

THE RECORDINGS OF WILLIE GANT

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

GANT, 'Willie' William D., pianist born: New York City, c. 1900; died: New York, February 1979
Known as 'The Tiger'. Began playing piano at the age of 12. First professional work at William Bank's Café, New York (c. 1917). Formed own band in 1921 which featured many well-known jazz soloists, led for long residencies in New York, Small's (sic), etc. Mainly solo work from 1927, played in New York, California, etc., during the 1930s and 1940s. Has worked mainly in New York during the last 30 years of his life, long residencies at Hotel Fairfax, Cerutti's, etc.

STYLISTICS

STYLE

Judging from the very few recordings with a tentatively documented Willie Gant on piano we are able to describe his style on piano as ragtime-derived (on-the-beat syncopated right-hand figures and strong left-hand chordal foundation – no stride bass), fresh, crisp and urgent.

TIME

He plays at the tip of the beat, yet not swinging because of his ragtime adhesion.

PHRASING

As can be deduced from the very scarce solo material, Gant clang to ragtime at the time of his few recordings, and does not perform in improvised jazz phrasing. This habit did not change with the development of Harlem jazz, so that he might have grown into a serious stride pianist when leading his promising band at Smalls' Paradise in summer 1926, as a substitute for the Charlie Johnson Paradise Band, that used to stay in Atlantic City in the summer season. But this obviously did not happen.

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

Personnel are taken from this source, but modified in the light of earlier or subsequent research or on the strength of my own listening, discussed with our listening group or other interested collectors.

- Documented, most certain and aurally absolutely obvious identifications are listed thus: **Willie Gant**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Willie Gant*
- 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: (*Willie Gant*)

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.

WILLIE GANT

001 **KATIE CRIPPEN** Henderson's Novelty Orchestra
Katie Crippen – voc;
unknown – tpt; *Chink Johnson* – tbn;
Garvin Bushell – clt; *Cordy Williams* – vln;

New York,

Mar. 1921

<i>Willie Gant</i> – pno			
P-103-2	Blind Man's Blues	BS 2003,	Document DOCD-5342
P-104-1	Play 'Em For Mama, Sing 'Em For Me	BS 2003,	Document DOCD-5602
P-104-2	Play 'Em For Mama, Sing 'Em For Me	BS 2003,	Document DOCD-5342

All players present play their arranged parts straight (as written in the arrangement). There are no ad-lib solos to possibly detect any individual traces in what is played by the wind instruments and the prominent violinist.

The retained clarinet player might well be the youthful Garvin Bushell recalling to have recorded with Miss Crippen. He is not Campbell for stylistic reasons!

The pianist plays close to the arrangement – probably as written – and was assumed to be Henderson judging from the band name and Henderson's position with the Black Swan company. But: in the second chorus of the second title suddenly a different piano player appears – much livelier and much looser than Henderson. The band ceases playing to give room for the piano soloist who accompanies Miss Crippen's spoken chorus in early Harlem stride/ragtime style to be relieved by the band again in the third/last chorus.

This piano player very probably is Willie Gant, who believed to have recorded behind Katie Crippen and other early blues/vaudeville singers when interviewed in the late 1950s (Record Research 30 p.4).

Listed musicians' names are taken from 'Hendersonia'. Their deduction may be taken from 'Hendersonia' p. 14.

Notes:

- Record Research 30-4: "He (Willie Gant) believes that he may have recorded behind Lavinia Turner, Katie Crippen and Josie Miles, to name some."

- WC Allen, *Hendersonia*, p18: unk. trumpet; Chink Johnson?, trombone; prob Edgar Campbell, clarinet; prob Cordy Williams, violin; Fletcher Henderson, piano

- Bushell/Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*: this session not listed in the G. Bushell discography!

- BGR*2: unknown t; prob George Brashear –tb; Edgar Campbell –cl; prob Cordy Williams –vn; Fletcher Henderson –p

- BGR*3,*4: unknown t; poss Chink Johnson –tb; prob Edgar Campbell –cl; prob Cordy Williams –vn; Fletcher Henderson –p

- Rust*3,*4: unknown t; ? George Brashear –tb; Edgar Campbell –cl; ?Cordy Williams –vn; Fletcher Henderson –p

- Rust*6: unknown t; ? Chink Johnson, tb; Edgar Campbell, cl; ?Cordy Williams, vn; Fletcher Henderson, p

Discernible differences of takes:

P-104-1: KC starts last chorus with: 2 eighth-notes db – c (play 'em), quarter-note bb (for), eighth-note bb, dotted quarter-note g (mama), 3 eighth-notes bb-c-d (sing 'em for), dotted quarter-note bb (me)

P-104-2: KC starts last chorus with: 2 eighth-notes bb – a (play 'em), quarter-note bb (for), quarter-note g, dotted quarter-note eb (mama), 3 eighth-notes bb-a-bb (sing 'em for), dotted quarter-note g (me)

002 **LILLYN BROWN** her Jazzbo Syncopators New York, c. Mar. 29, 1921

Lillyn Brown – voc;

Ed Cox or (Gus Aiken) – cnt; Frank Demont – tbn;

Garvin Bushell – clt; unknown – ten; Johnny Mullins – vln;

unknown – pno; Lutice Perkins – dms;

unknown – voc yodle (5,7)

41721-2 If That's What You Want, Here It Is Em 10366, Document DOCD-5627

41721-3 If That's What You Want, Here It Is Em 10366, Document DOCD-5627

41721-4 If That's What You Want, Here It Is Em 10366, Document DOCD-5489

41722-1 Ever-Lovin' Blues Em 10366 not on LP/CD

41722-2 Ever-Lovin' Blues Em 10366, Document DOCD-5627

41722-3 Ever-Lovin' Blues Em 10366 not on LP/CD

41722-4 Ever-Lovin' Blues Em 10366, Document DOCD-5489

Composer-credits: 41721 (Shepard N. Edmonds) / 41722 (Brown & De Mont)

Rust and Blues&Gospel Records do not list this item as including Gus Aiken. But according to Walter C. Allen, Gus Aiken recorded with Lillyn Brown! And there is one other session of this singer, only (see session 005 below).

This session is listed in Bushell's 'Jazz from the Beginning' obviously copying Rust's personnel, but not containing Bushell's comment on this personnel. Yet, he recalls to have been on a date with Lillyn Brown (see below)! We know that he did not take up a saxophone until 1923, so that he must be playing clarinet there. And on the well-known advertising sheet for Brown's recordings Bushell is positively recognised with his clarinet in the fore-ground! But I have not been able to hear a clarinet on these sides. I have kept him back in the above personnel because he definitely cannot be detected on the two sides of the subsequent Lillyn Brown disc, below, which are much better in sound. This very session is the only Lillyn Brown session listed in the discography of his book 'Jazz from the Beginning'.

Accompaniment is scored throughout and played straight, therefore impossible to discriminate personal styles.

- Ed Cox may be the trumpet/ cornet player as given, sounding stiff and tame as against the trumpeter on the subsequent Lillyn Brown session below. But trumpet playing (tone, vibrato, time) might well be by Gus Aiken as displayed in sessions 006 and 010 of my Gus Aiken list (see elsewhere on this website).

- The trombonist is impossible to identify as he only plays scored trombone parts.

- I do not hear an alto sax on these sides, but a tenor sax instead. As noted before, Bushell did not take up alto until 1923 although listed in Rust playing it here. But, much to my irritation, I do not hear a clarinet as well. My hope was to find out Lillyn Brown's session including Bushell by checking the composer-credits of both records. With the interest and generosity of Han Enderman of the Netherlands I received label-scans of both these discs, but much to my confusion: Miss Brown recorded one Shep Edmonds composition on each of her recordings (see Notes below). Had there been two Shep Edmonds compositions on one of her discs, this would clearly have been the record with Bushell on clarinet.

- On piano I have to exclude Willie Gant because of his comments on his appearance on Miss Bown's record advertisement (see below).

Violinist and drummer are assumed as given in the discographies as on the band photo.

Notes:

- Record Research 30, p. 4: "It was during this period that Gant sat in as the pianist on a Lillyn Brown Jazzbo Syncopators photo. Willie, after carefully recalling the events, at the time that Lillyn made her pioneering recordings for the Emerson company, did not record the Emerson recordings with Lillyn. He just filled a place left by an absent pianist who was supposed to be on hand for the photo. Willie, jokingly remarked that he received \$25 just to take the photo."

- Bushell, Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*, p.23: "Shep (Edmonds – KBR) was a detective, but also a composer. He had written some tunes, and I did a date with Lillyn Brown where she sang them." (The personnel listed is that from Rust).

- Bushell/Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*: no comment to this session in the G. Bushell discography!

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Ed Cox, cnt; Bud Aiken or Herb Flemming, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt, alt; Johnny Mullins, vln; unknown pno; Lutice Perkins, dms.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Ed Cox -c; Bud Aiken or Herb Flemming -tb; Garvin Bushell -cl -as; Johnny Mullins -vn; unknown -p; Lutice Perkind -d.

Discernible differences of takes:

41721-2: Last eight bars of tune (after accelerando): L. Brown shouts: "hey-ho" and "hey-hey".
 41721-3: Last eight bars of tune (after accelerando): L. Brown shouts: "hee-ho" and "hey-hey" and "hoi" on last beat of tune.
 41721-4: Last eight bars of tune (after accelerando): L. Brown shouts: "hee-ho" and "hey-hey" and "heh" on last beat of tune.
 41722-2: Fourth bar of second chorus after 16-bar verse and 16-bar first chorus: yodler "hee-ho".
 41722-4: Fourth bar of second chorus after 16-bar verse and 16-bar first chorus: yodler "yee".

003 **LAVINIA TURNER** Jazz Band New York, Mar. 1921
 Lavinia Turner – voc;
 (Gus Aiken) – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn;
 Garvin Bushell – clt; unknown – ten;
 Willie Gant – pno; Will Splivy Escoffery – bjo; Bill Benford – bbs; Joe Banks - dms
 69168 How Many Times ? PA 020544, Document DOCD-5447
 69169 Can't Get Lovin' Blues PA 020544, Document DOCD-5447

Record Research 30, p.4: "Gant considered Lavinia Turner as one of the great unsung singers who just never did get her due."
 Garvin Bushell in his 'Jazz from the Beginning', p. 28: "The band at Leroy's was sensational. We had Jake Frazier on trombone, Gus Aiken on trumpet, Charlie Jackson on violin, Willie Gant on piano, Bill Benford on tuba, and Joe Banks on drums."

Accompaniment is mainly played straight, therefore impossible to discriminate personal styles. But trumpet playing (tone, vibrato, time) is within the limits of Gus Aiken as displayed in session 009 and 011 of my Gus Aiken list, although vibrato here is somewhat out of the line. Bushell did not take up alto until 1923 although listed playing it here in Rust. What can be heard here is a tenor sax.

Splivy Escoffery plays in this early ragtime-derived banjo style in permanent sixteenth strokes, or doubling the sung melody with a permanent tremolo. The pianist sticks closely to the scores and displays a recognisable ragtime style as heard on session 001 above, and may thus be identified as Willie Gant, in contrast to Fletcher Henderson.

Notes:

- Record Research 30-4: "He (Willie Gant) believes that he may have recorded behind Lavinia Turner, Katie Crippen and Josie Miles, to name some."

- Bushell/Tucker, Jazz from the Beginning, p.149: For this session, the two entries following, and the 17 May 1921 Lavinia Turner date, Martin (sic) Rust lists Bushell on alto saxophone. Bushell, however, claims he did not play the instrument until 1923.

- BGR*2: possibly Gus Aiken, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt, alt; Willie Gant, pno; Spivey, bjo; Joe Banks, dms.

- BGR*3: poss Gus Aiken, c; poss Jake Frazier, tb; poss Garvin Bushell, cl, as; poss Willie Gant, p; poss Spivey, bj; poss Joe Banks, d.

- BGR*4: poss Gus Aiken, c; poss Jake Frazier, tb; poss Garvin Bushell, cl; unknown, cl, as; poss Willie Gant, p; poss Spivey, bj; poss Joe Banks, d.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: possibly Gus Aiken -c; Jake Frazier -tb; Garvin Bushell -cl -as; Willie Gant -p; ----- Spivey -bj; Joe Banks -d.

004 **LAVINIA TURNER** Jazz Band New York, c. May 17, 1921
 Lavinia Turner – voc;
 Gus Aiken – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn;
 Garvin Bushell – clt; unknown – alt;
 Willie Gant – pno; Will Splivey Escoffery – bjo; Bill Benford – bbs; Joe Banks - dms
 69232 A-Wearin' Away The Blues PA 020572, Document DOCD-5447
 69233 Sweet Man O' Mine PA 020572, Document DOCD-5447

Accompaniment is mainly played straight, therefore impossible to discriminate personal styles. But tpt playing (tone, vibrato, time) is within the limits of Gus Aiken as displayed in session 009 and 011 (of my Gus Aiken list elsewhere at this website).

Bushell did not take up alto until 1923 although listed playing it here in Rust. Thus, there must be somebody else playing the alto sax.

Willie Gant accompanies the second chorus of the first title in a manner congruent to his playing in session 001. This personnel seems to be at least partly to be the same as at the Lavinia Turner session before.

Notes:

- Record Research 30-4: "He (Willie Gant) believes that he may have recorded behind Lavinia Turner, Katie Crippen and Josie Miles, to name some."

- Bushell, Tucker, Jazz from the Beginning, p.150: possible personnel: Gus Aiken, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Garvin Bushell, cl, as; Willie Gant, p; ---- Spivey, bj; Joe Banks, d

- BGR*2: prob similar to: Gus Aiken, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt, alt; Willie Gant, pno; Spivey, bjo; Joe Banks, dms.

- BGR*3: poss Gus Aiken, c; poss Jake Frazier, tb; poss Garvin Bushell, cl, as; poss Willie Gant, p; poss Spivey, bj; poss Joe Banks, d.

- BGR*4: poss Gus Aiken, c; poss Jake Frazier, tb; unknown, cl, as; poss Willie Gant, p; poss Spivey, bj; poss Joe Banks, d.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: possibly Gus Aiken -c; Jake Frazier -tb; Garvin Bushell -cl -as; Willie Gant -p; ----- Spivey -bj; Joe Banks -d.

005 **LILLYN BROWN** her Jazzbo Syncopators New York, c. May 09, 1921
 Lillyn Brown – voc;
 Gus Aiken or Ed Cox – tpt; Bud Aiken or Herb Flemming – tbn;
 unknown – ten/cms; Johnny Mullins – vln;
 Willie Gant – pno; Lutice Perkins – dms;
 unknown – voc yodle (1,2)
 41795-2 Bad-Land Blues Em 10384, Document DOCD-5489
 41795-3 Bad-Land Blues Em 10384, Document DOCD-5627
 41797-2 The Jazz-Me Blues Em 10384, Document DOCD-5489
 Composer-credits: 41795 (Shepard N. Edmonds) / 41797 (Tom Delaney)

Rust and Blues&Gospel Records do not list this item as including Gus Aiken. But according to Walter C. Allen Aiken recorded with Lillyn Brown! The trumpet player seems to be more jazz inclined here and may thus be Gus Aiken. Ed Cox is a tamer player as characterized by Garvin Bushell.

This session is not listed in Garvin Bushell's "Jazz from the Beginning". Accompaniment is played from scores throughout, therefore impossible to discriminate personal styles. But tpt playing (tone, vibrato, time) is within the limits of Gus Aiken as displayed in session 006 and 010 of my Gus Aiken list (see elsewhere on this website). Vibrato could be the same as in later Aiken recordings. Bushell did not take up alto until 1923 although listed playing it here in Rust.

Piano accompaniment is very similar to that on the Lavinia Turner sides in style and manner, although there is no soloistic performance. On piano I then cautiously list Willie Gant again because of his appearance on Miss Bown's record advertisement. Violinist and drummer are as given in the discographies.

Notes:

- Bushell, Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*, p.23: "Shep (Edmonds – KBR) was a detective, but also a composer. He had written some tunes, and I did a date with Lillyn Brown where she sang them." (The personnel listed is that from Rust).

- BGR*2, *3, *4: Ed Cox, cnt; Bud Aiken or Herb Flemming, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt, alt; Johnny Mullins, vln; unknown pno; Lutice Perkins, dms.

- Rust*3, *4, *6: Ed Cox -c; Bud Aiken or Herb Flemming -tb; Garvin Bushell -cl -as; Johnny Mullins -vn; unknown -p; Lutice Perkind -d.

Discernible differences of takes:

41795-2: Introduction: violin starts playing – or becomes audible – in 5th bar. Shouting "No" and 2 times "Aaah" after 16th bar of last chorus.

41795-3: Introduction: violin plays parallel to trumpet from the start. 3 times shouting "Aaah" after 16th bar of last chorus.

006 KATIE CRIPPEN	Henderson's Novelty Orchestra	New York,	c. Jun. 1921
Katie Crippen – voc;			
Gus Aiken – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn;			
Edgar Campbell – clt; Buster Bailey – clt, alt;			
Fletcher Henderson – pno; unknown – bbs			
P-136-2	That's My Cup Blues	BS 2018,	Document DOCD-5342
P-137-1	When It's Too Late (You're Gonna Miss Me, Daddy)	BS 2018,	Document DOCD-5342

Walter C. Allen p22: "Both Buster Bailey and Garvin Bushell dimly recall recording behind Katie Crippen. Bailey had in fact been in New York the past February, recording with Mamie Smith. One of the clarinetists doubles on saxophone, and Bushell did not take up sax until 1923". Rust *6 lists Willie Gant – pno. Accompaniment is mainly played straight, therefore impossible to discriminate personal styles. But tpt playing (tone, vibrato, time) is within the limits and style of Gus Aiken as displayed in his later years.

One of the clarinet players constantly plays first parts together with the singer or the trumpet and might therefore well be Edgar Campbell of whom Garvin Bushell said "But one important clarinet player would take the solos. Ed Campbell did a lot of that. He wasn't much of a jazz man, but he was a very good reader". If I am right with this assumption this would rule out Bushell for this session. And it would furthermore mean that Bushell - recalling recording behind Katie Crippen – would be the very retained clarinetist of the first Crippen session (see above).

From these two Katie Crippen sides Edgar Campbell's personal clarinet style can now be deduced with some certainty.

The pianist certainly is Henderson throughout as no traces of the light and crisp piano style of Willie Gant can be detected here as in session 001.

Neither source list the tuba player who – according to the arrangement – is often coupled with the trombone.

Notes:

- WC Allen, *Hendersonia* p22: unknown trumpet; unknown trombone; poss Buster Bailey, clarinet and sax; possibly Garvin Bushell or Edgar Campbell, clarinet; Fletcher Henderson, piano

- Bushell/Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*, p.150: unknown t; unknown tb; Buster Bailey –cl –as; Garvin Bushell -cl; Fletcher Henderson –p (obviously from Rust*4)

- BGR*2: prob: Gus Aiken, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Garvin Bushell, Edgar Campbell or Buster Bailey, clt and clt/alt; Fletcher Henderson –p

- BGR*3, *4: unknown c; unknown tb; poss Garvin Bushell or Edgar Campbell –cl; poss Buster Bailey cl/sax; Fletcher Henderson –p

- Rust*3: prob: Gus Aiken -t; Jake Frazier -tb; Buster Bailey –Edgar Campbell -Garvin Bushell (2 cl, one dblg as); Fletcher Henderson –p

- Rust*4: unknown t; unknown tb; Buster Bailey –cl –as; Garvin Bushell -cl; Fletcher Henderson –p

- Rust*6: unknown t; ? Chink Johnson, tb; Edgar Campbell, cl; ? Cordy Williams, vn; Willie Gant, p

007 ELIZA CHRISTMAS LEE,		New York,	Nov. 02, 1921
Eliza Christmas Lee – voc;			
Gus Aiken – tpt; Jake Frazier – tbn;			
Garvin Bushell – clt; Charlie Jackson – vln;			
Willie Gant – pno; Joe Banks – dms			
7677	I Ain't Givin' Nothin' Away	Gnt 4801,	Document DOCD-5515
7677-A	I Ain't Givin' Nothin' Away	Gnt 4801,	Document DOCD-5627
7678	Arkansas Blues	Gnt 4801,	Document DOCD-5515
7678-A	Arkansas Blues	Gnt 4801,	Document DOCD-5627

Garvin Bushell in his 'Jazz from the Beginning', p. 28: "The band at Leroy's was sensational. We had Jake Frazier on trombone, Gus Aiken on trumpet, Charlie Jackson on violin, Willie Gant on piano, Bill Benford on tuba, and Joe Banks on drums."

This trumpeter's style seems to fit with the trumpet player of sessions 018 – 022 of my Gus Aiken list, and may therefore be Gus Aiken. His style is partly in 6/8th time and so quite out of the Johnny Dunn triplet style. Garvin Bushell in his 'Jazz from the Beginning' does not comment on this session! The trombone player's style is that known from Jake Frazier.

The strong piano playing is conform to Willie Gant's performance at the sessions above.

This personnel minus the violinist confirmed by Willie Gant in RR 30 p. 4, although there are neither banjo nor drums heard on these sides.

Notes:

- Record Research 30 p. 4: "... he made his way to the famous nightery "Leroy's", and there he fronted a band (from c. 1921 / 1923) consisting of Gus Aiken, trumpet; Garvin Bushell, clarinet; Jake Frazier, trombone; Gant, piano; Spivy or Splivy, banjo; and Joe Banks, drums. It was this "Leroy's" band that Gant made his initial recording behind Amelia Christmas (Miss Christmas, to all her friends and fans) for the Gennett label in late 1921 (Arkansas Blues/I Ain't Givin' Nothin' Away – Gennett 4801, as by Eliza Christmas Lee). ... Gant

recalls obtaining \$25 each for the musicians on the recording date. Following this recording adventure, Willie recalled doing several others behind different blues singers on various labels such as Okeh, Pathe and Black Swan with the "Leroy's" personnel. He believes that he may have recorded behind Lavinia Turner, Katie Crippen and Josie Miles, to name some."

- Bushell/Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*, p.154: Gus Aiken, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Garvin Bushell, cl; unknown, v; Willie Gant, p; --- Spivey, bj; Joe Banks, d

- BGR*2,*3: Gus Aiken, tpt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt; unknown, vln; Willie Gant, pno; --- Spivey, bjo; Joe Banks, dms

- BGR*4: possibly Gus Aiken, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt; unknown, clt, alt; Willie Gant, pno; Spivey, bjo; Joe Banks, dms.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Gus Aiken -t; Jake Frazier -tb; Garvin Bushell -cl; unknown -vn; Willie Gant -p; --- Spivey -bj; Joe Banks -d

Discernible differences of takes:

7677: Middle-eight of last chorus: rhythm section falsely continues playing in the first bar

7677-A: Middle-eight of last chorus: rhythm section plays strict stops on measures one and three of first bar

7678: First bar of instrumental (second) chorus: tpt plays one 'Johnny Dunn' triplet: a - g-a-g - e, then 2 eighth-notes a - g, 1 quarter-note e

7678-A: Start of instrumental (second) chorus: tpt plays two 'Johnny Dunn' triplets: a - g-a-g - e

008	LENA WILSON	the Jazz Masters	Long Island City, NY,	c. Sep. 1922
	Lena Wilson - voc;			
	Joe Smith or (Gus Aiken?) - tpt; (George Brashear ?) - tbn; (Julian Baugh) - clt;			
	Willie Gant or Fletcher Henderson - pno; unknown - bbs			
		The Wicked Fives' Blues	BS 14129,	Document DOCD-5443
-2		The Wicked Fives' Blues	BS 14129,	Document DOCD-5602
		You've Got Everything A Sweet Daddy Needs But Me	BS 14129,	Document DOCD-5443

The trumpet player certainly is a follower of the Johnny Dunn style ubiquitous in Harlem at this time, playing in strong military style with its staccato phrasing and its sharp triple bugle calls. I would suggest this player to be Gus Aiken who was able to perform in convincing Dunn style. The trombonist might be George 'Lorenzo' Brashear with his brash tailgate style. And then the clarinetist shows signs of the enigmatic Clarence Robinson of whom W.C. Allen says: "An unidentified clarinetist, with a fine ensemble sense and a tone that reminds me of Johnny Dodds (I am sure, however, that it was NOT Dodds), whom I tentatively identify as Clarence Robinson." (Hendersonia, p.33/34). The pianist may well be Fletcher Henderson as given by Allen, although no personal stylistic traits can be identified. But regarding this session related to the following sessions of Josie Miles, Willie Gant might also be the pianist here.

The tuba player then might be one of a number of New York theatre musicians employed by band leaders like Eubie Blake. Chink Johnson might be a possibility. This session very probably has the same personnel as Josie Miles' session of the same day for the same label!

Notes:

- Rust*3: unknown - c; unknown - tb; unknown - cl; unknown - p; unknown - d.

- W.C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p.47/48: "The next six titles are tentatively included as Henderson accompaniments, because of the use of the band name 'Jazz Masters'. The cornetist is not Joe Smith, however, but a weaker, less 'hot' man whom I cannot identify; the clarinetist also may be a different man than on the previous blues sessions."

- BGR*2: unknown cnt; unknown tbn; unknown clt; unknown pno; unknown bbs

- BGR*3,*4: unknown, c; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; presumably Fletcher Henderson, p; unknown, bb

- Rust*3: unknown -c; unknown -tb; unknown -cl; unknown -p; unknown -bb

- Rust*4,*6: unknown - c; unknown - tb; unknown - cl; Fletcher Henderson - p; unknown - d.

Discernible differences of takes:

The accompaniment seems to be played from written parts and dissimilarities of takes might be minimal, but the following can be discerned

-? trombone retained in ensemble in first two bars of introduction

-2 muted trombone (straight mute) very prominent and loud in first two bars of intro, but playing same notes as in -?

009	JOSIE MILES		Long Island City, NY,	c. Sep. 1922
	Josie Miles - voc;			
	Joe Smith or (Gus Aiken?) - tpt; George Brashear - tbn; (Julian Baugh) - clt;			
	Willie Gant - pno; (Ralph Escudero) - bbs			
424-2		If You Want To Keep Your Daddy Home	BS 14130,	Document DOCD-5466
425-1		You're Fooling With The Wrong Gal Now	BS 14130,	Document DOCD-5466

The trumpet player - whom W.C. Allen identifies as Joe Smith a little too hasty, perhaps, because I think he might as well be the youthful Gus Aiken, a pupil of the Jenkins Orphanage of Charleston, SC. Many trumpet players in Harlem in the very early twenties definitely were under the spell of Johnny Dunn and copied him as well as they could. One of these was Gus Aiken who - on a couple of early recordings of Edith Wilson in 1922 - very probably has hitherto been mistaken for Johnny Dunn. But Aiken certainly excelled in playing in a closely imitated Dunn style, recognizable only by his softer tone and his looser inner rhythm (compare Edith Wilson's recordings of 1922 elsewhere on this website!). But Joe Smith was a Dunn pupil as well, and can be distinguished as such in his early recordings with Mamie Smith (compare Mamie Smith's recordings August 1922 to January 1923 elsewhere on this website). Yet, Smith is recognizably on his way to a very distinct own approach and smooth and rhapsodic style, away from the Dunn mould. And Smith was on tour with Mamie Smith all through 1922 and into 1923 and his presence on this date at least has to be seen questionable. So, our man here - with his eighth triplets - might as well be Smith or Aiken.

The trombone player might well be George Brashear and the clarinetist might possibly be Julian Baugh, who was the only (?) reed player in early Harlem to come closer to the Western players like Johnny Dodds or Jimmy Noone. But he is a very shadowy figure and only very little is known of him. He was earlier named as Clarence Robinson, but Robinson was a dancer, and not a musician. The musician named such in Rust's editions very probably was the clarinetist Julian Baugh, identified by Swedish researcher Bo Lindström as being a member of Ethel Waters' accompanying orchestra (Ethel Waters Doesn't Splurge, Baltimore Afro-American, June 16, 1922 in: Bo Lindström, Oh Joe, Play That Trombone, p. 36).

The sounds from the piano are very light but two-fisted, and I therefore could well imagine this to be Willie Gant, following his own testimony below, which, by the way, would be one of three only possibilities to have recorded with Josie Miles, besides sessions 009 and 010, perhaps. Compare Katie Crippen's session of March 1921 where Willie Gant suddenly inserts a piano solo into a tune played by a very early Henderson recording unit with - as they say - Henderson on piano ('Play 'Em For Mama, Sing 'Em For Me). Gant is much lighter and airy - yet playing two-fisted - in his approach than the strongly founded Henderson.

A banjo player can not be detected on these sides as listed in early editions of Rust and BGR which are based on the below cited excerpts of Record Research. It should, yet, be added that Spivey or Splivey could only mean Will 'Splivey' Escoffery, banjo player of the June Clark band of 1925 ('Blue Rhythm Orchestra' and 'Gulf Coast Seven' on records) and school-fellow of the young Duke Ellington. When considering that this personnel heard might possibly not come from the Fletcher Henderson circle we lose the reason to suggest Ralph Escudero as tuba player, who, nevertheless, did not join the Henderson aggregation before January 1923. Lacking any stylistic idiosyncracies of the tuba sounds we better list this player as unknown. This session 009 may be closely related to Lena Wilson's BS session of the same date c. Sep. 1922 above!)

Notes:

- Record Research 30: "Following this recording adventure, Willie recalled doing several others behind different blues singers on various labels such as Okeh, Pathe and Black Swan with the "Leroy's" personnel. He believes that he may have recorded behind Lavinia Turner, Katie Crippen and Josie Miles, to name some." "Leroy's Band": Gus Aiken, trumpet; Garvin Bushell, clarinet; Jake Frazier, trombone; Gant, piano; Spivy or Splivy, banjo; and Joe Banks, drums.
 - WC Allen, *Hendersonia*, p. 39: Joe Smith, cornet; prob George Brashear, trombone; poss Clarence Robinson, clarinet; Fletcher Henderson piano; poss Ralph Escudero, tuba. "Joe Smith is identified from his characteristic cornet breaks. The matrix numbers seem to place this somewhat later than the preceding three sessions (J. Moody, M. Straine, A. Copeland – KBR), and it may therefore actually be out of its proper chronological sequence, but is placed here because of Smith's presence."
 - Bushell, Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*, p. 156: personnels as by Bruyninckx/Rust*3/Rust*4. No comment by G. Bushell, which may indicate that he did not recognize himself and thus had no recollection to this recording session.
 - BGR*2: Joe Smith, tpt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt; prob Fletcher Henderson, pno; --- Spivey, bjo; Joe Banks, dms.
 - BGR*3,*4: Joe Smith, c; Jake Frazier, tb; poss Clarence Robinson, ct; prob Fletcher Henderson, p; poss Ralph Escudero, bb.
 - Rust*3: Joe Smith - c; Jake Frazier - tb; Garvin Bushell - cl; ? Fletcher Henderson - p; --- Spivey- bj; Joe Banks - d
 - Rust*4: Joe Smith - c; ? George Brashear - tb; ? Clarence Robinson - cl; Fletcher Henderson - p; ? Ralph Escudero.
 - Rust*6: Joe Smith - c; ? George Brashear - tb; ? Clarence Robinson - cl; Willie Gant - p; ? Ralph Escudero.

009 **JOSIE MILES**

Long Island City, NY, c. Nov. 1922

Josie Miles – voc;

Joe Smith or (Gus Aiken?) – tpt; George Brashear – tbn; (Julian Baugh) – clt,
 Willie Gant or (Arthur Ray) – pno; (Ralph Escudero) - bbs

461-2 When I Dream Of Old Tennessee Blues

BS 14133, Document DOCD-5466

463-1 I Don't Want You (If You Don't Want Me)

BS 14133, Document DOCD-5466

This seems to be the same band as before. And may be the 'Black Swan Troubadours/Jazz Masters' accompanying Josie Miles for the following months. But then the pianist may also possibly be Arthur Ray.

Notes:

- WC Allen, *Hendersonia*: not listed
 - BGR*2: Joe Smith, cnt; prob Fletcher Henderson, pno
 - BGR*3,*4: unknown, c; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; unknown, p.
 - Rust*3: unknown -t, unknown -tb; unknown -cl -as; ?Willie Gant -p; unknown bb
 - Rust*4,*6: unknown, c; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; unknown, p.

010 **JOSIE MILES**

Long Island City, NY, c. Dec. 1922

Josie Miles – voc;

Gus Aiken or Joe Smith – tpt; Bud Aiken or (George Brashear) – tbn;
 (Julian Baugh) – clt, unknown – alt;

Willie Gant or (Arthur Ray) – pno; (Ralph Escudero) - bbs

476 Low Down 'Bama Blues

BS 14139, Document DOCD-5466

484-2 Love Me In Your Old-Time Way

BS 14139, Document DOCD-5466

Four O'Clock Blues

BS 14136, Document DOCD-1005

How I've Got Dem Twilight Blues

BS 14136, Document DOCD-1005

Although these four titles are commonly listed as recorded at one single session, the gap between the known matrix numbers certainly are noteworthy. And I have to declare my doubts as to their relation. I could well imagine that there are different musicians on the first title than on the three later ones. Smith and Brashear might be on the first title, and the Aiken brothers on the later ones, possibly with Arthur Ray on piano.

There is a nice ragtime introduction to the first title which fits to Willie Gant's characteristics of before. In the second title we hear strong trumpet – trombone unisono parts, very uncommon at this time in jazz/blues.

Again, the band parts are mostly written down and identification of the musicians is almost impossible. I nevertheless see the possibility of Gus Aiken here playing with his brother Bud in closely set parts. The clarinetist might be the before-mentioned Julian Baugh. And there is a hitherto unlisted alto saxophonist. The pianist plays integral parts of the beautiful and skilfully done arrangements, which might be a hint that these musicians are part of the below mentioned 'Black Swan Troubadours/Jazz Masters' and that they make up a well rehearsed band. This then could mean that the pianist is Arthur Ray as mentioned below, later to be known as accompanist to Bubber Miley on the 'Texas Blues Destroyers' sessions. There probably is a tuba player with the band.

Notes:

- WC Allen, *Hendersonia*, p. 59: unknown trumpet, trombone, clarinet and piano. "Josie Miles went on tour with the Black Swan Troubadours in January and February, 1923." *Ibid.* p. 42: "Meanwhile, the second tour of the Black Swan Troubadours began in January 1923, featuring Josie Miles, "The Blues Nightingale", accompanied by the Black Swan Jazz Masters. However, the pianist and director was Arthur Ray, not Henderson. Before she went on tour she made several records for Black Swan on which the accompanying orchestra was not identified."
 - BGR*2: unknown tpt, tbn, clt/alt, poss Willie Gant, pno; unknown bbs
 - BGR*3,*4: unknown, c; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; unknown, p.
 - Rust*3: unknown -t, unknown -tb; unknown -cl -as; ?Willie Gant -p; unknown bb
 - Rust*4,*6: unknown, c; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; unknown, p.

Willie Gant and his Paradise Ramblers were the house band at Smalls' Paradise in the summer of 1926, at least until October (Pittsburgh Courier, Oct. 16, 1926), with a personnel of Rex Stewart (later Leroy Rutledge), Ward Pinkett -tpt; Joe Williams - tbn; Clarence Adams - alt; Freddie Skeritt - alt, bar; Happy Caldwell - ten, clt; Willie Gant - pno, ldr; Johnny Lee - bjo; Billy Taylor - bbs; Manzie Johnson - dms. A band photo of Willie Gant's Orchestra is published in Keepnews/Grauer, A Pictorial History of Jazz, p. 109, and Storyville 66, p.216 showing a personnel of (from left) Billy Taylor, bbs; Willie Gant (seated), pno; Ward Pinkett, tpt; Happy Caldwell, clt, ten; Rex Stewart, cnt; Manzie Johnson, dms; Freddie Skeritt, alt; Joe Williams, tbn; Johnny Lee, bjo; Son Adams, alt (*looks like a really very nice outfit! - KBR*).

Gant reported recording several sessions during this period for Columbia, Pathe and Grey Gull with the band and also as a pianist with pick-up outfits. None of the recording are total solo endeavors and according to Gant these sessions were the last of his recordings. Owing to a lack of substantial statistical evidence these recordings are still in the realm of obscurity and are demanding of future research."

Willie Gant, Record Research 30, p.4: "Gant reported recording several sessions during this period (1926/27 - KBR) for Columbia, Pathe and Grey Gull with the band and also as a pianist with pick-up outfits. None of the recording are total solo endeavors and according to Gant these sessions were the last of his recordings. Owing to a lack of substantial statistical evidence these recordings are still in the realm of obscurity and are demanding of future research."

I have tried to find out corresponding sessions in 1926/27 with unknown accompanists, and was able to find some with a pianist in ragtime style similar to the piano performances on the above sessions. Of the related labels I only found Pathé Actuelle and Grey Gull to carry recordings with the assumed presence of Gant (and one single Banner session), whereas I did not succeed in finding any Columbia date. Below I list all sessions of 1926/27 with the assumed presence of Willie Gant. It is interesting that a couple of them hitherto were ascribed to Mike Jackson as pianist, and I followed their assumption. But now I know that Gant plays in a modified ragtime style without the stride-style left-hand rhythm which is used by Mike Jackson. And to my own astonishment, I also found him at the four-part Pathé Actuelle session with Netti Robinson, Laura Smith Rosa Henderson and Sadie Green on 15 January, 1927.

011 FRANKIE AND HER JAZZ DEVILS

New York, c. May 18, 1926

Frankie - voc;

June Clark - cnt; unknown - clt;

Willie Gant - pno

106873	You Can't Guess How Good It Is ('Till You Try It For Yourself)	PA 7507, Per 107,	Doc DOCD-5510
106874	Those Creeping Sneaking Blues	PA 7507, Per 107,	Doc DOCD-5510

I discovered this session in July 2006 when listening to obscure blues/vaudeville singers, and my immediate reaction was, that this could be June Clark on cnt. Certainly, my reaction was rather emotional, but this way of instinctive judgement must not be the worst. I have learned to trust it, not necessarily, but rather often. So, I added this session into my June Clark list.

- trumpet/cornet: I hear a player with a strong and urging tone, just as Clark's. He is not playing assuredly in the beginning of the first title. Clark's vibrato cannot be heard, if only in very subdued form. But time and phrasing is always up front of the beat. So, I see a strong possibility of Clark's presence.

- clarinet: a rather straight clt player with no recognizable characteristics.

- piano: a strong pno player, but obviously unidentified yet. 19-04-2021: recent research on pianist Willie Gant has brought me to the insight that this pianist may well be the named musician (see Record Research 30, p. 4 and my Willie Gant list elsewhere on this website). Our pianist here plays a strong ragtime derived style like Gant in earlier recordings (see above), and shows a special liking for fast upward runs in his right hand.

According to Dixon / Godrich BLUES & GOSPEL RECORDS this singer's name is probably Jane Howard.

Notes:

Record Research 30, p.4: "Gant reported recording several sessions during this period for Columbia, Pathe and Grey Gull with the band and also as a pianist with pick-up outfits. None of the recording are total solo endeavors and according to Gant these sessions were the last of his recordings. Owing to a lack of substantial statistical evidence these recordings are still in the realm of obscurity and are demanding of future research."

- BGR*2,*3: unknown tpt, clt, pno.

- BGR*4: unknown t; unknown cl; unknown p.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown -t; unknown -cl; unknown -p.

Recorded Tunes:

You Can't Guess How Good It Is Key of F Pathé Actuelle, Perfect
(Intro 4 bars ens)(A Verse 16 bars voc + ens)(B1 Chorus 16 bars AB voc + ens)(B2 Chorus 16 bars ens)(B3 Chorus 16 bars voc + ens)(Coda 4 bars ens)

Those Creeping Sneaking Blues Key of F Pathé Actuelle, Perfect
(Intro 4 bars ens)(A Verse 8 bars voc + ens)(B1 Chorus 18 bars AB voc + ens)(B2 Chorus 18 bars (8 bars ens - 10 bars voc + ens)(Coda 2 bars ens)

012 MANDY LEE

New York, Jul. 12, 1926

Mandy Lee - voc;

(Thomas Morris) - cnt; Willie Gant - pno

106990	Rounders Blues	PA 7509,	Document DOCD-5515
106991	Wandering Papa Blues	PA 7509,	Document DOCD-5515

Earlier research brought me to the assumption that we may possibly have Thomas Morris here, but very insecure and a bit hasty. And on piano Willie Gant, early Harlem pianist, leading his great band at 'Smalls' Paradise' for just one single summer season at this famous and popular Harlem institution.

This is what I have written earlier:

These musicians definitely sound like Thomas Morris and Mike Jackson. They show all their typical characteristics: Morris' uncertainty, weak fingering and Mike Jackson's flowery phrasing in the left hand and his modest stride style.

I really wonder why nobody did recognize both the accompanying musicians up to now!

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown cnt; pno.

- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown -c, -p.

013 ZAIDEE JACKSON		New York,	Aug. 1926
Zaidee Jackson – voc;			
<i>Willie Gant</i> – pno; unknown – gtr			
107075	I'm Mad Because I Turned My Baby Down	PA 7512,	Document DOCD-5514
107077	Something's Gonna Happen To You	PA 7512,	Document DOCD-5514

And again, we very probably find the same pianist, thus Willie Gant, as on the former 1926 sides above.
As for the guitarist: would guitar specialists, please, tell something about this player's identity?! (see also session 015)

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3: unknown acc
- BGR*4: unknown, p; unknown, g
- Rust*3,*4: unknown
- Rust*6: unknown, p; unknown, g

014 MISS FRANKIE		New York,	c. Dec. 1926
Frankie – voc;			
<i>Willie Gant</i> – pno			
2456-A	I Need A Good Man Bad	GG/Rx 7021,	Document DOCD-5510
2457-A	I Can't Be Worried Long	Rx 7021	not on LP/CD
2457-B	I Can't Be Worried Long	GG/Rx 7021,	Document DOCD-5510

These sides have the same ragtime/stride pianist as Miss Frankie's sides above, thus possibly Willie Gant. W. Gant recalled to have recorded in 1926 for Columbia, Pathé and Grey Gull, when he was leading his promising band at 'Smalls' Paradise' for the summer season, substituting for 'Charlie Johnson's Paradise Orchestra'. Fortuitously, Miss Frankie's two only recordings were cut by just two of these companies, Pathé and Grey Gull. Godrich/Dixon's assumption for Eubie Blake as pianist is just not so far away. But when listening to Gant's assumed 1921 recordings I have to settle for Mr. Gant here.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: possibly Eubie Blake, pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown -p

015 MANDY LEE		New York,	c. Dec. 27, 1926
Mandy Lee – voc;			
(<i>Willie Gant</i>) – pno; unknown – gtr			
7012-7	Harlem Blues	Ban 1920,	Document DOCD-5515
7016-1	Someone's Been Lovin' My Baby	Ban 1958,	Document DOCD-5515
7016-2	Someone's Been Lovin' My Baby	Ban 1958	not on LP/CD

Note: this very probably is a white singer!

This pianist shows ragtime derived playing technique as heard on the before listed sessions, and I see Willie Gant's possible presence on this session.

It has, yet, to be noted that this singer Mandy Lee aurally is not the same singer Mandy Lee as before (see above), as BGR*4 claims. Would guitar specialists, please, tell something about this player's identity?!

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: unknown pno; unknown gtr
- Rust*3,*4,*6: unknown -p; unknown -g

016 NETTIE ROBINSON		New York,	c. Jan. 15, 1927
Nettie Robinson – voc;			
Edwin Swayze – tpt; Bob Fuller – clt;			
<i>Willie Gant</i> – pno			
107311	I've Got The Right Man Now	PA 7523,	Document DOCD-5517
107312	I Never Loved But One Woman's Son	PA 7523,	Document DOCD-5517

This seems to be the same personnel as on Rosa Henderson's Vocalion session of July 02, 1926, although the pianist does not play Cliff Jackson's typical licks (broken rhythm or shifting of meter) and may therefore possibly be somebody else, yet a very strong stride piano player – not Mike Jackson who plays a very different right hand. Recent research (April 2021) on pianist Willie Gant unearthed Gant's recollection that he recorded for Pathé Actuelle in 1926/27 when he was leading a band in Harlem. This pianist's style of modified ragtime without modern and fashionable stride techniques of the time could well be Willie Gant's.

This is what our group said about this session in our Thomas Morris investigation some years ago:

KBR: aurally personnel seems to be right.

DB: as received but definite.

MR: Morris possible, Fuller doubtful.

Notes:

Record Research 30, p.4: "Gant reported recording several sessions during this period for Columbia, Pathe and Grey Gull with the band and also as a pianist with pick-up outfits. None of the recording are total solo endeavors and according to Gant these sessions were the last of his recordings. Owing to a lack of substantial statistical evidence these recordings are still in the realm of obscurity and are demanding of future research."

- RR 77-8: not listed.

- 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,*6: prob Thomas Morris, cnt; prob Bob Fuller, clt; prob Mike Jackson, pno

017 **LAURA SMITH** The Wild Cats New York, c. Jan. 15, 1927
 Laura Smith – voc;
 Edwin Swayze – tpt; Bob Fuller – 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

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!

My (KBR's) assumption – following recent research – is that Willie Gant may well be the pianist, not Cliff nor Mike Jackson.

This is what our group said about this session in our Thomas Morris investigation some years ago:

KBR: *aurally personnel seems to be right, though the trumpet player bears some similarity to Gus Aiken's style. ADDITION 160310: very probably Edwin Swayze*

DB: *I accept the personal although Tom sounds untypical at times – slurs – but he starts 'When A Gator' with his standard entry.*

MR: *Morris and Fuller both likely.*

Notes:

- RR 77-8: not listed.

- 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: *? Thomas Morris, cnt; ? Bob Fuller, clt; ? Mike Jackson, pno*

- Rust*3,*4,*6: *unknown, c; unknown cl; unknown p.*

018 **ROSA HENDERSON** New York, Dec. 1926/Jan. 1927
 Rosa Henderson – voc;
 Edwin Swayze – tpt; Willie Gant – pno
 107315 Slow Up, Papa PA 7522, Document DOCD-5404
 107316 Hock Shop Blues PA 7522, Document DOCD-5404

This trumpet player here has all characteristics of Edwin Swayze as on the Vocalions above. If you listen you hear a style closely related to Joe King Oliver's playing.

The pianist might be Willie Gant, after recent research on this musician/bandleader, as on the entire Pathé session of c. 15 Januar, 1927.

Cliff Jackson as listed by Rust, yet not very distinct here, just as on the session before.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown accompaniment.*

- *VJM 177, Bob Hitchens, The Choo Choo Jazzers: "Sounds like L. Metcalf to me, and poss Louis Hooper. ... KBR (N&N77) notes that this tpt does not fall away in tone at the end of notes as Metcalf had done on earlier recordings. He suggests that Edwin Swayzee fits the bill. But we have not heard from L. Metcalf for 18 months during which time he has been active in Harlem. A young musician is bound to develop his style in these circumstances. In the absence of any reference to Swayzee's involvement from contemporary media or in personal reminiscences by those who were there, I see no reason revise this personnel. I do agree that the same trumpet is heard on Rosa's next two issued sessions and on that of c. January 1927 (by which time Swayzee was in the mid-west with Trent)."*

- BGR*2,*3,*4: *unknown cnt; unknown pno.*

- Rust*3,*4,*6: *? Cliff Jackson, p.*

019 **SADIE GREEN** New York, c. Jan. 15, 1927
 Sadie Green – voc;
 Edwin Swayze – tpt; Willie Gant – pno
 107317 Alley Man (Haul My Ashes) PA 7524, Document DOCD-5511
 107318 Don't Wear Your Welcome Out PA 7524, Document DOCD-5511

Here, we hear the trumpeter assumed to be Edwin Swayze with his sharp yet earthy trumpet playing derived from King Oliver (see 'Edwin Swayze' elsewhere on this website under "Soloists"). Very beautiful!

The pianist plays the melody along with the trumpet and is not as strong rhythmically as Cliff Jackson, thus possibly Willie Gant, whose characteristic is playing in a modified ragtime manner with "locked" hands. He does not use the typical stride left-hand with bass-notes on one and three and subsequent chords on two and four. I have earlier assumed this player to be Mike Jackson, but Jackson decidedly plays with independent hands, a moderate stride left-hand and a flowery right hand. Willie Gant recalled having recorded for Pathé Actuelle in 1926/27 during his period as bandleader at Harlem's 'Smalls' Paradise'.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: *unknown cnt; unknown pno.*

- Rust*3,*4,*6: *unknown -c; unknown -p.*

Other candidates of sessions with Willie Gant participating may be Evelyn Preer's Banner session of 08 September, 1926, and Victor session of 14 October, 1926 which I did not have the chance to hear until now. These, at least, could fulfill Gant's note that he also recorded with his band, besides as solo pianist. I also could imagine Gant to be the pianist in Georgia Harvey's recordings on Black Swan in 1922 and 1923.

SOURCES:

Shapiro/Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, Rex Stewart: "Ah, those were the days – top and bottom, breakfast dances, and real jam sessions. Let's pause here and pay tribute to Willie 'The Lion' Smith, Stephen 'The Beetle' Henderson, James P. Johnson, and Willie 'The Tiger' Gant. Those fellows were the inspiration of most of the guys who were on The New York scene, many of whom became greats in the swing world – Fats Waller, Benny Carter, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, Goodman, and, oh yes, there was a five-piece band from my home town, Washington, who, rumour said, existed on the earnings of its pool-hustling drummer, Sonny Greer, because they worked very little."

Shapiro/Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya*, Joe Turner: "This was also the time when we had the world's most exciting piano contests, night after night, with the following pianists regularly present – James P. Johnson, Willie 'The Lion' Smith, Thomas 'Fats' Waller, and Joe Turner. Very rarely did other pianists dare to play. Of course, there were times when Stephen 'The Beetle' Henderson was getting into the contest, and he demanded the greatest respect for his perfect left hand. And there would be two others who would try their luck occasionally in the contests – 'Corky' Williams, and, especially, Willie Gant."

Fell/Vinding, *Stride: The Jazz Review* – Feb. 1959, Nat Hentoff, Garvin Bushell and the New York Scene: "It was at Leroy's that I first saw piano battles. Players like Willie 'The Lion', James P., Fats, Willie Gant. They'd last for three or four hours. One man would play two or three choruses, and the next would slide in. Jimmy was on top most of the time. Fats was the youngest, but he was coming along. They played shouts and they also played pop tunes. You got credit for how many patterns you could create within the tunes you knew, and in how many different keys you could play. You had to know how to play in every key because all those players had been baptized in cabarets. You never knew what kind of key the entertainers wanted. There'd be more controversy among the listeners than the participants. There was betting, and people were ready to fight about who's won. Jimmy played with the most originality. He'd create things the other guys hadn't thought up."

Ibid: Willie 'The Tiger' or 'The Leopard' Gant (1899 – 1974)

Born in New York City, Gant worked at William Bank's Café c. 1917. Taught by James P. Johnson. Blues accompaniments recorded with Eliza Christmas Lee (Gennett) and Lavinia Turner (Paramount). Led band at Small's Paradise (sic) and elsewhere, 1921 – 1927. Solo thereafter, largely in the New York area. Arthritis forced him into retirement."

Ibid: "(Eubie) Blake's next stop was Atlantic City, whose resort atmosphere fostered all-night clubs. Visitors from New York included Willie Gant, James P., and Willie The Lion. Blake impressed them all, and everyone impressed Blake, who told Lion of his affection for Franz Lehár and confided that his predilection for changing keys stemmed from an English light opera by Leslie Stuart 'Floradora'."

G. Hofer, Willie 'The Lion' Smith, *Music on My Mind*: "In the old days we used to call musicians by their animal nicknames. Stephen Henderson was the Beetle, Willie Gant was the Leopard, Jack Wilson was Jack the Bear; Donald Lambert answered to the lamb; and yours truly has always been the Lion."

Ibid: "Another one of the youngsters who was coming along about this time was William D. Gant. He hung around with James P. and myself at Lee's. A short time later Gant became one of the first pianists to work at Bill Bank's new uptown café on 133rd Street. Willie's home was Hell's Kitchen, where he lived in a building (at Forty-first Street and Eighth Avenue) that also housed Alberta Simmons, New York's best woman jazz pianist, Raymond (Lippy) Boyette, a piano-playing whiz who later sort of managed the Big Three; and Russell Brooks, a good friend of the Waller family. Brooks was the first one to haul Fats around to the saloons while the kid was still in short pants. We, all of us younger cats, used to follow around guys like Thad (Snowball) Wilkerson, who played by ear in one key – B natural; Jack the Bear; and Richard (Abba Labba) McLean, a sporting-house piano player who had once worked in a vaudeville act with my good friend Luckey Roberts.

Old Abba Labba wasn't easy to hear because he rarely took a regular job. He would just walk into a place and play for thirty minutes before walking out again. We – that is, James P., Willie Gant, Corky Williams (I can't recall whatever became of him), and the Lion – sure doug that cat. He used tenths in his bass and could swing like mad, just like an old-time Baptist preacher shouting at his congregation. James P. thought so much of Abba that he had a tendency to pick up on his style.

Tucker/Bushell, *Jazz from the Beginning*, p. 28: "The band at Leroy's was sensational. We had Jake Frazier on trombone, Gus Aiken on trumpet, Charlie Jackson on violin, Willie Gant on piano, Bill Benford on tuba, and Joe Banks on drums. At different times we also had Buddy Aiken or Geechie Fields on trombone, and Steve Wright on drums. Willie Gant was the boss of the band; the pianist was always the leader in cabaret bands, because he had to play behind the singers."

W.C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p. 33: "Willie Gant, in particular, recalls recording behind such singers as Josie Miles and Lavinia Turner; his band, regularly playing at Leroy's, 1921 -23, included at various times such men as Gus Aiken (cornet); Jake Frazier (trombone); Garvin Bushell (clarinet); Cokey Spivy (banjo), and Joe Banks (drums). Therefore, from 1922 on, the presence of Fletcher Henderson as pianist on Black Swan record dates can no longer be automatically assumed."

Ibid, p. 58: "This is a good place to state that the name 'Willie M. Grant' seen as a composer credit on some Black Swan recordings, is not a misprint for Willie Gant, but is a pseudonym for William Grant Still! This information is from Mr. Still himself."

Storyville 66, Freddie Skerritt tells his Story p. 215: "I played in Willie Gant's Band at Small's (sic) Paradise during the summer of 1926. Ward Pinkett and Rex Stewart, who was later replaced by Leroy Rutledge, were on trumpets, Happy Caldwell, Son Adams and myself were on reeds, Joe Williams on trombone, Johnny Lee on guitar and banjo, Billy Taylor on bass and Manzie Johnson on drums. I also worked in a small combo with Willie Gant at a downstairs room called Brittwoods on 140th and Lenox. I recall that Erskine Hawkins's wife was the checkroom girl there. I was beginning to play a lot of baritone saxophone then, because Gant likes me "bootin' out the baritone"."

Ibid, p. 216: "Regarding this period (1928/29 - KBR), Freddie recalled on another occasion that he shared jobs with Norman Thornton at the Paraquet on 61st Street, then played in a trio with Willie Gant in a street side bar on 139th, both of which Peter Carr thinks relate to this time. The Cliff Jackson episode recalled may, in fact, be two dates, as Freddie told Peter Carr that it was after playing with Willie Gant that he went to Newark with Cliff Jackson, whilst he told us that it was around 1930 (much later) that he worked with Jackson, Henry "Moon" Jones and a drummer by the name of Casey (no relation to either Floyd or Al Casey).

Storyville 87, Barclay Draper p.95: "Later on in that same year of 1926, I worked with Willie Gant at Connor's on 135th Street, right across from the Lincoln Theater. Ward Pinkett, Happy Caldwell, Jimmy Archey, Freddie Skerritt, and Mazie Johnson were in that band. We played at Connor's for about three or four months."

Willie Gant, Record Research 30, p.4: "Willie (Gant) left "Leroy's" about 1923 and hit the road with Sonny Thompson's Jazz Band (tenure: c. 1923 / 1925). They played the vaudeville route in the Keith circuit which took them to many cities in the U.S. In the band was Leroy Rutledge, trumpet; Cuba --- , clarinet; Herb Gregory, trombone; Gant, piano; and Sonny Thompson, drums. Notices of their whereabouts and photos of the band appeared in many periodicals of the day. They were known as a fine hot jazz band but unfortunately for jazz history they never recorded. Tiring of the road, Willie Gant took his leave of Sonny Thompson, and formed a band which ultimately played New York's "Cotton Club" and "Small's Paradise" (tenure: ca. 1925 / 1927). This was the pinnacle in Willie Gant's bandstand era. Such sidemen as Ward Pinkett, Rex Stewart, Leroy Rutledge, Joe Williams (tmb), Happy Caldwell, Freddie Skerritt (reeds), Manzie Johnson were to grace the personnel roster during this period. An interesting review of the band at "Small's Paradise" appeared in the May 26, 1926 issue of "Variety".

Gant reported recording several sessions during this period for Columbia, Pathe and Grey Gull with the band and also as a pianist with pick-up outfits. None of the recording are total solo endeavors and according to Gant these sessions were the last of his recordings. Owing to a lack of substantial statistical evidence these recordings are still in the realm of obscurity and are demanding of future research."

K.-B. Rau
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