whitted clt)(D2 Chorus 12 bars De Paris tpt - Harrison voc)(Bridge 2 bars ens)(E1 Verse III 16 bars AA ens)(D3 Chorus 12 bars De Paris tpt - Stafford cymbals)  
 47531-2 *The Boy In The Boat* Key of Gm (Bb) Victor  
 same as 47531-1  
 arrangement: Benny Waters (Ken Macomber?) / composer credit is: C. Johnson  
 47532-1 *Walk That Thing* Key of C Victor  
 (Intro 8 bars /pno 4, ens 4)(A1 Chorus 32 bars AA' Waters ten)(B1 Verse 20 bars AA' Waters ten - ens)(C1 Verse II 16 bars AA De Paris tpt - ens)(A2 Chorus 32 bars Harrison tbn)(D1 Verse III 16 bars AA Davis (?) tpt - clts)(D2 Verse III 16 bars Whitted clt - ens)(A3 Chorus 32 bars ens /breaks bbs, bjo, cymbals)(Coda 3 bars clt - ens)  
 47532-2 *Walk That Thing* Key of C Victor  
 same as 47532-1  
 47532-3 *Walk That Thing* Key of C Victor, Bluebird  
 same as 47532-1

Discernible differences of takes:

47531-1 Chorus D1: Stafford plays choked high-hat  
 Chorus D2: Harrison shouts "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes; preach that thing, brother low-down, do!"  
 47531-2 Chorus D1: Stafford plays hand cymbal  
 Chorus D2: Harrison shouts "Oh, preach that thing, brother, preach it now; preach it Kid!"  
 47532-1 ten solo Chorus A1: Waters starts with five notes, 1 eighth note (g), 1 quarter note (g), 3 eighth notes (g-eb-e) tpt solo in strain C1 (Verse II): tpt plays a three-quarter rhythm in second half of strain C1, breaks in tbn solo: arpeggio downward from g# to F in first bar, in third bar a syncopated downward sequence  
 47532-2 ten solo Chorus A1: Waters starts with three evenly played notes (g), breaks in tbn solo: no arpeggio  
 47532-3 ten solo Chorus A1: Waters starts hesitatingly with three nearly evenly played notes (g), breaks in tbn solo: arpeggio downward from g# to F in first bar, in third bar a downward sequence with 2 eighth notes and 1 quarter note (not syncopated)

**JACKSON AND HIS SOUTHERN STOMPERS**

New York, Sep. ?, 1928

Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris - tpt; Jimmy Harrison - tbn ;  
 Ben Whitted, Edgar Sampson - alt, clt ; Ben Waters - ten, clt;  
 Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms;  
 Bob Haring - arr (stock) (1?,2)

31339-2 Dusky Stevedore Mar 227 (7"), Frog DGF 71  
 31340-2 Take Your Tomorrow (Give Me Today) Mar 227 (7"), Frog DGF 71

This elusive coupling was only issued on a 7" Marathon disc. The small size of the disc resulted in very narrow groove which in turn made the sound of the disc very muddy. The first reissue of these two sides came out on John R.T. Davies' Ristic 28 in 1969, announced as "the greatest sleeper of recent years". As I have been told a whole cardboard box full of this very record, had been discovered in the 1960s in Europe - probably France? - unknown until then. Davies reissued the item and I was lucky enough to get hold of a copy through the very great services of Dick M. Bakker, then of Deventer, The Netherlands. My immediate reaction when listening was, that this band was in many respects akin or even identical with the Charlie Johnson Band. Certainly, there was Jimmy Harrison on trombone, Ben Waters on tenor and George Stafford on drums. I wrote a letter to John R.T. telling him my suggestions, but he wanted to have none of it. The reader may imagine my satisfaction when Rust\*4 listed exactly what I had distinguished. Particulars of the tune "Dusky Stevedore" and its issue and publication can be found in Bruce Bastin 'Never Sell a Copyright', p.44/45.

The personnel for this recording can only be concluded aurally and seems to be as given above. There seem to be two trumpets because of the thickness of sound and because certainly the arrangement required two, but only one can be distinguished clearly. And this player seems to be Leonard Davis with his majestic horn (listen to Eddie's Hot Shots for a sample of his great trumpet playing). He seems to be the only trumpet soloist here. Then we hear unequivocally the one and only Jimmy Harrison on trombone. Ben Whitted might be on first alto, because he was the saxophone leadman with the Johnson band. Presuming this to be the Johnson band the other alto has to be Edgar Sampson, who was with the band from mid 1928 on, just as Leonard Davis was. Although I do not know any Sampson solo that early, I assume that Sampson - as successor to Benny Carter - might have been under his influence. This could be a clue to the alto solo in the second title. The tenor solo in the beginning of the first title certainly sounds like what we have come to know of Ben Waters. Yet, when asked late in his life, Waters denied his presence here. Well, I have become aware of so many errors of memory and judgement of the surviving musicians in my research, that I am inclined not to believe in Waters' memory here. The rhythm section certainly is the one of the Johnson band. Only, that the presence of a piano cannot be stated with certainty. So, can it be the case, that the Johnson band recorded without their leader? For contractual reasons? Or because Charlie Johnson just did not care? Or because he simply was "upstairs" gambling? We do not know, yet the music is fantastic!

“Dusky Stevedore” follows the published arrangement of the Triangle Music Company of Joe Davis, as do the recordings of Thelma Terry and the Mills Hotsy Totsy Gang of the same year. The staff arranger might have been Bob Haring as with the next title. Great soloing by Waters (?), Whitted and Davis.

“Take Your Tomorrow (Give Me Today)” is a stock arrangement definitely by Bob Haring, published by the Triangle Music Company. Very typical Jimmy Harrison solo in chorus A3 and a very Carterish eight bar solo by the second alto player, who in my estimation must be Edgar Sampson (in this relation I would like to ask the reader to listen to Clarence Williams’ “Zonky” and “You’ve Got To Be Modernistic” of December 3, 1929. I think that we have the same musician here.)

And then the fantastic punch and swing of the band! What an aggregation!

Once again, at (\*) we have the device of starting a new chorus or bridge – in this case – on the two last bars of the preceding unit, just as before in “Charleston’s The Best Dance After All”. See there!

#### Notes:

- Delaunay, *New Hot Discography 1948*: not listed

- *Jazz Directory Vol. Five 1955*: not listed

- Rust\*2: not listed

- John R.T. Davies, cover text of *Ristic 28*: 2 tpts; tmb; alt; poss. Buster Bailey – clt, alt; Prob Prince Robinson – ten; Cyrus St. Clair – bbs; prob Leroy Harris – bjo; unknown – dms (Tom Lord in ‘Clarence Williams’ gives the same personnel)

- Rust\*3: 2 unknown - tpt; unknown - tbn; unknown - alt, clt; unknown - alt; Ben Waters - ten; ?Mike Jackson - pno; unknown - bjo; unknown - bbs; unknown – dms

- Rust\*4,\*6: probably: Leonard Davis, Sidney De Paris - tpt; Jimmy Harrison - tbn; Ben Whitted, Edgar Sampson - alt, clt; Ben Waters - ten, clt; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Cyrus St. Clair - bbs; George Stafford - dms

#### Tunes Structures:

31339-2 Dusky Stevedore Key of F / Bb / Ab Marathon

(Intro 8 bars ens)(A1 Chorus (F) 32 bars AABA Waters (?) ten - ens)(B1 Verse I 20 bars ens)(Bridge 8 bars ens modulation to Bb)(A2 Chorus (Bb) 32 bars Whitted (?) clt)(C1 Verse II (Vamp ?) 20 bars / ens 4, Davis tpt 8, Sampson (?) alt 4, ens 4 - modulation to Ab)(A3 Chorus (Ab) 32 bars / ens - Davis tpt lead 16, saxes 8, ens 8)(Coda 4 bars ens) arrangement: stock arrangement possibly by Bob Haring (see also Thelma Terry on Columbia and Mills’ Hotsy Totsy Gang on Duo) (Bruce Bastin, ‘Never Sell A Copyright’, p. 45) / composer credit is: Razaf & Johnson

31340-2 Take Your Tomorrow (Give Me Today) Key of F / Bb / Ab Marathon

(Intro 6 bars ens)(Verse 8 bars ens)(A1 Chorus (F) 32 bars AA’ saxes)(A2 Chorus (F) 32 bars / Davis tpt 16, Waters (?) ten 16)(Bridge 4 bars Davis tpt - ens modulation to Bb)(A3 Chorus (Bb) 32 bars / Harrison tbn 8, Whitted (?) clt 8, Harrison tbn 16\*)(Bridge 4 bars ens modulation to Ab)(A4 Chorus (Ab) 32 bars ens / ens 8, Sampson (?) 8, ens 8, bjo 4, ens 4)(Coda 2 bars ens)

Arrangement: stock arrangement by Bob Haring (Bruce Bastin, ‘Never Sell A Copyright’, p. 45) / Composer credit is: (not having been able to inspect a copy of this rare disc, I would like to add that the composers of this tune were Andy Razaf and J.C. Johnson)

#### **CHARLIE JOHNSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA**

New York,

May 08, 1929

Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris – tpt; George Washington – tbn ;

Ben Whitted, Edgar Sampson – alt, clt ; Ben Waters – ten, clt;

Charlie Johnson – pno; Bobby Johnson – bjo; Billy Taylor – bbs; George Stafford – dms;

Ben Waters – arr (1,2,3,4); Benny Carter – arr (5)

51298-1 Harlem Drag

Vic test,

Frog DGF 12

51298-2 Harlem Drag

Vic V38059,

Frog DGF 8

51299-1 Hot Bones And Rice

Vic V38059,

Frog DGF 8

51299-2 Hot Bones And Rice

Vic test,

Frog DGF 12

53600-1 Mo’lasses

Vic test unis.on 78, [www.soundcloud.com](http://www.soundcloud.com)

Note: 53600-1: see *VJM 167- 21/N&N 63-12, 69 - 10*

The Johnson band was able to keep a steady personnel over lengthy periods, possibly because of Ed Smalls’ generosity and Johnson’s happy-go-lucky attitude. Yet Arthur Gibbs’ disbanding in summer 1928 opened up the opportunity to engage some young and promising musicians and thus to fill vacancies. There had not been a distinct first trumpet player, such as the Henderson band and the Ellington band had. Here now, with Leonard Davis, a perfect man for this role had been hired. Together with him arrived Edgar Sampson to fill Benny Carter’s footsteps. These two musicians seem to have been engaged immediately and had already been recorded in the two preceding sessions of September 1928. Later arrivals from the same Gibbs band – it really is a pity they were not recorded under Gibbs’ name (but they were under ‘Lem Fowler’s Favorites’) – were trombonist George Washington to fill Harrison’s place and Billy Taylor sen. as replacement for Cyrus St.Clair. Both chairs were not easy to fill, as their earlier inhabitants left very big holes when leaving. And quite naturally the band lost a lot of impetus after the change.

Thus, it is no wonder that these two issued titles leave something to be desired. The band certainly sounds a bit tame here, inspite of the competent playing and soloing by all participants. Whereas every Victor session before produced at least one issued up-tempo tune, this session had only two slow-to-medium titles, the unissued title probably a fast one. A pity! We do not know anything about this title, but it should be added, that there exists a ragtime composition of that very name by C. Luckeith “Lucky” Roberts, recorded as piano roll on QRS in 1923. A quite lively and exciting tune and I wonder if it is the same as recorded here.

“Harlem Drag” is a rather neat blues composition, enlivened by some 16 bar strains. There is some variety in Waters’ arrangement and phantastic trumpet lead playing by Len Davis. Whitted is beautiful on clarinet, and I certainly wonder why Harry Dial rated him so poorly in his book ‘All This Jazz About Jazz’. With Johnson he played beautiful down-to-earth bluesy clarinet, just the right notes at the right places, just as he did later on on record with Eubie Blake’s Orchestra (listen to “St. Louis Blues”!). Very interesting growl playing of an individual kind by George Washington. And again, prominently de Paris on trumpet. Although all earlier discographies list Gus Aiken as trumpet here, he certainly is not on the record nor was he a permanent member of the band.

“Hot Bones And Rice”, a Charlie Johnson composition arranged by Waters is a sombre, partly minor, tune basing on extended blues structure, which only shows off its qualities when listened to carefully. Soloists again Whitted, Washington and de Paris. If only they had issued the third title!

These two tunes, together with the two issued titles of September 19, 1928, exhibit what we identify as the Charlie Johnson band sound. Yet it has to be stated that the Charlie Johnson band did not own an individual sound as the Ellington band or the Henderson band. These two last named bands had in Redman – later Benny Carter – and Ellington himself arrangers in their ranks, who were able to create a distinctive characteristic band sound, whereas the Johnson band relied on stock arrangements and arrangements from other sources. Johnson is known

to have bought everything available from outside arrangers. Thus, he played two different arrangements of "Rhapsody In Blue" from different people, one of them Benny Carter. Moreover, Ben Whitted was responsible to make fitting arrangements out of every hit tune published and he is known to have harmonized Louis Armstrong's recorded solos for three-part brass for the band.

It certainly was a major event for similarly interested collectors when the discovery of an hitherto unknown test pressing of this session's third recorded title "Mo'lasses" was published on the world-wide-web.

On this title we hear one of the hottest bands in Harlem at the end of the 1920s, very compact here, smoothly swinging their way with an arrangement which certainly is not by Benny Waters, as with most of the other band recordings. Waters' style was more down-to-earth – more rudimentary, in three-part harmony. Here now we hear an arrangement very much pointing forward to Swing-style Jazz. Certain elements of the arrangement – the rhythmic conception, the augmented chords - are very similar to the two titles by Joe Steele's Orchestra, of which we know that their arrangements were the work of a youthful Benny Carter. The young arrangers at that time made the rounds through the dancing-establishments to sell their latest works to the bands and earn some money and reputation. But as Carter had been a long-serving member of the Johnson band – now with Fletcher Henderson's band – he probably also had been an important contributor to the Johnson band book. We know that Johnson bought every arrangement suitable for his band. With Johnson's band Carter had made the earliest recordings of his arrangements (*Charleston Is The Best Dance After All* and *You Ain't The One* of January 24, 1928). The rhythmic approach, the chords, the chord-progressions and the four-part harmony force me to the conclusion that this has to be a Benny Carter arrangement.

As soloists we hear a rather smooth – or tame – Benny Waters on tenor, then 6 bars of a very unusual – for its time – saxophone section led by trombone in close four-part harmony (who would have thought of something like that but Benny Carter ?) (B1), then a short clarinet solo by the band's clarinet man Ben Whitted (B2), then unmistakably Sidney de Paris with his peppery hot style for one chorus (A2). In between and just after de Paris we hear two alto breaks by what must be the young Edgar Sampson. The style is very much like what we know of Benny Carter, and certainly Sampson was - as successor to Carter in the Johnson band - influenced by the growing giant Carter. This then supports very unexpectedly my claim in our Clarence Williams series part 3, session 096 in N&N 60, that Sampson might actually be the altoist of Williams' *Zonky* and *You've Got To Be Modernistic!* There aren't any further recordings of Sampson that early. The "middle-eight" of the tpt chorus is filled by a beautiful melodious trombone solo by Washington, not in his usual growl manner. He certainly was one of the many sadly overlooked great musicians of the Jazz-Age. In the last chorus (A3), again in the "middle-eight", we hear as soloist the majestic – and clear – Leonard Davis, he too one of the sadly neglected greats.

Furthermore I'd like the reader – and listener – to take notice of Billy Taylor Sr.'s 2 octave tuba-glissando in bar 8 of the last chorus (A3). Marvelous! (He was Duke Ellington's bass player in the late 1930 - another unsung master of Jazz.) And what I love to notice is the very amiably nonchalant inaccuracy of the band playing the music. Quite different from white bands of the time. But I love that! And the band swings like hell!

The title "Mo'lasses" is a tune by the great Harlem pianist C. Luckeyth "Lucky" Roberts, one of the fathers of Harlem stride piano. He composed the tune for his show "Go! Go!" in the early 20s. He also recorded this tune on piano-roll QRS 2306 in August 1923, reissued on LP Biograph BLP 1001. Words were by Alex Rogers. The tune has a Chorus in C, starting in minor chords in AABA form 32 bars, then goes – after a bridge – into a very unusual structure of 24 bars AAB in almost immovable harmonies. Then again it goes back to the chorus of the beginning. The Johnson recording (Carter arrange-ment?) follows this structure, yet expanding it harmonically, according to the possibilities of the band and in contempo-raneous style.

#### Notes:

- *DeLaunay, New Hot Discography 1948: Leonard Davis, Sidney De Paris, Gus Aiken - tpt; George Washington - tbn; Ben Whitted - clt; Edgar Sampson - alt, vln; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - gtr; Billy Taylor - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Jazz Directory Vol. Five 1955: Gus Aiken, Sidney De Paris - tpt; George Stephenson - tbn; Ben Whitted - clt; Edgar Sampson - alt, vln; Ben Waters - ten; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Billy Taylor - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Rust\*2: Sidney De Paris, Gus Aiken - tpt; George Stephenson - tbn; Ben Whitted - alt, clt; Edgar Sampson - alt; Ben Waters - ten, clt; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Billy Taylor - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: Leonard Davis, Sidney De Paris - tpt; George Stephenson - tbn; Edgar Sampson, Ben Whitted - alt, clt; Ben Waters - ten, clt, arr; Charlie Johnson - pno; Bobby Johnson - bjo; Billy Taylor - bbs; George Stafford - dms*  
 - *Storyville 35-185:*  
 - *Rust, The Victor Master Book Vol. 2: 2 t / tb / 3 s / p / bj / bb / d.*  
 - *Storyville 35-185: Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris, tpt; George Washington, tbn; Ben Whitted, Edgar Sampson, clt, alt; Ben Waters, ten, clt; Charlie Johnson, pno; Bobby Johnson, bjo; Billy Taylor, bbs; George Stafford, dms; "Rust lists George Stephenson as the trombone player on this last session but, according to John Chilton in his book 'Who's Who of Jazz', Stephenson did not join Charlie Johnson until three years later."*

#### Tunes Structures:

51298-1 Harlem Drag Key of Eb Victor

(A1 Chorus 12 bars blues Davis tpt - ens)(A2 Chorus 12 bars Whitted clt)(B1 Vamp 16 /ens 4, De Paris tpt 4, ens 4, De Paris tpt 2, ens 2)(C1 Verse 16 bars AABA ens)(C2 Verse 16 bars /De Paris tpt 8, saxes 4, Washington tbn 4) (Bridge 4 bars ens)(A3 Chorus 12 bars ens)(Coda 4 bars ens)

51298-2 Harlem Drag Key of Eb Victor

same as 51298-1

arrangement: Benny Waters / composer credit is: Benny Waters

51299-1 Hot Bones And Rice Eb / Eb m / Eb Victor

(Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Verse I 16 bars extended blues Whitted clt - ens)(Vamp 4 bars ens)(B1 Chorus (Eb minor) 16 bars AA' Washington tbn)(C1 Verse II (Vamp ?) 8 bars clts in harmony)(Bridge 4 bars ens)(B2 Chorus 16 bars De Paris tpt) (A2 Verse I 16 bars ens)

51299-2 Hot Bones And Rice Eb / Eb m / Eb Victor

same as 51299-1

arrangement: Benny Waters / composer credit is: Chas. Johnson

53600 Mo'lasses Key of C (Am) / F / C (Am) Victor unissued test

(Intro ens 4 bars) (A1 Chorus 32 bars AABA ens 16 - saxes 8 - ens 8 bars - alto break in bars 7/8) (bridge ens 8 bars modulation to F) (B1 Chorus 24 bars AAB Waters ten 6 - ens 2 - Waters ten 6 - ens 2 - tbn + saxes 6 - ens 2) (B2 Chorus 24 bars Whitted clt 6 - ens 2 - clt 6 - ens 2 - ens 8 modulation back to C (Am)) (A2 Chorus 32 bars AABA de Paris tpt 14 - Sampson alt 2 - Washington tbn 8 - de Paris tpt 2 6 - Sampson alt 2) (tag 6 bars Sampson alt 2 - ens 4) (A3 Chorus 32 bars AABA ens 16 - L. Davis tpt 6 - ens 2 - ens 8) (tag ens 2)

arrangement: Benny Carter / composer credit is: C. Luckeyth "Lucky" Roberts (not on test?)

#### Discernible differences of takes:

51298-1 *tpt II (De Paris) plays double-time in 7th bar of B1 Vamp*  
 51298-2 *tpt II (De Paris) does not play double-time in 7th bar of B1 Vamp*  
 51299-1 *A1 starts rather chaotic, clt plays 23 notes in first 4 bars*  
 51299-2 *A1 starts clean, clt plays only 13 notes in first 4 bars*

#### CHARLIE JOHNSON AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Personnel unknown, but probably:

*Leonard Davis, Frank Newton, Henry Red Allen* – tpt;

*Dicky Wells* – tbn;

*Ben Whitted, Harvey Boone* – alt, clt; *Leon Chu Berry* – ten;

Charlie Johnson – pno; *Bernard Addison* – gtr; *Billy Taylor* – sbs; George Stafford - dms

unknown title (12 bar blues)

Tiger Rag

unknown title

New York, Jan. 25, 1933  
 Broadcast from SMALLS' PARADISE  
 CLUB 135<sup>th</sup> Street & 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue

broadcast not on LP/CD

broadcast not on LP/CD

broadcast not on LP/CD

When I first came into contact to John R.T. in 1969, he told me that a number of Johnson radio transcriptions existed, and that he was optimistic about owning them some day. My latest inquiry on this matter happened to be just a couple of months before his untimely death, but he let me know that he still did not have them. The years before I had virtually asked everybody possible about this matter, but nobody knew anything about it. But 'Storyville' 35 positively stated in their Charlie Johnson disco, that "some broadcast items of Charlie Johnson's band from a later period exist, and it is to be hoped that these will appear on record eventually."

Finally, in ca. 2005 I found these – or some of these – items mentioned in Jan Evensmo's 'History of Jazz Tenor Saxophone' Vol. 1. You might imagine my surprise because I had regarded these items as simple rumors without actual value. It still cost me another two years to get hold of them, and I have to tell everybody interested that these items – there are three of them – are in fact very interesting, but that they are audible with great difficulty only because of their surface noise. And most of the listeners might judge it simply not worthwhile to listen. But we can hear a Charlie Johnson band of the day (early 1933) playing in advanced swing style as we know it from Count Basie in the beginning of his band's recording career. Benny Moten had just recorded his last Victor sessions in November 1932. These recordings are generally regarded as the first swing recordings. Now, 3 months later, Charlie Johnson shows us, that his band was perfectly aware of the developments in jazz music, and his band was at the forefront of what was going on.

The first title is a 12-bar blues tune, the first choruses missing, because the eager "recording engineer" switched his apparatus on too late. But we can hear a beautiful muted (?) trumpet chorus, which might come from Frankie Newton stylistically since he was a member of the band for some years. He is followed by a tenor solo with some counter-rhythm triplet phrasing on the sub-dominant part of the chorus. This might easily stem from Chu Berry who was Johnson's tenor man at the time, although I have to admit, that Evensmo prefers to leave this musician unknown, and it simply may be my own wishful thinking. Anyway, this beautiful tune then ends with some powerful riffs and a very advanced coda with extended chords.

"Tiger Rag" is played in a rather conventional arrangement – probably by Ben Whitted – with a competent solo clarinet on strains A and B. Then we have a full chorus of clarinet, followed by a full chorus of very exiting trumpet – probably Henry Red Allen, as he joined the band every evening after finishing his own engagement at another spot. Then a difficult to hear tenor chorus played by – perhaps – Chu Berry. This tenor chorus is divided into two parts, some bars missing in the middle. This because obviously the "recording engineer" had filled his disc with the first tune and the then following first half of "Tiger Rag". He then had to turn over his disc and record the second half of "Tiger Rag" and the following out-tune.

The title ends with a beautiful uncommon last riff chorus.

The last title, again unnamed, sounds very Ellingtonian, but is unknown to me or anybody else I have asked. Most of the sound is overlapped by the radio announcer, who brings the whole broadcast "from Smalls' Paradise" to an end.

#### Notes:

- Storyville 35-185: "Some broadcast items of Charlie Johnson's band from a later period exist, and it is to be hoped that these items will appear on record eventually."

#### Tunes Structures:

unknown title (12 bar blues) key of G (?) broadcast unissued

(A1 Chorus 12 bar blues fragment of tbn (?) chorus/ saxes – 2 bars only)(A2 Chorus 12 bars F. Newton (?) muted tpt)(A3 Chorus 12 bars Ch. Berry (?) ten)(A4 Chorus 12 bars ens syncopated riff)(A5 Chorus 12 bars ens call-and-response riff (saxes – brass))(A6 Chorus 12 bars ens)(Coda 3 bars ens)

arrangement: ? / no composer credit

Tiger Rag key of Bb, Eb, Ab

broadcast unissued

(A1 strain A 32 bars /8 bars ens /8 bars ens /8 bars clt breaks Whitted (?) /8 bars ens)(B1 strain B 32 bars ens – breaks clt Whitted (?))(C1 Chorus strain C 32 bars ens – clt Whitted (?))(C2 Chorus strain C 32 bars 'Red' Allen (?) tpt solo) (C3 Chorus strain C 32 bars Ch. Berry (?) ten solo - some bars missing)(C4 Chorus strain C 32 bars ens riff)

arrangement: Ben Whitted ? / no composer credit

unknown title key of Eb (?)

broadcast unissued

(c. 29 bars of Chorus 32 bars AABA (?) ens – ten interjections / out tune, announcer over band)

arrangement: ? / no composer credit

This is all we have as examples of the artistry of the Charlie Johnson Orchestra, or, as the band was better known, of Charlie Johnson's Paradise Ten. A really very fine body of historic Harlem big band music, very swinging, very urgent and very hot. We have a couple of recordings with musicians who were reportedly drawn from the Johnson aggregation, and I am thinking of a list of these recordings together with the recordings of 1921 as a subject for a later article in N&N.

This band really was a band from – or for – Paradise!

#### **References**

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K.-B. Rau  
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