

THE RECORDINGS OF BESSIE BROWN

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

Bessie Brown, as billed as “the Original Bessie Brown”, was neither the first Bessie Brown on record nor was she in fact a very original artist. Unconfirmed reports place her birth at c. 1895 in Cleveland, Ohio, which she may have left by age 16 if reports of her working in New York City in 1911 are correct. In 1922 she appeared in both the “Moonshine Revue” and “The World of Joy” at New York’s Lafayette Theatre, reportedly touring Brooklyn and Chicago that year as well. The twenties also found her working with Doc Straine (billed as Brown and Straine – sounds like a cooking recipe!), performing on Cleveland radio, and performing as a member of the “Darktown Follies Revue” at the Howard Theatre in Washington, D.C. Assertions that she worked as a male impersonator (in the *Chicago Defender* of 3/2/29) are plausible given her deep voice, but indicate nothing about her sexual orientation – her husband, Clarence Shaw, was deputy sheriff in Cleveland. Her last traced notice of a club appearance was in 1932 at Cleveland’s Club Madrid, leaving the rest of her life – and perhaps her death – a mystery. (Stan Tracy, booklet of Document DOCD-5456)

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: *Brown Bessie*
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Brown Bessie*
- 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: (*Brown Bessie*)

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.

BESSIE BROWN

001 ORIGINAL BESSIE BROWN	New York,	c. Nov. 04, 1925
Bessie Brown – voc;		
unknown - pno		
106379	Them “Has Been” Blues	PA 32156, Document DOCD-5456
106380	Papa De Da Da	PA 32156, Document DOCD-5456

This piano accompanist is very akin to Clarence Williams, but he plays phrases that are distinctly different from Williams’ style and thus this session is not listed as a Clarence Williams session in Tom Lord, Clarence Williams. And rightly so. This player is a stronger pianist than Clarence, but equally rooted in ragtime – the New Orleans way. Lacking special pianistic knowledge, I feel unable to search for this pianist among his known contemporaries.

But it must be mentioned that on this day – 4. November 1925 – the Blue Rhythm Orchestra aka June Clark and his Creole Band recorded two titles in numerical sequence for Pathé Actuelle. The pianist of this band is Charlie ‘Smitty’ Smith, a modest and largely unknown pianist of early Harlem times. He is described as one of the best “compers” – i.e. accompanist without soloistic ambition – by Count Basie in his book ‘Good Morning Blues’. And accordingly, his very few soloistic spots on record do not allow a competent estimation of his pianistic abilities. But because of his most probable presence in the recording studio I see a faint possibility of his cooperation, although his known style is not congruous with what we here on these two sides.

Notes:

- BGR*2: probably Clarence Williams pno
- BGR*3,*4: unknown pno
- Rust*3: Fletcher Henderson ? -p.

- Rust*4,*6: unknown -p.

002 BESSIE BROWN	New York,	early Jul. 1926
Bessie Brown – voc;		
Charlie Gaines – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Carmelo Jari – clt;		
Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian - bjo		
6706-1	What's The Matter Now?	Ban 1833 not on LP/CD, but held
6706-3	What's The Matter Now?	Or 698, Document DOCD-5456
6707-1	How Could I Be Blue?	Or 698 not on LP/CD
6707-2	How Could I Be Blue?	Or 698, Document DOCD-5456
6707-3	How Could I Be Blue?	Do 3781 not on LP/CD

The trombonist plays much more retained than Irvis usually does, but tone, entirely legato playing, and some Irvis-like licks make his presence probable.

This is the first appearance of reed man Carmelo Jari in the Williams stable. His rather unique and personal style and tone was identified by our team by comparison with the recordings of the Savoy Bearcats. He will be a familiar name with Williams personnels from now on until the Bearcats leave for an extended tour of South America in May 1927. (The second title of this session was also part of the Bearcats' repertoire.)

Notes:

- Storyville 19: unknown (cnt); poss Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ben Whittet (clt); poss Clarence Williams (pno); unknown (bjo).
- Lord, Clarence Williams p173: unknown (cnt); poss Charlie Irvis (tbn); Bennie Moten (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); unknown (bjo).
- BGR*2: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ben Whittet, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo.
- BGR*3,*4: unknown, c; poss Charlie Irvis, tb; Bennie Moten, cl; Clarence Williams, p; unknown, bj.
- Rust*3: unknown -c; unknown -tb; Ben Whittet -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bb; unknown -d.
- Rust*4,*6: unknown -c; ?Charlie Irvis -tb; Bennie Moten -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bj.

Notable differences of takes (from Lord p174):

- 6706-1: final bar of tune: tpt plays long held three-quarter note Bb.
- 6706-3: final bar of tune: tpt plays four eighth notes Bb-F-G-F and one quarter note Bb.
- 6707-1: this take -1 not reissued, therefore no comment possibly.
- 6707-2: two-bar clt break before final vocal chorus is played in high register.
- 6707-3: two-bar clt break before final vocal chorus is played in low register.

003 BESSIE BROWN	New York,	c. Aug. 10, 1926
Bessie Brown – voc;		
Ed Anderson – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Bennie Morton – clt;		
Clarence Williams – pno; unknown – bjo		
6767-2	Ain't Much Good In The Best Of Men Nowadays	Or 716, Document DOCD-5456
6767-3	Ain't Much Good In The Best Of Men Now Days	Ban 1833 not on LP/CD, but held

Certainly, a different accompanying group here than session #002. The trumpet player's style bears strong similarities to King Oliver's style. Reportedly Ed Anderson, known for his similarity to the Oliver style, had come to NYC with Eubie Blake and had been recruited by Clarence for his stable in early 1926. It is also worth mentioning that Anderson is regarded by a couple of authorities to be the only trumpet on Oliver's Dixie Syncopators recordings of September 1928!

Notes:

- Storyville 19: unknown (cnt); poss Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ben Whittet (clt); prob Clarence Williams (pno); unknown (bjo).
- Lord, Clarence Williams p175: unknown (cnt); poss Charlie Irvis (tbn); Bennie Moten (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); unknown (bjo).
- BGR*2: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ben Whittet, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo.
- BGR*3,*4: unknown, c; poss Charlie Irvis, tb; Bennie Moten, cl; Clarence Williams, p; unknown, bj.
- Rust*3: unknown -c; ?Charlie Irvis -tb; Ben Whittet -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bj.
- Rust*4,*6: unknown -c; ?Charlie Irvis -tb; Bennie Moten -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bj.

Notable differences of takes (from Lord p175):

- 6767-2: bar 31 of first vocal chorus (after vocal verse)(bar 59 of tune): cnt phrase descending.
- 6767-3: bar 31 of first vocal chorus (after vocal verse)(bar 59 of tune): cnt phrase ascending.

004 BESSIE BROWN	New York,	c. Aug. 1926
Bessie Brown – voc;		
Charlie Gaines – tpt; unknown – tbn; Carmelo Jari – clt;		
Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian - bjo		
6782-2	Senorita Mine	Or 716, Document DOCD-5456

After close and repeated listening members of our team still disagree on the identity of the singer on "Senorita Mine". Some believe her to be a different person from the singer on "What's The Matter Now" and "How Could I Be Blue" others still think her to be one identical person. Lord, p. 178: "One fact indicating that this side (SENIORITA MINE) is from a separate session is that the singer on this title is different from the singer on all the other titles from the three Bessie Brown sessions. Eva Taylor and her son Spencer, upon hearing tapes of these three Bessie Brown sessions, felt that SENORITA MINE was not sung by Bessie Brown, but by a white woman (whose name they couldn't recall) who used to come around the CWMPC office for new material. Note this singer's peculiar pronunciation of SENORITA (Seen-ee-or-ita: phonetic)."

Note: info re matrix number from Björn Englund N&N 60!

Notes:

- Storyville 19: unknown (cnt); poss Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ben Whittet (clt); prob Clarence Williams (pno); unknown (bjo).
- Lord, Clarence Williams p175: unknown (cnt); poss Charlie Irvis (tbn); Bennie Moten (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); unknown (bjo).
- BGR*2: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ben Whittet, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo.
- BGR*3,*4: by unknown, possibly white, artist of no blues interest.
- Rust*3: unknown -c; ?Charlie Irvis -tb; Ben Whittet -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bj.

- Rust*4,*6: unknown -c; ?Charlie Irvis -tb; Bennie Moten -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bj.

005 BESSIE BROWN	her Jazz Band	New York,	Sep. 1926
Bessie Brown – voc;			
Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; (<i>Jonas Walker</i>) – tbn; <i>Bennie Morton</i> – clt;			
Clarence Williams – pno; unknown – bjo			
6813-1	Nobody But My Baby Is Getting My Love	Ban 1859,	Document DOCD-5627
6813-2	Nobody But My Baby Is Getting My Love	Or 771,	Document DOCD-5456
6814-2	St. Louis Blues	Ban 1859,	Document DOCD-5627
6814-3	St. Louis Blues	Or 746,	Document DOCD-5456

And again, a different accompanying group here from session #081 and #082.

Big Charlie Thomas seems to have been identified by John R.T. Davies some years ago (see Timeless CD CBC 1-030), but is still controversially discussed in collectors' circles (see The FROG Annual Vol.1 2009). Our team prefers to follow John R.T..

Notes:

- *Storyville 19*: unknown (cnt); poss *Charlie Irvis* (tbn); *Ben Whittet* (clt); prob *Clarence Williams* (pno); unknown (bjo).
 - *Lord, Clarence Williams p175*: unknown (cnt); poss *Charlie Irvis* (tbn); *Bennie Moten* (clt); *Clarence Williams* (pno); unknown (bjo).
 - *BGR*2*: probably: *Tom Morris*, cnt; *Charlie Irvis*, tbn; *Ben Whittet*, clt; *Clarence Williams*, pno; *Buddy Christian*, bjo.
 - *BGR*3,*4*: unknown, c; poss *Charlie Irvis*, tb; *Bennie Moten*, cl; *Clarence Williams*, p; unknown, bj.
 - *Rust*3*: unknown -c; ?*Charlie Irvis* -tb; *Ben Whittet* -cl; *Clarence Williams* -p; unknown -bj.
 - *Rust*4,*6*: unknown -c; ?*Charlie Irvis* -tb; *Bennie Moten* -cl; *Clarence Williams* -p; unknown -bj.

Notable differences of takes (from Lord p.180):

6813-1: The first Bessie Brown vocal chorus is followed by 14 bars of *Bennie Morton* clt – ens.
 6813-2: The first Bessie Brown vocal chorus is followed by 16 bars of cnt solo
 6814-2: Bessie Brown ends final vocal with: „... die, Hey, Hey.“
 6814-2: Bessie Brown ends final vocal with: „... die.“

006 BESSIE BROWN		Chicago,	Jan. 25, 1928
Bessie Brown – voc;			
unknown – vln; unknown – vlc;			
(Cassino Simpson) – pno; unknown – dms			
C-1668	Chloe (Song Of The Swamp)	Br 3817	not on LP/CD
C-1669	Chloe (Song Of The Swamp)	Br 3817,	Document DOCD-5456
C-1670	Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man	Voc 15688	not on LP/CD
C-1671	Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man	Voc 15688,	Document DOCD-5456
C-1672	Someone Else May Be There While I'm Gone	Br 3817,	Document DOCD-5456
C-1673	Someone Else May Be There While I'm Gone	Br 3817,	Document DOCD-5627

Accompaniment is arranged throughout and there is no jazz on these sides, except for the pianistics on the last title's two takes. This player certainly belongs to the upper class of Chicago pianists, and from the fireworks of his right hand and the fast treble octave runs – and the harmonic expertise and knowledge I assume Cassino Simpson here on piano (*Storyville 2002/3*: “*Kenneth Anderson* noted that the piano solo – on *Jabbo Smith*'s ‘*Boston Skuffle*’ – at the beginning modulated through three different keys, and only Simpson would have done that at that time.”

Notes:

- *BGR*2,*3,*4*: unknown vln; unknown 'cello; unknown pno; unknown dms; or pno only (5,6).
 - *Rust*3,*4,*6*: unknown vn; unknown vc; unknown p; unknown d, or p only (5,6).

Notable differences of takes:

C-1668/C-1669: As only one take has been reissued, nothing can be said of possible differences.
 C-1670/C-1671: As only one take has been reissued, nothing can be said of possible differences.
 C-1672: first bar of first chorus (bar 37 of tune): piano plays fast run of three downward triplets starting on second beat of bar.
 C-1672: first bar of first chorus (bar 37 of tune): piano plays no triplets, but simple phrasing using blue notes.

007 BESSIE BROWN		Chicago,	Apr. 02, 1928
Bessie Brown – voc;			
(Cassino Simpson) – pno			
E-7309-	Arkansas Blues	Voc 1182,	Document DOCD-5456
E-7310-	Sugar	Voc 1182,	Document DOCD-5456
C-1861-	Smile	Br 3922,	Document DOCD-5456

These sides have a remarkable and expert pianist for accompaniment. It may be interesting to note the recording place Chicago! He plays in a modest “stride” style, but not – as might be suggested from this city – in an Earl Hines mode. My knowledge of Chicago pianists certainly is meagre, but I think to hear a kinship with the pianist on *Jabbo Smith*'s ‘*Boston Skuffle*’, variously listed as Earl Frazier, Alex Hill or Cassino Simpson in the discographies. He very probably is the same pianist as at the preceding session – and thus probably Cassino Simpson! Great piano playing!

Notes:

- *BGR*2,*3,*4*: unknown pno.
 - *Rust*3,*4,*6*: unknown -p

008 BESSIE BROWN	her Jazz Band	Chicago,	Apr. 03, 1928
Bessie Brown – voc;			
unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn;			
unknown – clt; unknown, unknown – vln;			
(Cassino Simpson) – pno; unknown – sbs; unknown – dms			

C-1865-	Blue Ridge	Br 3922,	Document DOCD-5456
E-7289-	The Man I Love	Voc 15688,	Document DOCD-5456

The accompaniments are arranged throughout. Because of that I feel unable to assume any individual musicians. I clearly hear a muted trumpet, a clarinet, probably two violins, a pianist, and probably a string bass. I do not hear a drummer, and a possible trombone only together with the trumpet in the second title. Because of the numerical sequence of matrices and the proximity of recording dates the pianist might be the same as before – but without any soloistic outings.

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3, *4: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown pno; unknown bjo; unknown bbs; unknown dms.
 - Rust*3, *4, *6: unknown c; unknown tb; unknown cl; unknown p; unknown bj; unknown bb; unknown d.

009 BESSIE BROWN		New York,	c. Mar./Apr. 1929
Bessie Brown – voc;			
Rex Stewart – cnt; Charlie Green – tbn;			
Harvey Boone – clt; Coleman Hawkins – ten;			
Fletcher Henderson – pno; Clarence Holiday – bjo; Del Thomas – bbs			
E-29531	Song From A Cotton Field	Br 4409,	Document DOCD-5456
E-29532	He Just Don't Appeal To Me	Br 4409,	Document DOCD-5456

This is a beautiful swinging affair accompanying singer Bessie Brown, with a selection of Henderson band heroes playing mainly ad-lib. W.C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p.249: “Instrumentation is as above; except for Hawkins, who takes a long solo, it is difficult to recognize the players. However, the Brunswick files contain the following quotation from an apparent publicity blurb for Brunswick 4409: “Fletcher Henderson and his Orch. accomp. hot trumpet – trombone and wailing sax. Composer assisted in making record. High and low clarinets, muted trumpet, shaking trombone – blue piano chords.” This confirms this date as a Henderson session, although the reference to “composer” assisting may indicate that (Porter) Grainger played some of the piano.”

The trumpet part is played very functionally and sparingly, different from Bobby Stark's multi-toned and fast-fingering style, and very much in Armstrong mode. I therefore definitely believe in Stewart's presence here. The trombone is what can be expected from Green. Hawkins is easy to identify. Harvey Boone's presence on clarinet is obviously derived from his known membership with the band at this time and period. The same applies to the banjo player – Clarence Holiday – and the tuba player – Delbert Thomas. Piano playing is very unobtrusive, but effective, and there are little snippets which I would not attribute to Porter Grainger's style as I know it. I therefore opt for Henderson. Grainger's possible presence is certainly assumed from the fact that both items are his compositions as listed on the record label.

Notes:

- *Hendersonia*, p. 249: Rex Stewart or Bobby Stark – trumpet; Charlie Green – trombone; Harvey Boone – clarinet; Coleman Hawkins – tenor sax; Fletcher Henderson or Porter Grainger – piano; Clarence Holiday – banjo; Del Thomas ? – tuba
 - BGR*2: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown ten; unknown pno; unknown bjo; unknown bbs.
 - BGR*3, *4: Rex Stewart or Bobby Stark, t; Charlie Green, tb; Harvey Boone, cl; Coleman Hawkins, ts; Fletcher Henderson or poss Porter Grainger, p; Clarence Holiday, bj; poss Del Thomas - bbs
 - Rust*3: unknown t; unknown tb; Buster Bailey -cl; Coleman Hawkins -ts; Fletcher Henderson -p; unknown bj; unknown bb.
 - Rust*4, *6: Rex Stewart or Bobby Stark -t; Charlie Green -tb; Harvey Boone -cl; Coleman Hawkins -ts; Fletcher Henderson or Porter Grainger -p; Clarence Holiday -bj; ? Del Thomas -bb.

010 BESSIE BROWN		New York,	c. Apr. 01, 1929
Bessie Brown – voc;			
(Russell Smith) – tpt; Charlie Green – tbn;			
Buster Bailey – clt; Coleman Hawkins – ten;			
Fletcher Henderson, Porter Grainger (if at all) – pno			
E-29538-	'Tain't Nobody's Fault But My Own	Br 4346,	Document DOCD-5456
E-29539-	The Blues Singer From Alabam'	Br 4346,	Document DOCD-5456

Against Walter C. Allen's opinion (see below) I do hear Russell Smith as trumpeter here. His way of phrasing and its inner rhythm on the second title is what I know from him. He is not a hot soloist, but this is what I expect from him when playing ad-lib, and the muted tone is his. Piano playing is distinctly the Henderson way, and I do not hear a second piano player.

Notes:

- W.C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p.250: “The vocalist on this and the preceding session, by the way, is the one from Cleveland, Ohio, billed occasionally as “Original Bessie Brown”, and a different singer than the Bessie Brown who sang vaudeville duets with George Williams. Instrumentation is as above with no rhythm instruments audible but perhaps a second piano joining in. The trumpeter takes some short solo passages, but he does not sound like Russell Smith, Rex Stewart, Bobby Stark, Cootie Williams, or any other known Henderson trumpeter. Bailey and Hawkins are readily identified by their solos; this was bailey's last known date with Henderson before he left for Europe with Noble Sissle. If a second pianist is indeed present, it might be Porter Grainger, who 'assisted in making the record'.”
 - BGR*2: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown ten; unknown, unknown pno.
 - BGR*3, *4: unknown, t; Charlie Green, tb; Buster Bailey, cl; Coleman Hawkins, ts; Fletcher Henderson, p; poss 2nd p by Porter Grainger.
 - Rust*3: unknown t; unknown tb; Buster Bailey -cl; Coleman Hawkins -ts; Fletcher Henderson, unknown -p.
 - Rust*4, *6: unknown, t; ? Charlie Green, tb; Buster Bailey, cl; Coleman Hawkins, ts; Fletcher Henderson, p; poss Porter Grainger 2nd p.