

CLARENCE WILLIAMS AND HIS BLUE MOANERS

When working on our group's 'Personnelography' of all the many Clarence Williams band recordings 1925 – 1947 issued in Names & Numbers 58 – 61, Michael Rader and I had a long discussion on the musicians of the CLARENCE WILLIAMS AND HIS BLUE MOANERS (session No. 091, N&N 60) unissued recording session on the Edison label.

As 'Personnelography' may indicate to the interested reader, we were not investigating recordings and their labels (the hardware), but, as most of our group are not collectors of 78s, we were merely interested in the personnels and the sounds (the software), as these seem to have been researched only very little in the 30 years after Tom Lord's magnificent book "CLARENCE WILLIAMS" of 1976.

We dedicated many, many hours of painstaking listening and comparing to this task, and we certainly identified a great number of unfitting suggestions in Lord's book and in the various editions of RUST. And certainly did we find some unexpected solutions to our problems. The most interesting matter having been to attribute much hitherto unknown or wrongly attributed clarinet playing to the mysterious clarinetist Carmelo Jari, who at first only was a name to us. This led to a discovery of an important musician of the Harlem era (Jari was considered "the fastest clarinet player in Harlem") and resulted in a large article on this musician in the FROG YEARBOOK Volume 2.

But there certainly remain a whole lot of other unsolved problems in our investigations. Just the other day one of these seems to have found a solution: the Clarence Williams and his Blue Moaners recording on Edison.

Two titles were recorded on August 7, 1929 by Edison under the above mentioned band name, but never issued: 19338 "Moanin' Low" and 19339 "Come On Home".

As usual with Edison, three takes of each title seem to have been recorded, unissued on 78, but some of them issued later on LP and CD.

The first issue was a double-LP "When Edison Recorded Sound" on EDISON Record ZM-473201/202/203/204 (each side being continually numbered). This issue also contained recordings of Henderson's "Dixie Moon" matrix 9481-A, Henderson's "My Papa Don't Two Time No Time" matrix 9482-A and Eva Taylor's "You Don't Understand" matrix N-1174-A and "I'm Not Worrying" matrix N-1176-B. Also issued were recordings by a bunch of operatic singers and some curiosities, such as Edison talking as well as Theodore Roosevelt, a song in Oneida Iroquois dialect and popcorn advertisements.

This double-Lp was obviously issued after Tom Lord's book, as Lord only mentions having heard three tests of the Williams sides without listing the LP. In his comment he writes: "Apparently Eva recalled that the Fess Williams band accompanied her on this date." This then led to the hitherto unaltered and always copied personnel as follows:

CLARENCE WILLIAMS AND HIS BLUE MOANERS New York, Aug. 07, 1929
George Temple or Kenneth Roane – tpt; David "Jelly" James – tbn; Felix Gregory or Perry Smith – clt, alt;
Clarence Williams or Hank Duncan – pno; Olly Blackwell or Andy Pendleton – bjo; Ralph Bedell – dms, wbd; Eva Taylor – voc

A later LP issue is listed in RUST*6 as 'Recorded Publications 77, which I personally do not know. In CD times the French Chronological Classics (*sic*) CD series did not contain these two titles.

In 1997 Diamond Cut Productions issued a beautiful CD with most of Eva Taylor's Edison recordings together with a couple of alternate takes. This CD also contained the Blue Moaners titles and two double takes. Once again the above personnel was repeated without any questioning.

In the course of our Clarence Williams research we found out that this personnel was way off the mark. And once again we found out that Eva Taylor's reminiscences re personnels were to be treated with the utmost caution.

First of all it became apparent that we heard the corner-stones of many Clarence Williams recordings here: Ed Allen unmistakably on cornet and Cyrus St. Clair on his majestic tuba. Then Clarence himself can be heard – also unmistakably – on piano and Eva Taylor singing. There certainly is no banjo. The drummer/washboard player was cautiously identified as poss. Floyd Casey. Cautiously, because the washboard playing was different from his usual style. But as Casey was the Williams man on hand for this device, it seemed appropriate to name him.

The trombonist's style rang a bell in your writer's head, and after some short listening and comparing it became quite certain, that he was the man who accompanied Bessie Smith on her session of March 27, 1930, which produced "Keep It To Yourself" and "New Orleans Hop Scop Blues", namely Charlie Green.

The big problem arose for the clarinet/alto player's identity. In our discussion two years ago at Michael's home, I had tried to find out a clarinet player in New York at this time, playing just like Jimmy Noone, very melodically and with great beauty. We were certain that Noone himself had to be disregarded for a recording session in New York at that time. Disregarding any colour limits I proposed Jimmy Dorsey, but this I did only half seriously. Our listening companions around the world thought this suggestion to be ridiculous, as I believe, and for a long period musicians like Fess Williams, Felix Gregory and others were discussed – and preferred by the group.

The other day I just happened to listen to Eva Taylor's vocals on the Charleston Chasers recording of June 28, 1929, which I had not done for at least 30 years. I should have done so earlier. My fault! What I heard first – and what wiped my ears out – was the drummer: Dave Tough, without any doubt the same man as on the Blue Moaners! Can you imagine Dave Tough with Clarence Williams? I couldn't! Being a drummer in 20s style myself, I feel positively sure about Tough. And there certainly is the explanation of the queer washboard playing: they gave one of those tin devices to poor old Dave, and he just did not know how to play it properly. He plays snare-drum with sticks (press-rolls) first, then washboard on "Moanin' Low", and throughout brushes on "Come On Home", undeniably Dave Tough!

This then led to comparing the clarinet playing on the Charleston Chasers recording with that of the Blue Moaners and to my firm belief, that we consequently have Jimmy Dorsey on clarinet/alto on both sessions, together with Dave Tough. And on both sessions Dorsey demonstrates his great affinity to the Creole clarinet style, mainly in the Noone mould, with great musicality and beauty. What a great musician!

So I am positively certain, that we now have another discographical problem solved with the following personnel (please, correct in your RUSTs, LORDs and in N&N 60):

CLARENCE WILLIAMS AND HIS BLUE MOANERS

New York,

Aug. 07, 1929

Ed Allen – cnt; *Charlie Green* – tbn; *Jimmy Dorsey* – clt, alt;
Clarence Williams – pno; Cyrus St. Clair – bbs; *Dave Tough* – dms, wbd;
Eva Taylor – voc

19338-A-1-1 Moanin' Low
N-1063-A Moanin' Low

Ed unissued on 78, *Ed ZM-473202 (LP)*
Ed unissued on 78, *Diamond Cut Edison*
Laterals 4 (CD)

N-1063-C Moanin' Low

Ed unissued on 78, *Diamond Cut Edison*
Laterals 4 (CD)

N-1064-B / 19339-A-1-1 Come On Home

Ed unissued on 78, *Ed ZM-473202 (LP)*,
Diamond Cut Edison
Laterals 4 (CD)

N-1064-C Come On Home

Ed unissued on 78, *Diamond Cut Edison*
Laterals 4 (CD)

Note: matrix numbers are as on the LP or CD covers!

Aurally three distinctively different takes of “Moanin' Low” and two of “Come On Home” are issued as shown above. Rust*6 mentions an additional issue of the two titles on ‘Recorded Publications 77 (LP)’ but these could not be heard and thus remain unlisted here.

We certainly have a recording session of great beauty here, and an additional example of racially mixed recording bands, which definitely were nothing but the rule in the late 20s. My question remains as to why these two sides were unissued at the time. Because of Edison's assumed problem with a racially mixed group?

My thanks to Michael Rader, David Brown and our listening group.

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Dear Clarence Williams lover,

it was a real pleasure to hear that you are willing to cooperate and to help shed some further light on a matter, which has been puzzling me for quite some years. It certainly requires close and intense listening and the ability to discriminate and to recognize musical phenomena and material and to bring it into a new order.

What Michael and I intend to do - and for a short time now have already been doing - is to listen and relisten to all the listed Clarence Williams band sessions 1925 to 1933 (113!) and to find out if Tom Lord's and Brian Rust's personal data are correct or need to be corrected, and if so, try to identify the people who made the music in these particular items. Tom

Lord's great book on Clarence Williams is from 1976, thus about 35 years of age, and much has been issued on the subject of Clarence Williams over the following years including interviews with musicians who claimed to have recorded with Williams, but never positively linked with specific sessions. Rust 6th edition seems to have mostly followed what Lord found out and wrote, and there - it seems - the matter rests. At least I do not know of any attempts to bring this subject further on.

When I started to deal with some mysterious subjects of the Harlem era some years ago, I found out a lot about trumpet player June Clark and his buddy Jimmy Harrison, resulting in a little booklet on Clark, which is about to be published by Names&Numbers of the Netherlands in 2010. This led to the plan to publish a booklet on Jimmy Harrison together with trombone player Ulrich "Ulla" Bela of Hamburg, Germany, which currently is in the process of preparation. And, as Clark also was a member of some Clarence Williams recording groups in 1925, it also led me to tackle the C. Williams personnels, because there was so much obviously wrong in Lord and Rust.

As I have become a member of the RedHotJazz mailing list through the good offices of Michael Rader some few weeks ago - I myself being a rather unexperienced and timid user of the PC - I have also found a great friend and fellow collector and listener and jazz-buff in Michael. Even more so, we even discovered, that we hail from the same city and even might have some ancestors in common, only, that we have not yet been able to find the "missing-link".

In our weekly conversations by phone we had the idea of including some experienced and discriminating listeners in our proceedings to put the whole investigation onto a broader basis.

This list here now contains all Clarence Williams band recordings - and band accompaniments to singers - from November 1925 (the post-Armstrong period) until May 1933 just before the introduction of the "Swing-washboard" band recordings.

What we would like you to do is: to listen to the sessions we take the liberty to select weekly, and then let us know, what you have found must be wrong, could be better or would even be correct in the light of your own files and listening experiences.

Every page contains three sessions with band name, titles, matrix numbers, recording dates and the personnels of Tom Lord (first box) and Rust 6th edition (second box). My own list, which you will not be receiving for the time being, contains a third box with my own findings.

The reason for selecting this procedure is to structure discussions so that we are all talking about the same thing at the same time and have a chance of finishing the project within a reasonable period of time.

You will be getting e-mails from me detailing the sides intended to be examined. Then you listen, and after a week you let us know what you have found or what you have noticed and what your conclusions are.

After receiving your notes re the examined sessions, I will compile them in a list, which will be sent to you right afterwards.

This gives you the opportunity to check your opinions against those of the others and discuss findings. Discussion on individual sessions will not be closed, so if you have a sudden revelation after the session has been discussed, do tell us all and we'll give you a fair chance to make your point.

So, after about half a year we might be able to present a seriously revised list of Clarence Williams' band recordings, which might even hopefully be issued by some suitable publisher.

When listening it might be most helpful to read Tom Lord's remarks about the personnels, which precedes every recording session in his book. And it certainly would be helpful, at least interesting - in due respect, to consult the STORYVILLE listing starting with STORYVILLE 13 (1967). If you don't have these, please let me know and we'll do our best to distribute the information in suitable form. Also, if any of you find relevant information in journals, magazines etc. you might have, please share the information.

That's all about the endeavour. I hope that you - and I - will find this a most thrilling and interesting enterprise. Wash your ears and stomp it off!

K.-B.

The trumpet/cornet players

Thomas Morris
Ed Allen
Ed Anderson
Charlie Gaines
June Clark
Charlie Christian
Leonard Davis

The trombonists

Charlie Irvis
Jimmy Harrison
Geechie Fields
Wilbur de Paris
George Washington
Charlie Green

The reed men

Bennie Moten	der Normale/Brave ?
Arville Harris	der Holprige ?
Ben Whitted	der Bluesige/ Essentielle
Ben Waters	der Kräftige
Albert Socarras	der Nicht-Swingende/ Virtuose
Edgar Sampson	der Carter-Artige
Carmelo Jari	der Pralltriller Mann
Cecil Scott	Cecil Scott
Russell Procope	???
Buster Bailey	der Virtuose
Darnell Howard	der quietschende, schnelle, schrille

Kasten 1 : Besetzungen aus Tom Lord, Clarence Williams

Kasten 2 : Besetzungen aus Brian Rust, 6th ed. 2002

Kasten 3 : Meine Besetzungen aus Lord, Rust, Literatur, eigenem Hören (mit Platz für eigene Notizen)

CLARENCE WILLIAMS RESEARCH. A small group of dedicated collectors has recently spent considerable time on revisiting the Clarence Williams band dates from 1925-1933. The result is now available on CD ROM for review by other interested parties, who are invited to comment and make further proposals. The aim is to compile a discography representing the best available knowledge and opinion on Clarence Williams band personnels. To receive a copy of the CD, please send a nominal payment of €5 or \$7 in banknotes (registered mail) to K.-B. Rau, Fuerther Strasse 73, 91058 Erlangen, Germany.