

THE RECORDINGS OF VIRGINIA LISTON

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

LISTON, Virginia, singer

born: c. 1890; died: St. Louis, June 1932

Virginia Liston was reportedly heard singing blues as early as 1912 at the Segak Theatre in Philadelphia. In the late teens she provided what amounted to an open house for singers and musicians at her Washington, D.C. domicile. There, in 1920 she teamed with pianist Sam H. Gray – to whom she was also married at the time – and the two toured the TOBA circuit as ‘Liston and Liston’ from 1920-1923. In 1923 they found them settling in New York, working the Harlem theatres and building a following for their act. ... Her first traced sessions commenced in September 1923 with OKeh Records, ending in 1926 with two sessions for Vocalion – 17 sessions in all. The January 1924 Defender reported that she was sidelined from touring and recordings by difficulties stemming from rheumatism, but she managed to “hobble down to the OKeh laboratories to make some new OKeh records

Despite whatever problems with illness, she used New York as a base from which she toured extensively, including a 1925 stint with ‘Eliza Scandals’ revue. However, she left the revue, and Sam Gray, who continued to tour with the revue and later with the Silas Green show, that same year. After recording twice for Vocalion in 1926, she moved to St. Louis where she married Charles Harry Lee Smith and committed herself to church work. She reportedly died in St. Louis in June 1932. (Steve Tracy, booklet to Document DOCD-5446)

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

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.

VIRGINIA LISTON

001 **VIRGINIA LISTON**

Virginia Liston – voc;

Clarence Williams – pno

71846-B Bed Time Blues

71847-B You Thought I Was Blind, But Now I See

New York,

Sep. 18, 1923

OK 8092,

Document DOCD-5446

OK 8092,

Document DOCD-5446

Clarence Williams as accompanist is printed on the labels.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p).*

- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno.*

- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.*

- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.61: Clarence Williams (pno)*

002 **VIRGINIA LISTON**

Virginia Liston – voc;

New York,

c. Sep. 21, 1923

Clarence Williams – pno			
71862	You Don't Know My Mind Blues	OK unissued	not on LP/CD
71863	Sally Long Blues	OK unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests seem to have been found and issued nothing can be said about this single side.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.61: possibly Clarence Williams (pno)*

003 VIRGINIA LISTON		New York,	Nov. 15, 1923
Virginia Liston – voc;			
Clarence Williams – pno			
71862-D	You Don't Know My Mind Blues	OK 8115,	Document DOCD-5446
71863-D	Sally Long Blues	OK 8115,	Document DOCD-5446
72063-B	Don't Agitate Me Blues	OK 8151,	Document DOCD-5446
72064-D	Happy Shout	OK 8134,	Document DOCD-5446

Clarence Williams as accompanist is printed on the labels.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.61: Clarence Williams (pno)*

004 VIRGINIA LISTON		New York,	c. Nov. 24, 1923
Virginia Liston – voc;			
Clarence Williams – pno			
72101-B	House Rent Stomp	OK 8134,	Document DOCD-5446
72102-B	Shreveport Blues	OK 8122,	Document DOCD-5446

Clarence Williams as accompanist is printed on the labels.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.73: Clarence Williams (pno)*

005 VIRGINIA LISTON – SAM GRAY		New York,	c. Jan. 02, 1924
Virginia Liston, Sam Gray – voc;			
Clarence Williams – pno			
72232-B	You Can Have It (I Don't Want It)	OK 8126,	Document DOCD-5446
72233-B	Just Take One Ling Last Lingering Look	OK 8126,	Document DOCD-5446

Clarence Williams as accompanist is printed on the labels.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.77: Clarence Williams (pno)*

006 VIRGINIA LISTON her Jazz Trio		New York,	c. Jan. 07, 1924
Virginia Liston – voc;			
Harry Cooper – tpt; (Joe Garland) – alt;			
Porter Grainger – pno			
72258-D	I Don't Love Nobody	OK 8138,	Document DOCD-5446
72259-D	Tain't A Doggone Thing But The Blues	OK 8138,	Document DOCD-5446

From the Cooper biography I learned of Cooper's first recordings with Virginia Liston in New York. This then caused my immediate listening to Liston's session of c. Jan. 07, 1924. And indeed, the trumpet player could well be Harry Cooper by his tone, his attack, his vibrato and his overall musical concept. Clarence Williams certainly is not the pianist, who may then be Porter Grainger. But the group's proximity to Graham Jackson might possibly also point to this pianist. The altoist's sweet and smooth performance might possibly be the young Joe Garland who later joined the Seminole Syncopators on a permanent basis.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Sidney Bechet (sop, possibly g); Clarence Williams (p); Buddy Christian (bj). "Harry Cooper claims to have recorded with this singer on Okeh and Gennett. There are no known Gennett sides and all the Okeh's have, to the best of our knowledge Clarence Williams accompaniments. Cooper says that the accompanying group was called the "Seminole Syncopators" and included himself on trumpet and Prince Robinson. Joe Garland (reeds); Bernard Addison (g); Graham Jackson, H. Williams on unknown instruments."*
- *BGR*2: poss Tom Morris, cnt; unknown clt/alt; Clarence Williams, pno*
- *BGR*3,*4: unknown, c; unknown, as; poss Clarence Williams or Porter Grainger, p.*
- *Rust*3: ? Tom Morris -c; unknown -cl -as; Clarence Williams -p.*

- Rust*4,*6: unknown c; unknown as; Clarence Williams or Porter Grainger -p.
 - T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.77: unknown (cnt); unknown (alt); possibly Clarence Williams or Porter Grainger -p.
 - T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p. 84: "The alto player here is aurally the same man as on Virginia Liston's OK 8138 (January 7, 1924)."

007 **VIRGINIA LISTON** New York, c. Nov. 24, 1923
 Virginia Liston – voc;
Sidney Bechet – gtr
 72265-A Jail House Blues OK 8122, Document DOCD-5446

Sidney Bechet as accompanist is printed on the labels. Yet, Bechet denied this, not without reason, as the playing is very poor (Rust*6). So, everybody has to judge for himself, whether a) Bechet does play the guitar but does not dare to concede because of his apparent incompetence on this instrument, or b) this really is another person (Sylvester Weaver?) and Bechet did only appear on the label by mishap. I am unable to have an own opinion.

All discographies list a take -2 of this item which is not listed in L. Wright, 'Okeh Race Records' 8000 series'.

Notes:

- McCarthy/Carey, *Jazz Directory Vol Five: Sidney Bechet* (possibly g).
 - BGR*2: Sidney Bechet, gtr according to the label, but Bechet was not the gtr player. It may possibly have been Sylvester Weaver.
 - BGR*3: poss. Sylvester Weaver, g..
 - BGR*4: poss. Sylvester Weaver, g. According to the label, the guitar accompaniment is by Sidney Bechet, but this is not in fact the case.
 - Rust*3: According to the label of the next item, the guitar acc. was played by Sidney Bechet, but this is wrong, according to Mr. Bechet himself. The musicianship is very poor, whoever was responsible.
 - Rust*4,*6: According to the label of the next item, the guitar accompaniment was played by Sidney Bechet, who denied this – not without reason, as the playing is very poor!

008 **VIRGINIA LISTON** New York, c. Apr. 30, 1924
 Virginia Liston – voc;
Clarence Williams – pno
 72478-B Mississippi Blues OK 8160, Document DOCD-5446
 72479-B I Never Knew What The Blues Were (Until You Went Away) OK 8151, Document DOCD-5446
 72480-A San Francisco Blues OK 8160, Document DOCD-5446

Clarence Williams as accompanist is printed on the labels.

Notes:

- McCarthy/Carey, *Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams* (p).
 - Storyville 22: not listed.
 - Lord, Clarence Williams p234: not listed.
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno.
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.
 - T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.81: Clarence Williams (pno)

009 **VIRGINIA LISTON** New York, c. Oct. 09, 1924
 Virginia Liston – voc;
Clarence Williams – pno
 72890-B Pineland Blues OK 8175, Document DOCD-5446
 72891-B Weeping Willow Blues OK 8175, Document DOCD-5446

Clarence Williams as accompanist is printed on the labels.

Notes:

- McCarthy/Carey, *Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams* (p).
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno.
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.
 - T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.104: Clarence Williams (pno)

010 **VIRGINIA LISTON** Clarence Williams' Blue Five New York, Oct. 17, 1924
 Virginia Liston – voc;
 Louis Armstrong – cnt; John Mayfield – tbn; Sidney Bechet – sop, clt;
 Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo
 72915-B Early In The Morning OK 8171, Document DOCD-5446
 72916-B You've Got The Right Key, But The Wrong Keyhole OK 8173, Document DOCD-5446

These two titles have been recorded together with 'Texas Moaner Blues' on the same session. So, everything said about the above session also applies to these two titles. And again, it is not Irvis!

Notes:

- McCarthy/Carey, *Jazz Directory Vol Five: Louis Armstrong* (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Sidney Bechet (sop, clt); Clarence Williams (p); Buddy Christian (bj).
 - Storyville 16: Louis Armstrong (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Sidney Bechet (sop, clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo)
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: Louis Armstrong, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Sidney Bechet, sop, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo
 - Lord, Clarence Williams p108: Louis Armstrong (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Sidney Bechet (sop, clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo)
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: Louis Armstrong (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Sidney Bechet (sop, clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo)

011 VIRGINIA LISTON	New York,	c. Oct. 24, 1924
Virginia Liston – voc;		
Clarence Williams – pno		
72934-B Give It To Me Good	OK 8187,	Document DOCD-5446
72935-B Bill Draw	OK 8173,	Document DOCD-5446

Clarence Williams as accompanist is printed on the labels.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p.*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.110: Clarence Williams (pno)*

012 VIRGINIA LISTON	New York,	c. Oct. 25, 1924
Virginia Liston – voc;		
Ernest Elliott – clt; Clarence Williams – pno		
72937-B Monkey Jungle Blues	OK 8247-B,	Doc DOCD-5446
72938-B Night Latch Key Blues	OK 8196-A,	Doc DOCD-5447
72939-B Any Day The Sun Don't Shine	OK 8196-A,	Doc DOCD-5447

The labels of OK 8196 list 'Clarinet by Sidney Bechet' and that of OK 8247 lists solely Clarence Williams as accompanist.

These are very good examples of Ernest Elliott's 1924 style: some jumping-trills added to his earlier very sober quarter- and eighths-notes playing, but still his staccato rhythm and his bended smears up and down to the anchor-notes. And in 'Night Latch Key Blues' in the last bar of the vamp after the intro (i.e. bar six of the tune) a very sudden and hitherto never heard thirty-second-notes chordal arpeggio. In the sixth chorus a riff played in sixteenth-notes together with a succession of sixteenth arpeggios. Ernest Elliott really is developing.

And beautiful Clarence on piano.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p)(1); add Sidney Bechet (clt)(2,3).*
- *BGR *2: Ernest Elliott (not Sidney Bechet, despite the labels), clt; Clarence Williams, pno*
- *BGR *3,*4: Ernest Elliott, clt; Clarence Williams, pno. The labels of Okeh 8196 credit the clarinet player as Sidney Bechet, but it is not Bechet in fact.*
- *Rust *3,*4,*6: Ernest Elliott (not Sidney Bechet, despite the labels) -cl; Clarence Williams -p*
- *Tom Lord p.110 and L. Wright Okeh Race Records p.56: The label says: 'Clarinet by Sidney Bechet'! "(S. Bechet): "But the trouble with Clarence was that he would never give any of us credit on a date. I spoke to him about it and in the end he put my name on two dates: one of them I never played on at all (this one!), and the other -- that was a date with Virginia Liston -- he put down I played guitar (prob. Jan. 10, 1924). That's the reason why I left him in the end; and Louis, he had the same trouble, and he left, too."*

013 VIRGINIA LISTON	New York,	Jun. 01, 1925
Virginia Liston – voc;		
Sam Gray – pno		
73387-A Papa De Da Da	OK 8218,	Document DOCD-5447
73388-A I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle	OK 8234,	Document DOCD-5447

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p, org).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: poss Sam Gray, pno.*
- *Rust*3,*4: ? Sam Gray -p. "This was Miss Liston's husband, who did accompany her on stage; labels credit Clarence Williams, but the sound does not support this, and Eva Taylor (Mrs. Clarence Williams) agrees with the suggestion of Sam Gray. It is not her late husband, she is sure."*
- *Rust*6: Sam Gray, p. "Sam Gray was Virginia Liston's husband and stage partner, suggested as the accompanist by Eva Taylor, who was certain her late husband Clarence Williams is not the pianist, despite the labels."*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.128: possibly Sam Gray (pno)*

014 VIRGINIA LISTON	New York,	c. Jun. 02, 1925
Virginia Liston – voc;		
Clarence Williams – pno, mdl; Buddy Christian – bjo (1)		
73390-A Make Me A Pallet	OK 8247,	Document DOCD-5447
73391-A You Can Dip Your Bread In My Gravy, But You Can't Have None Of My Chops	OK 8218,	Document DOCD-5447

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p); unknown (mand); unknown (bj).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, pno; unknown mand (2); Buddy Christian, bjo (1).*
- *Rust*3,*4: Clarence Williams -p; with unknown md (1) or Buddy Christian -bj (2).*
- *Rust*6: Clarence Williams -p; with unknown -md; Buddy Christian -bj (1).*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.129: Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo); unknown (mandolin)*

015 VIRGINIA LISTON	New York,	Jun. 03, 1925
Virginia Liston – voc;		
Clarence Williams – org		
73395-A I Ain't Got Nobody (And Nobody Cares For Me)	OK 8223,	Document DOCD-5447
73396-A Black Sheep Blues	OK 8223,	Document DOCD-5447
73397-A I'm Sick Of Fattening Frogs For Snakes	OK 8234,	Document DOCD-5447

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: Clarence Williams (p).*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams, reed-organ*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams, reed-organ*
- *T. Lord, Clarence Williams, p.130: Clarence Williams (reed organ)*

016 VIRGINIA LISTON

New York, Apr. 20, 1926

Virginia Liston – voc;

unknown – clt; Lovie Austin, pno

172/3 Titanic Blues

Voc unissued

not on LP/CD

174/5 Rolls Royce Papa

Voc unissued

not on LP/CD

As no tests seem to have been found and issued nothing can be said about this single side.

Notes:

- *BGR*2: Lovie Austin, pno*
- *BGR*3,*4: unknown, clt; Lovie Austin, pno*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: not listed*

017 VIRGINIA LISTON

Chicago, May 29, 1926

Virginia Liston – voc;

Joe King Oliver – cnt;

Luis Russell – pno; Bud Scott - bjo

E-3169 Rolls Royce Papa

Voc 1032,

Document DOCD-5447

E-3170/71 Titanic Blues

Voc 1031,

Document DOCD-5447

E-3172 Titanic Blues

Voc unissued

not on LP/CD

E-3174 Evil Minded Blues

Voc 1031,

Document DOCD-5447

E-3177 I'm Gonna Get Me A Man, That's All

Voc 1032,

Document DOCD-5447

Erroneously, I (KBR) have listed this session as a New York recording date before. When browsing through old VJM "Ramblings" the other day I came to the below listed note. And regarding the fact that Oliver's Dixie Syncopators were in this same studio on this very day recording matrices E-3179 to E-3983, the conclusion must be evident that Oliver's men were employed to deliver accompaniment.

By close listening we can easily identify Luis Russell as pianist and Bud Scott on banjo. The big question arises whether we hear Oliver on his cornet here. Although the VJM people "have their own views on this" (they do not tell us which ones, see below), and Laurie Wright simply was unable or unwilling to see – and hear – an obvious and conclusive relation. There only is the meagre note on V. Liston's matrices in his book, as shown below. I do hear Joe King Oliver accompanying Miss Liston here. Who else? Bob Shoffner I would exclude of stylistic reasons. He plays a legato style at the time and uses a more modern swinging rhythm. Instead, I hear Oliver's sharp staccato style of the time using a knob – or straight - mute, his unsecure embouchure, and his wooden attack. And, would he have donated the opportunity to earn some plus money to his employee when he himself was short of money at this time? I'd be interested to hear other listener's opinions!

In my eyes/ears, Mr. Wilson is absolutely right! And regarding Chris Hillman's opinion (VJM 135 below) I would like to comment: Although as a rule I appreciate Mr. Hillman's opinions and judgements very much, I have to contradict here: 1. the conformance of Oliver's and Liston's presence in the same studio and their recording subsequent matrices should be a most significant indication of the identical sameness of cornet/trumpet players. The presence of another cornet/trumpet player on the four matrices just after the Oliver's would be most improbable – just as there are two accomplished players present. And Mr. Hillman's note re an otherwise unknown trumpet player of Miss Liston's show of half-a -year later cannot really be seen serious as alternate for our player here. 2. I – KBR, and obviously others - do hear strong similarities of style, tonal quality, choice of mute, but little of rhythmic concept (yes!) with other King Oliver performances under Clarence Williams' name in New York two years later. Both aspects seen together certainly make a different sight of this problem most improbable – if not impossible.

Notes:

- *McCarthy/Carey, Jazz Directory Vol Five: unknown (cnt)(possibly King Oliver); unknown (p)(possibly Clarence Williams); unknown (bjo).*
- *BGR*2: poss Demus Dean, cnt; Perry Bradford, pno; Samuel Speed, bjo.*
- *BGR*3,*4: unknown, cnt; unknown, pno, org (3); unknown, bjo*
- *Rust*3: unknown -t; Perry Bradford -p; Samuel Speed -bj.*
- *Rust*4,*6: unknown -t; unknown -p; unknown -bj. "The Chicago Defender of July 3, 1926 refers to Miss Liston's having recorded some unspecified titles for an unspecified company in Chicago, apparently during the preceding few weeks. The only known session near the date of this report is the following, usually shown as accompanied by Perry Bradford -p; Sam Speed -bj; and an unidentified trumpet; this would make the location New York, but it is quite likely that neither Bradford nor Speed are concerned, and that the details are as shown."*
- *L. Wright, "King" Oliver, p. 62: "Adjacent matrices: E3168/77W are by Virginia Liston recorded P.M. on 29 May. E3184/8W are by Wilmer Davis also recorded P.M. on 29 May."*
- *VJM 134 (25-06-2004): "Clint Wilson (US) has written to say he feels the trumpet player on the session of May 29, 1926 is no less than King Oliver. He cites similar views from others, and points out the proximity of a Dixie Syncopators recording date on the same day. We have our own views on this – anyone else wish to comment?"*
- *VJM 135 (30-09-2004): Chris Hillman: "I am absolutely certain that the cornet player is not King Oliver. The playing is nothing like his style, being more typical of a New York musician under the influence of Johnny Dunn or Bubber Miley."*
- *Ibid: "I would suggest that the cornet player on the recordings was also in the orchestra for the show ('Shufflin' Sam from Alabam', Pittsburgh, August (!) 1926) though I can find no documentation of any of the musicians involved; perhaps somebody with more comprehensive files could help."*

K.- B. Rau
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