

# THOMAS MORRIS AND HIS SEVEN HOT BABIES

by K.-B. Rau

Thomas Morris certainly is one of the controversial figures of classic jazz. He was not one of the stars of the Harlem jazz scene, instead, probably because of lack of technical facilities owing to a non-existent formal instrumental education and training, his musical life occurred in a relative background of theatre shows, blues accompaniment and small gutbucket combo engagements. His was never a top name in Harlem and it is not astounding that he ceased his musical activities in the late twenties. Yet, to a certain extent he was able to deliver deep-felt and essential musical performances. Accordingly there are only a small number of recordings under his own name, and these just for the crème of the twenties' record labels, the Victor Talking Machine Company. I wonder how he gained this contract!

In an article for Names & Numbers 49 (April 2009) I tried to shed some light on the personnels of the four records by Thomas Morris Past Jazz Masters. Today I would like to tackle the recordings of Thomas Morris and his Seven Hot Babies, Morris-led recording units of 1926 with instrumentation and personnel of big band size, which yet perform in an ambiguous style of ad-lib played head arrangements in a seemingly context of pre-arranged big band tunes. Only very few arranged passages are heard, some brass riffs, some reeds riffs, but apparently always without written-down second or third harmony parts, these being ad-libbed instead. 'Jackass Blues' uses the structure of the well-known stock arrangement as played by Oliver or Henderson, a couple of other titles very probably compositions and inventions of Ralph S. Peer, Victor's new A&R man of the time, some of them Morris' own, one of them hailing from Morris' Past Jazz Masters titles of 1923.

It is always apparent that Morris himself is one of the least capable musicians in his bands. Garvin Bushell in his book 'Jazz from the Beginning' says about Morris: "Many a black musician in the 1920s couldn't blow his nose. Like Tommy Morris. He had some great ideas, but no lip – it just splattered all over the place." Accordingly, when you listen to the sides tackled below, you shall hear how Morris tries to hide his technical insufficiencies by just fingering his horn in an erratic manner trying to fake arpeggios and other technically demanding sequences he was not able to execute.

Much has been said about these recordings of Morris Seven Hot Babies, but although participants have been listed and then cancelled again – even to appear again in later editions of the discos – not everything seems to be clear. This little article is aimed to show what can be observed by listening and taking in account what has been published in recent years.

THOMAS MORRIS AND HIS SEVEN HOT BABIES		New York,	Jul. 13, 1926
Thomas Morris, Ward Pinkett – tpt; Julius Geechie Fields – tbn; unknown – alt, clt, bar; Happy Caldwell – ten; Marlow Morris – pno; Lee Blair – bjo; Bill Benford – bbs			
35762-3	Lazy Drag	Vic 20483,	Frog DFG 1
35763-1	Jackass Blues	Vic 20179,	Frog DFG 1
35763-3	Jackass Blues	Vic 20179,	Frog DFG 1
35764-2	Charleston Stampede	Vic 20180,	Frog DFG 1

According to reedman Happy Caldwell's recollections in Storyville 99 (see below) we might be certain of Thomas Morris, Ward Pinkett, Geechy Fields, Albert 'Happy' Caldwell, Lee Blair and perhaps Bill Benford on these sides.

Thomas Morris is the name-giving leader of the band. He plays first trumpet – i.e. the melody and the first part in the brass section – and he can be discovered playing solos in his own somewhat un-proficient way. For his solos see the structure of the recorded tunes below (Thomas Morris = TM). I assume that Morris' self-confidence as a musician was not very distinct, so that he engaged soloists of better quality than his own.

The much more elegant and securer soloist on trumpet is Ward Pinkett. His presence is documented in Laurie Wright's interview of Happy Caldwell, published in Storyville 99, but very sadly not continued as planned because of Caldwell's death not long after. For a time Rex Stewart had been assumed to be on trumpet, because of his own testimony in the late 1940s, but his style is much straighter and more in Armstrong's way than Pinkett's.

Geechie Fields is mainly known from J.R. Morton's Red Hot Peppers sides of June 1928 where he excels in off-beat growl solos. But what a wonderful legato trombonist he is here in the second chorus of his solo in 'Jackass Blues'. An unrecognized but very cultivated and elegant player who also knew how to play "freak". It really is a pity that he often has been misidentified in the past as the perpetrator of every "primitive" growl playing whose identity was not known.

Then there is an alto/baritone player doubling clarinet for whom I feel unable to propose a name. He is not Ernest Elliott as listed in any discography in the past. In my large investigation on Ernest Elliott's assumed presence in so many recording sessions I have isolated his very special stylistic features and these cannot be recognized here. So, he definitely is not present! Even more so, Happy Caldwell in his interview does not talk of Elliott as participant at all. The two clarinet solos in 'Jackass Blues' display a very queer shaky vibrato – not Elliott's – strong uncertainties of tone and phrase and seem to be played by a man, whose main instrument is saxophone. But then: why did they make him play solo on clarinet? In Verse II of 'Lazy Drag' he plays his first saxophone part so restrained – or reluctant – that the tenor sax of Caldwell is much to the fore, the alto only hardly audible and thus the melody (alto part) nearly inaudible.

Only in 'Charleston Stampede' can Albert 'Happy' Caldwell be heard on tenor with his somewhat erratic style, beginning phrases, continuing and ending them in an absolutely not anticipated way.

The pianist is named as Marlowe Morris, not the noted swing pianist, Thomas Morris' nephew, of 'Swinging The Blues' fame, but – as Caldwell claims – Thomas Morris' uncle, so probably the swing pianist's grandfather. (Rust\*6 wrongly lists both persons under one single notation in his index.) And it is interesting to note how this player keeps very much in the background and is mostly nearly inaudible, only coming to the fore in take -3 of 'Jackass Blues'. He does not seem to have been an experienced player and no other recordings of him are noted.

Lee Blair with his dry banjo sound seems to be as given. He can also be heard on the J.R. Morton RHP of June 1928, together with Bill Benford, whose presence here, shortly before his sojourn with the 'Blackbirds of 1926' band touring Great Britain, and after his time with the June Clark band at 'Smalls' Sugar Cane Club', seems to be confirmed. He played a straight upright tuba, not a sousaphone.

Pinkett, Fields, and Blair, together with drummer Tommy Benford, later were in Bill Benford's Rose Danceland band from where Morton picked them for recording purposes.

Notes:

- Rust, Victor Master Book Vol. 2: 2c / tb / 2s / p / bj / bb

- Rust\*2: Tom Morris, Ward Pinkett (cnt); Geechie Fields (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt, alt); Happy Caldwell (ten); Mike Jackson (pno); unknown (bjo); Bill Benford ? (bbs)

- Rust\*3,\*4: Tom Morris, Rex Stewart -c; Geechie Fields -tb; Ernest Elliott -cl, ts, bar; unknown -as; Mike Jackson -p; ? Lee Blair -bj; ? Bill Benford -bb

- Rust\*6: Tom Morris, Ward Pinkett -t; Geechie Fields -tb; Ernest Elliott -cl-as-bar; Happy Caldwell -cl-ts; Marlowe Morris -p; ? Lee Blair -bj; Bill Benford -bb

- Storyville 99-88, Happy Caldwell: "The first electrical recordings I made were with Tommy Morris – I remember we had a microphone instead of those big horns. Ward Pinkett and Tommy were on trumpets, Geechie Fields on trombone and Marlowe Morris – he was Tommy's cousin, er no, his uncle, he was on piano. I remember we did Ham And Gravy (sic) and Jackass Blues. No, I never recorded with Rex Stewart at that time."

Tunes:

35762-3 Lazy Drag: (Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 12 bars tpt TM)(Verse 1 16 bars ens)(Verse II 16 bars sax breaks)(Verse II 16 bars bjo breaks)(Chorus 2 12 bars tpt WP)(Chorus 3 12 bars bar)(Chorus 4 12 bars ens)(Coda 2 bars ens-ten HC)

35763-1 Jackass Blues: (Intro 4 bars tbn GF - tpt WP)(Chorus 1 12 bars tpt TM)(Chorus 2 12 bars ens theme)(Chorus 3 12 bars tbn (\*) GF)(Chorus 4 12 bars tbn GF)(Vamp 4 bars ens)(Chorus 5 12 bars clt)(Chorus 6 12 bars ens)

35763-3 Jackass Blues: same as -1

35764-2 Charleston Stampede: (Chorus 1 12 bars ens)(Chorus 2 12 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars ens)(Chorus 3 12 bars tpt WP)(Chorus 4 12 bars ten HC)(Chorus 5 12 bars bbs BB)(Chorus 6 12 bars ens)(Chorus 7 12 bars ens)(Chorus 8 12 bars tpt TM)(Chorus 9 12 bars tbn GF)(Chorus 10 12 bars ens)(Coda 4 bars ens)

Notable differences of takes (\*):

35763-1: first trombone solo chorus – pno nearly silent

35763-3: first trombone solo chorus – pno playing prominent chimes-like treble notes behind tbn

**THOMAS MORRIS AND HIS SEVEN HOT BABIES**

New York,

Aug. 17, 1926

Thomas Morris, Jabbo Smith – tpt; Julius Geechie Fields – tbn;

Ernest Elliott – alt, clt; Happy Caldwell – ten;

Marlow Morris – pno; unknown (*Buddy Christian*) – bjo; Bill Benford – bbs;

Mike Jackson – voc

36047-3 Georgia Grind

Vic 20180,

Frog DFG 1

36048-2 Ham Gravy

Vic 20179,

Frog DFG 1

36048-3 Ham Gravy

Vic 20179,

Frog DFG 1

With slightly altered personnel this session carries on as before. Morris, Fields, Caldwell and Benford are undisputed. The voice answering Mike Jackson in 'Georgia Grind' might then be Thomas Morris himself.

Being certain on Morris' presence – how else – the big problem is: who plays second trumpet? Rust in all his early editions named Jabbo Smith, changing this name to Charlie Thomas in his 6<sup>th</sup> edition. This he obviously did following John R.T. Davies' statement that it must be the mysterious person 'Big' Charlie Thomas, known as cornetist on some recordings of the Clarence Williams circle – a man who appeared out of the blue in New York in late 1925, recorded a couple of sides, and disappeared again without any further trace. His was a very beautiful cornet style with much Armstrong influence in it. John R.T. had isolated these recordings and discovered the identity of the cornetist, producing a very beautiful CD on the Dutch Timeless label in 1996. But he unfortunately also included three sides of Sara Martin with definitely June Clark on trumpet, and these sides by Thomas Morris of which we now know with the utmost probability that it is the very young Jabbo Smith on second trumpet, and not 'Big' Charlie Thomas. Marc van Nus of Almelo, The Netherlands, a friend of mine from the old days and a great trumpet player in the classic style himself, just recently told me of the days he had hosted Jabbo Smith in his home for several days in 1971. In the – among jazz musicians usual – "listening-sessions" Jabbo had denied his presence on the Buddy Christian Jazz Rippers, now believed to be the above noted "Big" Charlie Thomas. But when hearing the Morris' Seven Hot Babies sides he had spontaneously remarked that it was he himself on trumpet. When comparing both players' styles it becomes apparent that there are distinct differences of tone and style, Thomas with a crystal-clear cornet (?) tone and repeating phrases with large interval jumps, and Smith with a somewhat coated tone and rather flowing and partly chromatic linear phrases which find their correspondences in Jabbo Smith's solos in the Charlie Johnson sessions of 1927 and 1928. On this basis I feel certain now of Jabbo Smith's presence on second trumpet here, although I have to admit to being influenced for long by the very much admired John R.T.'s claim that Charlie Thomas was the trumpet player here. I have changed my mind now.

On trombone we obviously hear the acclaimed Geechie Fields as before, vacillating between beauty and primitivity.

Comparing the clarinet solo in 'Georgia Grind' to Elliott's solo in King Oliver's 'Tin Roof Blues' (11 June 1928 Vocalion) I think that the alto-clarinet man on this session really is Ernest Elliott.

'Ham Gravy' - both takes – has Happy Caldwell playing the tenor sax solo in his own inimitable way. What a beautiful and individual – and unsung - tenor player Caldwell was!

The pianist is as inaudible like at the session before and I assume that we hear Marlowe Morris again as named by Caldwell. In the A2 chorus piano solo of 'Ham Gravy' the right hand playing very much resembles the chimes-like phrases behind the trombone in take -3 of 'Jackass Blues' at the above session. Thus we very probably hear the same pianist at both sessions.

The banjo player has a stronger sound on his instrument and plays in a different style from Lee Blair's, thus must be listed as unknown, although I have a feeling that it might be Buddy Christian judging from sound and execution.

And again we hear the busy and agile Bill Benford on tuba, completing the gang of Jenkins Orphanage boys assembled here (Smith, Fields and Benford).

The singer is documented as Mike Jackson in the Victor vaults. As he is known to have been a friend to Morris, he might just by chance have been in the studio and asked to do the vocal. Or may he possibly also be the pianist on both sessions?

Notes:

- Rust, *Victor Master Book Vol. 2: 2c / tb / 2s / p / bj / bb; vocalist Mike Jackson*

- Rust\*2: *Tom Morris, Jabbo Smith (cnt); Geechie Fields (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt, alt); Coleman Hawkins (ten); Mike Jackson (pno); unknown (bjo); Bill Benford ? (bbs)*

- Rust\*3,\*4: *Tom Morris, Jabbo Smith -c; Geechie Fields -tb; Ernest Elliott -as; Happy Caldwell -ts; Mike Jackson -p; unknown -bj; ? Bill Benford -bb*

- Rust\*6: *Tom Morris, Charlie Thomas -t; Geechie Fields -tb; Ernest Elliott -cl-as-bar; Happy Caldwell -cl-ts; Marlowe Morris -p; ? Lee Blair -bj; Bill Benford -bb; Mike Jackson -v (1)*

Tunes:

36047-3 *Georgia Grind: (Intro 4 bars ens)(Chorus 1 12 bars ens)(Chorus 2 12 bars tbn GF)(Chorus 3 12 bars bjo)(Chorus 4 12 bars voc MJ)(Chorus 5 12 bars clt EE)(Chorus 6 12 bars tpt JS)(Chorus 7 12 bars tpt TM)(Chorus 8 12 bars voc - ens)*

36048-2 *Ham Gravy: (Intro 4 bars ens)(Verse 16 bars ens)(Chorus A1 16 bars ens, middle-break tbn GF)(Chorus A2 16 bars pno MM, middle-break clt EE)(Chorus A3 16 bars (\*) ens middle-break tpt JS)(Chorus B1 12 bars ten HC)(Chorus B2 12 bars tpt JS)(Chorus B3 12 bars tpt TM - ens)(Chorus B4 12 bars ens riff)(Chorus A 4 16 bars clt EE, middle-break brass)(Chorus A5 16 bars ens, middle-break bbs BB)*

36048-3 *Ham Gravy: same as -2*

Notable differences of takes (\*):

36048-2: *Chorus A3 first two bars 2nd tpt JS alone, 1st tpt TM enters at end of bar 2*

36048-3: *Chorus A3 full ens from beginning*

**THOMAS MORRIS AND HIS SEVEN HOT BABIES**

New York,

Nov. 12, 1926

Thomas Morris – tpt; Joe Nanton – tbn; *Happy Caldwell* – clt, ten;

*Marlow Morris* (or *Phil Worde* ?) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; Wellman Braud – sbs; unknown (*Eddie King*) – dms

36925-1	Blues From The Everglades	Vic 20330,	Frog DFG 1
36925-2	Blues From The Everglades	Vic 20330,	Frog DFG 1
36925-3	Blues From The Everglades	Vic 20330,	Frog DFG 1
36926-1	P.D.Q. Blues	Vic 20330,	Frog DFG 1
36926-2	P.D.Q. Blues	Vic 20330,	Frog DFG 1
36926-3	P.D.Q. Blues	Vic 20330,	Frog DFG 1

This is Thomas Morris on trumpet here, very typical - and very obvious. On trombone we hear Joe Nanton now, the new trombonist of the Duke Ellington band, who later gained the nickname 'Tricky Sam' for all the things he could do with a trombone and a mute. Nanton is easy to identify by his tone, his vibrato and the altitude of his playing which was not common in the jazz of 1926.

All editions of Rust list Ernest Elliott as reed player. But at no instance do I hear anything that fits with Elliott's characteristics, and I therefore would like to exclude his presence. Technical devices heard are partly beyond Elliott's abilities. And none of his "stylistics" can be detected, notably slight smears, changing pitch and the inability to play fast runs. Furthermore there has been no session in my investigation on Ernest Elliott were he can be heard play a tenor sax at all.

Instead, I assume Happy Caldwell's participating in this session when comparing the tenor sax playing here to the July and August sessions above. Tone, attack and style would be the same, and his clarinet style definitely is "Western" and has little in common with Elliott or Fuller. Furthermore he certainly would have been on Morris' list of preferred musicians being asked to play on the two sessions above.

The pianist strictly plays the chords, but he plays exactly with the band in arranged parts, and it may be asked whether he was the arranger of these two titles with their very complicated and strange structures. Lacking identifiable features of style leaves the pianist unknown. I do not know on which basis Rust lists the given names, only that Mike Jackson is said to have been a friend to Morris. But I could also imagine Marlow Morris on these sides.

Rust lists Buddy Christian on banjo, and he certainly would have been first choice for a Morris recording session. From what I hear I would agree with Christian.

Untypical for Harlem bands of these days is the string bass. Rust lists later Ellington bassist Wellman Braud, and he may be right. Yet, this player mainly bows his bass, and I thus feel unable to compare this bassist's style with Braud's later work with Ellington, and to really identify this player. It has to be added that there were very few string bass players in the Harlem bands at this period. Other string bass players of this period would have been Francisco Tizol or Harry Hull, but their styles are not documented.

And there is a drummer using only part of his drum-kit (tom-tom, snare drum, and cymbal), but unfortunately not his bass drum, although the Victor people certainly would have been able to record this with their new electric equipment. There are no personal characteristics of drumming heard, but what can be heard is absolutely compatible with what is known from two recording sessions of a year later by 'Thomas Waller with Morris' Hot Babies', where Eddie King, Victor studio manager, very probably plays the drums which he liked to do "much to the annoyance of most musicians" (L. Wright, Fats In Fact). May this be a clue as to Morris' getting a contract with the Victor people? The title 'Blues From The Everglades' bears Ralf S. Peer, A&R man of the Victor company at this time, as composer credit. I can only state that I have never tried to analyse a more complicated or erratic structure of tune like this one before. When trying to retrace my analysis below the interested reader/listener might well come to different conclusions than I did. (Please, let me know, if you do!)

Notes:

- Rust, *Victor Master Book Vol. 2: c / tb / s / p / bj / b / d*

- Rust\*2,\*3,\*4,\*6: *Tom Morris -c; Joe Nanton -tb; Ernest Elliott -cl, ts; Mike Jackson or poss Phil Worde -p; Buddy Christian -bj; Wellman Braud -sb; unknown -d*

Tunes:

36925-1 *Blues From The Everglades: (Intro 4 bars (\*) tbn JN)(Strain A 6 bars ens)(Strain B1 12 bars ens - 2 breaks tpt TM - 2 breaks ten HC)(Chorus 1 12 bars ens - break ten HC)(Strain B2 12 bars ens - 2 breaks tpt TM - 2 breaks clt HC)(Chorus 2 10 bars ens - break clt HC)(Strain C1 8 bars ens - 4 bars double-time - end-break tbn JN)(Strain C2 8 bars ens - 4 bars double-time - end-break tbn JN ) (Strain C3 8 bars ens - end-break clt HC)(Strain C4 8 bars ens)(Coda 2 brs)*

36925-2 *Blues From The Everglades: same as -1*

36925-3 *Blues From The Everglades: same as -1*

36926-1 *P.D.Q. Blues: (railroad noises)(Intro 4 bars clt HC + bjo BC)(Chorus 1 24 bars ens)(Chorus 2 24 bars tpt TM - clt HC)(Bridge 4 bars ens modulation Eb - F)(Interlude 14 bars tbn (\*) - ens)(Bridge 4 bars ens modulation F - Eb)(Chorus 3 24 bars ens - clt+ tbn)*

36926-2 *P.D.Q. Blues: same as -1*

36926-3 *P.D.Q. Blues: same as -1*

Notable differences of takes (\*):

36925-1:	<i>Intro: tbn starts in bar 2</i>
36925-2:	<i>Intro: tbn starts loudly from beginning</i>
36925-3:	<i>Intro: tbn starts very low at beginning so that sbs is heard strumming</i>
36926-1:	<i>last bar of tbn-solo beginning interlude: 1 quarter note C, 1 eighth note A, 1 quarter note C</i>
36926-2:	<i>last bar of tbn-solo beginning interlude: 1 quarter note F, 1 eighth note D, 1 quarter note F</i>
36926-3:	<i>last bar of tbn-solo beginning interlude: 1 quarter note F, 2 eighth notes D C, 2 eighth notes F F</i>

<b>THOMAS MORRIS AND HIS SEVEN HOT BABIES</b>	New York,	Nov. 24, 1926
Thomas Morris – tpt; Joe Nanton – tbn; <i>Happy Caldwell</i> – clt, <i>cms</i> or <i>alt</i> ;		
<i>Marlow Morris</i> (or <i>Phil Worde</i> ?) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; Wellman Braud – sbs; unknown ( <i>Eddie King</i> ) - dms		
36962-2	The Mess	Vic 20364, Frog DGF 71
36962-3	The Mess	Vic 20364, Frog DGF 1
36963-1	The Chinch	Vic 20483, Frog DGF 1
36963-2	The Chinch	Vic 20483, Frog DGF 1

There is no question as to Morris' and Nanton's presence here. But is this really Bob Fuller on reeds? Out of my knowledge of Fuller I would say: No! Comparing this clarinet style to Fuller's documented recordings of the time show that our clarinet player cannot be Fuller! In my ears this is Happy Caldwell again, the same player as at the session before. Only, that he plays a c-melody sax or perhaps an alto sax here. But from Caldwell's own testimony (Storyville 99) we know that he started on clarinet, later played alto and c-melody sax and later again switched over to tenor sax. So, for me this is Happy Caldwell with some certainty, possibly using his c-melody sax for the melody in 'The Mess'. (This assumption then would pose some further questions as to Bob Fuller's presence at other Morris-led sessions of 1926! But of this at a later date.)

The pianist is much more restrained and functional than Mike Jackson, who plays with much right hand flowery figures. Thus probably Phil Worde, if he really is an alternative. But I do not know where the suggestion of Phil Worde comes from. I could also think of the above listed Marlow Morris as the pianist on all four sessions tackled here. He restricts himself to pure comping, with very little solo work. Compare with Mike Jackson's soloing at the New Orleans Blue Five session, where his solo style is clearly audible and showing an assured Harlem stride style. Nothing of it on these sides!

The rest of the rhythm section obviously is the same as before.

Notes:

- *Rust*, *Victor Master Book Vol. 2: c / tb / s / p / bj / b / d*

- *Rust*\*2,\*3,\*4,\*6: *Tom Morris* –c; *Joe Nanton* –tb; *Bob Fuller* –cl, as; *Mike Jackson* or *poss Phil Worde* –p; *Buddy Christian* –bj;

*Wellman Braud* –sb; *unknown* -d

Tunes:

36962-2 *The Mess*: (Intro 4 bars dms EK)(Strain A 16 bars ens (\*))(Strain B1 32 bars cms HC)(Strain B2 32 bars ens, at end modulation F – D)(Chorus 1 16 bars ens – sbs WB)(Chorus 2 16 bars ens – clt HC)(Bridge 4 bars ens modulation D – F)(Chorus 3 16 bars ens)

36962-3 *The Mess*: same as -1

36963-1 *The Chinch*: (Intro 4 bars ens)(Strain A1 16 bars cms – ens)(Strain A2 16 bars ens)(Vamp 4 bars ens)(Strain B1 8 bars cms (Vamp 4 bars ens)(Strain B2 8 bars cms – ens)(Strain A3 16 bars ens)(Strain C1 16 bars cms – ens)(Strain C2 16 bars tpt)(Strain A4 16 bars clt (\*))(Vamp 4 bars ens)(Strain B3 8 bars cms – ens)(Vamp 4 bars ens)(Strain B4 8 bars cms – ens)(Strain A5 16 bars ens)

36963-2 *The Chinch*: same as -1

Notable differences of takes (\*):

36962-2: bar 13 of strain A: tpt all alone, playing a row of six Fs

36962-3: bar 13 of strain A: tpt and clt playing together for 3 beats, then clt dropping out to switch instrument

36963-1: end of clt solo: clt stops exactly before tpt coming in

36963-2: end of clt solo: clt plays together with tpt for 1 bar

From the two last sessions it becomes obvious that Thomas Morris, a second rate trumpet player in the Harlem jazz scene of the 1920s, struggled to make and keep contact with the first address of the record business of the time, the Victor Talking Machine Company. His first recording for the Victor people happened under Mike Jackson's name on July 02, 1926, just about two weeks prior to the first session above. Somehow he must have been able to secure a recording contract hoping to become part of the dance and jazz race recording business. But the first two sessions offer a rather limited picture of his efforts as Morris hastily had to collect a pick-up band – being mainly occupied in coloured show business he did not have a permanent own band – and provide them with fitting and fashionable arrangements. This he could only achieve in making his musicians play head arrangements without written parts for the band sections. This causes a rather disorderly and sloppy band sound which might not have been to the Victor officials' liking.

For the last two sessions he did not attempt to provide the illusion of a dance/big band in the studio, but he was content to working with a three-part front-line as usual in a New Orleans/Chicago context. Yet, for this model he also relied on arrangements. Somehow he must have had them written by someone not really interested in jazz band arrangement or not really skilled in this business. This makes all four titles recorded at the last two sessions outstanding in jazz recordings because of their very unusual and strange construction, structure and concept. With the possible exception of 'P.D.Q. Blues' the recorded tunes show a succession of erratic strains and parts, very different from anything else heard on jazz records of the time. It, yet, displays a certain charm and beauty, which, by the way, has also to be attributed to Morris' otherwise below-par trumpet playing. His qualities are outside of fashionable Harlem big band jazz of the time. The Victor people obviously did not prolong Morris' contract.

This article on Thomas Morris and his Seven Hot Babies did not unearth many hitherto unknown facts. But it should make apparent one crucial point: In the history of classic jazz research too little knowledge and experience has led to pile up every not so brilliant and wrongly pitched reed playing on the names of Ernest Elliott and Bob Fuller. These two guys seem to have been used as the "garbage-cans" of clarinet playing. Closer inspection and concentrated listening – at best with knowledge of reed-instruments and their handling and playing – reveal a whole bunch of other players responsible which, yet, still have to be acknowledged, analysed, and possibly identified. One highly probable example has been found above in Albert "Happy" Caldwell. It is not all Fuller that has not been acknowledged in the past. A large investigation in the work of Ernest Elliott I have done some time ago which may be published in the future, and the same has to be done to the work of Bob Fuller: Fuller or not Fuller. Would anybody like to participate or co-operate?

As always I have to thank the following persons for the time they have generously given to encourage me, help me, supply me with first and second hand information, and contradict me:  
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K.-B. Rau October 2016