

A Case of UNEXPECTED PLEASURE

The sudden appearance of a hitherto unknown alternate take of the COTTON CLUB ORCHESTRA

by K.-B. Rau

2012 brought one of the happiest moments of my now sixty years of collecting classic jazz recordings: the issue of an until then unknown test pressing of Charlie Johnson's 'Mo' Lasses' on the world-wide-web, an incident believed impossible more than 80 years after its recording, and after 60 years of intense efforts of many enthusiastic people world-wide to reissue almost everything from the classic years of jazz on LP and CD.

Since then, nothing actually surprising has happened in this field, only, that the fantastic American Mosaic label have complemented their exemplary CD boxes on Ellington, Lunceford, Hampton, Armstrong, Chu Berry, and others with many hitherto unissued takes of otherwise well-known recordings. But these are recordings from the 1930/40s, well stored in the vaults of the big record companies, but accessible to interested producers like those of the Mosaic label.

We are not in the enviable situation of still existing vaults of the important, or even less of the unimportant, companies for the 1920s. Hence, the appearance of an unknown alternate take of an otherwise well-known title of the classic jazz repertoire has become increasingly extraordinary, although I am aware that there must be some others still hidden in the hands of collectors. And I still hope to live to see them reissued. So, owners of these treasures, please, be generous and hurry up, before it is too late!

But this year 2020 brought us such an unexpected pleasure. Ate van Delden's 'Ate's Discographical Ramblings' in 'Vintage Jazz Mart' Vol. 188 noted the discovery of take -3 of the 'Cotton Club Orchestra' title 'Riverboat Shuffle' in his own collection (see below, and my article on R.Q. Dickerson in Names&Numbers 87)! And very opportunely, VJM 188 also features a most interesting article on this tune and its recordings by Albert Haim and Robert Spoo. This article describes the origin and first recording of 'Riverboat Shuffle' by the 'Wolverine Orchestra' and their followers. It also tackles the tune's evolution from Hoagy Carmichael's piano solo 'Free Wheeling' into the later jazz classic and its copyright issues. Reading is highly recommended!

'Riverboat Shuffle' by the Cotton Club Orchestra certainly is not an 'unknown' in our ears, as the Cotton Club Orchestra's recorded output has been well known for many years now (I still can only praise John A. Holley's – together with Chris Hillman's - fantastic Collectors Items LP 'Harry Cooper, RQ Dickerson & The Cotton Club Orchestra' of c. 1980). The latest reissue of these titles in their entirety was on the magnificent Frog label (see below). But here now, a hitherto unknown alternate take appears! And – quite by chance and through the good offices of Han Enderman - I am one of the utmost lucky guys to get to hear it.

The music heard is almost entirely scored and played straight from the arrangement throughout, including a single 16-bar solo by trombonist DePriest Wheeler which seems to be played ad-lib but fixed by repeated performance. The arrangement, obviously, is an original by one of the band-members. It is composed of a 12-bar introduction, followed by a theme-chorus by the saxes with stiff insertions by the trumpets, then the verse with its famous trills/shakes played by the trumpets, and a sort-of chase chorus between first trumpet and alternating other soloists. Thereafter, the trombonist, De Priest Wheeler, takes a half-chorus solo spot in his robust Mid-Western style – rather similar in both takes – and a subsequent final chorus is dominated by the swinging trumpets. (All other versions of 'Riverboat Shuffle' cut in the 1920s have an identical structure of "verse – chorus – chorus - chorus", different from the above version.)

The distinct differences recognisable are:

- in bar 9 of the introduction the unknown train-whistle operator forgets to trigger his whistle in take -2, yet whistling in bar 11; while he performs perfectly exact whistle-blows in bars 9 and 11 of take -3;
- in bars 27/28 of the second chorus the beautiful and singable legato melody is played reliably by the entire saxophone section in the common take -2; yet, the first saxophone part missed out completely in take -3. Instead, we only hear the second alto or c-melody saxophone part - above the tenor - but probably not playing his line correctly, as his last note 'a' is actually the first player's note, while he should play a 'f#'.
- in the middle-break of the last chorus (bars 15/16), which is played by the banjo in take -2 and by the piano in take -3. I wonder what may have led the musicians to switch the banjoist's duties to the pianist, whose break in take -3 is much less convincing than the banjo break in take -2.

COTTON CLUB ORCHESTRA

Andy Preer – vln, ldr;

Harry Cooper, R.Q. Dickerson – tpt; De Priest Wheeler – tbn;

Eli Logan – alt; Dave Jones – cms; Andrew Brown – ten, clt;

Earres Prince – pno; Charlie Stamps – bjo; Jimmy Smith – bbs; LeRoy Maxey – dms;

unknown – voc interjection (1); unknown – train-whistle (2,3)

140475-5 Original Two-Time Man

140476-2 Riverboat Shuffle

140476-3 Riverboat Shuffle

New York,

Apr. 27, 1925

Col 374-D,

Frog DGF 32

Col 374-D,

Frog DGF 32

Col 374-D,

not on LP/CD, but heard

This – as is commonly known – was the band that later bore the name "Missourians" and which later still was taken over by Cab Calloway to become his own world-wide known Orchestra. This band played the New York Cotton Club after Piron's band went back to New Orleans and before Duke Ellington became resident band, some other bands also being engaged in between, notwithstanding.

On this second issued recording session of the Cotton Club Orchestra the personnel very probably is as listed above. Cooper played first trumpet, Dickerson second, taking the solos. Logan was still playing alto (he died in June 1925, not July 1924 as noted in Rust*6), Dave Jones of New Orleans obviously playing his preferred c-melody-sax, and Andrew Brown was on tenor, staying with the band – under Cab Calloway's name - until 1945.

The rhythm section is as given above.

As can be recognized, Dickerson was the principal soloist and "get-off man" and thus in the second trumpet chair, and Harry Cooper played first trumpet throughout the session. Andy Preer is distinctly recognizable as violinist leading the band.

Notes:

- Jazz Directory Vol. 2: R.Q. Dickerson, Harry Cooper (tpt); DePriest Wheeler (tbn); Dave Jones, Eli Logan (alt); Andrew Brown (ten); E. Prince (p); Charley Stamps (bj); Jimmy Smith (bs); LeRoy Maxey (d).
 - Rust*2: R.Q. Dickerson, Louis Metcalfe (tpts); DePriest Wheeler (tbn); Dave Jones, Eli Logan (alti); Andrew Brown (ten); Eddie Prince (pno); Charly Stamps (bjo); Jimmy Smith (bbs); LeRoy Maxey (dms); Andy Preer (ldr and vln when used).
 - Rust*3: R.Q. Dickerson, Henry Cooper -t; DePriest Wheeler -tb; Dave Jones, Eli Logan -as; Andrew Brown -cl -ts; Earres Prince -p; - Rust*4: Andy Preer -vn when used,- dir; R.Q. Dickerson, Harry Cooper -t; DePriest Wheeler -tb; Dave Jones, Eli Logan -as; Andrew Brown -cl -ts; Earres Prince -p; Charley Stamps -bj; Jimmy Smith -bb; LeRoy Maxey -d.
 - Rust*6: Andy Preer -vn when used,-dir; R.Q. Dickerson, Harry Cooper, t; DePriest Wheeler, tb; Dave Jones, ? Walter Thomas, as, bar; Andrew Brown, cl, ts; Earres Prince, p; Charley Stamps, bj; Jimmy Smith, bb; LeRoy Maxey, d.
 - Collectors Items 006 (LP): R.Q. Dickerson, Harry Cooper (c); DePriest Wheeler (tb); Eli Logan (as); Dave Jones (cms); Andrew Brown (cl, ts); Earres Prince (p); Charlie Stamps (bj); Jimmy Smith (bb); LeRoy Maxey (d); Andy Preer (vn, ldr).
 - VJM 188, Ate's Discographical Ramblings: "Unknown take by 'The Cotton Club Orchestra' (Columbia 1925): While most copies of Columbia 374-D have 140556-2 of 'Riverboat Shuffle', some copies have take -3. The Columbia file card reveals that indeed take -2 was 1st choice and take -3 was 2nd, take -1 being rejected. Accepting 2 takes for issue was common, but issuing a 2nd take was rare for Columbia. Incidentally these were acoustic recordings while some earlier masters already were electric."

Tune structures:

140475-5 Original Two-Time Man Key of Eb Columbia
 (Intro 4 bars EP pno – voc – ens)(A1 Chorus 32 bars AABA ens 16 – DJ cms 8 – ens 8)(Verse 16 bars ens)(A2 Chorus 32 bars DJ cms 16 – bbs/ tpts/ bbs/tbn 8 – DPW tbn 8)(A3 Chorus 32 bars saxes 8 – RQD tpt 8 – pno 8 – saxes 8)(A4 Chorus 32 bars ens)

140476 Riverboat Shuffle Key of F Columbia
 (Intro 12 bars ens*)(Chorus 1 32 bars ABAC ens)(Verse 16 bars AABA tpts 8 – saxes 4 – tpts 4)(Chorus 2 32 bars ABAC HC tpt 2 – saxes 4 – HC tpt 2 – tbn 2 – ens 4 – HC tpt 2 – RQD tpt 2 middle-break – HC tpt 2 – saxes 2 – HC tpt 2 – saxes 2 – HC tpt 2 – saxes 2** – ens 4)(Tag 2 bars ens)(Half-Chorus 3 16 bars AB DPW tbn)(Chorus 4 ABAC 32 bars tpts 8 – ens 6 – bjo/pno 2 middle-break*** – ens 14 – saxes 2)(Tag 2 bars tpts 2)

Discernible differences of takes:

140476-2: *Intro: 1 train-whistle in bar 11 / **Chorus 2 bars 27/28 lead-alto plays melody correct (3 quarter-notes a-bb-c, 2 half-notes bb-a) / ***Chorus 4 middle-break is played by the banjo
 140476-3: *Intro: 2 train-whistles in bars 9 and 11 / **Chorus 2 bars 27/28 lead-alto misses out on his melody-part and third alto is heard playing second saxophone part (3 quarter-notes f-g-f, 1 half-note a) / ***Chorus 4 middle-break is played by the piano

Where, now, is the CD publisher to reissue it?

My sincerest thanks go to Ate van Delden, Han Enderman and - again - to Michael Rader, crucial part of our listening team, for persistent advice and help!