

A CASE OF A HIDDEN BANDLEADER

Elmer Snowden's bands on record

In 1973 the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors (IAJRC) issued a LP devoted to Elmer Snowden and his recordings. I knew that he was the leader of the early Ellington band somehow, and that he led a couple of other bands. But as I did not like his kind of banjo playing I did not care. The above named LP changed my attitude drastically. Although I owned the Musical Stevedores on a very old Pirate EP and the Jungle Town Stompers on an equally old Phillips EP, the Jasper Davis then later on a Historical LP, I had not realized that these recordings had to be seen as a coherent body of jazz music. And a very beautiful and rewarding one!

But these recordings only make the second half of this investigation. The first three sessions feature three Elmer Snowden working bands, part of the very famous Washingtonians first – without Duke Ellington here –, then a band Snowden lead when he had left the Ellington band alone – officially called Snowden's Orchestra as on the photo, but here under Mamie Smith's name -, and at last the band he fronted at the Nest Club in 1927, miraculously bearing the trombonist's name.

PERRY BRADFORD'S JAZZ PHOOLS

New York, Feb. 1924

unknown, Bubber Miley – tpt; *Charlie Irvis* – tbn;unknown – clt; *Otto Hardwick* – alt; unknown (*Coleman Hawkins*) – ten;*Perry Bradford* – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Harry Hull* – bbs

1668-1	Charlestown, South Carolina	Pm 20309,	Frog DGF 56
1668-2	Charlestown, South Carolina	Pm 20309,	Timeless CBC 1-073
1669-1	Hoola Boola Dance	Pm 20309,	Frog DGF 56
1669-3	Hoola Boola Dance	Pm 20309,	Timeless CBC 1-073

I would like to refer the reader/listener to Names & Numbers 70 where I have discussed this session at length with the following result: "So I am convinced that we have 4/5 of the early Ellington band here, together with some colleagues from other bands."

It has to be added that in February 1924 it still was Elmer Snowden's Washingtonians at the Hollywood Club in Harlem (Frank Dutton, Storyville 80, p.48), but featuring all of the stalwarts of the early Ellington band of late 1924.

MAMIE SMITH Jazz Hounds

New York, c. Sep. 1924

Mamie Smith – voc;

Horace Holmes, Gene Bud Aiken – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn;

Ernie Bullock – clt; *Alex Jackson* – alt (if at all);Leslie A. Hutch Hutchinson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; *Bob Ysaqure* – bbs; Norman Buster – dms, marimba

31669 Lost Opportunity Blues Ajax 17058, Doc DOCD 5360

31670 Good Time Ball Ajax 17058, Doc DOCD 5360

This band obviously is Elmer Snowden's Orchestra of the time (see notes). There is a photo of this band (Snowden's Orchestra) in Perry Bradford's 'Born With The Blues' on page 102. This photo does not show Percy Glascoe (identification of shown musicians in Storyville 106-150). From that it seems likely that all since listed personnels are settled on a beat copy of this Ajax record in Walter C. Allen's possession (see notes). My own reference is Document DOCD-5360 and the source record for these titles obviously is not better than Allen's.

So, I have to admit not to be able to discriminate one or two cornets/trumpets, but it sounds like two in the very first bars of 'Lost Opportunity Blues'. I hear trombone and a clarinet, no discernable saxophone. From my knowledge of Jake Frazier's playing I have to certify his presence here. Whether it is Ernie Bullock (obviously the same man as listed with J.R. Morton's Red Hot Peppers of March 20, 1930 (?)) – who is on the photo - or Percy Glascoe who cannot be heard very favourably on several Lem Fowler sides in 1925/6, I cannot really distinguish. Comparing this clarinetist here with Glascoe of the Fowler sides I tend to name Bullock! I have nevertheless listed Jackson as alto player here, because I hear a tuba – no bass sax! – and if this is correct, Jackson has to play sax or not be present at all on the session. 'Hutch' Hutchinson was a well acquainted and respected pianist who unfortunately only made three other recordings in 1923, 1924 and 1927 (Rust*6). He is heard very favourably here.

Elmer Snowden plays a very strong, yet rudimental rhythm without his later multiple banjo strumming.

The bass notes are very sharp cut like from a brass bass, not like those from a bass saxophone (the photo, by the way, shows Jackson doubling on baritone sax, not bass sax, which certainly is more appropriate for an alto player, as alto and baritone are pitched Eb). I have therefore added Ysaqure on tuba as shown in the photo.

The drummer can be heard playing the blocks and an occasional cymbal crash, together with some marimba accompaniment in 'Good Time Ball'.

ADDITION 160418: Close inspection of these sides in better condition have shown that there is only one trumpet present – not known whether Aiken or Holmes – and that there is no alto saxophone. The only reed instrument is clarinet. The personnel should thus be corrected!

Notes:

- RR 57-10: "Horace Holmes (*Jazz Music Vol. 15, No. 4*) says that the Elmer Snowden band signed to accompany Mamie Smith. He recalled the two titles on Ajax 17058 but thought they were rejected, and gave the personnel of the Snowden band as: Holmes, cornet; Gene Aiken, trumpet; Jake Frazier, trombone; Ernie Bullock, Percy Glascoe, Alex Jackson, reeds; Leslie Hutchinson, piano; Elmer Snowden, banjo.

- RR 63-12: Walter C. Allen: "Ajax 17058 : no marimba on 31670. Instr. (tpt, tbn, clt, alt, p, bjo, bass sax) agrees pretty much with Horace Holmes' personnel. Bass sax man would be Alex Jackson; Clarinet, Percy Glascoe. My copy is so beat that I cannot tell whether or not two cornets are present, as Holmes claimed."

- BGR*2, *3: Gene Aiken, Horace Holmes, cnts; Jake Frazier, tbn; Percy Glascoe, Ernie Bullock, sax; Leslie A. Hutchinson ("Hutch"), pno; Elmer Snowden, bjo; Akex Jackson, bsx; Norman Buster, dms (1).

- Rust*3: Horace Holmes or Gene Aiken (but hardly both), c; Jake Frazier, tb; Ernie Bullock or Percy Glascoe, as; Alex Jackson, bsx; Leslie A. Hutchinson ("Hutch"), p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Norman Buster, d, marimba (obviously based on W.C. Allen).

- BGR*4: Gus Aiken, Horace Holmes – cnt; Jake Frazier – tbn; Ernie Bullock, Percy Glascoe – clt, sax; Leslie A. Hutchinson (Hutch) – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Alex Jackson – bsx; Norman Buster – dms

- W. Bryant, AJAX Records (Mainspring Pres, 2013) list the following personnel "as per Snowden" : Gus Aiken (trumpet), Jake Frazier (trombone), Alex Jackson (bass saxophone), Leslie Hutchinson (piano), Elmer Snowden (banjo). (No mention of alto sax, clarinet and drums! Did Elmer really listen?- KBR)

- Rust*6: Horace Holmes or Gene Aiken, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Ernie Bullock or Percy Glascoe, as; Alex Jackson, bsx; Leslie A. Hutchinson, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Norman Buster, d, marimba (obviously based on W.C. Allen).

31669 Lost Opportunity Blues Key of C Ajax 17058
(Intro 4 bars ens)(Verse 20 bars voc – ens)(Bridge 8 bars voc – ens)(Chorus 22 bars voc – ens)

31670 Good Time Ball Key of C Ajax 17058
(Intro 4 bars ens)(Vamp 4 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars AA'AB voc – ens)(A1 chorus 16 bars AA' voc – ens)(A2 chorus 16 bars AA' clt – ens)(A3 chorus 16 bars voc – ens)(Coda 4 bars pno – ens)

TE ROY WILLIAMS AND HIS ORCHESTRA

New York, May 25, 1927

Rex Stewart – cnt; Te Roy Williams – tbn;

Joe Garland – alt, clt; unknown – ten, clt;

Freddie Johnson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bob Ysaguirre – bbs; Walter Johnson – dms;

Teddy Nixon - arr

144214-2 Oh! Malinda

Har 439-H,

Frog DGF 38

144215-3 Lindbergh Hop

Har 439-H,

Frog DGF 38

As you may read below in the notes, this was Elmer Snowden's Nest Club Band. How it came to be re-named after the trombonist is a miracle nobody can explain.

For many years now, the trumpet player on this session has been a matter of discussion, beginning with Walter C. Allen's notice in Storyville 21 (see below). I remember that I assumed this player to be Tommy Ladnier when I first heard these sides on the IAJRC 12 LP. And it is interesting to see that Rust immediately changed his personnel according to Allen's note. Most interesting for me is the note of VJM 169 (see below) which cites a participant of this session – Bob Ysaguirre - claiming it was Rex Stewart, yet. When listening it becomes apparent that the trumpet certainly is not far from Ed Allen, but this certainly is not Allen's tone and vibrato. As I have got to know Rex Stewart's development into a fine trumpet player in the Armstrong mould after Louis' arrival in New York, I would also think that he could be able to play in such a southern style after some years of gigging in Harlem. Accordingly I would opt for Stewart.

Te Roy Williams was not the bandleader, and it is an unsolved question how he could be put as bandleader on the record label.

Joe Garland was a player of all the saxophones. Performing mostly on tenor sax in later years he was mainly engaged as an alto sax man cum clarinetist in the twenties. I therefore think that he is on alto here and that he is the clarinet soloist (see also Chick Webb's Jungle Band session, where Garland is on alto and clarinet, and not Louis Jordan!). He can be heard in an alto break just after the tenor solo in A3 of 'Oh! Malinda'.

As it is definitely known that Prince Robinson as part of the Leon Abbey band arrived at exactly this recording date in Rio de Janeiro (Storyville 73, p.8). Robinson – who was a tenor player and clarinetist throughout – cannot be present. The tenor solo spots do affirm exactly this fact! But then, who is the tenor player in A3 of the first title? He is a player below Robinson's level! He may also be found playing with the Okeh Melody Stars. At last it has to be stated that other than Walter Allen's suggestion there are only two reed men on this session!

Freddie Johnson is on piano, but I wonder why Rust lists a second pianist who is heard nowhere.

Snowden is the bandleader anyhow, and he plays his banjo in his very own strumming way.

Bob Ysaguirre of early Armand Piron and later Don Redman fame obviously is the tuba player, and Walter Johnson – who later, with Fletcher Henderson, "invented" the modern jazz style of drumming – is heard in his first recording session, playing quite "old-fashioned".

Teddy Nixon, Fletcher Henderson's trombonist of 1923/24, is said to be the arranger of these titles.

Notes:

- Rust*2: ? Rex Stewart – cnt; Te Roy Williams – tbn; Prince Robinson – clt; Joe Garland – clt, ten; Freddie Johnson and another – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bob Ysaguirre – bbs; Walter Johnson - dms

- Rust*3,*4: Ed Allen – c; Re Roy Williams – tb -ldr; Prince Robinson – cl; unknown – cl –as; Joe Garland – cl -ts; Freddie Johnson and another – p; Elmer Snowden – bj; Bob Ysaguirre – bb; Walter Johnson – d.

- IAJRC 12, cover text: Snowden: "Te Roy Williams was my trombone player, who was on notice when this record was made. ... This was my Nest Club Band, and to this day, I can't figure out how his name got on the label."

- Storyville 21, p.112: "In Jazz Information, Vol.2 No.2 there appeared a photo of the Elmer Snowden Orchestra at the Nest Club in '1925'. The personnel was Rex Stewart (cnt), TeRoy Williams (tbn), Joe Garland and Prince Robinson (saxes), Freddie Johnson (pno), Elmer Snowden (bjo), Bob Ysaguirre (bbs) and Walter Johnson (dms). So far so good. But in a copy of Melody Maker in 1942 (?) someone preposed that this personnel applied to the Te Roy Williams recordings on Harmony 439-H: Oh! Malinda (Razaf and Johnson) / Lindbergh Hop (Nixon and Snowden). Since that time, this personnel has come to be accepted by Rust and everyone else, with absolutely no corroboration or foundation, purely as the result of someone's suggestion. It seems time to set the record straight. By this time, even Elmer Snowden believes that this is the correct personnel, probably because someone showed him 'the book'. (But did that someone actually play him the record ???) I have a fine copy of the record, and on listening, the instrumentation appears to be: trumpet, trombone, three clarinets and saxes, piano, banjo, tuba and drums. The trumpeter, to my ears, is Es Allen and nothing at all like Rex Stewart. I admit that I am not certain of all the facets of Rex's style, but I do know my Ed Allen from his Clarence Williams work, and Rex never played in that lovely 'singing' style or with that tone. The trombone, apparently, is Te Roy Williams, for obvious reasons. One title being a band original, co-composed by Elmer Snowden, would indicate that his presence on banjo is a distinct possibility, but who 'Nixon' might be, and which particular 'Johnson' wrote 'Oh! Malinda', is something I do not know. Incidentally, is it not strange that as important a Harlem bandleader as Elmer Snowden never recorded under his own name?"

- Rust*6: Ed Allen, c; Te Roy Williams, tbn; Prince Robinson, cl, as; Joe Garland, cl, ts; Freddie Johns, and another, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Bob Ysaguirre, bb; Walter Johnson, d.

- VJM 169-19: "Juan Carlos Lopez (Spain) interviewed Bob Ysaguirre, Te Roy Williams' bass player, who was very insistent that it was Rex Stewart who plays cornet on the Te Roy Williams Harmony session (see Doctor Jazz Mag. #205, June 2009). The interview took place in 1979 together with Al Vollmer. Incidentally Richard Rains notes that 'Oh! Malinda' was recorded for Vocalion – but rejected – seven weeks earlier by ... Rex Stewart & His Orchestra! Coincidence?"

144214-2 Oh Malinda Key of F / Bb / F

Harmony 439-H

(Intro 8 bars ens)(A1 chorus 32 bars AABA tpt16, clt8, tpt6, saxes2)(Verse 8 bars tpt – saxes)(A2 Chorus 32 bars AABA saxes16, tbn8, saxes6, tpt2 modulation to Bb)(B1 chorus AABA clts16, pno8, clts6, brass2)(Bridge 2 bars brass modulation to F)(A3 chorus 32 bars AABA ten14, alt2, ens16)(Coda 4 bars ens)
composer credit is: Razaf and Johnson

144215-3 Lindbergh Hop Key of Bb Harmony 439-H
(Intro 4 bars pno - clts)(Verse 1 10 bars AA' clts)(Verse 2 10 bars AA' pno – ens)(A1 chorus 16 bars AA' saxes)(A2 chorus 16 bars AA' tpt)(A3 chorus 16 bars AA' tbn)(Bridge 8 bars ens - tpt and clt breaks)(A4 chorus 16 bars AA' brass - clts)(A5 chorus 16 bars AA' ens tpt lead)(A6 chorus 16 bars AA' clts – brass8, saxes – brass8)(A7 chorus 16 bars AA' ens)(Coda 2 bars bbs – ens)
composer credit is: Snowden and Nixon

MUSICAL STEVEDORES

Ward Pinkett – tpt, scat voc; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt;
Cliff Jackson – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo; *Bud Hicks* – bbs; unknown – percussion effects;
unknown - arr

New York,

Jan. 30, 1929

147899-3 Happy Rhythm

Col 14406-D,

Frog DGF 32

147900-3 Honeycomb Harmony

Col 14406-D,

Frog DGF 32

These two titles are not just straight-ahead jazz performances, but they are distinct – and beautiful – little compositions, by all means, in a sense of – for instance – Duke Ellington's creations. Composer credits for both items are "Williams", without any first name. This might have led to the assumption that Spencer Williams, one of the early group of jazz composers (think of 'Shim-Me-Sha-Wobble'), could be responsible for the authorship – and the piano part here.

For all the years I have listened to these sides – they had been part of a long deleted Swedish EP Pirates 514 – it had been a firm and fixed truth that Louis Metcalfe – he very probably also on the following three sessions – was the trumpet player on these titles. But Storyville 2000, p. 121, reports information as to the possible presence of Ward Pinkett on trumpet and on vocal here. And indeed, if you listen closely and without pre-fixed opinion the trumpet sounds do correspond with what we all know of the brilliant Mr. Pinkett. And we also know that Pinkett could be a fantastic growl-man, what can be heard exemplarily in the second title. There is no second trumpet player!

The trombonist is Henry Hicks, one of the main-stays of the early Mills' Blue Rhythm Band. Born in 1904 he played with the Wilberforce Collegians aka Benny Carter's Savoy Play Boys under Benny Carter's leadership in 1928/9 – which in itself is a great recommendation – and later joined the Mills' Blue Rhythm Band to disappear into oblivion in 1934. He was a first class hot soloist, and Snowden certainly became aware of his qualities to hire him for the four sessions of early 1929 dealt with here. Further proof of his importance is Jan Evensmo's presenting him in his renowned series of "Solographies" – one among only four trombonists in this series.

On the reed instruments we hear the great Charlie Holmes from Boston, later one of the star soloists of the Luis Russell band. At the time of these recordings he certainly also was one of the few highly gifted youngsters on the Harlem jazz scene. He plays alto sax, soprano and clarinet on these three issued sessions, and can be assumed on the unissued 'Six Scrambled Eggs' session as well.

As said before, Spencer Williams has been assumed as piano player because of the composer credits of both titles. Yet, the piano bass notes with their shifting of the meter are so decidedly and typically of Cliff Jackson that he himself must be listed as pianist. Most of the discographies – including John Collinson's in Storyville 147 – assume or agree in Cliff Jackson's presence as pianist. I myself have to reduce my own assumption a bit because of the lack of Jackson's otherwise so apparent rhythmic strength. Unfortunately, Spencer Williams can only be found two times in the index to Rust*6: as pianist of the 'Six Scrambled Eggs' (see below) and as singer with 'Freddie Johnson - Arthur Briggs and their All-Star Orchestra in Paris, France, July 1933 (and he very probably was in Europe at about this recording date). This then leaves us without any recorded example of Williams' piano style, and makes comparing impossible.

On banjo, recognizable by his own personal and very busy banjo style with up-and-down strumming, tremolos and trills – as opposed to the strong and plain rhythm playing of for instance a Dave Wilborn or a Buddy Christian – is Elmer Snowden, he himself sometime the leader of up to five bands at the same time as stated elsewhere.

Bud Hicks is a name only listed once in Rust – for this session – and I am unable to name any band of importance in the Harlem years of which he might have been a member. But he definitely plays with beauty and sensitivity and makes good rhythm. As suggested in Storyville 154 below, you may hear some sort of percussion-strokes on a drum – or a suitcase, or whatever – between the piano solo and the scat vocal (F trio strain) and at the very end of the item. This might have been Mr. Joe Davis himself, who obviously – although not a musician himself - was fond of taking part in the recording sessions he organized.

Notes:

- Rust*2: *Louis Metcalfe* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Grimes*, *Charlie Holmes* – clt, alt; *Cliff Jackson* – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bass Edwards* – bbs; unknown – scat voc

- Rust*3: *Freddie Jenkins*, *Louis Metcalfe* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Clarence Grimes*, *Charlie Holmes* – clt, sop, alt; *Spencer Williams* ? – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bud Hicks* – bbs; two unknown – scat voc

- IAJRC 12, cover text: *Snowden*: "These sessions were all made around the same time. Some sound like Ted Nixon arrangements. He was my trombone player, and we wrote Lindbergh Hop together. Joe Davis used to throw in so many musicians that I couldn't keep track. We used to call Henry Hicks "Reverend" cause he was so quiet. Charlie Holmes sounded a lot like Hodges, but on this record (Happy Rhythm) he sounds like Procope. We called him "Pickles". I used to get \$25.00 a side in those days, and we recorded with all the companies. The toughest one was Edison. We couldn't finish until the record was perfect."

- Rust*4: *Freddie Jenkins*, *Louis Metcalfe* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Clarence Grimes*, *Charlie Holmes* – clt, sop, alt; *Cliff Jackson* – pno-cymbal; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bud Hicks* – bbs; scat voc

- Storyville 147, p.108: *Freddie Jenkins*, *Louis Metcalfe*, t; *Henry Hicks*, tb; *Clarence Grimes*, cl/ss; *Charlie Holmes*, cl/as; prob *Cliff Jackson*, p; *Elmer Snowden*, bj; *Bud Hicks*, bb; 2 unknown, v. *John Collinson*: "I doubt that Jackson is the pianist on this session, but lacking definite information it is included. Columbia files show that 3 takes of each title were recorded, with the first of each being rejected and the second marked as 2nd choice."

- Storyville 154, p.160, Let's Really Listen: "Brian Williams suggests we listen to 'Happy Rhythm' by the Musical Stevedores with reference to the rhythm section in the second half of the side."

- Storyville 2000, p.121: "Clarence Grimes says he did not reach New York until 1934 and is thus not the clarinet and soprano player on the Musical Stevedores coupling. Charlie Holmes has identified himself on these sides, playing cl/ss/as and Greely Walton identifies the scat vocalist as Ward Pinkett, who is thus more likely on trumpet than Louis Metcalfe, who is currently listed."

- Rust*6: *Freddie Jenkins*, *Louis Metcalfe* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Clarence Grimes* – clt; *Charlie Holmes* – sop, alt; *Cliff Jackson* – pno-cymbal; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bud Hicks* – bbs; scat voc

147899-3 Happy Rhythm Key of Ab /Db

Columbia 14406-D

(Intro 6 bars ens)(A strain a 16 bars AA ens in part harmony)(B strain b 16 bars AA' tpt)(C strain c 16 bars AB tbn14, ens4)
(D strain a 16 bars AA clt)(Bridge 4 bars ens modulating to Db)(E trio strain 32 bars AABA tpt16, tbn8, clt6, bjo2)(F trio strain 32
bars AABA pno16, scat-voc8, ens8)(Coda 2 bbs1, perc1)
composer credit is: Williams

147900-3 Honeycomb Harmony Key of Bb /Eb /Bb (Gm) Columbia 14406-D
(Intro 4 bars ens)(A strain a 16 bars AA clt -acc tpt, tbn)(B strain b 8 bars tpt)(C strain b 8 bars scat-voc6, bbs2)(Bridge 4 bars
pno)(D strain c 8+2 bars alt8, bbs/ens2)(E strain a 16+2 bars AA tpt8, clt6, ens 2+2)
composer credit is: Williams

JUNGLE TOWN STOMPERS

New York, Apr. 09, 1929

Ward Pinkett – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt;

Luis Russell – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Henry Bass Edwards - bbs; unknown (Elmer Snowden ?) – percussion (2)

unknown (Luis Russell ?) – arr

401797-C African Jungle

OK 8686,

JSP CD 308

401798-B Slow As Molasses

OK 8686,

JSP CD 308

As it seems this is the same band as before. With some minor alterations possible.

But first of all: This is the same trumpet player as on the foregoing session, thus very probably Ward Pinkett. If you listen to this player's staccato playing and occasional trills and compare it with the Morton Red Hot Peppers of June 11, 1928, you will easily see/hear that this is the same person. And this really is a very surprising realization! For all the years of discography Metcalf had been stated as trumpet player here. But after the note in Storyville 2000, p.121 this certainly cannot be retained. It is my suspicion that Luis Russell when being asked recalled titles he simply did not have played on (see Storyville 146, p.46 below). The record label does not say anything about the musicians (L. Wright, OKeh Race Records). And on hearing these titles - with certainly Charlie Holmes on them - he deduced a personnel from his own band, including himself on piano. But I am convinced that we have Pinkett here. It is the same tone, same sound, same vibrato and same staccato as on the Mortons! Apparently Russell named Metcalf as he was on the Burning Eight sides at the beginning of Russell's recording career and only 3 months apart from this session. But our trumpet man here does not use Metcalf's squeezed notes, and he plays with more laziness – not as stressed as Metcalf always does.

On trombone we most probably have Henry Hicks again as stated everywhere, and I do not know anything against it, but I have to observe that everything played by the trombone on these two sides might also be played by Higginbotham, only lacking Higgie's little tricks and close trills and his exuberant bounce. No wonder that Luis Russell heard Higginbotham here. But should Higgie be "reading his solos"? The alto saxophonist is Charlie Holmes again to my conviction. This alto sound is unmistakable. Only on clarinet he obviously was not as skilled as on his main instrument, and you hear typically reduced clarinet playing as from a saxophonist.

Luis Russell recognized himself as piano player and arranger (see Storyville 146, p.46) which certainly led to this record always being reissued under the Luis Russell flag. Yet, a big and severe doubt may be allowed as to this statement. We have so often come to know of musicians' distinctly wrong estimations of their own or other's playing, that I would not be surprised that somebody else is responsible for the piano part here. The short solo on celeste has a bit of Russell's airy piano style, although not of his usual hasty piano playing, and without any distinct reason to leave him out of consideration I shall certainly keep him in the personnel. The time would be that of the building process of the Russell band: there still was no Red Allen and no Pops Foster. And Russell might have been willing to play for another bandleader and get some additional cash. But the arrangements heard here are not in Russell's style as shown on his own later recordings, and I therefore would deny his authorship.

On banjo we have Elmer Snowden the bandleader again.

Rust lists Henry Bass Edwards on tuba throughout. Although I know Edwards as a very skilled and proficient tuba player I also know him to display very short and hart-hitting notes I do not hear on these sides. Lacking any distinct tuba features I therefore would leave him listed in the personnel. Russell claimed Bass Moore – his own tuba player at the time – as bass player.

Finally we hear some sort of drumming (snare-drum, played with brushes) behind the celesta solo. No bass drum, no cymbals. If it was not for the extremely short changing-over from banjo to drum – no beat left out - I would have named Snowden himself as the "drummer", the more so as there are two bars between the end of drumming and the entrance of the banjo again. And just remember that we also had some very few "drum strokes" on the Musical Stevedores session. So, this might have been Elmer Snowden or rather the organizer of the session, Mr. Joe Davis. I do not see any reason to name Kaiser Marshall as in earlier Rusts. Can you imagine star-drummer Kaiser Marshall playing at a session for only half a chorus and without being member of the band? Oh yes, life happens!

Some people claim to hear a tenor sax and even a second trumpet somewhere on these sides. The second trumpet I would exclude instantly, but there certainly are instances where a tenor sax might be suspected. But there are no distinct tenor parts to be heard - and no solos – and any possible tenor part – together with the alto – is played softly by the trombone (for instance part C in the first title).

Notes:

- Rust*2: Louis Metcalfe – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes – ten; Clarence Williams ? – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Edwards – bbs; unknown – dms

- Rust*3: Louis Metcalf – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes – ten; Luis Russell – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Bass Edwards – bbs; Kaiser Marshall ? – dms (2)

- Rust*4: Louis Metcalf – tpt; Henry Hicks – tbn; Charlie Holmes – clt, alt; Charlie Grimes – ten; Luis Russell – pno, cel; Elmer Snowden – bjo; Henry Edwards – bbs; with percussion effect on the second side.

- Storyville 146, p46 (Luis Russell interview by Walter C. Allen): "(I) played OKeh 8686 (Jungle Town Stompers). (Luis Russell) didn't recall the titles until hearing it. Gave identifications of: growl and open solos by Louis Metcalf, trombone by Higgy – reading solos; alto and soprano by Holmes; Johnson, Moore (or Buford?); Luis Russell arrangement, piano and celeste – never saw the latter before and fooled around with it in the studio and used it on the record."

- Storyville 152, p80, Let's Really Listen: K.B. Rau comments that the instrumentation of the Jungle Town Stompers and Jasper Davis and his Orchestra is not as given in Rust and elsewhere – what do you hear?"

- Storyville 153, p120: "Several readers agree entirely with Rust for both groups. For 'Slow As Molasses' John Snow and Brian Williams offer t/tb/cl/p-cel/bb/d with the drums replaced by banjo on the reverse. They also feel that a second trumpet may be present on 'African Jungle' and that a second sax may be present on both sides."

- Rust*6: Louis Metcalf, t; Henry Hicks, tb; Charlie Holmes, cl, as; Charlie Grimes, ts; Luis Russell, p, cel; Elmer Snowden, bj; Henry Edwards, bb; with percussion effect on the second side.

401797-C African Jungle Key of Eb

OKeh 8686

(Intro 8 bars ens - bbs)(A strain a 16 bars AA ens)(B strain a 16 bars AA tbn)(C strain a 16 bars AA ens)(D strain a 16 bars AA alt)
(Vamp 2 bars alt)(E strain b 20 bars AA' tpt)(F strain b 18 bars AA'' ens)(Coda 8 bars ens - bbs)
composer credit is: Williams; arrangement: possibly Luis Russell

401798-B Slow As Molasses Key of Eb (harmony-modified blues) OKeh 8686
(Intro 4 bars ens - pno)(A chorus 1 12 bars ens)(B chorus 2 12 bars growl-tpt)(C chorus 3 12 bars cel8, ens4)(D chorus 4 12 bars
tbn) (Vamp 2 bars tbn)(E chorus 5 12 bars clt)(F chorus 6 12 bars ens)(Coda 2 bars ens)
composer credit is: Williams; arrangement: possibly Luis Russell

SIX SCRAMBLED EGGS

Louis Metcalf – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Holmes* – clt;
Spencer Williams – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bass Moore* – bbs; *Paul Barbarin* – dms;
Jasper Davis – dir; *Ken Macomber* – arr
51187-2 Magnolia Blues
51188-2 Soft Shoe Shuffle

New York, Apr. 18, 1929

Vic unissued not on LP/CD
Vic unissued not on LP/CD

Unfortunately – and much to my grief – have these two sides been rejected and unissued by the Victor people. And although the Victor vaults have dismissed a whole lot of their own great unissued jazz music in later years, these two sides were not among them, if there perhaps is somebody somewhere who owns them secretly on a test pressing. I'd be very much interested to hear them! It certainly would be interesting where Rust received his information as to the personnel from! And we definitely have to use them with great caution!

Notes:

- Rust*2,*3,*4,*6: probably: *Louis Metcalfe* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Holmes* – alt; *Spencer Williams* – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bass Moore* – bbs; *Paul Barbarin* – dms; *Jasper Davis*, *Ken Macomber* – dir
- Rust, *Victor Master Book Vol. 2: Joe Davis* – *Ken Macomber*/ c/ tb/ s/ p/ bj/ bb/ d.

GEORGIA GIGOLOS (Jasper Davis and his Orchestra)

Ward Pinkett – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Holmes* – clt, alt;
unknown – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Ernest Bass Moore* – bbs;
Lizzie Miles – voc
148465-3 Georgia Gigolo
148468-2 It Feels So Good

New York, Apr. 23, 1929

Har 944-H, Frog DGF 38
Har 944-H, Frog DGF 38

These sides have formerly always been issued under the name of “Jasper Davis and his Orchestra” (see Rust*6 below).

I have my doubts as to the trumpet player now. He probably is the same as before, thus *Ward Pinkett*, yet not as distinct as before. He is not *Metcalf*, but I am unable to name anybody else. (The recorded sound is rather bad, unfortunately, caused by *Harmony's* un-timely use of the acoustic recording equipment !)

On trombone we certainly have *Henry Hicks* again, this time more distinct than on the *Jungle Town Stompers* session. He is a marvellous player, legitimate and id-lib, and his unfamiliarity to the public may only be explained by his sudden disappearance in 1934. He was a player of the future.

Charlie Holmes is the reed player again, on alto and on clarinet, as before. As on the *Jungle Town Stompers* sides no second alto can be discovered, nor any other saxophone. As to the listed name of *Charlie Grimes* – who, by the way, is *Clarence Grimes* with the *Musical Stevedores* - it has to be added that these last two sessions are the only sessions in *Rust* listed for *Charlie Grimes*, and that *Clarence Grimes* did not arrive in New York earlier than 1934 – as for his own documented statement.

The piano player does not solo at all, with the exception of two very short breaks – 1 bar each – in ‘It Feels So Good’ A8, which does not leave any room for suggesting this player’s identity. Three names have been suggested so far - *Cliff Jackson*, *Louis Hooper* or *J.C. Johnson* – but I do not see any reason to attribute what can be heard to any of these names, and I would therefore leave him as unknown.

We certainly hear *Elmer Snowden* with his own banjo sound.

There cannot be detected anything what might identify the tuba player. He may be *Bass Moore*, but this association might only be the consequence of the supposed presence of *Luis Russell* musicians. So, he equally might be someone else.

This *Georgia Gigolos* session is not as thoroughly arranged as the earlier ones, and thus leaves much more room for ad-lib improvisation than before. It also shows the benefit of *Lizzie Miles's* presence.

Notes:

- Rust*2: *Louis Metcalfe and another* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Holmes* – clt, alt; *Charlie Grimes?* – alt; *Cliff Jackson?* – pno, cel; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bass Moore* – bbs; *Lizzie Miles* - voc

- Rust*3: *Louis Metcalf and another* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Holmes* – clt, alt; *Charlie Grimes?* – alt; *Cliff Jackson?* or *Louis Hooper* (or possibly *J.C. Johnson*) – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Ernest Moore* – bbs; *Lizzie Miles* - voc

- Rust*4: *Louis Metcalf and another* – tpt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Holmes* – clt, alt; *Charlie Grimes* – alt; ? *J.C. Johnson* – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Ernest Moore* – bbs; *Lizzie Miles* – voc. (“*Jasper Davis*” is probably a pseudonym – for whom ?)

- *Storyville 147, p.109: Louis Metcalf, unknown, c; Henry Hicks, tb; Charlie Holmes, cl/as; Charlie Grimes, as; prob Cliff Jackson, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Bass Moore, bb; Lizzie Miles, v. John Collinson: “This session was originally entered in the files as by The Gigolos and 3 takes were made of each title, take -2 of the first and take -1 of the second being rejected with the others as second choices. ... Jasper Davis is thought to be a pseudonym for Joe Davis, who organized the session. Again, I am not convinced of Jackson's presence here and would welcome the opinion of others.”*

- *Storyville 152, p80, Let's Really Listen: “K.B. Rau comments that the instrumentation of the Jungle Town Stompers and Jasper Davis and his Orchestra is not as given in Rust and elsewhere – what do you hear?”*

- *Storyville 153, p120: “Several readers agree entirely with Rust for both groups. ... For Jasper Davis they hear t/tb/2as/p/bj/bb/v with one sax player switching to cl on the second side. Again they think there is a suspicion of a second trumpet on both sides.”*

- BGR*4: *Louis Metcalf, unknown* – cnt; *Henry Hicks* – tbn; *Charlie Holmes* – alt, clt; *Charlie Grimes* – alt; *poss Cliff Jackson* – pno; *Elmer Snowden* – bjo; *Bass Moore* - bbs

- Rust*6: *Louis Metcalf, c; Henry Hicks, tb; Charlie Holmes, cl, ss, as; Charlie Grimes, as; ? J.C. Johnson, p; Elmer Snowden, bj; Ernest Moore, bb; Lizzie Miles, v. All issues as Jasper Davis and his Orchestra. Davis was a Harlem bandleader, but the Columbia files list this session under the Georgia Gigolos name, with no indication of Davis' presence.*

148465-3 Georgia Gigolo Key of Eb Harmony 944-H
 (Intro 6 bars ens - bbs)(A1 Chorus 32 bars AABA ens)(Bridge 4 bars alt - ens)(Verse 16 bars tpt)(A2 Chorus 32 bars AABA voc)(A3 Chorus 32 bars AABA tbn16, ens16)(Coda 2 bars ens)
 composer credit is: Williams

148468-2 It Feels So Good Key of Eb – Ab - Eb (blues) Harmony 944-H
 (Intro 8 bars ens - bbs)(A1 Chorus 12 bars ens)(A2 Chorus 12 bars tpt)(Bridge 4 bars modulation Eb to Ab)(A3 Chorus 12 bars voc)
 (A4 Chorus 12 bars clt)(A5 Chorus 12 bars tbn)(A6 Chorus 12 bars voc)(Bridge 2 bars tpt modulation Ab to Eb)(A7 abridged Chorus
 10 bars tpt)(A8 abridged Chorus 10 bars ens)
 composer credit is: Williams

To sum up: The last three (or four) sessions definitely represent a coherent body of recorded music in spite of their differing band names. In Snowden's memory did he put the band(s) together for Joe Davis. The trumpet player was not Metcalf as hitherto listed, but Ward Pinkett. And – most interestingly – Metcalf is not named by Snowden in his comment on the IAJRC LP cover text. Hicks and Holmes are!

The trombonist was the unfortunately little estimated Henry Hicks, and on the reeds – alto sax and clarinet – we very probably hear the young Charlie Holmes. All three were fantastic players at this time, and Snowden showed great taste to get these men together. I have to state earnestly that in no instance on these three 1929 sessions a second reed man can be heard and distinguished – and no second trumpet player as well. And in Snowden's comment to these recordings (see IAJRC 12 at the Musical Stevedores notes above) no second reed man or trumpeter is mentioned!

Only on the first session (Musical Stevedores) do we hear Cliff Jackson on piano. On the other sessions the pianist must remain unidentified – I even would like to leave Luis Russell as such, against his own testimony. Also the tuba players do not show any sufficient individual traces to identify, and have therefore only to remain assumptions. According to Chilton did Spencer Williams work in Europe 1925 to 1928, and would therefore be no possibility, either.

The arrangements of all these recorded sides constitute a special attraction to the listener. The Musical Stevedores and the Jungle Town Stompers sides are arranged by one man whose identity is not clear. Luis Russell claimed the arrangements of the Jungle Town Stompers as his own. But they definitely do not represent his arrangement manners/style as documented in his later band recordings (three part chords in various rhythmic execution). These arrangements show other elements: four part chords encompassing the tuba, extended use of the sixth, meter shifts in ensemble played breaks (which might hint at Cliff Jackson's possible authorship!), abridging of chorus structures by inserting the start of a new structure into the last two bars of the foregoing one (as in Duke Ellington's 'Stevedore Stomp' and claimed as novel in A. Hodeir's 'Jazz.- It's Evolution and Essence' for Ellington's 'Concerto For Cootie' in 1956!), playing around with structures and forms, and the frequent interplay of band ensemble and a solo tuba. The Georgia Gigolo sides do show these elements in a less degree, but they also contain the ensemble – tuba interplay and arranged ensemble intros, codas and breaks. Yet, they have more improvisational freedom and more solo work, and the additional vocals by Miss Miles. After reading Ken Macomber's name among the participants of the Six Scrambled Eggs session in Rust's 'Victor Master Book Vol. 2' I suppose that this man was responsible for all the arrangements of these four sessions. He allegedly was a young white arranger at that time, trying to sell his arrangements to the Harlem bands personally by strolling through the Harlem clubs and ballrooms using his beautiful young wife as bait to gain attention. He claimed to have been the author of Charlie Johnson's 'The Boy In The Boat' (which is equally claimed by Benny Waters!) and is listed in Rust*6 as arranger of the Swanee River Stompers (not reissued). Yet, after Elmer Snowden's information above, trombone player Teddy Nixon – of whom we know very little – might have been the arranger on some of these titles, too.

Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools, Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds and Te Roy Williams and his Orchestra are recorded groups built from Elmer Snowden's bands, or simply are his working bands recorded under a different name.

In later years Elmer Snowden was busy leading a couple of bands, once even five simultaneously, and he was able to present one of his bands in a film short called "Smash Your Baggage" in 1932 the sound part of which has been issued on a difficult to obtain Ristic Special SAC 10" LP. But this might be a subject for Mr. Mark Cantor.

A single recording session in December 1934 features a Snowden organized trio with Clarence Grimes – here he is now according to his own statement – and Cliff Jackson under the name of Sepia Serenaders. These sides bear no problems as to the personnel and are thus not discussed here.

OTHER SOURCES

- Bruce Bastin, Never Sell A Copyright, p.26: "In May 1927 two titles were recorded for Harmony under the name of Te Roy Williams & his Orchestra. It was actually Snowden's band; Williams played trombone. Of the session Elmer recalled that *Joe Davis used to throw in so many musicians that I couldn't keep track*, thereby confirming Louis Hooper's reference to Davis's constant experimentation. In January Snowden was recording for Columbia as the Musical Stevedores. In April 1929 he played with some of the group – Louis Metcalfe, Henry Hicks, Charlie Grimes, Charlie Holmes and others – recording for Okeh as the Jungle Town Stompers, cutting two Davis-published tune written by Spencer Williams. That same month he recorded with Jasper Davis & His Orchestra for Harmony with these same musicians and others, - including pianist Cliff Jackson. They cut two more Spencer Williams-written/Joe Davis-published tunes; *Georgia Gigolo* and *It Feels So Good*. The vocalist was Lizzie Miles. No Jasper Davis has ever come to light and since, according to Elmer Snowden, this was a Joe Davis session, it was probably a Jos. Davis Orchestra; the only time his name was used (well, almost) on a record label as a bandleader. As the credit to the 1927 Te Roy Williams session was an error, or at least Snowden couldn't figure out how his name got on the label as it was his own Nest Club Band, it is also possible that Jos. M. Davis somehow became Jasper Davis. Then again, Davis was something of a trickster and might well have been amused by the whole incident."

- Bruce Bastin, Never Sell A Copyright, p.275: "Elmer Snowden wrote to Davis in September (1966 – KBR) to state that his Nest Club Band of about September 1924 with Mamie Smith was on Ajax 17058, and that *Lindburgh Hop*, by Te Roy Williams's band on Harmony 439-H, was actually written by Snowden and Ted Nixon (sic). Nixon, like Williams, was a trombonist. It is not possible to confirm the reasons for this inquiry but perhaps some researcher was trying to determine personnel of these early sides; Canadian Jim Kidd was involved in researching the Ajax catalogue and recorded Louis Hooper, Snowden's pianist colleague from those days, in May 1967. Len Kunstadt of *Record Research* magazine was always checking on early personnel, partly for his history of jazz in New York, and he did interview Joe Davis. Davis had a photograph Elmer Snowden presented to him after Snowden's 'rediscovery', autographed *To My First Boss Joe Davis*, as well as a copy of a letter from John Hammond of Columbia Records, dated 2 December 1962, written to one Jack Smith of Scranton, Pennsylvania, which Snowden has presumably given him. In it Hammond states that Snowden: *was the greatest banjo player I ever heard and there are, fortunately, a few recordings to prove it. Back in 1930 he made some records on the Bluebird label, with a group called the "Sepia Serenaders", which are absolutely unique as far as the art of the banjo is concerned.* Hammond went on to say that Snowden's

band of 1931 – 1932 at Small's Paradise *actually outswung Henderson's*, so that it was *a tragedy that the band never recorded*. Hammond ends with *I would do anything I can do to promote him today*, which is probably why Jack Smith had written him.”
- there are articles on Elmer Snowden in Storyville 16 to 18 and in Storyville 1989/99.

My sincerest thanks to Michael Rader again for persistent advice and help!