

AIKEN, GUS

STYLE

Initially Aiken played in a strongly Dunn-derived style as many Harlem musicians in the early 20s did. But after his expanded Cuba tour (May 1923 – end 1923) he dropped the square triplet dominated staccato Dunn style and changed to a more Southern Armstrong/Oliver inspired style with flashy reminiscences of Jabbo Smith (Jenkins style?). Yet, his tone and overall concept was a bit indistinct, resulting in unclear and seemingly unsecure phrasing.

TONE

His tone was mostly weak and coated, rather mushy, not strong, sharp and brilliant.

VIBRATO

TIME

PHRASING

ANDERSON, ED

STYLE

Clear southern style of lead trumpet, very strong forward no-nonsense style with little slurs and bent notes, very much following King Oliver's way of playing. Later, when with MBRB, more following Armstrong's way of expressive shouting style, when playing melody or solo.

TONE

Like Oliver rather sharp tone. His playing on Oliver's session of "Aunt Hagar's Blues" has long been thought to be Oliver's.

VIBRATO

TIME

PHRASING

CLARK, JUNE

STYLE

June Clark was an extremely forceful player who would seemingly burst with power and drive. He was a strong follower of the Armstrong way of playing.

TONE

Clark owns a fat tone, very strong, loud and urgent. Probably resulting from his relationship with Louis Armstrong, he tried to get a similar quality of tone and thus ruined his lip, which caused him to resign at Small's Sugar Cane in late 1925.

VIBRATO

He uses a rather irregular vibrato, which for me is a crucial criterion of Clark's playing when listening and trying to judge whether it is him or somebody else. And he maintains his vibrato over the whole length of a note. 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 (Schuller, p. 97)

TIME

He always plays just a little split second before the beat, thus sounding hectic and erratic. Although this habit prevents his playing from swinging, he nevertheless plays with a lot of drive and fire.

PHRASING

Clark has a lot of Armstrong phrases and licks at his disposal, which caused Joe Turner to remark, that Clark was a "carbon copy" of Armstrong.

He certainly is not a follower of the early Harlem period Johnny Dunn school of "military" playing, as Bubber Miley was.

His style is more on the New Orleans – Chicago side, which became so much en vogue when Armstrong hit New York in late 1924. This is what Rex Stewart calls "Western Style".

June Clark learned this when getting acquainted with King Oliver and Louis Armstrong in Chicago.

DUNN, JOHNNY

STYLE

Dunn is easy to identify from his ubiquitous staccato style. Probably because of early influences he displays a unique "military" style with a lot of triplets derived from bugle signals. But at times he uses early blues derived phrases which hint to later instrumental jazz playing. He also uses a plunger or cub mute to a very personal and supple wa-wa playing, very expert and beautiful, even when compared with later Ellington men. His wa-wa playing is executed with a very own and expert after-the-beat phrasing in later years. He is quite adept in playing early blues style, yet rhythmically stiff and wooden. He always accentuates measures one and three (military two-beat) and never measures two and four (after-beat).

Dunn certainly was the most influential jazz trumpet player in Harlem, New York, before the arrival of Louis Armstrong in November 1924.

TONE

His tone is strong and open and secure, probably from his being a legitimate musician with a thorough instrumental education at Fisk University and having performed for a couple of years with W.C. Handy's band.

VIBRATO

Vibrato is not distinct because of his predominant staccato playing. But at times it can be heard as a vibrato of medium length and amplitude.

TIME

As Dunn's high-time was before the advent of Southern styles in Harlem, New York, off-beat phrasing or cross-rhythms were probably unknown to Dunn, and can therefore not be detected. In later recordings he proved to be quite adaptable, and his playing in the late 20s and 30s was much more fashionable and swinging, yet traces of his earlier style cannot be denied. He later developed kind of "lazy" behind-the-beat playing, mostly when using his plunger.

PHRASING

He displays simple staccato quarter-note phrases in change with triple staccato phrases and frequent double-timing. (Double-timing seems to have been his trade-mark and is frequently also used by his band members, possibly on his request?) Sometimes – in early recordings – he plays strong 6/8 phrasing which was fashionable at the time and might probably be seen as the attempt of a legitimate musician (Dunn had been a military musician?) trying to emulate the Southern musician's "swing" (triplet phrasing with the middle triplet tone missing instead of equal eighth notes). He also shows a couple of other devices typical for his style as jumping-trills and forward looking blues feeling. He very often plays short repetitive phrases with slight variations at their ends.

GAINES, CHARLIE

(from: Fats Waller And His Buddies)

STYLE

Gaines does not play in a southern style. His style, though, is more rhythmical than melodic. His playing is somewhat quirky and a bit erratic, using long notes where you would not expect them, rather irregular. His playing is not marked by the use of harmonic finesse or elegance. Instead he ad-libs by playing a row of not melodically related notes, but varying their rhythmical relations. His general style might still show some influence from Freddie Keppard, as shown above.

tone

Not clear, rather molded. Not, what we call a beautiful tone.

VIBRATO

Gaines uses very low – rather irregular – vibrato, lasting during the whole length of a tone, but increasing in frequency in the middle of a tone's duration, then lowering again (no final vibrato of tone as so often with other trumpeters). He often starts his notes with relatively strong vibrato, then immediately getting lower.

TIME

His notes come on the beat without dragging or being hasty. He displays good rhythmic feeling and drives the band along.

PHRASING

His ad-lib playing is linear, consisting of long phrases with little difference of altitude, mainly staying in a limited range of his trumpet. He does not play melodically, but more rhythmically, using his notes in rhythmical coherence to relate on the ground-beat. Thus he very often uses staccato notes. There is no singable quality in his playing.

STEWART, REX

STYLE

Stewart plays in a distinctly Armstrong-influenced trumpet style, but sometimes using a Ragtime derived staccato phrasing which he loses in his further development. He plays as if using high atmospheric air pressure. At other times (Rosa Henderson March 02, 1926) he plays with beautiful "schmaltz" without being trashy. But sometimes - when he plays fast runs - a great amount of fast technique can be heard. He performs easily all over the trumpet's range and also handles the mutes with taste.

tone

Tone is sharp and clear. No slurs up or downward as with Louis Metcalf.

VIBRATO

He uses a permanent irregular fast vibrato (ca. until mid-1925). This later gives room to an Armstrong derived final vibrato.

TIME

Rex's time is a bit hasty at times which prevents him from really swinging in the early 20s.

PHRASING

His phrasing follows very much Louis Armstrong's, thus is "Western" style and does not show the otherwise ubiquitous Johnny Dunn influence.

STARK, BOBBY

STYLE

As noted by John Chilton, Who's Who Of Jazz, Bobby Stark studied piano and reed instruments in his youth tutored by the very famous and effective Lt. Eugene Mikell, teacher of a whole lot of Harlem jazz musicians. This might be the cause for Bobby Stark's very fluent and fast-fingering style – possibly derived from saxophone playing – and his large range all over the trumpet. (As for fluency his style reminds of Jabbo Smith's.) He is not so much influenced by Louis Armstrong, but features his own technically skilled and vertical style.

TONE

Tone is not sharp, but rather coated.

VIBRATO

In long sustained notes he shows a wide yet not distinct vibrato. In his fast-fingered passages vibrato is difficult to determine. Only in shortly held notes ending fast phrases he uses a short but strong final vibrato.

TIME

Stark plays with a very tense feeling for rhythm which enables him to keep a strong time, yet also play loose off-beat phrases without hastening or dragging. His time is very strong and assured.

PHRASING

Stark plays long enduring melodic phrases changing between horizontal lines and fast vertical arpeggios through the chords. His phrasing is relaxed and owns a rhapsodic charm. He phrases with great ease.