

THE RECORDINGS OF LAURA SMITH

An Annotated Tentative Name-Discography

SMITH, Laura, singer

From Indianapolis. Toured in South, Mid-West And East in early 1920s, sometimes with her 'Ginger Pep Workers' group. Got as far West As Houston in late 1922. July 1924 Washington D.C., Baltimore. Oct. 1924 rehearsing in New York City. Toured Pittsburg (band included Robert Taylor, cnt; Wilton Crawley, clt; Grace Barnett, pno/ldr; Ernest Session, dms), Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago. Oct. 1925 to New York. 1926 living in Baltimore. Wife of Slim Jones, comedian. Later toured Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles (Dec. 1929), where she died in Feb. 1932. (Tom Lord, Clarence Williams)

SMITH, Laura was born Loretta Bryant and had assumed the name Laura Smith for professional reasons.

(L. Wright, Storyville 1998/99-170)

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

Personnels 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: **Laura Smith**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Laura Smith*
- 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: (*Laura Smith*)

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.

A very big thank has to be payed to Tom Lord, author of 'Clarence Williams' (Storyville Publications, 1976), who with his expert knowledge has enabled the collector to identify Clarence Williams' piano playing by extracting Williams' most frequently played piano phrases and publishing them in listed short notations to everybody's easy use in his above-named fundamental bio-discography.

LAURA SMITH

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|---|---------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 001 LAURA SMITH | Clarence Williams' Harmonizers | New York, | c. Aug. 01, 1924 |
| Laura Smith – voc; | | | |
| Thomas Morris – cnt; <i>John Mayfield</i> – tbn; Ernest Elliott -clt; | | | |
| Clarence Williams – pno; <i>Buddy Christian</i> – bjo | | | |
| 72719-B | Texas Moaner Blues | OK 8157, | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 72720-B | I'm Gonna Get Myself A Real Man | OK 8186, | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 72721-B | Has Anybody Seen My Man? | OK 8157, | Document DOCD-5429 |

Morris and Williams are obvious. The banjo might be a bit too heavy to be Christian. But the trombonist very certainly is not Charlie Irvis with his legato trombone but could rather be John Mayfield of the early Clarence Williams stable with his simple staccato style. There is little clarinet to hear, but the square quarter tone phrasing and the downward smear in bar four of the introduction of 'Has Anybody Seen My Man?' are typically Elliott and seem to be proof of his presence.

Notes:

- *Storyville 15: Thomas Morris (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo)*
- *BGR *2, *3, *4: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ernest Elliott, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo*
- *Lord, Clarence Williams p97: Thomas Morris (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo) "There is agreement on the personnel with the exception of the clarinet. TKD lists Buster Bailey, however Bailey was not in New York, and aural evidence suggests Elliott."*
- *Rust *3, *4, *6 Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ernest Elliott, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo*

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|---------|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|
| 002 | LAURA SMITH | | New York, | c. Oct. 10, 1924 |
| | Laura Smith – voc; | | | |
| | Clarence Williams – pno | | | |
| 72895-B | My Best Friend Stole My Man And Gone | OK 8186, | | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 72896-B | Two-Faced Woman Blues | OK 8169, | | Document DOCD-5429 |

Clarence Williams as accompanist is documented on the OKeh record label, and it is stylistically unmistakably he.

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3, *4: Clarence Williams - pno
- Lord, Clarence Williams, p. 105: Clarence Williams (pno)
- Rust*3, *4, *6: Clarence Williams - pno

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|---------|--|---|-----------|--------------------|
| 003 | LAURA SMITH | Clarence Williams Harmonizers / Instrumental Trio | New York, | c. Oct. 11, 1924 |
| | Laura Smith – voc; | | | |
| | unknown – clt; Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian– bjo | | | |
| 72897-B | I Can Always Tell When My Man Don't Want Me 'Round | OK 8169, | | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 72898-B | Lake Pontchartrain Blues | OK 8179, | | Document DOCD-1005 |
| 72899-B | Gravier Street Blues | OK 8179, | | Document DOCD-1005 |

It is unmistakably Clarence Williams here on piano – and he is listed as leader of the accompanying trio.

Crucial characteristics of Elliott's playing and style cannot be detected here, and from what can be heard I would deny his presence on this session. The clarinetist plays in a harmonically and rhythmically simple style different from Elliott's. But: I also feel unable to find any elements of the great Lorenzo Tio's style and would therefore also exclude him from possibility as expressed in Rust*4 and *6. This clarinetist is much too square rhythmically than would be expected from Tio! And: there is no cornet on the second and third titles as listed in the Storyville series Vol. 16.

Notes:

- Storyville 16: Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo); Thomas Morris (cnt) added on second and third titles.
- BGR*2*3*4: Ernest Elliott – clt; Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo
- Rust*3: Ernest Elliott – cl; Clarence Williams – p; Buddy Christian – bj; with Tom Morris -c (2,3)
- Rust*4,*6: ? Lorenzo Tio – cl; Clarence Williams – p; Buddy Christian – bj
- Lord, Clarence William p 105: Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo) “While these dates are not exact, it is interesting to mention that the Chicago Defender for October 11, 1924 mentions that Ernest Elliott, “clarinet and saxophone expert is featured with the big time act ‘Frisco’”, in Chicago.

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|---------|--|----------|-----------|--------------------|
| 004 | LAURA SMITH | | New York, | Oct. 01, 1925 |
| | Laura Smith – voc; | | | |
| | unknown, unknown – vln; unknown - gtr | | | |
| 73663-B | Face To Face | OK 8252, | | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 73664-B | Take Me Home, Heavenly Father, With Thee | OK 8252, | | Document DOCD-5429 |

The record label only names an Instrumental Trio as accompanying group. Apparently present are two violinists playing straight – without improvising – throughout, and a guitarist playing simple chordal accompaniment, without playing a permanent beat in the first title. Nothing can be said about these musicians, except that the guitarist could well be Buddy Christian sound-wise. But, are there really two violins present?

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3, *4: two unknowns – vln; unknown - gtr
- Rust*3, *4, *6: two unknowns – vln; unknown - gtr

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|---------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 005 | LAURA SMITH | Perry Bradford's Mean Four | New York, | Oct. 03, 1925 |
| | unknown – har; unknown – vln; | | | |
| | Perry Bradford – pno; unknown - gtr | | | |
| 73678-A | Lucy Long | OK 8366, | | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 73679-B | Disgusted Blues | OK 8246, | | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 73680-A | Humming Blues | OK 8246, | | Document DOCD-5429 |
| 73681-A | Cool Can Blues | OK 8366, | | Document DOCD-5429 |

After his recordings for OKeh with Mamie Smith in 1920, for Columbia with Edith Wilson and Johnny Dunn in 1921 and later with the Gulf Coast Seven and Original Jazz Hounds, and an interlude with Paramount – the ‘Jazz Phools’ – Bradford had the chance to record for OKeh again accompanying a handful of vaudeville/blues singers, starting in 1925 with this session. This is his first session under this name, supporting singer Laura Smith. Quite different from all his other accompanying bands he chose an instrumentation of violin, harmonica, guitar and – probably his own – piano. Comparing this session with all his other ones, this one is most unusual and might have been intended for another market in the blues business of the time.

Coming from the jazz side I feel unable to comment on the musicians performing here. Maybe there is a blues collector with sufficient knowledge of the rural instruments used here – and their players - to comment on the participating musicians? All I can say is that the piano performance is well within Perry Bradford's range and possibility.

As for the second violinist listed in BGR*4: I hear two melody players on all titles – harmonica and violin – but on the first title the violin plays in the same range as the harmonica throughout and might therefore have been led to the assumption that there is a second violin.

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3: unknown hca; unknown vln; unknown vln/gtr; presumably Perry Bradford, pno.
- BGR*4: unknown h; unknown vn; poss second unknown vn-1; unknown g; presumably Perry Bradford p.
- Rust*3, *4, *6: unknown h; unknown vn; unknown vn , g; ? Perry Bradford p.

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|-----|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 006 | LAURA SMITH | Perry Bradford's Mean Four | New York, | Apr. 01, 1926 |
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Laura Smith – voc;
 Gus Aiken – tpt; Bud Aiken – tbn; unknown – clt;
 Perry Bradford - pno
 74083-A I'll Get Even With You OK 8316, Document DOCD-5353
 74084-A If You Don't Like It OK 8316, Document DOCD-5353

After a short excursion into PA territory Perry Bradford's Mean Four are with OKeh again accompanying Laura Smith (see my pieces on Gus Aiken and Perry Bradford's Mean Four elsewhere on this website!). We hear some familiar sounds in the persons of the 'master' himself together with brothers Gus and Bud Aiken. The only 'unknown' is the clarinet player.

Gus Aiken on trumpet is very assured now, and his brother Bud, a trombonist as well as trumpeter, shows a very remarkable development into a first-class trombone player, very modern for his time and obviously in the spell of the future trombone master of swing, Jimmy Harrison. Bud Aiken with his exceptionally modern improvisational style – reaching forward into stylistic regions of the 50s and 60s – will be heard and listed again on the hitherto unidentified recording session of Perry Bradford and his Gang of May 1926 in one of the next volumes of Names&Numbers.

The clarinet player is not at all incompetent, but can stylistically not be identified. Bradford clearly is at the piano.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3: no personnel

- BGR*4: unknown c; unknown tb; unknown cl; presumably Perry Bradford p

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Rust does not list a personnel here, thus possibly indicating that the personnel of the preceding session (L. Smith, Oct. 03, 1925 – see above – the har-vln-gtr-pno personnel!) should apply to this session, too.

007 LAURA SMITH New York, May 28, 1926
 Laura Smith – voc;
 Clarence Williams – pno
 80045-B Jackass Blues OK 8331, Document DOCD- 5429
 80046-B Them Has Been Blues OK 8331, Document DOCD- 5429

Clarence Williams as accompanist is documented on the OKeh record label, and it is stylistically unmistakably he.

Notes:

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

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams - pno

008 LAURA SMITH Her Wild Cats New York, c. Jan. 15, 1927
 Laura Smith – voc;
 Edwin Swayze – tpt; unknown – clt;
 Willie Gant – pno
 107313 I'm Goin' To Have Seven Years' Bad Luck PA 7520, Document DOCD-5429
 107314 When A 'Gator Hollers (Folks Say Sign O' Rain) PA 7520, Document DOCD-5429

My assumption – following recent research – is that Willie Gant may well be the pianist, not Cliff nor Mike Jackson. The pianist does not play Cliff Jackson's typical licks (broken rhythm or shifting of meter) nor Mike Jackson's light and flowery stride-style, and may therefore possibly be somebody else, yet a very strong piano player – not Mike Jackson who plays a very different right hand. Mind the consecutive matrix numbers of these four PA sessions – their recording date certainly should be checked and corrected!

As on the fore-going PA sessions of this date, Edwin Swayze is on trumpet. He was touring in the East with the show Bamville Dandies at this time. Comparison with Edwin Swayze reveals strong similarities stylistically, and I am convinced that the trumpet player here is Edwin "King" Swayze. (Compare the Sammy Lewis OK 8285 and Sammy Lewis and his Bamville Syncopators Vocalions and The Levee Serenaders !) Swayze himself is remembered by colleagues as "a terrific trumpeter whose idol was King Oliver – not Louis as most of us were trying to sound like" (Arcadia 2008 cover text). For Swayze's correct name see Storyville 78, p. 230.

The clarinet has been found not to be Fuller.

Notes:

- BGR*2: poss Thomas Morris, cnt; poss Bob Fuller, clt; poss Mike Jackson, pno.

- BGR*3,*4: prob Thomas Morris, cnt; prob Bob Fuller, clt; prob Mike Jackson, pno.

- Rust*3,*4: ? Tom Morris, c; ? Bob Fuller, cl; ? Mike Jackson, p.

- Rust*6: unknown, c; unknown cl; unknown p.

009 LAURA SMITH New York, c. Jan. 1927
 Laura Smith – voc;
 unknown – pno; unknown - gtr
 107427-B I'm Gonna Kill Myself PA 7525, Document DOCD-5429
 107428-B If You Don't Do It Like I Want It Done (I'll Get Somebody Else) PA 7525, Document DOCD-5429

Both accompanists are unknown. But stylistically Willie Gant and Bobby Leecan should be checked.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown, pno; unknown, gtr

- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown, p; unknown, g

010 LAURA SMITH New York, c. Jan. 26, 1927
 Laura Smith – voc;
 unknown – cms; unknown – vln; unknown – kazoo;
 unknown - pno
 7074-2 Gonna Put You Right In Jail Ban 1977, Document DOCD-5429

The esteemed reader/listener might pardon my admission that I have no idea who the musicians playing here might be. I hear some snippets I think to know from Mike Jackson, but this pianist is much more extrovert than what I know of Jackson. I think that the saxophone played here is of the c-melody-sax variety.

Notes:

- BGR*2: unknown, kazoo; unknown, alt; unknown, pno
- BGR*3,*4: unknown, vn; unknown, as; unknown, p
- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown, kazoo; unknown, alt; unknown, pno

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|--|---|---|
| 011 LAURA SMITH Laura Smith – voc; unknown – tpt; unknown – pno 80400-B My Man Just Won't Don't 80401-B Hatefull Blues | New York, OK 8445, OK 8445, | Feb. 07, 1927 Document DOCD-5429 Document DOCD-5429 |
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I have to admit that both players do not ring a bell in my aural memory, only that the trumpeter belongs to the group of "rhapsodic" players like Joe Smith of Fletcher Henderson's band (the Henderson band was in Detroit at the Graystone Ballroom for two weeks from January 25, but: who knows?). (A player with a similar style was Harry Smith!)

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown, tpt; unknown, pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown, tpt; unknown, pno

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| 012 LAURA SMITH / SARA LAWRENCE Laura Smith – voc; Thomas Morris – tpt, voc injections; Mike Jackson – pno 7130-2 Don't You Leave Me Here 813-2 Don't You Leave Me Here 814-2 If You Don't Like My Potatoes | New York, Ban 1977, Or 894, Or 894, | Feb. 25, 1927 Document DOCD-5429 Document DOCD-5461 Document DOCD-5461 |
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The esteemed reader/listener should know that my (KBR's) foremost interest belongs to Charlie Johnson and his Paradise Band. Having this in mind it should not be astonishing that I think to have "downloaded" the very few individual stylistic features of Charlie Johnson's pianistic style as audible from Johnson's recordings in my memory.

Thus I was very much surprised a couple of years ago – when hearing this first title by Laura Smith (Ban 1977) for the first time on Selmerphone SHN-4032 – to intuitively recognize Charlie Johnson's piano style on this title. Thomas Morris on trumpet/cornet was easily identifiable – with the help of Richard Rains in his article on Sara Lawrence in Storyville 153. Here Rains said: "If Mike Jackson is the pianist on Laura Smith's 'Don't You Leave Me Here', who on earth was Lukie Johnson?" My own immediate answer was: Lukie Johnson must be a pseudonym for bandleader/pianist Charlie Johnson. And in this respect it is most interesting to note that on this same day – February 25, 1927 – Thomas Morris is assumed to have recorded within the ranks of the Charlie Johnson Orchestra, although he was not a member of the band, as far as is known. And this would have been most improbable as Morris' technical abilities were much beyond the demands of a band like Charlie Johnson's. But what the pianist played reminded me very much of what I knew of Charlie Johnson's piano style.

Only after the reissue of the two Sara Lawrence Oriole 894 titles on Document DOCD-5461 it became apparent that the pianist on all three titles has to be seen as identical, and he furthermore is addressed as 'Mike' by Miss Smith on 'If You Don't Like My Potatoes'. This is definitely one person, and this person's style compared to what Charlie Johnson plays behind the singer in his own recording of this title definitely excludes Charlie Johnson's presence. (Johnson plays much stronger and more daring – sometimes even reaching into strange chordal sequences – than the assumed Mike Jackson.) Thomas Morris is said to have maintained a close relationship to pianist Mike Jackson, a musician of the lesser known bunch of Harlem Stride pianists. And what we do hear on these sides pianistically would easily fit into the picture I have of Mike Jackson with his unobtrusive, light and sober pianistic style.

Consequently and regrettably I had to depart from my pet idea that Charlie Johnson might have been the pianist on these sides.

The Oriole issue is as by Sara Lawrence! And there is no naming of 'Lukie Johnson' elsewhere in the discographies or other jazz literature.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3: as by Sara Lawrence: reportedly Tommy Ladnier, c; James P. Johnson, p
- BGR*4: Tom Morris, cnt; Lukie Johnson, pno; unknown male voc. "Oriole 894, which show the control numbers indicated, as by 'Sara Lawrence'. These performances are aurally by Laura Smith and 813-2 appears to be an alternative take of matrix 7130. Although the singer calls the pianist 'Mike', it is believed that he is in fact Lukie Johnson."
- Rust*3,*4: ? Tommy Ladnier, c; James P. Johnson, p
- Rust*6: Tom Morris, cnt; Lukie Johnson, pno

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|--|---|---|
| 013 LAURA SMITH Perry Bradford's Mean Four Personnel and instrumentation unknown, but possibly comprising <i>James P. Johnson</i> – pno 80510 Home (Cradle Of Happiness) 80511 If Anybody Here Wants A Real Kind Mama (Here's Your Opportunity) | New York, OK unissued OK unissued | Mar. 09, 1927 not on LP/CD not on LP/CD |
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As these titles are unissued and no tests seem to have been found nothing can be said about musical contents or personnel.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: instrumentation and personnel unknown
- Rust*3,*4,*6: instrumentation and personnel unknown

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| 014 LAURA SMITH Laura Smith – voc; Clarence M. Jones – pno 38651-1 Lonesome Refugee | Chicago, Vic 20775, | Jun. 07, 1927 Document DOCD-5431 |
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| 38652-3 | The Mississippi Blues | Vic 20775, | Document DOCD-5431 |
| 38653-2 | Fightin' Blues | Vic 20945, | Document DOCD-5431 |
| 38654-2 | Red River Blues | Vic 20945, | Document DOCD-5431 |

Laura Smith is accompanied here by famous Chicago pianist and band leader Clarence M. Jones, as documented on the record labels. Jones is reputed for his fine legitimate musicianship and his band leading at the Owl Theater in Chicago. He recorded under his own name with his Wonder Orchestra and his Sock Four.

These sides were made in Chicago! Beautiful and sensitive recordings these.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence M. Jones, pno

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Jones - pno

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|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 015 LAURA BRYANT | Clarence Williams and his Orchestra | Long Island City, | c. Jan. 1929 |
| Laura Bryant (<i>Laura Smith</i>) – voc; | | | |
| Ed Allen – cnt; Arville Harris – clt; | | | |
| Clarence Williams – pno ; unknown – dentist drill noises | | | |
| 322-A | Dentist Chair Blues Part 1 | QRS R-7055, | Frog DGF 49 |
| 323- | Dentist Chair Blues Part 2 | QRS R-7055, | Doc DOCD-5376 |
| 323-A | Dentist Chair Blues Part 2 | QRS R-7055, | Frog DGF 49 |
| 324- | Saturday Night Jag | Pm 12870 test, | Frog DGF 49 |
| 324-A | Saturday Night Jag | Pm 12870, | Frog DGF 49 |

These sides are recorded very probably by Laura Smith using the pseudonym Laura Bryant (see Storyville 1996/97, p.227 and Storyville 1998/99, p. 170) as an “amalgam of her stage and real names” (L. Wright).

These titles have been tackled in our team’s Clarence Williams investigation a couple of years ago (see elsewhere on this website). The team opinion here favours Harris as clarinetist, although Elliott is suggested as an alternative on account of the blue playing.

Yet, intensive listening very soon proofs Arville Harris’ presence on these sides. Not any of Elliott’s characteristics, but playing that we are accustomed from Harris.

Ed Allen and Clarence Williams are their reliable selves, and the dentist is a virtuoso on the drill!

Notes:

- Storyville 24: “The (Storyville – KBR) Team’s opinion here favours Harris, although Elliott is suggested as an alternative on account of the blue playing.”

- BGR*2: Ed Allen – cnt; Prince Robinson – clt; Clarence Williams – pno

- BGR*3,*4: Ed Allen, c; prob Ernest Elliott, cl; Clarence Williams, p

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Ed Allen, c; Ernest Elliott, cl; Clarence Williams, p

- Storyville 1998 p 170: Laura Bryant (nee Loretta Bryant) is most probably identical to Laura Smith

Notable differences of takes (from Lord p.274):

323- : “Um – Hum. Oh Lord. I ever get out o’ here, I betcha I won’t come back here no more.”

323-A: “Uhhh. I ever get outa here, I never come back no more. MmMMM.”

324- : Intro clt starts marking the beat, starts playing ad-lib in second half of second bar

324-A: Intro clt starts on second beat of third bar (no marking the beat earlier)

Note: Laura Bryant (nee Loretta Bryant) is most probably identical to Laura Smith (St. 1998-170)!

Acc. band to Laura Smith, Chicago June 1929 (St. 1996 p 229):

Gus Aiken, Johnny Biggs – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn;

Herbert Waters, Floyd Blakemore – alt; James Bradley – ten;

Jack Simms – pno; Ernest Meyers – bjo; William Burrell – bbs; Clifton Drake - dms

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