

THE RECORDINGS OF HERB GREGORY

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo-Discography

GREGORY, Herbert

Nothing biographically is known of trombonist Herb Gregory apart from Rex Stewart's recollections of his early days in Harlem as a member of John Montague's band.

He can be found on a photograph of Dave Nelson's Orchestra of 1931, sitting left holding his trombone (Driggs/Lewine, Black Beauty, White Heat).

When compiling my list of Jake Frazier's recordings a couple of years ago, I detected some recordings attributed to Frazier, which were in complete contrast to Frazier's style as they showed a trombonist who played legato throughout, while Frazier plays staccato. I recognized that this had to be a different player whose name was unknown and whose style did not fit to anybody else's known. But it was noteworthy that this man could only be detected on recordings of late 1924 and mostly on the Ajax label.

When reading Rex Stewart's marvellous books 'Jazz Masters of the Thirties' and 'Boy Meets Horn' I got to know Stewart's blowing and drinking partner Herb Gregory of his time with the John Montague Band in New York 1924. As pianist Montague is also present on some of these sides, it became reasonable that this unknown and undistinguished trombonist could well be the said Gregory.

As this is not more than my personal assumption, the reader/listener has to be aware that I might be in error on this matter. We shall never know for sure. But it is my certain feeling that I may be right here. It is only interesting and annoying, that nobody before became aware of this player's distinct own identity.

STYLISTICS

STYLE

Herb Gregory is only known as Rex Stewart's band-mate in the John Montague Band of 1924. All his recordings have hitherto been listed as Jake Frazier's. But Gregory plays in a distinct legato style, obviously influenced by Charlie Irvis' style, although he does not show Irvis' clearness and melodic consequence. (Frazier uses a staccato style throughout.)

TONE

His tone is sharp and voluminous.

VIBRATO

No vibrato can be recognised, but if there is one, it is very slow and wide with little changing altitude.

TIME

Simple time on the beat, sometimes slightly off-time.

PHRASING

Because of mainly functional playing, no distinct phrases can be found. What can be heard is fundamental harmonic playing with little rhythmic alteration and little melodic content. Obvious is his legato playing. His only recordings are exclusively in accompanying bands to blues singers.

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

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.

GREGORY, HERB

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|-------|---|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 001 | SUSIE SMITH | Choo Choo Jazzers | New York, | Sep. 18-22, 1924 |
| | Monette Moore – voc; | | | |
| | <i>Louis Metcalf</i> – tpt; (<i>Herb Gregory?</i>) – tbn; | | | |
| | Louis Hooper – pno; Joe Davis – effects | | | |
| 31692 | | Workhouse Blues | Ajax 17064, | Document DOCD-5338 |
| 31694 | | House Rent Blues | Ajax 17064, | Document DOCD-5338 |
| 31695 | | House Rent Blues | Ajax 17064, | Document DOCD-5338 |

The Rust and BGR personnel has been seen as correct and has been found as such a couple of years ago when collating my Jake Frazier discography. But after intense and repeated listening I have concluded that this trumpet player must be Louis Metcalf. Here now, we hear a trombone player in the legato style of Charlie Irvis, Bubber Miley's band mate and blowing partner of the early Ellington band. Only, that he lacks some important ingredients of Irvis' most individual style. The obvious differences between Irvis and this player can also be found on a couple of other band accompaniments in 1924. Since this player appears together with Rex Stewart – mostly assumed to be Bubber Miley in the discos – for some months, I can only deduce that this must have been Herb Gregory, Stewart's blowing partner and also member of John Montague's band. (Trumpet – trombone partnerships were very fashionable in Harlem at this time!) As we do not know any documented appearances of Gregory on records, this can only be my own personal assumption and has to be seen as a hypothesis. But I insist that this musician is neither Frazier nor Irvis!

Notes:

- RR 77-6, 77-6: Miley, Frazier, Hooper

- W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bubber Miley, cornet; Jake Frazier, trombone; Louis Hooper, piano; effects reputedly by Joe Davis.

- BGR*4: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p; Joe Davis, effects

- Rust*6: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p; Joe Davis, effects

- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, B. Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Jake Frazier, (tb); Louis Hooper, (p); Joe Davis (effects).

Notable differences of takes:

31694: last four notes of cnt at the titles end: G – Ab – Bb – G

31695: last four notes of cnt at the titles end: Bb – C – Bb – Db

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|-------|---|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 002 | SUSIE SMITH | | New York, | Sep. 18-22, 1924 |
| | Monette Moore – voc, kazoo; | | | |
| | <i>Harry Smith</i> – tpt; (<i>Herb Gregory?</i>) – tbn; | | | |
| | Louis Hooper – pno | | | |
| 31706 | | Bullet Wound Blues | Ajax 17075, | Document DOCD-5338 |

Here I now hear Harry Smith and the unknown trombonist of above on this side. This session obviously is the same with Josie Miles Ajax session of the preceding matrix numbers, the trumpet player seems to be the same. He sounds akin to Louis Metcalf here.

My comment on this side to Bob Hitchen's excellent Choo Choo Jazzers investigation was: "Is this really Bubber Miley? Drunk? Or another – less lively – player, trying to copy Miley? The trombonist is a legato player somewhat in Charlie Irvis' style, but unknown to me. Or is this Irvis, intoxicated, just like his colleague from the Snowden/Ellington band? As a matter of fact: this is not Frazier." In the light of my recent realizations I strongly believe the trombonist to be Herb Gregory.

Hooper claimed his own presence on piano.

Notes:

- RR 77-6: Fuller, Frazier, Hooper

- W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; possibly Louis Hooper, p;

- Rust*3,*4: Bubber Miley -c; Jake Frazier -tb; Louis Hooper -p.

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p.

- Rust*6: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p.

- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Jake Frazier, (tb); Louis Hooper, (p).

- VJM 175, B. Hitchens, Choo Choo Jazzers: Bubber Miley (t), Jake Frazier (tb), Louis Hooper (p). "KBR insists not JF. John Montague (p) was Monette's regular accompanist at this time."

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|-------|---|---------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 003 | SUSIE SMITH | | New York, | Sep. 18-22, 1924 |
| | Monette Moore – voc, kazoo; | | | |
| | <i>(Herb Gregory?)</i> – tbn; Bob Fuller – clt; | | | |
| | Louis Hooper – pno; | | | |
| 31721 | | Salt Water Blues | Ajax 17073, | Document DOCD-5339 |
| 31722 | | Rainy Weather Blues | Ajax 17073, | Document DOCD-5339 |

This trombonist is the legato player again, similar to Charlie Irvis, but certainly not Irvis himself. He has nothing of Frazier's staccato style as displayed on undoubted Frazier appearances and thus certainly is not Frazier. I have not been able to accord any name to this musician.

But in connection with other sessions listed in this article I assume this man to possibly be Stewart's pal Herb Gregory. Clarinet definitely Bob Fuller and Hooper on piano.

Notes:

- RR 77-6: Fuller, Frazier, Hooper

- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bob Fuller, clarinet; Louis Hooper, p*
 - *BGR*4: Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p*
 - *Rust*6: Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p*

004 **JULIA MOODY** New York, c. Oct. 29, 1924
 Julia Moody – voc;
 Rex Stewart – tpt (2); (*Herb Gregory?*) – tbn (1); (*Cecil Benjamin*) – clt;
 Louis Hooper or (*John Montague*) – pno
 5693-3 Worried Blues Ban 1468, Document DOCD-5418
 5694-2 Mad Mama’s Blues Ban 1451, Document DOCD-5418

After hearing Bubber Miley and Charlie Irvis here for many years I now hear – in the context of all other sessions compiled here - very probably Rex Stewart and possibly his pal Herb Gregory. Definitely not Jake Frazier with his staccato style: legato against staccato playing. Bob Fuller’s fast vibrato is distinct, as is Hooper’s simple equal fours in his left hand.

Notes:

- *RR 77-9: Bubber Miley; Jake Frazier; Bob Fuller; Louis Hooper; Snowden.*
 - *BGR*2,*3,*4: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
 - *Rust*6: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
 - *Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp); Jake Frazier (tb); Bob Fuller (cl); Louis Hooper (p).*

005 **VIOLA McCOY** Kansas City Five New York, Nov. 21, 1924
 Viola McCoy – voc, kazoo;
 (*Rex Stewart*) – cnt; (*Herb Gregory?*) – tbn; (*Cecil Benjamin*) – clt;
 (*John Montague*) – pno; unknown – bjo;
 9860-A Memphis Bound Ed 51478, Document DOCD-5417
 9860-B Memphis Bound Ed 51478 not on LP/CD
 9860-C Memphis Bound Ed 51478, IAJRC 49 (LP)

I would like to refer to Monette Moore’s Vocalion session of 25 September, 1924 where she is accompanied by members of the John Montague band: To my ears this is the same band, even enlarged by the band’s trombonist and an unknown banjo player. I believe strongly to recognize Rex Stewart and the band’s clarinetist – whose name was Cecil Benjamin. Both men’s interplay is comparable to that at the Vocalion session and the trombonist fits in perfectly. Therefore, and because of the temporal accordance I opt for the members of the contemporaneous Montague band.

This is what I have written some time ago about these three following coherent Edison sessions: *This is a very difficult record to determine. The trumpet player is much too reticent and owns too little tension to be Miley. He may possibly be Thomas Morris, but my listening companions have denied this, and I agree. Of the trombonist much too little can be heard to determine his style and identity. Accepted that he is the same player as on the following Edison sessions of that very day (with Rosa Henderson and Josie Miles, respectively), this is not Frazier, but a legato player, yet not Charlie Irvis. The clarinet player has nothing of Fuller’s style, melodically and per vibrato, and plays in a slow arpeggiated legato style with a wooden tone and slow vibrato. He may be found in Western circles. The pianist cannot be determined as he permanently plays rhythm in accordance with the banjo, so, that his style is impossible to recognize. The banjo player’s sound is much less brilliant than that of Snowden, lacks Snowden’s embellishments, and plays a single-string accompaniment to the kazoo solo totally unaccustomed from Elmer Snowden. This accompanying band might possibly be searched for in another surrounding. There seems to be no connection to the Ajax recording personnel of the time!*

(Bob Hitchens’ “Choo Choo Jazzers” research in VJM 175-3 still maintains the usually listed personnel as given below, against my own contribution and statement: “KBR hears a completely new set of musicians here. If that is wrong the regular musicians must all have been “under the weather”. I myself doubt a recording session – particularly with Edison – with all musicians “under the weather”!) Comparison of the issued takes on DOCD-5417 and IAJRC 49 (LP) do not show any differences. Their destination of takes must therefore be doubted and taken with care.

Notes:

- *BGR*2,*3: prob personnel Tom Morris or Bubber Miley, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Bob Fuller, clt; Louis Hooper or Arthur Ray, pno; Elmer Snowden, bjo; own kazoo*
 - *BGR*4: prob Thomas Morris, c; prob Jake Frazier, tb; prob Bob Fuller, cl; prob Louis Hooper or Arthur Ray, p; prob Elmer Snowden, bj.*
 - *Rust*3: Tom Morris or Bubber Miley –c, Jake Frazier –tb; Bob Fuller –cl; Arthur Ray or Louis Hooper –p; Elmer Snowden –bj; own kazoo*
 - *Rust*4,*6: ? Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Arthur Ray or Louis Hooper, p; Elmer Snowden, bj.*
 - *Bob Hitchens, Choo Choo Jazzers, VJM 175: prob Bubber Miley (t) poss Jake Frazier (tb) poss Bob Fuller (cl) Louis Hooper (p) Elmer Snowden (bj)*
 - *Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Jake Frazier, (tb); Bob Fuller (cl), Arthur Ray or Louis Hooper (p), Elmer Snowden (bj). “The personnel for this Viola McCoy/Rosa Henderson session is listed in Rust as above, except that he has a question mark before BM and definitely Hooper on the Rosa Henderson title. To us it is definitely B. Miley aurally, and we agree about the identification of the others. The pianist is probably the same throughout, and Hooper seems the most likely one. Dixon-Godrich have Thomas Morris instead of B. Miley and “prob” before all the other names. They are even in doubt about the identity of the kazoo player, who is quite obviously Viola McCoy. The booklet of DOCD-5417 indicates 9860-A, and it is aurally different from the version on IAJRC 49, which is listed as -C on the sleeve.”*

Discernible differences of takes:

- 9860-A: DOCD-5417 claims take –A and IAJRC 49 claims take –C, but close listening and comparing do not indicate any differences. Takes issued on Document DOCD-5417 and IAJRC 49 (LP) seem to be identical.
 9860-B: not reissued, comparison impossible
 9860-C: see 9860-A

006 **ROSA HENDERSON** Kansas City Five New York, Nov. 21, 1924
 Rosa Henderson – voc;
 (*Rex Stewart*) – cnt; (*Herb Gregory?*) – tbn; (*Cecil Benjamin*) – clt;

(John Montague) – pno; unknown – bjo;
unknown - chimes

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|--------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 9861-A | Undertaker's Blues | Ed 51476 | on LP/CD |
| 9861-B | Undertaker's Blues | Ed 51476, | Document DOCD-5403 |
| 9861-C | Undertaker's Blues | Ed 51476 | on LP/CD |

I would like to refer to Monette Moore's Vocalion session of 25 September, 1924 where she is accompanied by members of the John Montague band: To my ears this is the same band, even enlarged by the band's trombonist and an unknown banjo player. I believe strongly to recognize Rex Stewart and the band's clarinetist – whose name was Cecil Benjamin. Both men's interplay is comparable to that at the Vocalion session and the trombonist fits in perfectly. Therefore, and because of the temporal accordance I opt for the members of the contemporaneous Montague band. See my comment above!

Notes:

- BGR*4: unknown, c; prob Jake Frazier, tb; prob Bob Fuller, cl; prob Louis Hooper, p; prob Elmer Snowden, bj; unknown bells
- Rust*6: prob Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p; Elmer Snowden, bj.
- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Jake Frazier, (tb); Bob Fuller (cl), Arthur Ray or Louis Hooper (p), Elmer Snowden (bj). "The personnel for this Viola McCoy/Rosa Henderson session is listed in Rust as above, except that he has a question mark before BM and definitely Hooper on the Rosa Henderson title. To us it is definitely B. Miley aurally, and we agree about the identification of the others. The pianist is probably the same throughout, and Hooper seems the most likely one. Dixon-Godrich have Thomas Morris instead of B. Miley and "prob" before all the other names. They are even in doubt about the identity of the kazoo player, who is quite obviously Viola McCoy. LAJRC 49 lists 9861-B, and it is aurally the same take as on DOCD-5403."

Discernible differences of takes:

9861: LAJRC 49 claims take – B, and close listening and comparing indicates that takes issued on Document DOCD-5403 and LAJRC 49 (LP) seem to be identical.

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|---|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 007 | JOSIE MILES | Kansas City Five | New York, | Nov. 21, 1924 |
| Josie Miles – voc; | | | | |
| (Rex Stewart) – cnt; (Herb Gregory?) – tbn; (Cecil Benjamin) – clt; | | | | |
| (John Montague) – pno; unknown – bjo; | | | | |
| 9862-A | Mad Mama's Blues | Ed 51477, | Document DOCD-5467 | |
| 9862-B | Mad Mama's Blues | Ed 51477, | Document DOCD-5654 | |
| 9862-C | Mad Mama's Blues | Ed 51477, | IAJRC 49 (LP) | |

I would like to refer to Monette Moore's Vocalion session of 25 September, 1924 where she is accompanied by members of the John Montague band: To my ears this is the same band, even enlarged by the band's trombonist and an unknown banjo player. I believe strongly to recognize Rex Stewart and the band's clarinetist – whose name was Cecil Benjamin. Both men's interplay is comparable to that at the Vocalion session and the trombonist fits in perfectly. Therefore, and because of the temporal accordance I opt for the members of the contemporaneous Montague band. See my comment above!

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3: prob Bubber Miley or Johnny Dunn, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Bob Fuller, clt; Louis Hooper or Arthur Ray, pno; poss Elmer Snowden, bjo
- BGR*4: prob Bubber Miley, c; prob Jake Frazier, tb; prob Bob Fuller, cl; unknown, p; prob Elmer Snowden, bj.
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Bubber Miley or Johnny Dunn, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper or Arthur Ray, p; ?Elmer Snowden, bj.
- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Jake Frazier, (tb); Bob Fuller (cl), unknown (p), prob Elmer Snowden (bj). "This is aurally the same personnel as for the Viola McCoy and Rosa Henderson titles from the same session. Dixon-Godrich have the above personnel, with a "prob" before all the names. Rust has B. Miley or Johnny Dunn (tp), but it is clearly Bubber Miley."
- VJM 175: prob Bubber Miley (t); poss Jake Frazier (tb); Bob Fuller (cl); prob Louis Hooper (p); Elmer Snowden (bj).

Discernible differences of takes:

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|---|----------------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 008 | SUSIE SMITH | | New York, | Nov. 23- Dec. 03, 1924 |
| Monette Moore – voc; | | | | |
| Rex Stewart – cnt; (Herb Gregory?) – tbn; | | | | |
| Louis Hooper – pno; Joe Davis – train effects | | | | |
| 31729 | The Bye Bye Blues | Ajax 17079, | Document DOCD-5339 | |
| 31730 | Weeping Willow Blues | Ajax 17079, | Document DOCD-5339 | |

According to my conclusions of earlier investigations I now believe the brass men involved to be Stewart and perhaps Gregory as before.

Notes:

- RR 77-6: Miley, Frazier, Hooper
- W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p
- Rust*3,*4: Bubber Miley -c; Jake Frazier -tb; Louis Hooper -p.
- BGR*2,*3,*4: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p
- Rust*6: Bubber Miley, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Louis Hooper, p
- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: Bubber Miley (tp), Jake Frazier, (tb); Louis Hooper, (p).
- B. Hitchens, Choo Choo Jazzers: prob Bubber Miley (t); poss Charlie Irviss (tb); Louis Hooper (p); prob Joe Davis (bell and train whistle effects). "I think prob B. Miley but tb more like that on matrices 31709-15."

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|---|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 009 | HELEN GROSS | Choo Choo Jazzers | New York, | Nov. 23- Dec. 03, 1924 |
| Helen Gross – voc; | | | | |
| Rex Stewart – cnt; (Herb Gregory?) – tbn (1,2); Bob Fuller – clt (3); | | | | |
| Louis Hooper – pno | | | | |
| 31755 | Last Journey Blues | Ajax 17090, | Document DOCD-5477 | |
| 31757 | Bitter Feelin' Blues | Ajax 17086, | Document DOCD-5477 | |
| 31759 | Workin' Woman's Blues | Ajax 17133, | Document DOCD-5477 | |

I feel certain for Rex Stewart, Bob Fuller and Louis Hooper. Stewart is identified by Louis Hooper here, and he still is under Bubber Miley's spell here. But again, I do not think that this is Jake Frazier here on trombone. This again is a different player stylistically, and the same man as heard earlier. Again, I would like the reader/listener to consider that Rex Stewart had a drinking and trombone playing buddy named Herb Gregory with whom he used to spend his days and go jamming. These trumpet/trombone partnerships were common in Harlem at the time. And: Herb Gregory was – together with Stewart – a member of John Montague's band at a dance hall on Columbus Circle at exactly this time. Unfortunately, we do not have any documented example of Gregory's playing – we even do not know if he ever recorded at all – but this might possibly be this man. (In our investigation on Jake Frazier recordings our group have detected essential differences between the playing heard here and Frazier's known and documented trombone style!) (See also www.harlem-fuss.com/soloists/)

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol. 4: not listed*

- *RR 77-6: Rex Stewart, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Louis Hooper, pno. Bob Fuller, clt for Frazier on 31759.*

- *W. Bryant, Ajax Records: personnel per Hooper: Rex Stewart, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p*

- *BGR*4: Rex Stewart, c; Jake Frazier, tb (1,2); Bob Fuller, cl (3); Louis Hooper, p.*

- *Rust*6: Rex Stewart, c (1,2); Jake Frazier, tb (1,2); Bob Fuller, cl (3); Louis Hooper, p. (Stewart plays on all three titles!)*

- *VJM 176, B. Hitchens, Choo Choo Jazzers: Rex Stewart (cnt), Jake Frazier (tb), Bob Fuller (cl), Louis Hooper (p). "Very prob R. Stewart (much vibrato). KBR is sure this is not J. Frazier; he invites speculation that it might be Rex's buddy Herb Gregory instead. Composer credit 'Jones' (first two titles – KBR) is Duke Jones = Arthur Ray."*

K.-B. Rau
11-07-2019