

THE RECORDINGS OF THORNTON G. BROWN

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

BROWN, Thornton G., cornet/trumpet

No personal details known

Member of Drake & Walker show in Harlem (Aug. 1924) and at the Douglas Theatre, Baltimore (Sep. 1924). With Lois Deppe, also with the 7-11 show (1925 and early 1926), and recording with the 'Original Jazz Hounds' under Perry Bradford in 1925. With Ethel Waters' 'Black Bottom Revue' at the Lafayette Theatre, New York in Sep. 1926, also recording with Ethel Waters in May - July 1926. In 1927 with Earl Walton's Orchestra at the Palace de Dance in Detroit. (Storyville 1998-99)

Thornton G. Brown does not belong to the group of trumpet players living and working in Harlem during the 1920s and early 1930s and thus labelled 'Harlem' musicians. Instead, he was part of the large group of jazz musicians working permanently in travelling shows all over the U.S.A., and even in other parts of the Americas. He, yet, has become known to us by his few, but very interesting recordings, cut in New York in the 1920s, and listed below.

STYLISTICS

STYLE

His trumpet style is very much influenced by Johnny Dunn and characterised by his very sharp tone, his permanent staccato playing when ad-libbing, and his favoured 6/8th phrasing. When using mutes he is following Johnny Dunn as well, and has thus been identified as Bubber Miley. But he does not achieve Dunn's power when blowing.

STONE

He owns a sharp and slim but clear and beautiful tone.

VIBRATO

His vibrato is very fast and with little amplitude.

TIME

Brown's time is urgent and very much on the beat.

PHRASING

Phrasing is marked by very much playing on the beat, frequently using triplets and long held blue-notes.

This personnelo-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: **Thornton G. Brown**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Thornton G. Brown*
- 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: (*Thornton G. Brown*)

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.

BROWN, THORNTON G.

In Storyville 79 – 22 Clyde Bernhardt reports of Lois Deppe's Serenaders of Chicago: "*Lois Deppe had a terrific ten piece band there (Pittsburgh – KBR) in 1922 thru 1924 and into later years, and there was no organised band in New York at that time that came anywhere near Los Deppe & his Serenaders. In 1923 he had Earl Hines and Vance Dixon and Thornton Brown in his band. ... Lois Deppe took his famous band to Richmond, Ind. to record for the Gennett Record Company in September 1923, and I remember all the publicity they got in the Pittsburgh Courier weekly newspaper.*" The band personnel in Rust*3 to Rust*6 has one trumpet player only, Leon Smothers, but there should be a second trumpet player in a ten piece band. This might possibly have been Thornton G. Brown. Unfortunately, the only recording reissued of this session, 'Congaine' (or 'Congane' as by Bernhardt) on Milestone MPL 2012 (LP) or RST JPCD-1519-2 (CD), is of a deplorably bad sound quality and does not allow judgement on the number of trumpeters, but may possibly enclose Thornton G. Brown.

001 ORIGINAL JAZZ HOUNDS	New York,	Jul. 14, 1925
Thornton G. Brown – cnt; <i>Wilbur de Paris</i> – tbn; <i>John Howell</i> – alt, clt; (<i>William Elliott</i>) – ten; Perry Bradford – pno; <i>George Gilmore</i> – bjo		
140760-1 'Fo' Day Blues	Col 14086-0,	Frog DGF 56
140760-3 'Fo' Day Blues	Col 14086-0,	Frog DGF 56
140761-2 1620 To 1865 (Uncle Eph's Dream)	Col 14086-0,	Frog DGF 56
<i>Composer credits are: 140760 (Bradford); 140761 (Horsley and Bradford)</i>		

From the above sources Brown on trumpet and very probably Howell on clarinet and saxophone are given. The only other instances of Thornton G. Brown's playing can be heard on Ethel Water's sessions of 29 July and 18 September 1926 !

There is no report that Jake Frazier was part of the 7-11 show, and his presence has to be strongly doubted for stylistic reasons. In fact, after listening to a long row of recordings with the participation of Jake Frazier (after Rust*6) – quite a number have proved to contain other trombonists! – I have to report, that this trombone player here on the Jazz Hounds has nothing in common with Jake Frazier. Frazier throughout plays in a strong staccato style, linear and horizontal, using short, blues-oriented, often repeated phrases, played with a rather dry tone. Our trombone man here has a very melodic, mainly legato style. In contrast to Frazier he owns a perfect sense for harmonic refinement. He knows exactly how and where to use the right chord tone to good effect – and he owns a warm and voluminous tone. He is a much better musician than Frazier and I only would wish to know his name. I did not succeed in finding him elsewhere on record. Stylistically Gene Bud Aiken and Herb Flemming come to mind by comparison, but Flemming was in Europe at this time and Aiken is not known to have been part of the 7-11 burlesque show at any time. So, we seem to have one of those unsung masters of jazz music here, whose names are unreported and unremembered. A note from the Chicago Defender of 2 January 1926 cited in Storyville 1996/7 p. 192 names William Paris as trombonist of the Seven-Eleven Company band of January 1926, and our player here might be this man of whom we do not have any known recorded evidence, but he obviously was trombonist with Chick Webb's Harlem Stompers recording one unissued title for Vocalion in August 1927. (Rust*6 lists the personnel for this early Webb recording. But he lists William Paris as alto player together with Johnny Hodges. This certainly is a mistake as no alto player of that name has been listed anywhere, and a dance band with a personnel of tpt, 2 altos, tenor and rhythm does not make sense at that time. (The usual personnel was tpt, tbn, alt, ten, pno, bjo, bbs, dms.)

(The trombonist now has been recognized as Wilbur de Paris by Mark Berresford – see below!)

As will be seen, the clarinetist of this first session plays with a completely different vibrato than the clarinetist of the second and third sessions. Therefore, I believe these to be two different musicians. So, it might be Howell on this first session, if not on the later ones. If we consider the time between recording a record and issuing might be rather 6 weeks or more than 3 or 4, it certainly should rather be Howell on this first session!

As the tenor sax player plays tenor throughout, Howell has to be the alto man doubling clarinet. He obviously is a jazz musician of the first degree, and it is very sad that he did not record more often. He plays with a strong tone and a wide vibrato, somewhat between Bechet and Dodds. Moreover, he does play beautiful blues solos, urgent, down-to-earth, no-nonsense and very musically.

The tenor saxophonist seems to hail from an archaic period in Afro-American music. He sounds as if playing into a bucket, his attack and time are pedestrian and completely unswinging and have very limited musical value. He almost exclusively plays straight parts, possibly arranged on the spot. I have no memory having heard this man anywhere else. Following the above-mentioned note in the Chicago Defender the tenor saxophonist's name might be searched for in the line of the named musicians there: Jess Faithful, A. Pole, Eugene Callaway. I suspect that our tenorist here might have been a long-serving member of the band who could easily have stayed on with the band for a couple of years. Perhaps one of the doubling sax and violin musicians?

On piano we definitely hear Mr. Perry Bradford himself. His own very distinct style of 'tinkle-tinkle-plink' in the treble part of the piano without distinct bass notes of the left hand can be heard on many Bradford recordings – and only there. Bradford is named as composer of both recorded titles and thus further identified.

As far as is known, Gus Horsley was not a banjo player. So, we should assume The 7-11 band player George Gilmore for these sessions. So, here we have an entirely different personnel – except for Brown – than those given in all the discographies. There definitely is no sign of Bob Fuller or even Ernest Elliott on these sides!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*

- Rust*2: *Bubber Miley (cnt); Jimmy Harrison (?) (tbn); Herschel Brassfield (?) (clt, alt); Coleman Hawkins (ten); Leroy Tibbs (pno); Gus Horsley or Samuel Speed (bjo); Perry Bradford (vcl)*

- Rust*3, *4, *6: *Thornton G. Brown -c; Jake Frazier -tb; Bob Fuller -cl -as; Ernest Elliott -cl -ts; Mike Jackson -p; Samuel Speed -bj; Perry Bradford -v*

002 ORIGINAL JAZZ HOUNDS	New York,	Aug. 11, 1925
Thornton G. Brown – cnt; <i>Wilbur de Paris</i> – tbn; <i>(John Howell)</i> – alt, clt; (<i>William Elliott</i>) – ten; <i>(Quinton Redd)</i> – pno; <i>George Gilmore</i> – bjo; Perry Bradford – voc; band – voc (2)		
140840-2 I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle	Col 14094-D,	Frog DGF 56
140841-3 Slow Down	Col 14094-D,	Frog DGF 56

Composer credits are: 140840 (Perry Bradford); 140841 (Perry Bradford)

Trumpet player, trombonist, tenor sax player and banjo player are aurally the same men as on the first session one month ago. But Bradford in command of the session possibly had to replace the clarinet soloist – probably Howell – from the former personnel with another man. This new clarinet/saxophone player is stylistically rather akin to Howell, but he plays with a completely different vibrato, so much so that I suggest him not to be Howell. This new player displays a very fast, narrow and almost whining vibrato which could be a hint to Bob Fuller as listed in all earlier discographies. And he obviously plays with a different mouth-piece than the first clarinetist (Howell?) does. Yet, for my knowledge, this man here plays a much more essential and tasteful style than Bob Fuller did on his own solo recordings which were more on the corny and gas-pipe side. So more probably he should be looked for among the other reed players of the 7-11 band as listed above, provided that these men had been members of the band half a year ago. (Dave Brown thinks that there is only one clarinet player responsible for the sessions of 1925 despite differences of tone and vibrato! He also adds that these Original Jazz Hounds recordings must be some of the earliest electric recordings made, which could be the cause of different studio sounds because of experimentation on balance and mike placement. Michael Rader adds that the different clarinet sounds might nevertheless have been made by one person as the clt player of the first session also tends to a tighter vibrato when playing in ensemble. (The differences might then have been caused by using a different instrument. The author does not entirely agree!)

On piano another man has replaced Bradford, feeding the band with a much better foundation and rhythm than Perry could provide. Rust*6 lists Mike Jackson, but I feel unable to identify any distinct piano player from stylistic elements here. As far as I know of Mike Jackson, he had a lighter approach to piano playing than this man here. I assume that Bradford made room for the 7-11 band's regular piano player. The above note from the Chicago Defender of 2 Jan. 1926 presents the name of a certain Quinton Redd who might have been responsible. Yet the singer unequivocally is Perry Bradford with all his short-comings. The banjo player may then be the 7-11 man as well.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography*, 1948: not listed

- Rust*2: Bubber Miley (cnt); Jimmy Harrison (?) (tbn); Herschel Brassfield (?) (clt, alt); Coleman Hawkins (ten); Leroy Tibbs (pno); Gus Horsley or Samuel Speed (bjo); Perry Bradford (vcl)

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Thornton G. Bown -c; Jake Frazier -tb; Bob Fuller -cl -as; Ernest Elliott -cl -ts; Mike Jackson -p; Samuel Speed -bj; Perry Bradford -v

003 ORIGINAL JAZZ HOUNDS

Thornton G. Brown – cnt; Wilbur de Paris – tbn;
(John Howell) – alt, clt; (Williams Elliott) – ten;
(Quinton Redd) – pno; George Gilmore – bjo

140846-2 Cannon Ball Blues

140847-3 Vamping Lucy Long

Composer credits are: 140846 (Balkan); 140847 (Bradford)

New York, Aug. 12, 1925

Col 14124-D, Frog DGF 56

Col 14124-D, Frog DGF 56

Obviously, because it took place the following day, the same personnel are responsible as for this session.

And Perry Bradford mercifully renounces to sing!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography*, 1948: not listed

- Rust*2: Bubber Miley (cnt); Jimmy Harrison (?) (tbn); Herschel Brassfield (?) (clt, alt); Coleman Hawkins (ten); Leroy Tibbs (pno); Gus Horsley or Samuel Speed (bjo); Perry Bradford (vcl)

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Thornton G. Bown -c; Jake Frazier -tb; Bob Fuller -cl -as; Ernest Elliott -cl -ts; Mike Jackson -p; Samuel Speed -bj; Perry Bradford -v

ADDITION 18.06.2018: Referring to my article in N&N 68 I am pleased that we now have some more names of real band members possibly responsible for these recordings and supporting my suggestions. Thornton G. Brown already found his way into the discographies before, but my suggestion of William Paris on trombone seems to be the right one, only that the *New York Morning Telegraph* gives his first-name as Thomas. Keeping in mind the ubiquitous vagueness of correct names in our sources I persist in William Paris, as a trombonist of this name is also documented with an early Chick Webb band (see my article also in N&N 68). (*The trombonist now has been recognized as Wilbur de Paris by Mark Berresford – see below.*) George Gilmore may well be the banjo player and might even be a misreading of Gillie Roberts of the Stanley Bennett Orchestra below – or vice versa.

The probable presence of John Howell and Quinton Redd have been suggested in my article, and there is nothing in the *New York Morning Telegraph* to the contrary. The name of Williams (or William?) Elliott certainly points to Ernest Elliott, famous for sub-standard and old-fashioned reed playing in the discographies. But this player does not show Ernest Elliott's special characteristics at all (as shown in my Ernest Elliott list on www.harlem-fuss.com). His name might therefore be as given – or similar. He certainly is not Ernest Elliott!

And now, having said all that, have a look at Rust's suggestions for the personnel above!

Notes:

- Storyville 1996/7 p.191/2 from the Chicago Defender, 02 Jan. 1926: "Stanley Bennet's Orchestra – with Seven-Eleven Company on Columbia Wheel. Played Star & Garter Theater, Chicago last week. Personnel: Thornton Brown, Louis Prevost, c; William Paris, tb; Jess Faithful, A. Pole, sax/vn; Eugene Callaway, John Howell, sax/cl; Frank Robinson, bsx; Quinton Redd, p; William Brand (Wellman Braud!), bass; Gillie Roberts, bj; Joe Wynn, d. (all sic)."

004 ETHEL WATERS her Jazz Band

Ethel Waters – voc;

Thornton G. Brown – tpt; Edward Carr – tbn;

Lorene Faulkner – pno; Dad Stewart – dms

142476-3 Heebie Jeebies

142477-2 Ev'rybody Mess Aroun'

Composer credits are: 142476 (Atkins - Jones); 142477 (Bradford)

New York, Jul. 29, 1926

Col 14153-D, Chronological Classics 672

Col 14153-D, Chronological Classics 672

On this session, Ethel Waters is accompanied by her contemporary stage band, as noted in the Chicago Defender of June 16, 1926, and, as well, in the Columbia files.

Besides Miss Waters' magnificent jazz singing, we hear Thornton G. Brown of the 'Original Jazz Hounds' fame as above in a typically over-hasted ragtime-laden style of ancient times – and still prevailing in vaudeville and tent show circles. Unfortunately, Mr. Brown starts proceedings in this first title and dominates pace and rhythm with his hectic attitude. (Do not compare with Louis Armstrong's effort on this

same composition of Chicago musician Boyd Atkins of February 26, 1926! It is my suspicion that these travelling musicians did not have the chance to listen to Armstrong when on the road, neither in public appearance nor on record, and thus did not have a chance to copy and be influenced by him.) Little is heard of trombonist Carr, but he shows a good and smooth tone. Miss Faulkner certainly is not one of the great ladies of the piano, but she presents herself well.

The second title shows a much better image of the band. Here the whole affair swings to a degree, Ethel Waters starting proceedings with her personal rhythm and time. Her partners then have to agree with it, and everything is much more laid back.

Although a drummer is listed by most discographies, nothing can be recognised of him. Thus, in opposition to the usual situation in discographical research, we here have a name, but no sound of his instrument on the disc.

Notes:

- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Thornton Brown, cnt; Edward Carr, tbn; Lorene Faulkner, p*
- BGR*2: *Thornton Brown, cnt; Edward Carr, tbn; Lorence Faulkner, pno; unknown, dms*
- BGR*3,*4: *Thornton Brown, c; Edward Carr, tb; Lorene Faulkner, p; unknown, d*
- Rust*3,*4: *Thornton Brown -c; Edward Carr -tb; Lorence Faulkner -p; unknown -d*
- Rust*6: *Thornton Brown -c; Edward Carr -tb; Lorence Faulkner -p*
- *Storyville 1996-97, p.232: "Ethel Waters and her 'Vanities'" toured in May-July 1926 and played the Grand Theater, Chicago, week 14 June. A review in the 'Defender' criticised the band for being too loud and named them as: Thornton Brown, c; Eddie Carr, tb; Lorene Faulkner, p/dir; Dad Stewart, d. (CD 19/6/26 6/1). It seems likely that, since the first three are named for the Columbia session on her return to New York, that Stewart is the unknown drummer.*

<p>005 ETHEL WATERS Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra Ethel Waters – voc; <i>Thornton G. Brown</i> – tpt; unknown – vln; unknown – vlc; J.C. Johnson – pno; male vocal chorus – voc (1,2) 142649-2 I'm Coming, Virginia 142649-3 I'm Coming, Virginia 142650-3 We Don't Need Each Other Any More</p>	<p>New York, Sep. 18, 1926</p>	<p>Col 14170-D, Chronological Classics 688 <i>Col 14170-D</i> not on LP/CD Col 14162-D, Chronological Classics 688</p>
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*Note: a third title recorded has accompaniment by J.C. Johnson only.
 Composer credits are: 142649 (Heywood); 142650 (Johnson)*

Judging from Ethel Waters recording session of 29 July 1926, where Thornton G. Brown, a renowned trumpet player of the vaudeville show circuit, is among the accompaniment – he is reported to be with Ethel Waters' 'Black Bottom Revue' at the Lafayette Th., NY week 20 Sep. (Ad NYA 11/9/26) – it is most probable that he also is accompanying her on these sides. He may be identified by his very sharp tone, his permanent staccato playing when ad-libbing, and his favoured 6/8th phrasing. We have J.C. Johnson here with Ethel Waters. In 'I'm Coming Virginia' he obviously only plays from the score as noted. On the second title he is on his own and plays as we have got to know him from the first two sessions with Ethel Waters above: a solid, skillful and swinging accompaniment.

I like the violin arpeggios in the intro of 'I'm Coming Virginia', strong, musical, and not syrupy at all. (Did Anthony Barnett – or anybody else - check these sides for Eddie South's possible presence? The Jimmy Wade band from Chicago was at the Club Alabam for a long period at about this time. Some of the Wade musicians probably recorded with Perry Bradford (Georgia Strutters) and Clarence Williams (Eva Taylor) on 06 August 1926 and Bradford again (Alberta Hunter) on 13 September!).

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*
- BGR*2: *unknown tpt; unknown vln; unknown cello; prob Pearl Wright, pno; with choir dir by Will Marion Cook (as Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra on first side, 'Novelty Orchestra' on second; or acc by Pearl Wright, pno (3)*
- BGR*3: *unknown, c; unknown, vn; unknown, vc; prob Pearl Wright, p; choir (Will Marion Cook, dir), v*
- BGR*4: *Ethel Waters & Her Singing Orchestra (1,2); Ethel Waters Acc Novelty Orchestra (3); unknown, c; unknown, vn; unknown, vc; prob Pearl Wright, p; choir (Will Marion Cook, dir), v*
- Rust*3: *unknown -t; unknown -vn; unknown -vc; prob Pearl Wright -p; with choir dir by Will Marion Cook (as Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra on first side, 'Novelty Orchestra' on second*
- Rust*4,*6: *Will Marion Cook's Singing Orchestra (unknown c; vn; vc; J.C. Johnson -p)*
- *Storyville 1998, p. 170: Thornton G. Brown: In Ethel Waters' 'Black Bottom Revue' at the Lafayette Th., NY week 20 Sep. (Ad NYA 11/9/26)*

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