

THE RECORDINGS OF THE OKEH MELODY STARS

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

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

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

As always in my discographies on this website I have written recording sessions with their headings, dates, titles and names of musicians in italics, whenever I am convinced that the eponymous musician of this discography is not part of the accompanying group of this session! Documented names of musicians if known – in recording ledgers or on record labels – are listed in bold letters.

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

OKEH MELODY STARS

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New York, August 23, 1926

June Clark, Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;
unknown – alt, clt; unknown – ten;
Porter Grainger (or *Vivian Wright?*) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo;

Clarence Todd – voc

74310-A	Look Out, Mr. Jazz	OK 8382	not on LP/CD ?
74310-B	Look Out, Mr. Jazz	OK 8382,	? Timeless CBC 1-030
74311-A	A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You	OK 8382	not on LP/CD
74311-B	A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You	OK 8382	not on LP/CD

Note: The Timeless CD booklet gives matrix-number 74311-A for 'Look Out, Mr. Jazz'

As stated below, it is definitely June Clark here on first trumpet/cornet with his strong tone, his permanent irregular vibrato and his very personal fiery and hasty attack.

On second trumpet/cornet – and thus mainly in the background – is the mysterious, but beautifully poetic “Big Charlie” Thomas. (I make no attempt to repeat what his mystery is and what is known about him. This can be easily read in the booklet to the Timeless CD CBC 1-030 bearing his very name.) Listen to his breaks in the last chorus of “Look Out, Mr. Jazz”. Mr. Thomas displays a very light and slim tone with a wide vibrato and a phrasing very close to Louis Armstrong's recordings of the time, using wide interval jumps. And I am fairly certain that he leads the band in the out chorus of ‘A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You’.

The trombonist has finally been identified as Charlie Irvis in Rust*6, and this is certainly correct. Irvis plays with his usual vigour and legato style and is easy to identify.

There is an alto player who doubles clarinet throughout on “Look Out, Mr. Jazz”. I feel unable to identify this player as there is too little to judge, and his performance lacks recognizable stylistic characteristics. On alto, which he plays throughout the second title, he only plays set parts, which makes him even more undistinguishable. So, no assumption here.

It might be possible to find a name for the beautifully driving tenorist, but I do not know which one. He plays powerfully in a simplified Hawkins manner, but still using strong staccato technique, getting rather old-fashioned at the time, and he has a good and strong tone. He is not Caldwell, nor Prince Robinson, but Benny Waters from the Charlie Johnson band might be a reasonable possibility – and a possible clue to the altoist? Or, perhaps, one of the youngsters, such as Arville Harris or Elmer Williams. Judging from the other musicians he must have been an accomplished musician. And: there were not so many respectable tenor saxophonists in Harlem at the time. (Will reed specialists, please, listen carefully and let me know what they think?)

Both titles are Porter Grainger's compositions. Thus, it would be appropriate to assume Grainger's presence on piano here. Yet, after listening to his vocal-group accompaniments (Harmony Hounds, P. Grainger's Three Jazz Songsters, Buddy Christian's Four Cry-Babies, P. Grainger's Jubilee Singers) I have been unable to find anything compatible with what can be heard from the pianist on the Okeh Melody Stars. Grainger here employs desperately simple piano comping and chording behind the singers, almost without any melodious alterations

contrary to what is heard in the vocal chorus of "Look Out, Mr. Jazz". His own probable accompaniment to these same titles recorded by Sara Martin on September 05, 1926 (this is not Clarence Williams!) may give a hint to his possible presence on the Okeh Melody Stars session. With Martin and other singers Dolly Ross or Clint Jones he shows a little more melodious style which may correspond with what can be heard on "Look Out, Mr. Jazz" in the background to the vocal chorus: a simple eighth-note chordal arpeggiation. So, Grainger's presence cannot be ruled out, but may be probable rather than definite.

Storyville 1998/9 p.195 lists a quote from the Baltimore Afro-American: "Vivian Wright, former pianist with Sammy Lewis". She obviously "herded with Okeh Stompers, noted recording artists" (sic). (BAA25/9/26 6/3) Her former activity as noted here might possibly be proof of her possible presence. But lacking any musical information on Miss Wright nothing can be said about her stylistically. So, Porter Grainger's possible presence seems to be more reasonable and probable.

The very strong and straight banjo player probably is Buddy Christian, pianist and banjo player from New Orleans, as noted in the Chicago Defender 16/4/27 p.6: "Buddy Christian, banjo with Clarence Williams Blue Five, Okeh jazz band, playing with Charles A. Watson's (sic) Dreamland Orchestra on West 125th Street, New York, every evening." We are familiar with his very sober four-to-the-bar strumming from many Clarence Williams recordings.

As singer Clarence Todd is listed on the record label.

Notes:

- Rust*2: Clarence Williams (pno) dir. unknown group; Clarence Todd (vcl)

- Storyville 21, p93: Clarence Todd (vcl) acc 2 unknown cnt, tbn, alt, ten, pno and bjo (Bob Graf says that his copy is in rather poor shape and he is unable to determine whether bass or drums are present. One of the reedmen doubles clarinet on the first side. He says that although the record doesn't have a Clarence Williams sound it is still a very fine record.)

- Rust*3,*4: 2c / tb / cl-as / ts / p / bj / Clarence Todd -v

- Rust*6: Charlie Thomas and another, c / Charlie Irvis, tb / cl, as / ts / p / bj / Clarence Todd, v

- L. Wright, Okeh Race Records: vocal chorus by Clarence Todd (Bob Graf owned a copy of this record which used take -a on both sides, but he kept no record of label type or stampers. Jazz Records shows take -B used for each side. The only copy inspected is as above (74311-a /74310-b)).

Tunes:

74310-B Look Out, Mr. Jazz key of C (or Bb?) Okeh session
(Chorus 1 32 bars ABAC ens JC lead - nice BCT in bars 16 - 21) (Verse 16 bars ens) (Chorus 2 32 bars voc - ten, pno in background) (Chorus 3 32 bars ens JC lead - cnt, tbn, clt breaks)

(CD plays B natural, but that would be a very uncommon pitch. Sara Martin on her recording sings in C, not Db as given by Tom Lord)

74311 A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You key of G (or F?) Okeh session
(Chorus 1 32 bars ABCA' ens JC lead) (Chorus 2 32 bars ten 16 - ens 8 - ten 8) (Verse 16 bars ens) (Chorus 3 32 bars voc - ens in background) (Chorus 4 32 bars ens BCT lead 16 - saxophones 8 - ens 8)

(record probably plays Gb. Sara Martin on her recording sings in G, not Ab as given by Tom Lord)