

THE RECORDINGS OF 'BIG CHARLIE' THOMAS

An Annotated Tentative Discography

STYLISTICS

STYLE

Feather light, very much built after Armstrong, but in another way as June Clark who plays horizontally and with a lot of pressure. Using high interval jumps, using the interesting harmonic notes, thus playing vertical, not horizontal lines, but very melodically and singable. "Big Charlie" is a romanticist, playing with a good portion of blues.

TONE

Slim and not so powerful tone like Armstrong's, but a tone with beauty and crystal-clear.

VIBRATO

Strong and wide vibrato, with the final altitude of the vibrato amplitude often rising upwards uncontrolled at end of tone. Some people would say "shake".

TIME

Laid-back swinging inner rhythm in his playing, with much off-beat phrasing. Not hasty or pressing. Uses a lot of triplets in his phrases.

PHRASING

Just like Armstrong in his Hot Five/Seven days. He sounds like being a pupil of Armstrong's, but nobody has any knowledge of where "Big Charlie's" came from nor where he went after his short Harlem period. He uses unfamiliar chord notes in his phrases, just the interesting notes at the time, often the ninths or sixths.

This personnel-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: **Charlie Thomas**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Charlie Thomas*
- 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: (*Charlie Thomas*)

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.

Big Charlie Thomas (or whatever his real name was) plays his own feather-light and singing style. We certainly have to thank John R.T.Davies for his discovery of the identity of this first-class musician, the name still a near mystery, although voices have been heard that this distinct and un-confusable musician should be Charlie Gaines (see the Frog Blues and Jazz Annual Vol. 5).

'BIG' CHARLIE THOMAS

001 **SARA MARTIN** *Clarence Williams' Blue Five*
Sara Martin – voc;
June Clark – cnt; Jimmy Harrison – tbn; Leonard Fields – alt;

New York,

Nov. 23, 1925

Clarence Williams – pno, voc (1,2); Buddy Christian – bjo		
73773-B	I'm Gonna Hoodoo You	OK 8270, Doc DOCD-5397
73774-B	Your Going Ain't Giving Me The Blues	OK 8270, Doc DOCD-5398
73775-B	What More Can A Monkey Woman Do	OK 8270, Doc DOCD-5398

John R.T. Davies ascribes the cornet-playing on these titles on his otherwise marvellous CD (Timeless) to the mysterious “Big Charlie” Thomas. Although I must admit a certain similarity I am absolutely positive that this is Clark and not Thomas. Furthermore, as to his own testimony in JAZZ INFORMATION, did June Clark record “Hoodoo” with Sara Martin. This definitely is NOT a Big Charlie Thomas item! See my June Clark Disco elsewhere on this website!

This is a Clarence Williams session, and Clarence seems to have taken advantage of the Clark’s Creole Stompers’ popularity in engaging the frontline of the band for backing Sara Martin.

This personnel is confirmed by June Clark himself!

This is one of the records found in June Clark’s uncle’s house!

Notes:

- Rust*3: --- Thomas -c; ? Charlie Irvis-tb; ? Buster Bailey -as; apparently Clarence Williams -p, definitely v where shown (1,2 – KBR); ? Buddy Christian -bj

- Rust*4,*6: --- Thomas -c; ? Charlie Irvis-tb; unknown -as; Clarence Williams -p -v; ? Buddy Christian -bj

BGR*2: --- Thomas, cnt; poss Charlie Irvis, tbn; prob Buster Bailey, alt; Clarence Williams, pno, voc (1,2); prob Buddy Christian -bj

BGR*3,*4: --- Thomas, cnt; poss Charlie Irvis, tbn; unknown, alt; Clarence Williams, pno, voc (1,2); prob Buddy Christian -bj

Recorded Tunes:

I'm Gonna Hoodoo You Key of C OKeh

(Intro 4 bars ens)(Vamp 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 12 bars voc-duet + ens)(A2 Chorus 12 bars voc-duet + ens)(A3 Chorus 12 bars voc-duet + ens)(A4 Chorus 12 bars voc-duet + ens)(A5 Chorus 12 bars ens)

Your Going Ain't Giving Me The Blues Key of C OKeh

(Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 12 bars voc SM + ens)(A2 Chorus 12 bars voc CW + ens)(A3 Chorus 12 bars voc SM + ens)(A4 Chorus 12 bars voc CW + ens)(A5 Chorus 12 bars voc SM + ens)(A6 Chorus 12 bars voc-duet + ens)

What More Can A Monkey Woman Do Key of C OKeh

(Intro 4 bars ens)(A1 Chorus 16 bars voc + ens)(A2 Chorus 16 bars voc + ens)(A3 Chorus 16 bars voc + ens)(A4 Chorus 16 bars voc + ens)(Coda 4 bars ens)

Sources:

- “With Louis gone, Clarence looks around for another hornman. TKD (4) inserts a note, which should come at this time. At this stage something must be said about June Clark. It is clear from information received from a number of sources – including both Clark and Williams – that Williams used Clark on a number of sessions, often in company with Jimmy Harrison (the two men played together with a Bradford unit) (?), and that these sessions fall in the period between Louis Armstrong’s leaving New York – between the 2nd and 9th of November 1925 – and early 1926. (Tom Lord, CLARENCE WILLIAMS, p. 142)

- “An article by Herman Rosenberg (34) on June Clark (the JAZZ INFORMATION article !) states: There’s the vocal duet by Sara Martin and Clarence Williams, with the accompaniment by Clarence Williams’ Blue Five; “I’m Gonna Hoodoo You”, and “Your Going Ain’t Giving Me The Blues” on Okeh 8270. According to June (Clark), the band included himself on cornet, Jimmy Harrison, trombone, Len Fields, sax, and Clarence Williams, piano. A third side from the same session (but not identified by June) was released on Okeh 8283. It’s “What More Can A Monkey Woman Do ?” by Sara Martin, accompanied by Clarence Williams’ Blue Five. The accompanying personnel has been open to question. The cornet has been given as June Clark by Rust (10) and Davies (6). He is the same man as on the session that follows this. Eva identifies him as ----- Thomas, a man older than the rest of the musicians, who had a lot of Louis Armstrong’s licks. The trombone has been listed as Jimmy Harrison by Rust and Davies, however it sounds as if it might possibly be Charlie Irvis. The alto has quite a prominent part in the ensembles. He has been listed as Len Fields (10,6) on this and the next session (C. W. Blue Five, Dec. 15, 1925 Shake T. Thing / Get It Fixed !). Eva was questioned, but had no recollection of the name. The source of his name is obviously the June Clark article quoted above. Buster Bailey is now considered as quite possibly the alto. However, I feel that the alto on this session is the same as on the following session, where the clarinetist is definitely Bailey, so this alto must remain unknown. He is a strong “correct” player, with arpeggios at his fingertips, but still unknown. The piano has been accepted as played by Clarence, however it’s hard to tell.” (Tom Lord, CLARENCE WILLIAMS, p. 146)

Now, this is some irritating comment on this session! Why has the problem of personnel – if there really is one – been handled so complicated when it could have been handled very simply: June Clark tells Mr Rosenberg that he recorded “I’m Gonna Hoodoo You” and a second title with Sara Martin, Rust and Davies follow this assertion, and these quotations could simply have been counterchecked with the Blue Rhythm Band and the Gulf Coast Seven recordings and everything would have been cleared at once. Here we have the direct statement of a participant only 15 years after the recording, but this seems to be so much unreliable, that Tom Lord prefers to neglect it and so his personnel, and then Rust’s own following him, is far off the mark. Just listen to the Blue Rhythm Orchestras and the Gulf Coast Sevens consecutively, and then these Sara Martins, and you will at once recognize and be convinced!

Nevertheless, there is a strong similarity between June Clark and Charlie Thomas. John R. T. Davies has been confused here when compiling his CD on “Big” Charlie Thomas on TIMELESS.

Yet, by careful listening and comparing these two men, you will see (or hear respectively) that both men have a lot of Armstrong phrases and licks at their disposal, but Thomas has a rather light tone with little vibrato, whereas Clark owns a fat tone with much vibrato. His vibrato starts immediately with the beginning of the tone, not, as very often the case with other trumpet players, being developed out of a straight tone, loosening up into a “terminal” vibrato.

002 CLARENCE WILLIAMS’ BLUE FIVE		New York,	Dec. 15, 1925
Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Buster Bailey – clt; Leonard Fields – alt;			
Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo;			
Eva Taylor - voc			
73837-B	Shake That Thing	OK 8267,	Timeless CBC 1-030
73838-B	Get It Fixed	OK 8267,	Timeless CBC 1-030

This personnel is commonly accepted (Rust*6), with the exception of the alto player. But his identity is easy to recognize when listening to June Clark’s recordings of 1925 (Blue Rhythm Orchestra, Gulf Coast Seven 05-11-25) where he is the documented alto saxophonist.

Notes:

- Rust*2: unknown (cnt); Buster Bailey (clt); Len Fields (alt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo); Eva Taylor (vcl).

- Rust*3,*4: ---- Thomas -c; Buster Bailey -cl; unknown -as; Clarence Williams -p; Buddy Christian -bj; Eva Taylor -v.

- Rust*6: Charlie Thomas, c; Buster Bailey, cl; unknown as; Clarence Williams, p; Buddy Christian, bj; Eva Taylor, v.

003 MARGARET CARTER	New York,	early Aug. 1926
Margaret Carter – voc;		
Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;		
Happy Caldwell – clt; unknown (<i>George McClennon?</i>) – clt, alt;		
Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo		
107041 I Want Plenty Grease In My Frying Pan	PA 7511,	Timeless CBC 1-030
107042 Come Get Me Papa, Before I Faint	PA 7511,	Timeless CBC 1-030

Most unfortunately Laurie Wright did not have the opportunity to continue his interview with Happy Caldwell published in Storyville 99. Thus, we do not know Happy's possible statements as to this and the next session and have to rely on our own judgement and that of our listening companions. (Both this and the consecutive session have to be seen as one, following the sequence of matrix numbers and the recording company.) Both sessions have been reissued in John R.T. Davies' famed 'Big Charlie Thomas' CD on Timeless and have therefore been – and still are – subject of much controversy. But, what do we hear:

Unequivocal is Buddy Christian's presence as banjoist and probable organizer of the session.

On trumpet/cornet we hear the mysterious 'Big' Charlie Thomas as faintly remembered by Eva Taylor and on this basis identified in a remarkable series of recordings in Harlem in 1926. Against any contradiction I am sure of this player's identity whatever his actual name might have been.

There is little heard from the trombone here, but the trombone break in the ensemble instrumental chorus of 'I Want Plenty Grease ...' is definite Charlie Irvis and has nothing in common with anything heard from Jake Frazier on record.

Both reed players play clarinet in the second title, exclusively in pre-set arranged simple riffs. There is no ad-lib by any of the clarinetists here. In 'I Want Plenty Grease ...' only one clarinet can be distinguished, playing ad-lib and with a distinct Dodds influence in this style. This stylistic element might lead to Happy Caldwell regarding Preston Jackson's statements as to his stylistic ambitions early on in Chicago. Only that he is much more secure here than on the October 1923 sides.

The other reedman delivers a restrained obligato to the musical proceedings, obviously on alto saxophone, without identifiable individual elements.

The pianist takes a back seat in little differentiated accompaniment, using modest treble figurations in his right hand or simply pounding four-four rhythm with both hands. This might be a hint as to Mike Jackson's assumed presence here which corresponds to what I know of Jackson's style.

Notes:

- Rust*3: Margaret Carter –v; probably Tom Morris –c; Jake Frazier –tb; Happy Caldwell –cl; Bob Fuller –ss; Mike Jackson –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

- BGR*2: Margaret Carter –v; unknown –c; Charlie Irvis –tb; unknown –cl; Bob Fuller –cl –as; Louis Hooper –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

- T. Lord, Clarence Williams: Margaret Carter (vcl); unknown (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); unknown (clt); Bob Fuller (clt, alt); poss Louis Hooper, or less likely Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo).

- Rust*4: Margaret Carter –v; probably Tom Morris –c; Jake Frazier –tb; Happy Caldwell –cl; Bob Fuller –ss; Mike Jackson –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

- BGR*3, *4: Margaret Carter –v; unknown –c; Charlie Irvis –tb; unknown –cl; Bob Fuller –cl –as; Louis Hooper –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

- Rust*6: Margaret Carter –v; probably Tom Morris –c; Jake Frazier –tb; Happy Caldwell –cl; Bob Fuller –ss; Mike Jackson –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

004 BUDDY CHRISTIAN'S JAZZ RIPPERS	New York,	early Aug. 1926
Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;		
Happy Caldwell – clt; unknown (<i>George McClennon?</i>) – clt;		
Mike Jackson – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo, voc		
107043 South Rampart Street Blues	PA 8518,	Timeless CBC 1-030
107044 The Skunk	PA 8518,	Timeless CBC 1-030

These two sessions seem to be the only jazz sessions by Pathe Actuelle of Afro-American musicians in early August 1926 and can therefore be assumed to have been recorded in direct succession. Although there are known examples of changing personnel in the run of recording sessions in the history of jazz, we can consider both personnels identical. So, only this is to add here:

On 'South Rampart Street Blues' the clarinet soloist – who certainly is not the player assumed to be Happy Caldwell – plays in a distinct "freak" or even "gas-pipe" style, and it seems that both reed players are on clarinet now. Rust*6 names George McClennon as second reed man. Comparing these clarinet sounds with George McClennon's documented recordings at least show a most striking similarity. It is this "freak" player who commands all proceedings in the first title, the other clarinetist – Caldwell? – staying in the background. On 'The Skunk' the "freak" player plays the very simple melody, almost sounding like an alto sax because of his sharp tone. Caldwell – if it is he – obviously has difficulties to play a decent jazzy ad-lib part over the ensemble, possibly pre-set in parts. But this may be explained by the fast pace the band takes.

In this respect, Rust's possibility of George McClennon becomes quite reasonable and I am cautiously following. There is not any instance of Bob Fuller on these sides. But this would mean that most probably we also hear McClennon on the Margaret Carter sides, on alto in the first title and in the second one on clarinet together with Caldwell.

Charlie Thomas on trumpet/cornet is certain. Again, the trombonist is very restrained playing only ensemble parts as arranged.

The singer in 'The Skunk' seems to be Mr. Buddy Christian himself as he is accompanied by the two clarinets and the trombone, the trumpet/cornet starting his solo into the vocal. Buddy Christian was a most respected pianist in his New Orleans days, and it is thus not surprising that he recorded his own compositions here. 'The Skunk' is easily recognized as a composition for solo piano.

The band's pianist's only task is comping and delivering a simple chordal four beat rhythm.

Notes:

- Rust*2: pers. similar to: Tom Morris ? (cnt); Jake Frazier ? (tbn); Bob Fuller (clt); Clarence Williams (pno) definite; Buddy Christian (bjo); unknown (dms)

- Rust*3: probably Tom Morris –c; Jake Frazier –tb; Happy Caldwell –cl; Bob Fuller –ss; Mike Jackson –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

- T. Lord, Clarence Williams: unknown (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); unknown (clt); Bob Fuller (clt, alt); poss Louis Hooper, or Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo).

- Rust*4: probably Tom Morris –c; Jake Frazier –tb; George McClennon –cl; Bob Fuller –ss; Mike Jackson –p; Buddy Christian –bj.

- Rust*6: probably Charlie Thomas, c; Charlie Irvis, tb; George McClennon, cl; Bob Fuller, cl, ss; Mike Jackson, p; Buddy Christian, bj.

005 THOMAS MORRIS AND HIS SEVEN HOT BABIES

New York,

Aug. 17, 1926

Thomas Morris, Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Geechie Fields – tbn;
Ernest Elliott – alt, clt; Happy Caldwell – ten, clt;
Mike Jackson – pno, voc; unknown – bjo; Bill Benford – bbs

36047-3 Georgia Grind

Vic 20180,

Frog DFG 1

36048-2 Ham Gravy

Vic 20179,

Frog DFG 1

36048-3 Ham Gravy

Vic 20179,

Frog DFG 1

Thomas Morris certainly is one of the controversial figures of classic jazz. He certainly was not one of the stars of the Harlem jazz scene, instead, probably because of lack of technical facilities owing to a non-existent formal instrumental education and training, his musical life occurred in a relative background of blues accompaniment and small gutbucket combo engagements. His was never a top name and it is not astounding that he ceased his musical activities in the late twenties. Yet, in a certain extent he was able to deliver deep-felt musical performances. Accordingly there are only a small number of recordings under his own name, and these just for the crème of the twenties' record labels, Victor. I wonder how he did gain this contract!

This session carries on as before with mainly the same personnel with a few changes.

Comparing the clarinet solo in 'Georgia Grind' to Elliott's solo in King Oliver's 'Tin Roof Blues' (11 June 1928 Vocalion) I think that the alto-clarinet man is Ernest Elliott now.

Yet, on 'Ham Gravy' - both takes - I think it is Happy Caldwell as clarinet soloist, because the clarinet tone is very different to before and the use of slight slap-tongue technique seems to hint to Caldwell.

Morris, Fields, Caldwell and Benford are undisputed (what a beautiful and individual tenor player Caldwell was!), and Big Charlie Thomas (or whatever his real name was) plays his own feather-light and singing solos. We certainly have to thank John R.T. Davies for his discovery of the identity of this first-class musician, the name still a near mystery, although voices have been heard that this distinct and un-confusable musician should be Charlie Gaines.

The singer is documented in the Victor vaults as Mike Jackson. As the piano solo is in the usual Mike Jackson style known from other recording sessions, it is not to be assumed that we hear Marlowe Morris again, and it certainly would have been senseless to have two piano players, one of them singing only.

The banjo player has a stronger sound on his instrument and plays in a different style from Lee Blair's, thus must be listed as unknown.

Notes:

- Rust, Victor Master Book Vol. 2: 2c / tb / 2s / p / bj / bb; vocalist Mike Jackson

- Rust*2: Tom Morris, Jabbo Smith (cnt); Geechie Fields (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt, alt); Coleman Hawkins (ten); Mike Jackson (pno); unknown (bjo); Bill Benford ? (bbs)

- Rust*3,*4: Tom Morris, Jabbo Smith -c; Geechie Fields -tb; Ernest Elliott -as; Happy Caldwell -ts; Mike Jackson -p; unknown -bj; ? Bill Benford -bb

- Rust*6: Tom Morris, Charlie Thomas -t; Geechie Fields -tb; Ernest Elliott -cl-as-bar; Happy Caldwell -cl-ts; Marlowe Morris -p; ? Lee Blair -bj; Bill Benford -bb; Mike Jackson -v (1)

Tunes:

36047-3 Georgia Grind: 4 Intro ens / 12 Chorus 1 ens / 12 Chorus 2 tbn GF / 12 Chorus 3 bjo / 12 Chorus 4 voc MJ / 12 Chorus 5 clt EE / 12 Chorus 6 cnt CT / 12 Chorus 7 cnt TM / 12 Chorus 8 voc - ens

36048-2 Ham Gravy: 4 Intro ens / 16 Verse ens / 16 Chorus A1 ens, middle-break tbn GF / 16 Chorus A2 pno MJ, m-br clt HC (?) / 16 Chorus A3(*) ens m-br cnt CT / 12 Chorus B1 ten HC / 12 Chorus B2 cnt CT / 12 Chorus B3 cnt TM - ens / 12 Chorus B4 ens riff / 16 Chorus A 4 clt HC (?) m-br brass / 16 Chorus A5 ens m-br bbs BB

36048-3 Ham Gravy: same as -2

Notable differences of takes (*):

36048-2: 16 Chorus A3 first two bars 1st cnt CT alone, 2nd cnt TM enters at end of bar 2

36048-3: 16 Chorus A3 full ens from beginning

006 OKEH MELODY STARS

New York,

Aug. 23, 1926

June Clark, Big Charlie Thomas – tpt/cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;

unknown – alt, clt; (Happy Caldwell) – ten;

Porter Grainger (or Vivian Wright?) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo;

Clarence Todd – voc

74310-A Look Out, Mr. Jazz

OK 8382

not on LP/CD ?

74310-B Look Out, Mr. Jazz

OK 8382,

? Timeless CBC 1-030

74311-A A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You

OK 8382

not on LP/CD

74311-B A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You

OK 8382

not on LP/CD

Note: The Timeless CD booklet gives matrix-number 74311-A for 'Look Out, Mr. Jazz'

As stated above, it is definitely June Clark here on first trumpet/cornet with his strong tone, his permanent irregular vibrato and his very personal fiery and hasty attack.

On second trumpet/cornet – and thus mainly in the background – is the mysterious, but beautifully poetic "Big Charlie" Thomas. (I make no attempt to repeat what his mystery is and what is known about him. This can be easily read in the booklet to the Timeless CD CBC 1-030 bearing his very name.) Listen to his breaks in the last chorus of "Look Out, Mr. Jazz". Mr. Thomas displays a very light and slim tone with a wide vibrato and a phrasing very close to Louis Armstrong's recordings of the time, using wide interval jumps. And I am fairly certain that he leads the band in the out chorus of 'A Glass Of Beer, A Hot Dog And You'.

The trombonist has finally been identified as Charlie Irvis in Rust*6, and this is certainly correct. Irvis plays with his usual vigour and legato style and is easy to identify.

There is an alto player who doubles clarinet throughout on "Look Out, Mr. Jazz". I feel unable to identify this player as there is too little to judge, and his performance lacks recognizable stylistic characteristics. On alto, which he plays throughout the second title, he only plays set parts, which makes him even more undistinguishable. So, no assumption here.

It might be possible to find a name for the beautifully driving tenorist, but I do not know which one. He plays powerfully in a simplified Hawkins manner, but still using strong staccato technique, getting rather old-fashioned at the time, and he has a good and strong tone. He is not Prince Robinson, but Benny Waters from the Charlie Johnson band might be a reasonable possibility – and a possible clue to the altoist? Or rather Happy Caldwell who seems to have been very busy in Harlem in mid-1926. Or, perhaps, one of the youngsters, such as Arville Harris or Elmer Williams. Judging from the other musicians he must have been an accomplished musician. And: there were not so many respectable tenor saxophonists in Harlem at the time. (Will reed specialists, please, listen carefully and let me know what they think?) After

comparison to Happy Caldwell's solos on the Morris Seven Hot Babies sides I feel inclined to see him as the tenor sax player here, cautiously judging from style, tone and vibrato.

Both titles are Porter Grainger's compositions. Thus, it would be appropriate to assume Grainger's presence on piano here. Yet, after listening to his vocal-group accompaniments (Harmony Hounds, P. Grainger's Three Jazz Songsters, Buddy Christian's Four Cry-Babies, P. Grainger's Jubilee Singers) I have been unable to find anything compatible with what can be heard from the pianist on the Okeh Melody Stars. Grainger here employs desperately simple piano comping and chording behind the singers, almost without any melodious alterations contrary to what is heard in the vocal chorus of "Look Out, Mr. Jazz". His own probable accompaniment to these same titles recorded by Sara Martin on September 05, 1926 (this is not Clarence Williams!) may give a hint to his possible presence on the Okeh Melody Stars session. With Martin and other singers Dolly Ross or Clint Jones he shows a little more melodious style which may correspond with what can be heard on "Look Out, Mr. Jazz" in the background to the vocal chorus: a simple eighth-note chordal arpeggio. So, Grainger's presence cannot be ruled out, but may be probable rather than definite.

Storyville 1998/9 p.195 lists a quote from the Baltimore Afro-American: "Vivian Wright, former pianist with Sammy Lewis". She obviously "herded with Okeh Stompers, noted recording artists" (sic). (BAA25/9/26, 6/3) Her former activity as noted here might possibly be proof of her possible presence. But lacking any musical information on Miss Wright nothing can be said about her stylistically. So, Porter Grainger's possible presence seems to be more reasonable and probable.

The very strong and straight banjo player probably is Buddy Christian, pianist and banjo player from New Orleans, as noted in the Chicago Defender 16/4/27 p.6: "Buddy Christian, banjo with Clarence Williams Blue Five, Okeh jazz band, playing with Charles A. Watson's (sic) Dreamland Orchestra on West 125th Street, New York, every evening." We are familiar with his very sober four-to-the-bar strumming from many Clarence Williams recordings.

Singer Clarence Todd is listed on the record label.

Notes:

- Rust*2: Clarence Williams (pno) dir. unknown group; Clarence Todd (vcl)

- Storyville 21, p93: Clarence Todd (vcl) acc 2 unknown cnt, tbn, alt, ten, pno and bjo (Bob Graf says that his copy is in rather poor shape and he is unable to determine whether bass or drums are present. One of the reedmen doubles clarinet on the first side. He says that although the record doesn't have a Clarence Williams sound it is still a very fine record.)

- Rust*3, *4: 2c / tb / cl-as / ts / p / bj / Clarence Todd -v

- Rust*6: Charlie Thomas and another, c / Charlie Irvis, tb / cl, as / ts / p / bj / Clarence Todd, v

- L. Wright, Okeh Race Records: vocal chorus by Clarence Todd (Bob Graf owned a copy of this record which used take -a on both sides, but he kept no record of label type or stampers. Jazz Records shows take -B used for each side. The only copy inspected is as above (74311 -a /74310-b).

Notable differences of takes:

74310: no alternate take reissued, so no comment possible

74311: this title still un-reissued (although held) and no alternate reissued, so no comment possible

007 BESSIE BROWN

New York,

Aug. – Sep. 1926

Bessie Brown – voc;

Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Bennie Morton – clt;

Clarence Williams – pno; unknown – bjo

6813-1 Nobody But My Baby Is Getting My Love

Ban 1859,

Timeless CBC 1-030

6813-2 Nobody But My Baby Is Getting My Love

Or 771,

Timeless CBC 1-030

6814-2 St. Louis Blues

Ban 1859,

Timeless CBC 1-030

6814-3 St. Louis Blues

Or 756,

Document DOCD-5456

Notes:

- Rust*3: unknown -c; ?Charlie Irvis -tb; Ben Whittet -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bj

- Rust*4, *6: unknown -c; ?Charlie Irvis -tb; Bennie Moten -cl; Clarence Williams -p; unknown -bj

- BGR*2: probably: Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ben Whittet, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian -bjo

- BGR*3, *4: unknown, c; poss Charlie Irvis, tb; Bennie Moten, cl; Clarence Williams, p; unknown, bj.

Notable differences of takes:

6813-1:

6813-2:

6814-1:

6814-2:

008 ROSA HENDERSON

New York,

Aug. 1926

Rosa Henderson – voc;

Big Charlie Thomas – cnt; Bob Fuller – clt;

Cliff Jackson – pno

6781-4 Papa, If You Can't Do Better

Ban 1882,

Timeless CBC 1-030

6781-5 Papa, If You Can't Do Better

Ban 1882,

Timeless CBC 1-030

6852-2 I'm Saving It All For You

Ban 1882,

Timeless CBC 1-030

We hear the mysterious "Big Charlie" Thomas here. A very distinct and individual trumpet – or possibly cornet - player who suddenly appeared in Harlem, recorded a couple of very interesting and thrilling sides in the short run of a little over a year, and then disappeared again into oblivion. The story belonging to this player can be read in the CD booklet to the above Timeless CD. His personal existence is questioned by some people, but the reality of this player, documented in the coherence of his recordings, cannot be denied. These two takes of one title show very intensely the features of this player's individual style: a style surprisingly close to Louis Armstrong's of the time, feather-light phrasing with large interval jumps, a slim but beautiful tone and a strong and wide vibrato with the end altitude of the vibrato amplitude often rising upwards uncontrolled, and often using unfamiliar chord tones in his phrases. This is NOT Charlie Gaines! The clarinetist obviously is the same musician as on the Vocalion sessions before. But I have to question Louis Hooper's presence. I hear a stride oriented pianist with a rather strong left hand and would opt for possibly Mike Jackson because of his rhythmic strength..

Notes:

- RR 77-8: not listed.

- Rust*3, *4: Louis Metcalf -c; Bob Fuller -cl; Louis Hooper -p.

- BGR*2, *3: poss Lois Metcalf, cnt; poss Bob Fuller, clt; Louis Hooper, pno.

- BGR*4: *poss Louis Metcalf, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.*
 - Rust*6: *Charlie Thomas, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p(1,2); Cliff Jackson, p (3).*

Notable differences of takes:

6781-4:

6781-5:

009 DIXIE WASHBOARD BAND		New York,	Oct. 21,1926
Charlie Thomas – cnt; <i>Prince Robinson</i> – clt, ten;			
Clarence Williams – pno; Bruce Johnson – wbd;			
Clarence Todd - voc			
W142852-3	Dark Eyes	Col 14188-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030
W142853-1	Gimme Blues	Col 14188-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030

Although not generally accepted as a definite person/musician (see FROG Annual 2010), we nonetheless stick to John R.T. Davies' findings and believe in this enigmatic trumpeter's "Big Charlie" Thomas identity. We therefore regard this personnel as conclusive and correct.

Notes:

- Rust*2: *Ed Allen (cnt); Ben Whittet (clt, alt); Clarence Williams (pno); Floyd Casey (?)(wbd).*
 - Rust*3,*4: *?Louis Metcalf -c; unknown -cl -ts; Clarence Williams -p; Bruce Johnson -wb; Clarence Todd -v.*
 - Rust*6: *Charlie Thomas, c; unknown -cl -ts; Clarence Williams, p; Bruce Johnson, wb; Clarence Todd, v.*

010 DIXIE WASHBOARD BAND		New York,	Oct. 22,1926
Charlie Thomas – cnt; unknown – tbn; (<i>Prince Robinson</i>) – clt, ten;			
Clarence Williams – pno; unknown (<i>Leroy Harris</i>) – bjo; Bruce Johnson – wbd; unknown (<i>Clarence Todd</i>) – tom tom;			
Clarence Todd – voc; Cl. Williams – Cl. Todd – dialogue			
W142856-3	King Of The Zulus	Col 14171-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030
W142857-3	The Zulu Blues	Col 14171-D,	Timeless CBC 1-030

Obviously, a recording companion to session #009, but with some differences. Our group was unable to find a serious candidate for the trombone player. It was also very difficult to identify the clarinetist and the banjo player. Difficult also to answer who plays the tom-tom throughout.

Notes:

- Rust*2: *Ed Anderson (cnt); Charlie Green (tbn); Ben Whittet (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Ikey Robinson (bjo); Bruce Johnson (wbd); Clarence Todd (vcl).*
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: *Charlie Thomas, c; John Masefield, tb; unknown cl,ts; Clarence Williams, p; unknown bj; unknown tom-tom; Bruce Johnson, wb; Clarence Todd, v.*

011 ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	Dec. 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
<i>Big Charlie Thomas</i> – tpt; <i>Cliff Jackson</i> (or <i>Porter Grainger?</i>) – pno			
107303	Git Goin'	PA 7519,	Document DOCD-5404
107304	Someday You'll Come Back To Me	PA 7519,	Document DOCD-5404

All editions of Rust have Demas Dean on trumpet for this session, and I did believe him until a couple of weeks ago! Yet, this trumpet player certainly is not Demas Dean – after several listening sessions of the Savoy Bearcats recordings! I certainly would like to know who started – and published – this assumption. Dean's playing is rooted in early Harlem style in performing almost exclusively 6/8 rhythms in his phrases – listen to the Savoy Bearcats, where Dean is responsible for all hot trumpet solos, Gilbert Paris being the straight first trumpet man. What we hear on this recording is a beautiful trumpet accompaniment in early Armstrong style, and I dare to assign what we hear to the mysterious "Big Charlie" Thomas – perhaps on a bad day – as heard on the session of August 1926 above. Style, rhythm, vibrato and phrasing are all his own, and I do not wonder why I was tempted to think of June Clark when working on my June Clark investigation some years ago. Unfortunately, the sound quality of the Document CD is very bad because of a rather worn source record. But if you turn up your amplifier you can easily hear Big Charlie Thomas' - or whatever his name was – characteristic playing. And this is my third pleasant surprise!

The piano player's style is strong, yet not distinct, and I would rather opt for Cliff Jackson as on the Vocalion sides of Rosa Henderson than for Porter Grainger.

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown accompaniment.*
 - BGR*2,*3,*4: *Demas Dean – cnt; Porter Grainger – pno*
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: *Demas Dean – c; Porter Grainger – p*

012 JOE SIMS AND CLARENCE WILLIAMS		New York,	c. Jan. 1927
Joe Sims, Clarence Williams – voc duet;			
<i>Big Charlie Thomas</i> – cnt;			
Fats Waller - pno; <i>Leroy Harris</i> - bjo			
2799-1	What Do You Know About That	Pm 12435,	Timeless CBC 1-030
2799-2	What Do You Know About That	Pm 12435,	JSP 927D
2800-1	Shut Your Mouth	Pm 12435,	JSP 927D
2800-2	Shut Your Mouth	Pm 12435,	Timeless CBC 1-030

There also is a banjo on these beautiful hokum sides, and nobody has heard it up to now.

Notes:

- Rust*3: *?Louis Metcalf -c; Fats Waller -p.*
 - Rust*4: *Louis Metcalf or Addington Major -c; Fats Waller -p.*
 - Rust*6: *Charlie Thomas -c; Fats Waller -p.*

Notable differences of takes:

2799-1:

2799-2:

2800-1:

2800-2:

See also Dave Brown's article on "Big Charlie" Thomas under 'Published Articles' elsewhere on this web-site. Dave is not in every respect in accordance with my judgement and opinion! But LISTEN and judge for yourself!

K.-B. Rau
05-08-2018
14-08-2018