

# THE RECORDINGS OF LEM FOWLER

## An Annotated Tentative Personnelo-Discography

FOWLER, Lemuel, pianist born: prob. Chicago, Ill., c. 1903; died: prob. New York, 1962 or later  
Worked as pianist and composer in Chicago from 1919 on. From January 1922 working in New York, member of Jack Mills Publishing Company from July 1923 on.

LEM FOWLER came to New York from the Mid-Western region, probably Chicago, aged c. 19 years, obviously with the hope to achieve a name in composing blues and popular tunes. He was a pianist of amateur grade with little to medium qualification and tried his luck in offering his compositions to musicians, bands and P&R people. As it seems, he was not really successful in a city like New York, and he enlarged his business with accompaniments on blues recordings and later with recordings of his own recording band in trio or quartet form. Yet, in c. 1926/27 he had developed into a quite respectable pianist in his chosen field, although with a couple of blues singers each he only recorded once. It is interesting to note that he was not part of the Harlem pianist guild and that he is never mentioned by those who were on the spot in the 1920s. But he once appeared in public knowledge when Perry Bradford had un-legitimately published of Fowler's compositions. His band recordings are quite below Harlem standard, with the exception of his last band recording under the name of 'Fowler's Favorites', when the Columbia people had attached the then recently founded and little occupied Arthur Gibbs Orchestra to him for his use. In the 1920s he also cut many piano-rolls, only two of them having been reissued on LP - as far as I know! (K.-B. Rau)

FOWLER, Lemuel

### STYLE

When playing solo, Fowler uses variances of early boogie-woogie music, with mainly one-note left-hand blues and boogie figures and rather simple and un-diversified right-hand playing. His style of piano-playing is deeply rooted in Mid-Western blues music and has nothing in common with ragtime or even Harlem stride music!

In band work he restricts himself to a very simple accompaniment, often doubling his probably self-composed parts of the horn men (wind instruments).

### PHRASING

His phrasing leaves much to be desired when compared to the playing of Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson or Meade Lux Lewis, yet remains in the scope of early blues/boogie players like 'Pinetop' Smith, Cow Cow Davenport or Jim Clarke.

His 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.

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

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.

## LEM FOWLER

001 **JOHN P. VIGAL** Bobby Lee and his Imperial Six Long Island City, NY, c. May 1922  
 John P. Vigal – voc;  
 unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn;  
 unknown – clt; unknown – alt;  
 Bobby Lee – pno; unknown – bjo; unknown – bbs  
 Fowler Twist BS 14115, Frog DGF 66

Although this session starts Frog's great Lem Fowler CD and lists his assumed presence on the keys here, he is only documented as composer of the tune on the record label, and his musical contribution is denied by the 'Talking Machine World's' note as listed below. Aurally Fowler might be the pianist soloing in the tune's coda – using one-note bass only as on later recordings, but the whole performance seems to be entirely scored and may thus be played by Mr. Bobby Lee, the leader of this recording group. Bobby Lee recorded two titles for Chappelle & Stinnette later this year in the same early stylistic genre as heard here, and his pianistic efforts probably are in the same manner as on this John P. Vigal side (Bobby Lee & His Musical Landers on CD Timeless CBC 1-045).

Notes:

W.C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p. 37: "The reverse of this record (Mary Straine session of end June 1922, see below -KBR), by tenor John P. Vigal, has a six-piece accompaniment, with different trumpet at least, which was identified in 'Talking Machine World' (July 1922) as Bobby Lee's Imperial Six; the title was 'Fowler Twist' – surely an early musical use of the second word?"

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

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Bobby Lee and his Imperial Six: unknown (tpt); unknown (tbn); unknown (clt); unknown (alt); Bobby Lee (pno); unknown (bjo); unknown (bbs)

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Bobby Lee and his Imperial Six: unknown -t; unknown -tb; unknown -cl; unknown -as; Bobby Lee -p; unknown -bj; unknown -bb

- Frog DGF 66, CD-booklet: Orchestra Accompaniment: unknown t; unknown tb; unknown cl; unknown as; ?Lemuel Fowler p; unknown bj

002 **MARY STRAINE** Joseph Smith's Jazz Band Long Island City, NY, end Jun. 1922  
 Mary Straine – voc;  
 (Joe Smith?) – cnt; (George Brashear?) – tbn; (Julian Baugh?) – clt;  
 Lem Fowler or (Fletcher Henderson) – pno  
 -1 I Ain't Got Nothing Blues BS 14115, Document DOCD-5342

This cornetist/trumpeter obviously is not the young Joe Smith as identified by W.C. Allen. Instead, he sounds very much like a Western trumpet player, reminding me of Tommy Ladnier. This is not Smith's soft tone heard at the succeeding sessions, and there are definite features of Louis Armstrong's style that were never incorporated in Joe Smith's playing. And this is not Johnny Dunn style as would have to be expected from Joe Smith. But the trumpet performance certainly has good jazzy quality. The whole affair reminds me of Ollie Power's 'Play That Thing' of Sep. 1923!

This also includes the trombonist's playing. This trombonist shows similar features to Brashear's, probably resulting from a "Western" origin of the musicians present, but his playing is not stylistically constant as Brashear's in the following sessions. He uses triplets sometimes which cannot be detected in Brashear's playing.

The clarinetist, also, might not be identified as the hitherto mentioned Clarence Robinson, but – if so – with a much harder tone and a more squeaking performance. He sounds as having listened to Johnny Dodds. Following Bo Lindström's noteworthy find of an Ethel Waters interview in the Baltimore Afro-American (see below) we now seem to know the real name of this clarinetist: Julian or Julius Baugh of Chicago.

The pianist probably is not Fletcher Henderson, and might be Lem Fowler as noted by W.C. Allen.

So, this does not seem to be a Joe Smith item, despite the band name on the label. But it might well be a George Brashear or Clarence Robinson/Julian Baugh item.

Notes:

- W.C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p. 37: poss Joe Smith, cornet; George Brashear, trombone; Clarence Robinson, clarinet; Fletcher Henderson or Lem Fowler, piano. "This is an 'orphan' title; although the cornet is in the background, there are snatches of double-timing characteristic of Joe Smith at this time, and the clarinetist is the same man (Clarence Robinson?) as on succeeding dates. This record was advertised as a new release in mid July 1922, but it is possible that it could have been recorded at the end of June by the Jazz Masters; alternatively, it could be by a Lem Fowler unit with the same clarinetist later used by Fletcher Henderson."

- Bo Lindström: "Most probably George Brashear."

- Bo Lindström, 'Oh Joe, Play That Trombone', *The Life and Music of George L. Brashear*, p.36, Baltimore Afro-American, June 16, 1922: Ethel Water Doesn't Splurge: "The present organization of her Jazz Masters is composed of: Joe Smith, cornet; Fletcher Henderson Jr, piano; Julian Baugh, clarinet; George Brashear, trombone."

- BGR\*2: Joe Smith, cnt; Henry Brashear, tbn; Clarence Robinson, clt; Fletcher Henderson, pno.

- BGR\*3,\*4: poss Joe Smith, cnt; poss George Brashear, tbn; poss Clarence Robinson, clt; Fletcher Henderson or Lem Fowler, pno.

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Joe Smith –c; ?George Brashear –tb; Clarence Robinson –cl; Fletcher Henderson –p.

- Frog DGF 66, CD-booklet: Accompanied by Joseph Smith's Jazz Band: Joe Smith, c; Lorenzo Brashear, tb; ?Clarence Robinson, cl; ?Lemuel Fowler or Fletcher Henderson, p

003 **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 above, with slight weakness in structure and melodic variance.

Notes:

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

004 <b>HELEN BAXTER</b>		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.*

005 <b>LEM FOWLER</b>		New York,	Jul. 03, 1923
Lem Fowler – pno			
81107	Satisfied Blues	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
81108-1	Blues Mixture	Col A-3959	not on LP/CD
81108-2	Blues Mixture	Col A-3959	not on LP/CD

Unfortunately, neither of these sides have been issued/reissued on LP/CD and could thus not be heard.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: Lemuel Fowler (p solos)*  
 - Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: Lem Fowler, p solos*  
 - Rust\*2,\*3: Lemuel Fowler pno soli.  
 - Rust\*4,\*6: Lemuel Fowler pno solos.

Discernible differences of takes:

81108: *As no takes of this title have been reissued on LP/CD, comparing was impossible.*

006 <b>HELEN McDONALD</b>		New York,	c. Jul. 04, 1923
Helen McDonald – voc;			
Lemuel Fowler – pno			
8431-B	Squawkin' The Blues	Gnt 5193,	RST JPCD-1520-2
8432-B	You Got Ev'rything A Sweet Mama Needs (But Me)	Gnt 5193,	RST JPCD-1520-2

Lem Fowler seems to be approving on these sides, but still remaining in his chosen early boogie mode. His playing is much more adventurous and lively than before, but still a bit un-secure in his choice of notes.

Notes:

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

007 <b>MAE SCOTT</b>		New York,	Jul. 04-10, 1923
Mae Scott – voc;			
Lem Fowler – pno (1); Lewis Thomas – pno (2)			
1451-3	Squakin' The Blues	Pm 12048,	RST JPCD-1520-2
1452-2	I'll Get Even With You (Revengeful Blues)	Pm 12048,	RST JPCD-1526-2

Lem Fowler accompanies the first title in his above determined boogie style, this time using right-hand tremolos. The second side is accompanied by one Lewis Thomas – his very only appearance on a recording – who strictly seems to be playing from a publishing sheet, almost without any rhythm in his left hand.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Lemuel Fowler, pno (1); Lewis Thomas, pno (2)  
 - Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lemuel Fowler -p (1); Lewis Thomas -p (2)

008 <b>ELLEN COLEMAN</b>	Lem Fowler's Orchestra	New York,	Jul. 10, 1923
Helen Baxter – voc;			
unknown – 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 half-tone up. I have left Frog 66 with take -C and attributed take -A to DOCD-27 and take -B to DOCD-46 – this without better knowledge. Document DOCD-5654 has 9066-C, but with intro and vamp cut-off.*

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 - and 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

**009 LEM FOWLER**

New York, Jul. 19, 1923

Lem Fowler - pno

81107-4	Satisfied Blues	Col A-3959	not on LP/CD
81107-5	Satisfied Blues	Col A-3959,	Frog DGF 66
81108-5	Blues Mixture	Col A-3959,	Frog DGF 66
81108-7	Blues Mixture	Col A-3959,	RST JPCD-1520-2

Both titles are self-composed blues tunes by Lem Fowler, with little variance and a monotonous equal pace throughout of c. 92 bpm. And they show him to be a limited player of blues/boogie woogie styled piano solos probably composed and scored for publication before. It should not be overlooked that there are nice and fashionable little melodic sequences in his playing.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Fowler is a pianist quite not on a par with all the well-known young piano "ticklers" of the Harlem stride school and affiliated players. In these piano solos - although entirely built on the 12-bar blues scheme - he is not able to keep the structures, but drops measures or entire bars from the sequences. It thus does not seem to be surprising that the Edison people did not engage him for accompanying Miss Helen Baxter again on her succeeding recording session on the Edison label (see session 008 above).

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: not listed
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3*: not listed
- Rust\*2, \*3: Lemuel Fowler pno soli.
- Rust\*4, \*6: Lemuel Fowler pno solos.

Discernible differences of takes:

- 81107: As one take only has been reissued on LP/CD, comparing was impossible.
- 81108-5: Fowler drops a half bar (2 measures) at the end of the second chorus
- 81108-7: Fowler drops a whole bar (4 measures - or at least 3 measures) at the end of the second chorus

**010 EDNA HICKS**

New York, Aug. 18, 1923

Edna Hicks - voc;

Lemuel Fowler - pno

8470-A	Tin Roof Blues	Gnt 5234,	Document DOCD-5428
8471-A	Oh Daddy Blues	Gnt 5234,	Document DOCD-5428

Accompanying Edna Hicks now in his familiar manner with his pianistic weaknesses.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948/1963*: Lem Fowler (p).
- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4*: Lem Fowler (p).
- BGR\*2, \*3, \*4: Lemuel Fowler, pno
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: Lem Fowler -p.

**011 EDNA HICKS**

New York, Aug. 24, 1923

Edna Hicks – voc;

**Lemuel Fowler** - pno

11886 / 87	Wicked Dirty Fives	Voc 14659,	Document DOCD-5428
11890	Squawkin' The Blues	Voc 14659,	Document DOCD-5428

Again, Lem Fowler as known from earlier recordings. Yet, it has to be stated, he is developing and uses some nice and pleasant spots in his familiar way of playing. As the name of the accompanist is documented on the record label there is no reason for doubt. This performance should serve as a positive measure for Lem Fowler's style.

Notes:

- *Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography, 1948/1963: Lem Fowler (p).*
- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: Lem Fowler (p).*
- *BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Lemuel Fowler, pno*
- *Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lem Fowler -p.*

**012 EDNA HICKS**

New York, c. Sep. 03, 1923

Edna Hicks – voc;

Lemuel Fowler - pno

8498-	Satisfied Blues (A Barrelhouse Blues)	Gnt 5252,	Document DOCD-5428
8498-A	Satisfied Blues (A Barrelhouse Blues)	Gnt 5252	not on LP/CD
8499-A	No Name Blues (Some Blues)	Gnt 5252,	Document DOCD-5428 ?
8499-B	No Name Blues (Some Blues)	Gnt 5252,	Document DOCD-5428 ?

*Note: one take of each title is on CD Document DOCD-5428, given without letter designation. Rust\*6 lists two takes –? and -A for the first title, and -A and -B for the second titles.*

The same kind of uniform accompaniment here, not un-interesting, but of medium pianistic quality.

Notes:

- *Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography, 1948/1963: Lem Fowler (p).*
- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed.*
- *BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Lemuel Fowler, pno*
- *Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lem Fowler -p.*

Discernible differences of takes:

8498 – 8499: *As no alternate takes have been reissued comparison and identifying is impossible.*

**013 EDNA HICKS**

New York, Sep. 24, 1923

Edna Hicks – voc;

**Lemuel Fowler** - pno

81227	Daddy, Ease It To Me	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
81228-1	No Name Blues	Col 14001-D,	Document DOCD-5428

Lem Fowler's name is documented on the record label. Piano accompaniment similar to the above recordings.

Notes:

- *Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography, 1948/1963: Lem Fowler (p).*
- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: Lem Fowler (p).*
- *BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Lemuel Fowler, pno*
- *Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lem Fowler -p.*

**014 SARA MARTIN**

New York, Sep. 24, 1924

Sara Martin – voc;

**Lem Fowler** – pno

72846-B	What Kinda Man Is You?	OK 8191,	Document DOCD-5397
72847-B	Some Blues (No Name Blues)	OK 8226,	Document DOCD-5397

Sara Martin accompanied here by Lem Fowler, a little recorded and mysterious pianist from Chicago, probably. His traceable history is profoundly and thoroughly documented by Mark Berresford in the booklet to the Frog DGF 66 Lemuel Fowler CD. This is Sara Martin's only recording with Fowler.

Notes:

- *Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography, 1948: Lem Fowler (p).*
- *BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Lem Fowler, pno.*
- *Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lem Fowler -p.*

**015 MAGGIE JONES**

New York, Oct. 14, 1924

Maggie Jones – voc;

**Lemuel Fowler** – pno

140104-2	Four Flushing Papa (What Kind A Man Is You)	Col 14044-D,	Document DOCD-5348
140105-1	Jealous Mama Blues	Col 14044-D,	Document DOCD-5348

Accompanist documented by label imprints or company ledgers. Piano playing as before. In my opinion, Fowler's accompaniments lack any relation to the performance of the singers, but remain piano solos isolated from words and statements.

This is Maggie Jones' only recording with Fowler.

Notes:

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

016 <b>GEORGE WILLIAMS AND BESSIE BROWN</b>	New York,	Feb. 28, 1925
George Williams, Bessie Brown – voc duet; Lem Fowler – pno		
140405-1            Scat! Mr. Sweetback	Col 14065-D,	Document DOCD-5527
140406-2            Bald-Headed Mamma Blues	Col 14065-D,	Document DOCD-5528

Again, a rather un-inspiring piano playing for a renowned and popular husband-and-wife act in vaudeville, and – as I do not like to say – boring and unsuitable for their purposes.

Notes:

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

017 <b>GEORGE WILLIAMS</b>	New York,	Mar. 17, 1925
George Williams – voc; <b>Lem Fowler</b> – pno		
140440-2            What Makes Papa Hate Mama So?	Col 14078-D,	Document DOCD-5528
140441-2            Oh! Dark Gal	Col 14078-D,	Document DOCD-5528

Same as before.

Notes:

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

018 <b>CLARA SMITH</b>	New York,	Mar. 27, 1925
Clara Smith – voc; <b>Lemuel Fowler</b> – pno		
140470-1            When I Steps Out	Col 14069-D,	Document DOCD-5366
140471-1            The L & N Blues	Col 14073-D,	Document DOCD-5366

Same schedule as before. Unstate rhythmic and unsecure harmonics. Fowler recorded with Clara Smith later again.

Notes:

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

019 <b>FOWLER'S WASHBOARD WONDERS</b>	New York,	Jul. 02, 1925
Percy Glascoe – clt; <b>Lemuel Fowler</b> - pno; Stanley Harding - wbd		
140742-3            Chitterlin' Strut	Col 14084-D,	Frog DGF 66
140743-2            Washboard Stomp	Col 14084-D,	Frog DGF 66

We hear the same phenomenon here as before: two musicians playing together, but without any interrelation, as it seems. This is a strange – as seen against later developments – form of early jazz music, and certainly not a form that had any qualities to be carried on. Also, Glascoe's and Fowler's stylistic characteristics seem to be very far apart – too far apart to build up a recording unit. No wonder, that the Columbia people later in July 1927 provided Fowler with a working band for recording, not one Fowler had any relations to.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: unknown (cl); Lemuel Fowler (p); unknown (wb)*
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: unknown (clt); Lem Fowler (p); unknown (wbd)*
- Rust\*2: Percy Glascoe (cl, alt); Lemuel Fowler (pno); unknown (wbd).
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lem Fowler -p; Stanley Harding -wb.

020 <b>PERCY GLASCOE</b>	New York,	Jul. 03, 1925
<b>Percy Glascoe</b> – clt; <b>Lemuel Fowler</b> – pno		
140744-1            Stomp 'Em Down	Col 14088-D	not on LP/CD, but held
140745-1            Steaming Blues	Col 14088-D	not on LP/CD, but held

Here now, we have some real inter-action of the two participants, probably because there was some directing mind in proceedings. And the music develops some unexpected charm in its own right. There is little boogie/blues playing in Fowler's contributions here, and this adds to a better coherence – and possibly makes Mr. Glascoe play in a more straight-forward way.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: Percy Glascoe (clt); Lem Fowler (p)*
- Rust\*2, \*3, \*4, \*6: Percy Glascoe – clt; Lemuel Fowler – pno

021 <b>CLARINET JOE AND HIS HOT FOOTERS</b>	New York,	Aug. 08, 1925
Percy Glascoe – clt; Lemuel Fowler – pno; Richard Ward - dms		
140826-3            Rabbit Foot Blues	Har 8-H,	Frog DGF 66
140827-1            What Kinda Man is You?	Har 8-H,	Frog DGF 66

Under Glascoe's leadership, the same concept as before is continued, and despite Glascoe's corny playing there is some coherence in the performance. And certainly, Glascoe has to be seen as a performer in his own right, with his own very special and uncommon qualities

which, yet, were not to be carried on into the future.

Lem Fowler plays a jazz accompaniment which works, and is supported by a drummer performing on one single chinese tom-tom only, used for single strokes mostly on the after-beats.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: Bob Fuller (clt); Lem Fowler (p); unknown (bjo)*
- Rust\*2: *Bob Fuller or Percy Glascoe (clt); Lemuel Fowler or Louis Hooper (pno); Ricard Ward (?) (dms).*
- Rust\*6: *Percy Glascoe – clt; Lemuel Fowler – pno; Richard Ward - dms*

**022 FOWLER'S WASHBOARD WONDERS**

New York, Aug. 27, 1925

Clarence Wheeler – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, cms;

**Lemuel Fowler** - pno; Stanley Harding - wbd

140870-3

Dodgin' My Man

Col 14096-D,

Frog DGF 66

140871-3

Pig Foot Shuffle

Col 14096-D,

Frog DGF 66

The whole performance is scored, and Fowler only supports the band with a most limited accompaniment. (It is my believe that he had no experience as a band player at all when reaching New York some years before.)

Wheeler is a workmanlike, somewhat limited musician who knows how to use the mutes. His style shows ragtime roots and is rhythmically rather uninteresting. Glascoe's style is characterized above. He doubles on c-melody-sax here. And the washboard player is most inventive.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: unknown (tp); unknown (cl); Lemuel Fowler (p); unknown (wb)*
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: unknown (tpt); unknown (clt); Lem Fowler (p); unknown (wbd)*
- VJM 148, p. 12, Dan Levinson: "Percy Glascoe was indeed quite a saxophonist! On the track where he triple-tongues ('Pig Foot Shuffle' - KBR), he reminds me a lot of Stump Evans. Am I correct that he is credited as ALTO saxophonist? That definitely ain't no alto. Still hard to ascertain whether it's C-melody or tenor, but I'd vote for C-melody. Just a feeling ... So... I think C-melody is a safe bet for Glascoe. Hope I don't get crucified."
- Rust\*2: *Seymour Irick (tpt); Percy Glascoe (clt, alt); Lemuel Fowler (pno); unknown (wbd).*
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: *Clarence Wheeler (tpt); Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lem Fowler -p; Stanley Harding -wb.*

**023 (LEM) FOWLER'S WASHBOARD WONDERS**

New York, Sep. 24, 1925

Clarence Wheeler – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, cms;

**Lemuel Fowler** - pno; Stanley Harding – wbd; unknown – train effects (2)

141042-2

Steppin' Old Fool

Col 14101-D,

Frog DGF 66

141043-2

Express Train Blues

Col 14101-D,

Frog DGF 66

The trumpet player shows much better jazz feeling here, using off-beat phrasing and blues elements. Other participants as before.

Glascoe is very "freakish" on these sides.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: unknown (tp); unknown (cl); Lemuel Fowler (p); unknown (wb)*
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: unknown (tpt); unknown (clt); Lem Fowler (p); unknown (wbd)*
- Rust\*2: *Percy Glascoe (clt, alt); Lemuel Fowler (pno); unknown (sbs); unknown (wbd).*
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: *Clarence Wheeler (tpt); Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lem Fowler -p; Stanley Harding -wb.*

**024 JIM - DANDIES**

New York, Oct. 24, 1925

Seymour Irick – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, sop;

Lem Fowler – pno; Richard Ward – dms

141188-1

Shake That Thing

Har 55-H,

Frog DGF 66

141189-1

Charleston Geechie Dance

Har 55-H,

Frog DGF 66

The legendary Seymour Irick is on trumpet here. His time is stiff and unadventurous, but he displays a good technique, and shows a somewhat softened Johnny Dunn influence. His legend might be based on his reputation of a lady's man (which, by the way, brought him an untimely death). Glascoe doubles on soprano-sax here.

This coupling is one of two hitherto undisputedly and unquestionedly containing Seymour Irick as trumpeter in its personnel. Frog DGF 66 is the first reissue of these two recordings, and we have to be very thankful to the Frog people for their affection towards this kind of early jazz music.

We hear an urgently driving trumpet player with sharp and strong tone, but with little improvisational talent we usually expect from well-known jazz musicians. But this still was the time of strongly ragtime-derived music in Harlem, although for other – younger – musicians Louis Armstrong's one-year already presence in Fletcher Henderson's band had caused a strict change of musical direction into rhythmically different ways. Our man's way of playing here wears out in presenting a row of little-altered variations of the given melodic material and using the different mutes on-hand for achieving a kind of jazz music which is far from the Southern – or Western – style that Armstrong presented in Harlem at this very time, and that became standard for jazz playing in the future. Johnny Dunn and Jack Hattton were the prototypes of this kind of trumpet playing in early Harlem, and we have to accept this style as a model of this special time.

Percy Glascoe is a 'relic' of this time, as well, although he performs in a somewhat looser style, presenting parts of his solos in free improvisation with little reference to the given melodies.

Fowler on piano restricts himself to fundamental chordal and rhythmic work. The drummer – as usual – is confined to rudimentally use a drum and a cymbal, without bass-drum and the snares.

This obviously is a simple kind of jazz music, although the players were experienced and legitimate musicians.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: not listed*
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: Seymour Irick (cnt); Percy Glascoe (clt, sax); Lemuel Fowler (p); Richard Ward (traps).*
- Rust\*2: *Seymour Irick (tpt); Percy Glascoe (clt, alt); Lem Fowler (pno); Richard Ward (wbd).*
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: *Seymour Irick -t; Percy Glascoe -cl -ss -as; Lem Fowler -p; Richard Ward -wb.*

**025 FOWLER'S WASHBOARD WONDERS**

New York, Oct. 28, 1925

Seymour Irick – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, cms;		
Lemuel Fowler - pno; Al Brunson – dms/wbd		
141202-3           The Florida Blues	Col 14111-D,	Frog DGF 66
141203-2           Salty Dog	Col 14111-D,	Frog DGF 66

This coupling is the other one hitherto undisputedly and unquestionably containing Seymour Irick as trumpeter in its personnel. Provided that this long-lasting assumption is correct, we may – and we do not have any other choice – take this player’s trumpet style as exemplary for Irick’s trumpet style. Luckily, we are in a situation to possess an expertly reissued CD of Lem Fowler’s entire recorded band-work on the above listed Frog CD. And this enables us in an incomparably better way to hear and assimilate this music of 1925 than with the only comparable earlier issue on the LP of the British VJM label of the 1960s.

The drummer/washboard player on these sides might also be the same one as on the Jim Dandies sides, thus Richard Ward.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: unknown (tp); unknown (cl); Lem Fowler (p); unknown (wb)
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3*: unknown (tpt); unknown (clt); Lem Fowler (p); unknown (wbd)
- D. Mahony, *Columbia 13/14000-D Series*: Lem Fowler, p; unknown, tpt; unknown, clt/sax; unknown, wbd
- Rust\*2: Seymour Irick (tpt); Percy Glascoe (clt, alt); unknown (ten); Lemuel Fowler (pno); unknown (wbd).
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: Seymour Irick -t; Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lemuel Fowler -p; Al Brunson -wb.

<b>026 (LEM) FOWLER’S WASHBOARD WONDERS</b>	New York,	Jan. 24, 1926
Clarence Wheeler – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, alt;		
Lemuel Fowler - pno; Al Brunson - wbd		
141529           Hoochy Coochy Blues	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
141530           So They Say	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests seem to have been found and issued nothing about the musical content can be said.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: not listed.
- Rust\*2: Instrumentation and personnel unknown
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: Clarence Wheeler -t; Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lemuel Fowler -p; Al Brunson -wb.

<b>027 (LEM) FOWLER’S WASHBOARD WONDERS</b>	New York,	Feb. 17, 1926
unknown – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, alt;		
Lemuel Fowler - pno; Al Brunson - wbd		
141693           Jelly Roll Blues	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests seem to have been found and issued nothing about the musical content can be said.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: not listed.
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3*: not listed
- Rust\*2: Instrumentation and personnel unknown
- Rust\*3, \*4, \*6: Sidney de Paris -t; Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lemuel Fowler -p; Al Brunson -wb.

<b>028 (LEM) FOWLER’S WASHBOARD WONDERS</b>	New York,	Mar. 01, 1926
unknown – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, alt;		
Lemuel Fowler - pno; Al Brunson - wbd		
141730           Frisky Feet	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests seem to have been found and issued nothing about the musical content can be said.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: not listed.
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3*: not listed
- Rust\*2, \*3: not listed.
- Rust\*4, \*6: Sidney de Paris -t; Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lemuel Fowler -p; Al Brunson -wb.

<b>029 (LEM) FOWLER’S WASHBOARD WONDERS</b>	New York,	Apr. 06, 1926
unknown – tpt; Percy Glascoe – clt, cms;		
Lemuel Fowler - pno; Al Brunson – wbd/dms		
141693           Jelly Roll Blues	Col 14155-D,	Frog DGF 66
141730           Frisky Feet	Col 14155-D,	Frog DGF 66

The naming of Sidney de Paris at this session is ridiculous. I suppose that this player might possibly be the afore listed Clarence Wheeler in an intoxicated state. De Paris can be heard on the Cotton Club Orchestra’s ‘Charleston Ball’ of half a year earlier as a solid swinging jazzy player with big tone and expert and bluesy handling of a plunger mute which is miles apart from our man here. Let alone his fantastic solo outings on both takes of Charlie Johnson’s ‘The Boy In The Boat’ of 1928, which definitely are mile-stones of classic jazz soloing. Our man here has little tone and embouchure – and bad pitch - and little improvisational talent. Furthermore, he plays too hasty and thus avoids to swing.

Glascoe, Fowler and Brunson are as heard before.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948*: unknown (tp); unknown (cl); Lemuel Fowler (p); unknown (wb)
- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3*: unknown (tpt); unknown (clt); Lem Fowler (p); unknown (wbd)
- Rust\*2: Seymour Irick (tpt); Percy Glascoe (clt, alt); Lemuel Fowler (pno); unknown (wbd).
- Rust\*3: Seymour Irick -t; Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lemuel Fowler -p; Al Brunson -wb.
- Rust\*4, \*6: Sidney de Paris -t; Percy Glascoe -cl -as; Lemuel Fowler -p; Al Brunson -wb.

030	<b>CLARA SMITH</b>	New York,	May 25, 1926
	Clara Smith – voc;		
	<b>Lem Fowler</b> - pno		
142250-3	How'm I Doin'	Col 14150-D,	Document DOCD-5367
142251-1	Whip It To A Jelly	Col 14150-D,	Document DOCD-5367

Together with the great Clara Smith we hear a somewhat matured Lem Fowler who had learned to play a decent left-hand bass and nice melody in his right, while still keeping all his afore heard characteristics. This is nice jazz/blues music.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Lem Fowler, pno

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lem Fowler -p

031	<b>JIM - DANDIES</b>	New York,	Aug. 24, 1926
	Jacob Green – tbn; Peter Duconge – clt		
	Lem Fowler – pno		
142566	Oil Yo' Ankles	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
142567	Blue Echo	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests seem to have been found and issued nothing about the musical content can be said.

Notes:

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

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory Vol 3: Jacob Green (tbn); Peter Duconge (clt); Lemuel Fowler (p)*

- Rust\*2,\*3,\*4,\*6: Jacob Green (tbn); Peter Duconge (clt); Lemuel Fowler (pno)

032	<b>CLARA SMITH - SISTERS WHITE AND WALLACE</b>	New York,	Nov. 23, 1926
	Clara Smith – voc;		
	<b>Lem Fowler</b> - pno		
143140-1	Percolatin' Blues	Col 14202-D,	Document DOCD-5367
143141-3	Ease It	Col 14202-D,	Document DOCD-5367

This certainly is Fowler as documented in the Columbia files. His four years now in New York have left their mark in Fowler's playing. He is much securer in his right hand and has modified his single-note basses to a more modern left hand with bass note and subsequent accentuated octave on measures 2/4. And on 'Ease It' they perform a beautiful minor bluesy number of the 'My Daddy Rocks Me' manner.

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: Lem Fowler, pno

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lem Fowler -p

033	<b>CLARA SMITH - SISTERS WHITE AND WALLACE</b>	New York,	Nov. 23, 1926
	Clara Smith, Ethel Grainger, Odette Jackson – voc;		
	Porter Grainger - pno		
143142-2	Livin' Humble	Col 14183-D,	Document DOCD-5367
143143-1	Get On Board	Col 14183-D,	Document DOCD-5367

These two titles certainly are accompanied by Porter Grainger in his very personal smooth stride style. BGR\*2 and all Rusts still have Lem Fowler for these two titles.

Notes:

- BGR\*2: Lem Fowler, pno

- BGR,\*3,\*4: Porter Grainger, pno

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: Lem Fowler -p

034	<b>FOWLER'S FAVORITES</b>	New York,	Mar. 08, 1927
	unknown personnel;		
	Lem Fowler – pno, speech		
143607	Fowler's Hot Strut	Col unissued	not on LP/CD
143608	Whip It To A Jelly	Col unissued	not on LP/CD

As no tests seem to have been found and issued nothing about the musical content can be said.

Notes:

- Rust\*2: Seymour Irick (tpt); Percy Glascoe (clt, alt); Lemuel Fowler (pno); unknown (wbd).

- Rust\*3: Instrumentation and personnel unknown

- Rust\*4,\*6: Lemuel Fowler -p -speech, Rest unknown

035	<b>FOWLER'S FAVORITES</b>	New York,	Jul. 05, 1927
	Leonard Davis, cnt; George Washington, tbn;		
	Eugene Mikell, clt, alt; Happy Caldwell, ten, sop;		
	Lem Fowler, pno, voc (1); Arthur Gibbs – pno (2); Paul Burnett, bjo; Billy Taylor, bbs; Sammy Hodges, dms.		
144627-1	Percolatin' Blues	Col 14230-B,	Frog DGF 66
144628-3	Hot Strut	Col 14230-B,	Frog DGF 66

- The trumpet player of the FAVORITES shows a very exact and clean-cut, no-nonsense playing, with good and clean tone and a good range, but little vibrato. He plays very secure and seems to be a good reader as these two titles certainly were not recorded by a working band – at least there is no one known as Lem Fowler’s. At the time of working on the June Clark article I tended to attribute this trumpet work to Clarence Wheeler who can be heard on the Fowler’s Washboard Wonders sides of August/September 1925. Clarence Wheeler recorded with Alex Jackson’s Plantation Orchestra on September 16, 1927 in Richmond for Gennett, thus only less than three months after the Fowler’s Favorites session. He certainly would have been capable to lead the FOWLER’S FAVORITES through the arrangements. As an alternate possibility I noted Leonard “Ham” Davis in my files, taking into account the very clear, strong and legitimate style of this player. Only the rather thin – or subdued – tone made me wonder and this would not fit to Davis’ style of performance (compare Eddie’s Hot Shots, February 8, 1929!).

- On trombone we hear a musician with a rather shallow growl tone – not as voluminous and deep as Nanton’s or Irvis’ – and a nearly motionless expression and phrasing on the first title, whereas very agile and technically profound on the second title, yet here playing without mute, but with good range and speed, although fluffing a note.

- Although Rust has three reed players in his editions from \*3 on, there certainly are only two of them, just as you might expect: an alto player who obviously doubles on clarinet, and a tenor player who doubles on soprano. There might even be the possibility that in the second half of chorus A1 of “Percolatin’ Blues” the clarinet is played by the tenorist and the soprano played by the altoist! Be that as it may, the altoist is a hell of a reed player, very advanced – more so on alto than on clarinet, and it is unbelievable that Rust listed so limited a player as Ernest Elliott as clarinetist. As I see it, Rust found himself in a dilemma when he became aware that the altoist was much too good to be Elliott, and so he had to invent a third reed player – on alto – and gave him the name of Charlie Holmes, obviously of stylistic reasons. Only that Charlie Holmes moved to New York (together with Harry Carney) in early 1927 – at about the time of this session - and it is to be questioned whether he would have been engaged for a recording session at that early stage of his career – the more so for only one half-chorus. (His earliest documented recording being with Oliver’s Dixie Syncopators in November 1928 - his questioned participation with James P. Johnson’s Orchestra of June 1928 seems to be unfounded.) At no place of these two sides can you hear clarinet and alto played simultaneously, which certainly is further proof that both reeds are played by one player.

- The tenorist certainly is remarkable a player as is the altoist. And it is understandable that the author of the FROG CD-booklet assumed him to be Benny Waters. But this player here is a lot smoother and more swinging than Waters in his early years, and there is ample reason to suggest that this man is a “western” player. (When thinking of other jazz tenor players in Harlem of the time it is interesting to note that there were not many distinct tenorists - apart from Hawkins, Prince Robinson, Benny Waters and a small couple of others fewer than might be expected!)

- On piano – and on vocal – we certainly hear Mr. Lem Fowler himself, he very probably hailing from the mid-west, judging from his piano style. (The FROG CD-booklet offers a couple of details known of his life that shall not be repeated here.)

- In the rhythm section we hear a capable banjo player, a remarkably capable tuba player, and a drummer playing the traps that were allowed him to play in this early state of recording technology – Andrew Hilaire of J.R. Morton’s Red Hot Peppers already used the bass drum clearly on the Victor recordings of half a year earlier.

These then are the players heard, not in any way those as listed in the discographies above! The most consistent name found in the discos is Ernest Elliott, and I have to report that after compiling a listing of all his recordings and non-recordings – yet listed in the discos to encompass him – I have found him not to be present on these sides. But then: who were these capable and impressive players?

The cardinal point of my recognition was the trombone player. This one-dimensional growl playing I knew from George Washington, trombonist with the Charlie Johnson band of 1928/9 (see my articles on Charlie Johnson in N&N57 and N&N63), and later the Mills Blue Rhythm Band and Louis Armstrong’s Orchestra of the late 30s and early 40s. On Ch. Johnson’s “Harlem Drag” a very similar growl solo by Washington can be heard, and – as I have attempted to show in N&N60 – he can also be heard on a couple of Clarence Williams items of late 1929 – obviously borrowed from the Ch. Johnson band. This player certainly can be heard on these two Fowler’s Favorites sides!

My second acknowledgement was that there weren’t so many tenor saxophonists in Harlem at that time playing “western” style – as said above. Checking through the few names known I came to Mr. Happy Caldwell – he coming from the Chicago jazz scene of the early twenties and thus playing in a swinging western style, to be heard with Thomas Morris’ Seven Hot Babies – not Elliott here! – and Eddie Condon’s Hot Shots, as well as possibly shown in my article on the Georgia Strutters in N&N73.

In L. Wright’s article on Caldwell – “Happy Horn” in Storyville 99 – Happy recalls: *“One of the bands I worked with in New York was Arthur Gibbs – that would be around 1927, or maybe 1926. I’ve played so many places ... night clubs and cabarets, that I just can’t remember. I know we made records with Arthur Gibbs, that was in the Victor (sic!) studio downtown. We had Leonard Davis on trumpet, Gene Mikell and myself were the reeds, we had to double on clarinet and soprano sax. George Washington was the trombone player... Bob Bennett (sic!) on guitar and ... Billy Taylor, that’s the father of Billy Taylor, on bass and tuba and Sammy Hodges on drums. He was no relation of Johnny or of Tommy. We also worked the Savoy, and the guys had made records before I joined them.”*

With these two distinct players in mind, I remembered a very interesting photo in Timme Rosenkrantz’s beautiful book “Is This To Be My Souvenir?” of the Arthur Gibbs band of 1927/8, a band which is not commonly known, but which played the Savoy and Arcadia ballrooms in New York mid 1927 to mid 1928. (A different photo of this elusive band can be found in [thereisjazzbeforetrane.blogspot.de](http://thereisjazzbeforetrane.blogspot.de)). Washington and Caldwell both were members of that band. The trumpet player of this band then was Leonard “Ham” Davis, a musician I had earlier assumed to be a candidate for the trumpet player (see above) on the Fowler sides. “Ham” Davis can also be heard majestically on the Condon’s Hot Shots sides, and with the Charlie Johnson band (also with Jackson’s Southern Serenaders, a Ch. Johnson pseudonym). On this photo Davis shows a cornet, not a trumpet, and this might be a hint as to his rather thin tone on the Fowler sides. His tone is much more voluminous on the Condon’s Hot Shots and the Charlie Johnson sides, where he plays a trumpet!

Having now found three musicians that were in an appropriate class as those heard on the Fowler sides – and who could very well be the musicians searched for – it became urgent to see who the clarinetist/altoist could be. As it was often the case with musicians of the Harlem scene who had contracts with recording companies, but no steady band, did they hire parts of other bands or even complete units to use them for recording under their own name. So, it was necessary to check if one of the two reedmen on the photo – Edgar Sampson and Eugene Mikell – could be our altoist.

Eugene Mikell certainly is a very well-known name in early big bands of the Harlem scene, but he is not distinctly known as a soloist or improviser. He seems to have been more a reliable section man, not so much of a soloist, and in his reminiscences in the Storyville yearbook 1998/9 he only talks about others plying the solos. I myself would get into trouble to tell the reader where Mikell could be heard soloing, except for the baritone parts on the Joe Steele Orchestra sides! But following Happy Caldwell’s report above Mikell very probably is the clarinet/alto player here on the Fowler’s Favorites sides, and it is really astonishing how he handles the clarinet part and – even more so – the alto solo breaks in Chorus B1 of “Hot Stuff”. I have to admit that I thought of Sampson as alto/clarinet player because of this player’s fine craftsmanship before getting aware of Happy Caldwell’s remembrance.

On piano then we certainly hear the leader himself, Lem Fowler. The compositions are his, showing typical piano pieces that he played as piano solos otherwise, with a row of different strains. The Columbia people obviously were interested to attribute him a qualified band for his last recording session showing no further interest in recording him. And it is my firm suggestion that they made use of the just then forming Arthur Gibbs band, possibly offered by Gibbs himself, a way of recruiting musicians that was common in the 20s and – as I have shown in several cases (see also N&N 73, Georgia Strutters of May 23, 1927) – employed by Clarence Williams, Pery Bradford and others.

If I am right, the rhythm players would certainly also be found in the Gibbs band: Paul Burnett, banjo, Billy Taylor, tuba, and Sammy Hodges, drums.

ADDITION 08-06-2021: - In 'Hot Strut' we surprisingly hear a different pianist, then, using Harlem stride pianistic techniques, such as single-note cum chord rhythm in the left hand together with broken rhythm (shifted bass beats), and chordal playing in the right hand. Because of this I believe that on this side the factual leader of this band, Arthur Gibbs, has taken over the piano stool. This, after all that we have got to know of Lem Fowler's piano possibilities, is not he himself! This pianist owns a much superior pianistic technique. Billy Taylor is no unknown, and this tuba player's characteristics accord with the tuba playing on the last Charlie Johnson session and the McKinney Cotton Pickers sessions from November 1929 on. He certainly was an experienced and attentive player, even that early in his career. And obviously one of the first to play bass-lines.

Paul Burnett on banjo and Sammy Hodges on drums are not unknowns, but their styles seem not to be documented on record anywhere as they are not listed in any editions of Rust.

Burnett, yet, is mentioned as banjo player with Earle Howard in 1923 (Storyville 88-135) and with Wen Talbert and Bubber Miley in the early 1930s (Storyville 87-98/9). Bob Bennett – as reported by Caldwell above - yet, was Stuff Smith's guitarist in 1936.

Drummer Sammy Hodges' naming in the Caldwell article is the only one I could find anywhere.

Concluding, I feel very certain to have found the FOWLER'S FAVORITES personnel as explained above. Happy Caldwell's remembrance of the Victor studio can safely be ignored as – very often in recollections of jazz musicians – their memories have suffered with age and the recording of two titles sometime between job and going home for a little rest is not as significant as to remember it exactly after so many years. Suffice it to say that it was one of the leading record companies. But Caldwell's naming Mikell – and not Sampson, the more famous one – seems to be important as this kind of remembrance certainly is correct.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography, 1948: Lemuel Fowler (p & vo); other personnel unknown.*

- Carey, McCarthy, *Jazz Directory, Vol.3: Lem Fowler (p, vcl); unknown tpt; tbn; ten; alt; clt; bj; tu; d.*

- Rust\*2: *unknown (tpt); unknown (tbn); unknown (clt, alt); unknown (ten); Lemuel Fowler (pno, vcl); unknown (bjo); unknown (bbs); unknown (dms)*

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: *unknown -t; unknown -tb; ?Ernest Elliott -clt -ss; ?Charlie Holmes -as; unknown -ts; Lemuel Fowler -p -v; unknown -bj; unknown -bb; unknown -d*

Tunes structures:

144627-1 Percolatin' Blues (Fowler) Key of Bb / Eb Columbia 14230-D  
 (Intro 4 bars clt – ens) (V1 Verse 16 bars AA' ens (tpt, tbn, clt, ten)) (V2 Verse 16 bars AA' clt/tbn 8 bars – clt 4 bars – tbn 2 bars – clt/tbn 2 bars) (A1 Chorus 32 bars ABAC tpt/ten 16 bars – sop/clt 16 bars) (A2 Chorus 32 bars ABAC voc – acc tpt/tbn) (V3 Verse AA' 16 bars ens (tpt, tbn, clt, ten)) (Bridge 4 bars ens modulation Bb to Eb) (B1 Chorus 18 bars AA' tbn) (B2 Chorus 18 bars AA' alt/ten in harmony) (B3 Chorus 18 bars AA' ens) (coda 2 bars cymbal)

144628-3 Hot Strut (Fowler) Key of Bb / Eb Columbia 14320-D  
 (Intro 4 bars ens) (A1 Chorus 18 bars AA' ens (tpt, tbn, clt, ten)) (A2 Chorus 18 bars AA' ten) (V1 Verse 16 bars AA' ens) (V2 Verse AA' clt/ten 8 bars – tbn 8 bars) (A3 Chorus 18 bars AA' ens) (Bridge 4 bars pno) (B1 Chorus 16 bars AA' alt/ten 8 bars – ens/alt 8 bars) (B2 Chorus 16 bars AA' pno) (B3 Chorus 16 bars AA' ens) (Coda 8 bars ens – ten-clt – tpt – ens)

036 CLARA SMITH

New York,

May 21, 1928

Clara Smith – voc;

Lem Fowler - pno

146310 Down And Out Blues

Col unissued

not on LP/CD

146311-2 Gin Mill Blues

Col 14419-D,

Document DOCD-5368

This is Lem Fowler's last record session, and he disappears from the public thereafter. He performs in his usual somewhat erratic blues style on this single side. What might have been the reason to reject the flip side?

Notes:

- BGR\*2,\*3,\*4: *Lem Fowler, pno*

- Rust\*3,\*4,\*6: *Lem Fowler -p*

K.- B. Rau

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