

THE RECORDINGS OF HELEN BAXTER

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

BAXTER, HELEN, singer

no personal data known

This personnel-discography is based on RUST, JAZZ AND RAGTIME RECORDS 1897 – 1942.

Personnel are taken from this source, but modified in the light of earlier or subsequent research or on the strength of my own listening, discussed with our listening group or other interested collectors.

- Documented, most certain and aurally absolutely obvious identifications are listed thus: **Helen Baxter**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Helen Baxter*
- Not attributable identifications – although the musician in question might be an otherwise well-known person – are listed thus: unknown
- If a possible identification for an otherwise unknown musician is suggested by the author without the possibility to prove the factual evidence, it is listed thus: (*Helen Baxter*)

When feeling certain without a musician's documented presence, I have not refrained from altering Rust's statements without using italics. In any case, my statements are open to discussion and I would appreciate any contribution – pro or contra!

As always in my discographies on this website I have written recording sessions with their headings, dates, titles and names of musicians in italics, whenever I am convinced that the eponymous musician of this discography is not part of the accompanying group of this session! Documented names of musicians if known – in recording ledgers or on record labels – are listed in bold letters.

This discography still is – and will certainly be – a work in progress for a long time, if not eternally. Yet, on the way to a definite discography of all jazz recordings before 1942 – which certainly will never be possible – it is intended to fill some gaps that have not been treated before.

The following statements and the resulting list of recordings only reflect the opinion of this writer/listener and are open to discussion. More so, discussion is eagerly invited. Corrections, amendments and controversial opinions are much appreciated.

HELEN BAXTER

001 HELEN BAXTER	New York,	May 18, 1923	
Helen Baxter – voc;			
Lem Fowler – pno			
81025	The Wicked (Dirty) Fives	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
81026-2	You Got Everything A Sweet Mama Needs (But Me)	Col 3922,	RST JPCD-1520-2

The singer owns a strong voice and sings her lyrics with clearness, yet very simple rhythmically.

Fowler uses a one-note left hand with occasional upward arpeggios, and shows all the characteristics as listed below, with slight weakness in structure and melodic variance. Fowler's playing is characterized by its pianistic and simplicity, together with the occasional faulty harmonic bass-note, dropped bars or parts of bars, and the lack of a clear compositional melodic direction.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Lemuel Fowler, pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Lemuel Fowler -p

002 HELEN BAXTER	New York,	c. Jun. 16, 1923	
Helen Baxter – voc;			
Lem Fowler – pno			
71633-B	Satisfied Blues (A Barrel House Blues)	OK 8080,	RST JPCD-1520-2
71633-D	Satisfied Blues (A Barrelhouse Blues)	OK 8080	not on LP/CD
71634-B	Daddy, Ease It On Me	OK 8080,	RST JPCD-1520-2

Fowler is the same here as before, using boogie elements in the first – blues – title. The second title is a 22-bar popular song in AA' form of his own authorship, probably played after his own published score. He does not use blues/boogie elements, here.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Lemuel Fowler, pno

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Lemuel Fowler -p

Discernible differences of takes:

71663: As one take only has been reissued on LP/CD, comparing was impossible.

003 ELLEN COLEMAN	Lem Fowler's Orchestra	New York,	Jul. 10, 1923
Helen Baxter – voc;			
(Charlie Saunders?) – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt			
Lem Fowler – pno; unknown – bjo			
9065-A	Cruel Back Bitin' Blues (A Heart Aching Chant)	Ed 51200,	Document DOCD-5627
9065-B	Cruel Back Bitin' Blues (A Heart Aching Chant)	Ed 51200,	Document DOCD-5646
9065-C	Cruel Back Bitin' Blues (A Heart Aching Chant)	Ed 51200,	Frog DGF 66
9066-A	You Got Everything A Sweet Mama Needs (But Me)	Ed 51200,	Frog DGF 66
9066-B	You Got Everything A Sweet Mama Needs (But Me)	Ed 51200,	RST JPCD-1520-2
9066-C	You Got Everything A Sweet Mama Needs (But Me)	Ed 51200,	Document DOCD-5654

Note: 9065-A on RST CD seems to be identical with 9065-C on Frog CD, but is remastered too fast a halfnote up. I have kept Frog 66 with take -C and attributed take -A to DOCD-5627 and take -B to DOCD-5646 – this without better knowledge.

Document DOCD-5654 has 9066-C, but with intro and vamp cut-off.

Ellen Coleman was the pseudonym for Helen Baxter on Edison recordings.

Here, now, we have Lem Fowler as bandleader and band pianist. He sticks to his before recognised simple pianistics, but is entirely covered up by the very busy banjo player with his typical 'Clef Club' style of the late 1910s.

This clarinetist certainly is Percy Glascoe with his crazy attack and his obtrusive lead-part playing. Listen to Clarinet Joe and his Hot Footers and Fowler's Washboard Wonders below. He has none of Fuller's characteristics and possibilities as a clarinetist, but plays his instrument like a trumpet. This certainly is a result of playing first parts only – without a trumpet – in his own bands and engagements. There is no interplay by trumpet and clarinet as in the Southern tradition. And it sounds corny and even silly – for nowadays listeners. Yet, it might have been a fashionable style in certain Harlem circles in 1923, and it was still maintained in the Jim-Dandies sides of October 1925 (see session 024 below). But it doesn't swing at all!

The trumpet player is one of a long list of Johnny Dunn followers and I am unable to propose a name. He might well have been one of the trumpet players of the then well-known dance bands in Harlem.

ADDITION 23-06-2021: in a recent e-mail Javier Soria Laso of Madrid, Spain, let me know that he – together with Yves Francois Smierciak – think to have recognized this trumpet player as one of the Charlie Johnson band's trumpet players of their first recording session of February 1925 (Edison), thus Leroy Rutledge or Charlie Saunders (No, the latter is not in Rust or anywhere else, except for Storyville 77-191). As Rutledge is known as a first-chair player, our man here must then be Charlie Saunders. Obviously, he was a rather shadowy figure of the Harlem scene – as there were many others – and we have no documented appearance of this player anywhere else on record or in prints. Saunders plays with fire and swing on the Charlie Johnson sides, recognizably in a clear Johnny Dunn mode as did so many in Harlem at this time and earlier, but on a recording session one-and-a-half years after this Baxter/Fowler session when he might well have developed after Armstrong's arrival. Thus, I feel unable to agree to my friend's proposal, but I feel unable not to, as well! There is just too little to compare. So, listen and take your own choice!

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown cnt; prob Bob Fuller, clt; Lem Fowler, pno; unknown bjo.

- Carey, McCarthy, Jazz Directory Vol 2: Lem Fowler (p)

- Rust*3,*4: unknown c; ? Percy Glascoe, cl; Lem Fowler, p; unknown bj.

- Rust*6: unknown c; ? Bob Fuller or Percy Glascoe, cl; Lem Fowler, p; unknown bj.

Discernible differences of takes:

9065-A:	sequence of clt notes in second and third bar of intro: 2 eighth-triplets e-d-c – a-ab-g, 3 eighth-notes g-a-g; eighth-note c, quarter-note c, 3 eighth-notes g-a-g
9065-B:	sequence of clt notes in second and third bar of intro: 2 eighth-triplets e-d-c – a-ab-g, 3 eighth-notes g-a-g; dotted quarter-note bb, 6 eighth-notes g-a–eb-e-g-c-d
9065-C:	sequence of clt notes in second bar of intro: 2 eighth-notes a–ab, eighth-triplet g–a–g, eighth-note e, quarter-note c
9066-A:	bar 32 of first chorus (after 8 bars intro, 4 bars vamp, 16 bars verse): clt plays growled sustained whole-note low bb
9066-B:	bar 32 of first chorus (after 8 bars intro, 4 bars vamp, 16 bars verse): clt plays 2 eighth-notes eb-f, 3 quarter-notes g – eb – eb
9066-C:	bar 32 of first chorus (after 8 bars intro, 4 bars vamp, 16 bars verse): clt plays 7 eighth-notes eb-eb-f-eb-f-eb-f

004 ELLEN COLEMAN		New York,	Sep. 14, 1923
Helen Baxter – voc;			
unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn;			
unknown – alt, clt, flt;			
unknown – pno			
9163-A	She Walked Right Up And Took My Man Away	Ed 51242	not on LP/CD ?
9163-B	She Walked Right Up And Took My Man Away	Ed 51242,	Document DOCD-5660
9163-C	She Walked Right Up And Took My Man Away	Ed 51242,	RST JPCD-1526-2?

As noted above, Ellen Coleman was the pseudonym for Helen Baxter on Edison recordings. And it seems that the Edison officials, known as not very obliging and promoting black performers, were not satisfied with the performance of 'Lem Fowler's Orchestra' at the preceding recording session of July 10, 1923. It is thus not surprising that they hired a white "studio" band to accompany Miss Baxter/Coleman.

The band plays from written scores and may well alter their answer-phrases individually. (I did not check possible variations.) There appear to be a saxophonist – prob alt – in the introduction, and a clarinetist as well as a flutist in the later run of the item, but all heard snatches of the reed instruments (alt, clt, flt) are of short duration and may also well be played by one single player only, as there never are the instruments heard simultaneously.

The clearest difference between take -B and possibly -C is as given below (take -C is not secured here, and may possibly be take -A!)

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3: acc by unknown white studio group

- BGR*4: unknown, t; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; unknown, p (white studio group)

- Rust*3,*4,*6: acc by unknown white studio band

Notable differences of takes:

9163-A: as take -A very probably is not reissued, comparison is not possible

9163-B: Last chorus (after 4-bar instrumental vamp and 16-bar verse): Baxter sings in bar 2: "... and took my man away."

9163-C: Last chorus (as above): Baxter clearly sings in bar 2: "... and took my man ay-way."

005 **HELEN BAXTER**

New York,

Jan. 1927

Helen Baxter – voc;

Robert Cooksey – har, kazoo; Phil Worde – pno; Bobby Leecan – gtr

6909-1 I Wants A Real Man

Ban 1920,

Document DOCD-5279

6910-2 Scrubbin' Blues

Ban 1920,

Document DOCD-5279

Miss Baxter's voice is a bit drowned here by her accompanists. But accompaniment is beautifully executed, yet not very bluesy on these song titles, but swinging. Halas, the pianist is very much in the background, and individual traces cannot be distinguished.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3: Robert Cooksey, hca/kazoo; Bobby Leecan, gtr; poss Phil Worde, pno

- BGR*4: Robert Cooksey, h/k; Bobby Leecan, g; prob Phil Worde, p

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Robert Cooksey -h -kazoo; Bobbie Leecan -g; ?Phil Worde -p

K.- B. Rau
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