

A CASE OF PLEASANT SURPRISES

Rosa Henderson's 1926 recordings and their trumpeters

by K.-B. Rau

For the second half of 2015 I largely tried to contribute to Bob Hitchens great investigation on various aspects of the Choo Choo Jazzers' recordings. It certainly is a very large piece of work, encompassing the tunes recorded on about 180 recording sessions.

Among the recording sessions were very many Ajax sessions, but also other occasions where blues/vaudeville singers had been recorded between 1923 and 1929. And – as a matter of fact – all the many trio sides Bob Fuller recorded together with Louis Hooper and Elmer Snowden. These trio sides have been scarcely reissued on LP or CD in the last fifty years, and this might be understood due to the not so jazzy performances as compared to the swinging affairs of “Southern” and “Western” style musicians on other recordings. Yet, when you get acquainted to this kind of music you will certainly acknowledge its many attractive, interesting and even beautiful details and issues. Even in the times of vanishing CD reissues this might still be a rewarding task for any producer in the classic jazz field.

It really was hard and painstaking work to listen to all these 180 sessions and also check and mostly rethink their personnel. Very often my own findings and opinions did not meet with those of other researchers and listeners associated with this investigation. And even more often it appeared impossible to find and name one or any of the musicians performing on the recordings.

One group of recordings where the trumpet players' identities seemed not to be recognized sufficiently – or at all - by Rust and his colleagues or by any of the contributors to this examination stuck in my memory. These are Rosa Henderson's recording sessions of March 1926 up to January 1927. After repeated and intense listening and discussions with my listening group I feel ready to suggest quite different names for the horn men than those listed in Rust/BGR or those suggested by others, or even for the “unknowns”.

ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	Mar. 02, 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
Rex Stewart – cnt; Louis Hooper – pno			
141740-1	Let's Talk About My Sweetie	Col 14130-D,	Document DOCD-5403
141741-2	Mama Is Waitin' For You	Col 14130-D,	Document DOCD-5403

If we only had records like this one! Any investigation would be simply unnecessary! Here we have Rex Stewart and Louis Hooper named in the recording files and nobody has to wonder. So this record is a perfect model to compare and judge others. Yet, Rex Stewart is not as sharp-cut and brilliant as on other sessions before this date. He is a bit exaggerated here. The ubiquitous booze might have been a trigger to it. But what a development he had made date from his first recordings on! At the date of this session he was just about to join the Fletcher Henderson band as successor to Louis Armstrong. And it is easy to see that he was an able and fitting substitute. If only his nerves would have endured this challenge! Also, Hooper is a much better pianist than at the beginning of his recording career.

Notes:

- *Delaunay: Fletcher Henderson (p)*
- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: Rex Stewart, c; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *Record Research #77-8: not listed*
- *Mahoney, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Files list: Acc Rex Stewart, cnt, Louis Hooper, p.*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Rex Stewart, c; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Rex Stewart, c; Louis Hooper, p.*

ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	Mar. 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
Thomas Fats Waller – pno			
106735	You Get Mad	PA 7501,	Document DOCD-5403
106736	What's The Matter Now?	PA 7501,	Document DOCD-5403

Beautiful and great Fats Waller undisputedly on piano. Without the vocal parts the whole affair would be just more Waller piano solos as those on Victor. It seems as if the singer accompanies Fats Waller here.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown (pno).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Fats Waller –p.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Fats Waller –p.*

ROSA HENDERSON Four Musical Blackbirds		New York,	Mar. 31, 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
Thomas Morris – cnt; Bob Fuller – clt;			
Louis Hooper – pno; unknown – bbs			
E-2713/14/15	Do It, Mr. So-So	Voc 1011 uniss.	Document DOCD-5654
E-2716/17/18	Fulton Street Blues	Voc 1011 uniss.	Document DOCD-5654

As listed in Rust from the 3rd edition on, this may be Thomas Morris, but did he really have this fast vibrato? In an investigation of our listening group some years ago we agreed on Morris on trumpet, but were not convinced.

Clarinet playing is exactly what we have got to know from Fuller at this time. In connection with Fuller – and stylistically – the pianist very probably is Louis Hooper. The tuba player is impossible to identify. BGR do not say anything on the personnel. Luckily we have this recording on Document CD, although unissued in 78.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown (cor); unknown (clt); unknown (p); unknown (tu)*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown, c; unknown, cl; unknown, p; unknown, bb*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Tom Morris, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p; unknown bb.*

ROSA HENDERSON	Three Hot Eskimos	New York,	May 14, 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
<i>Edwin Swayze</i> – tpt; <i>Bob Fuller</i> – clt;			
Cliff Jackson – pno			
E-3050	Here Comes My Baby	Voc 1021,	Document DOCD-5403
E-3052	Chicago Policeman Blues	Voc 1921,	Document DOCD-5404

A couple of relevant Harlem trumpet players of the time have been named by the discos as you might see below. But in listening I recognized that not one of the listed players was present here. First I suggested Louis Metcalf, following Rust. After comparing with earlier Metcalf sides I missed his dropping the tone at the end, and I opted for Rex Stewart. But further listening and Joerg Kuhfuss' objections to the previously mentioned players made me search for other trumpet players who might have recorded for Vocalion in June 1926. As a pleasant surprise I found Edwin Swayze (sic) who was touring in the East with the show Bamville Dandies at this time. Comparison revealed strong similarities stylistically, and I am convinced now that the trumpet player here is Edwin "King" Swayze. (Compare the Sammy Lewis OK 8285 and Sammy Lewis and his Bamville Syncopators Vocalions and The Levee Serenaders !) Swayze himself is remembered by colleagues as "a terrific trumpeter whose idol was King Oliver – not Louis as most of us were trying to sound like" (Arcadia 2008 cover text). For Swayze's correct name see Storyville 78, p. 230.

Unfortunately, this result did not bear any hints as to the personality of the clarinet player with his very strong tone and rather hasty multi-toned phrasing. The reed players of the Bamville Syncopators as recognizable are out of question here. The way of playing made me think of a Caribbean musician as there were many of them living and playing in New York in these years, and I suggested Carmello Jari as a possibility. Also the rhythmically erratic Arville Harris came to my mind. But to my next pleasant surprise it dawned on me that I heard the not-so-well esteemed Bob Fuller, who obviously had advanced and completed a remarkable development at this date. Comparison with the Three Jolly Miners sides verified my assumption. (But then, Fuller's presence with the New Orleans Blue Five has to be sincerely doubted.) Cliff Jackson on piano with his steam-roller stride is absolutely certain!

Notes:

- *Delaunay: possibly: Joe Smith (c), Buster Bailey (cl), Fletcher Henderson (p)*
- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown (cor); Jimmy O'Bryant (clt); unknown (pno).*
- *RR 77-8: not listed.*
- *BGR*2,*3: Tom Morris or Bubber Miley cnt; Bob Fuller, clt; prob Louis Hooper or poss Cliff Jackson, pno.*
- *BGR*4: unknown, c; Bob Fuller, cl; prob Louis Hooper or poss Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Louis Metcalf, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson or Edgar Dowell, p.*

ROSA HENDERSON	the Four Black Diamonds	New York,	Jun. 05, 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
<i>Edwin Swayze</i> – tpt; <i>Oscar Hammond</i> – tbn; <i>Bob Fuller</i> – clt;			
Cliff Jackson – pno			
E-3189 / 90	Hock Shop Blues	Voc unissued	not on LP/CD
E-3191	I'm Savin' It All For You	Voc unissued	not on LP/CD
E-3194	Daddy, Come Back	Voc 1025,	Document DOCD-5404
E-3196	I've Got Somebody Now	Voc 1025,	Document DOCD-5404

Aurally, as with the last session above, I recognize Swayze again, as well as Bob Fuller on clarinet.

The rather unprofessional playing of the trombonist accords well with what can be heard from Oscar Hammond, trombonist of the Sammy Lewis Bamville Syncopators. And I think that he is the player. (The Bamville Syncopators' personnel of the time you might find in Storyville magazines No. 78, p.229 and No. 162, p. 240, or in Franz Hoffmann's compilations of "Jazz Advertised".)

And again very beautiful, strong and distinct Cliff Jackson.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown personnel*
- *RR 77-9: not listed.*
- *Rust*3,*4: Louis Metcalf, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, Louis Hooper or Edgar Dowell, p.*
- *BGR*2,*3: Louis Metcalf, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Bob Fuller, clt; prob Louis Hooper or poss Cliff Jackson or Edgar Dowell, p.*
- *BGR*4: unknown, c; unknown, cl; unknown, p.*
- *Rust*6: Louis Metcalf, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Cliff Jackson, p. Louis Hooper may be the pianist.*

ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	Jul. 02, 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
<i>Edwin Swayze</i> – tpt; <i>Bob Fuller</i> – clt ;			
Cliff Jackson – pno			
E-3361	Rough House Blues (A Reckless Woman's Lament)	Voc 1038	not on LP/CD
E-3363	Rough House Blues (A Reckless Woman's Lament)	Voc 1038,	Document DOCD-5404
E-3366	She Belongs To Me (He Belongs To Me)	Voc 1038,	Document DOCD-5404
E-3367	Hock Shop Blues	Voc unissued	not on LP/CD

This is the same personnel as on the last two sessions! Listen to Swayze's solo in "She Belongs To Me" and you will immediately hear that his style is derived from King Oliver. Might this be the reason for the fact that he is named Edwin "King" Swayze in the papers of the time? Even Fuller plays remarkably, yet not in the Western way we love to hear from Dodds or Noone. And it is distinctly Cliff Jackson, "The Terror", with his characteristic shifting the meter.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown (cor); Jimmy O'Bryant (clt); unknown (pno).*
- *RR 77-8: not listed.*
- *BGR*2,*3: unknown, cnt(1,2,3); unknown,clt; unknown, pno.*
- *BGR*4: unknown, c; unknown,cl; unknown, p.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown, c; unknown cl; unknown p.*

ROSA HENDERSON	New York,	Jul. 15, 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;		
Cliff Jackson – pno		
142450-3 He´s My Man	Col 14152-D,	Document DOCD-5404
142451-2 In That Apartment Upstairs	Col 14152-D,	Document DOCD-5404

How easy! Cliff Jackson is listed on the record-label. So, there is no need to compare and find out. And so beautiful.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *RR 77-8: not listed.*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Cliff Jackson, p.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Cliff Jackson, p.*

ROSA HENDERSON	New York,	Aug. 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;		
Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; <i>Bob Fuller</i> – clt;		
<i>Louis Hooper</i> (or <i>Mike Jackson</i> ?) – pno		
6781-4 Papa, If You Can´t Do Better	Ban 1882,	Timeless CBC 1-030
6781-5 Papa, If You Can´t Do Better	Ban 1882,	Timeless CBC 1-030
6852-2 I´m Saving It All For You	Ban 1882,	Timeless CBC 1-030

We hear the mysterious “Big Charlie” Thomas here. A very distinct and individual trumpet – or possibly cornet - player who suddenly appeared in Harlem, recorded a couple of very interesting and thrilling sides in the short run of a little over a year, and then disappeared again into oblivion. The story of this player can be read in the CD booklet to the above Timeless CD. His personal existence is questioned by some people, but the reality of this player, documented in the coherence of his recordings, cannot be denied. These two takes of the first title show very intensely the features of this player´s individual style: a style surprisingly close to Louis Armstrong´s of the time, feather-light phrasing with large interval jumps, a slim but beautiful tone and a strong and wide vibrato with the end altitude of the vibrato amplitude often rising upwards uncontrolled, and often using unfamiliar chord tones in his phrases. This is NOT Charlie Gaines! The clarinetist obviously is the same musician as on the Vocalion sessions before. But I have to question Louis Hooper´s presence. I hear a more stride oriented pianist with a rather active right hand and would opt for possibly Mike Jackson.

Notes:

- *RR 77-8: not listed.*
- *Rust*3,*4: Louis Metcalf –c; Bob Fuller –cl; Louis Hooper –p.*
- *BGR*2,*3: poss Louis Metcalf, cnt; poss Bob Fuller, clt; Louis Hooper, pno.*
- *BGR*4: poss Louis Metcalf, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
- *Rust*6: Charlie Thomas, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p(1,2); Cliff Jackson, p (3).*

ROSA HENDERSON	New York,	Dec. 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;		
<i>Big Charlie Thomas</i> – tpt; <i>Cliff Jackson</i> (or <i>Porter Grainger</i> ?) – pno		
107303 Git Goin´	PA 7519,	Document DOCD-5404
107304 Someday You´ll Come Back To Me	PA 7519,	Document DOCD-5404

All editions of Rust have Demas Dean on trumpet for this session, and I did believe him until a couple of weeks ago! Yet, this trumpet player certainly is not Demas Dean – after several listening sessions of the Savoy Bearcats recordings! I certainly would like to know who started – and published – this assumption. Dean´s playing is rooted in early Harlem style in performing almost exclusively 6/8 rhythms in his phrases – listen to the Savoy Bearcats, where Dean is responsible for all hot trumpet solos, Gilbert Paris being the straight first trumpet man. What we hear on this recording is a beautiful trumpet accompaniment in early Armstrong style, and I dare to assign what we hear to the mysterious “Big Charlie” Thomas – perhaps on a bad day – as heard on the session of August 1926 above. Style, rhythm, vibrato and phrasing are all his own, and I do not wonder why I was tempted to think of June Clark when working on my June Clark investigation some years ago. Unfortunately, the sound quality of the Document CD is very bad because of a rather worn source record. But if you turn up your amplifier you can easily hear Big Charlie Thomas´ - or whatever his name was – characteristic playing. And this is my third pleasant surprise!

The piano player´s style is strong, yet not distinct, and I would rather opt for Cliff Jackson as on the Vocalion sides above than for Porter Grainger.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown accompaniment.*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Demas Dean – cnt; Porter Grainger – pno*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Demas Dean – c; Porter Grainger – p*

ROSA HENDERSON	New York,	c. Jan. 15, 1927
Rosa Henderson – voc;		
<i>Edwin Swayze</i> – tpt; unknown – pno		
107315 Slow Up, Papa	PA 7522,	Document DOCD-5404
107316 Hock Shop Blues	PA 7522,	Document DOCD-5404

This trumpet player here has all characteristics of Edwin Swayze as on the Vocalions above. If you listen you hear a style closely related to Joe King Oliver's playing.

The pianist probably is not Cliff Jackson as listed by Rust and heard on above sessions. Therefore I would rather list him as unknown.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown accompaniment.*

- *BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown cnt; unknown pno.*

- *Rust*3,*4,*6: ? Cliff Jackson, p.*

So, these above recordings and their personnel certainly come as surprising additions to the not so comprehensive discographies of the participating musicians, and I am glad to have filled up another white region of the discographies.

According to the consecutive matrix numbers of the below listed two Pathe Actuelle sessions the accompanying musicians are certainly identical with the above listed last Rosa Henderson session and should therefore be mentioned. Although the matrix numbers are consecutive, the recording date of the Henderson session as given by Rust*6 is a bit out of probable sequence and has thus been adjusted.

LAURA SMITH	The Wild Cats	New York,	c. Jan. 15, 1927
Laura Smith – voc;			
<i>Edwin Swayze – tpt; Bob Fuller – clt;</i>			
unknown – pno			
107313	I'm Goin' To Have Seven Years' Bad Luck	PA 7520,	Document DOCD-5429
107314	When A 'Gator Hollers (Folks Say Sign O' Rain)	PA 7520,	Document DOCD-5429

This again seems to be the same personnel as on Rosa Henderson's Vocalion session of July 02, 1926, although the pianist does not play Cliff Jackson's typical licks (broken rhythm or shifting of meter) and may therefore possibly be somebody else, yet a strong stride piano player – not Mike Jackson who plays a very different right hand.

Notes:

- *BGR*2: poss Thomas Morris, cnt; poss Bob Fuller, clt; poss Mike Jackson, pno.*

- *BGR*3,*4: prob Thomas Morris, cnt; prob Bob Fuller, clt; prob Mike Jackson, pno.*

- *Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown, c; unknown cl; unknown p.*

SADIE GREEN		New York,	c. Jan. 15, 1927
Sadie Green – voc;			
<i>Edwin Swayze – tpt; unknown – pno</i>			
107317	Alley Man (Haul My Ashes)	PA 7524,	Document DOCD-5511
107318	Don't Wear Your Welcom Out	PA 7524,	Document DOCD-5511

Here again we hear the trumpeter assumed to be Edwin Swayze with his sharp yet earthy trumpet playing derived from King Oliver. Very beautiful!

Notes:

- *BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown, cnt; unknown pno*

- *Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown, c; unknown p.*

My sincerest thanks to Jörg Kuhfuss, Michael Rader and Dave Brown again for persistent advice and help – and contradiction!