

THE RECORDINGS OF ESTHER BIGEOU

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

BIGEOU, Esther

"The Creole Songbird" sang and recorded with A.J. Piron Orchestra in '30s. Was with Peter Bocage; toured Theater Owner's Booking Association vaudeville circuit. Cousin of Paul Barbarin.

Born: New Orleans, Louisiana, c. 1895; Died: c. 1936

(Rose / Souchon, New Orleans Jazz, A Family Album)

"Ca. 1916 – 1919 reported at Lincoln Theater, NYC; 1918 – 1920 toured Bristol, and western Pennsylvania, New Jersey with 'Darktown Follies'; toured South with Perin & Henderson's road show (1920). 1922 toured. 10/10/22 (CD) St. Louis, Booker Washington Th. "Late star of 'Broadway Rastus' and Okeh Records. Girl with the Million Dollar Smile". April to late November 1923 toured, Chicago, Grand Thater "Moonshine", "A Kentucky Derby", Billy King Company, and with Lucille Hagamin, to Birmingham, Frolic Theater. December 1923 – August 1925 tour Pittsburgh, Chicago, Dallas, New Orleans. Appeared in large ad in CD (several times) endor sing Hi-Ja Beauty Products. March 1927 to February 1930 – tour Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Birmingham. Last notice 2/1/30 (CD).

(T. Lord, Clarence Williams)

"She toured the theatres until Depression, when she retired in New Orleans and died about 1936."

(P. Oliver, The Story of the Blues)

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

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.

ESTHER BIGEOU

1895 - 1936

001 **ESTHER BIGEOU**

Esther Bigeou – voc;

unknown – tpt ; unknown – tbn;

unknown – clt; unknown – alt;

unknown – pno; unknown – bbs; unknown – dms

70223-C The Memphis Blues

70224-A The St. Louis Blues

New York,

c. Oct. 05, 1921

OK 8026,

Document DOCD-5489

OK 8026,

Document DOCD-5489

Miss Bigeou certainly was a handsome person, and one of the few vaudeville/blues singers hailing from New Orleans. And also, she had a strong and imposing voice with a dark hue and clear declaration, and the ability to drive a band with fire and swing. The latter probably as a

heritage of her Southern origin.

The band accompaniment is entirely scored, and there is very little ad-lib hot playing by the band, if any. But they play with swing and urgency.

In only one chorus of each title and in the introduction of the first title you might hear some hot notes. In these parts the trumpet player shows his ability to hot up his parts. The piping clarinetist might well have been Edgar Campbell as he was known for his inability to improvise. Instead, he often used to copy the first parts of the trumpet and play these in unisono with the trumpeter. The early discographies only list a tuba player while the later ones drop him, and yet he is clearly distinguishable in the first title.

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3: unknown cnt, tbn, clt, alt, pno, bbs, dms. It has been suggested that the pianist may be Clarence Williams, but aurally this is unlikely.

- BGR*4: unknown c, tb, cl, as, p, bb, d.

- Rust*3: unknown c; tb; cl; as; ?Clarence Williams -p; d.

- Rust*4, *6: acc. by c; tb; cl; as; p; d.

002 ESTHER BIGEOU

New York,

c. Nov. 05, 1921

Esther Bigeou – voc;

unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn;

unknown – clt; unknown – ten;

unknown – pno; unknown – bbs

70294-A Stingaree Blues (A Down Home Blue)

OK 8025,

Document DOCD-5489

‘The girl with the million-dollar smile’ – as the Pittsburgh Courier” observed her (booklet to Document DOCD-5489) – “*seems to be reading them (the songs) off the song sheet, however, with verve*” says Mr. Chris Smith, author of the Document CD booklet text. And he apparently is right, but, what should Miss Bigeou have done in a recording studio where she would be ordered to use songs of the OK people’s advice or the publisher’s wishes and needs. Yet, she still sings convincingly and firm.

The band sounds to be the same as before, yet without the alto sax and the drummer. I (KBR) feel unable to hear a violin, but would opt for the tenor sax as listed in BGR*2.

It is interesting to see below that the later discographies list a violin for this session, as well as a tenor sax in BGR*2. I have listened closely and intensively and do not hear a violin! There is a descant instrument in the introduction which I believe to be a clarinet. This might be the same piping player as in the session before, thus possibly Campbell. In the further course of the title this instrument plays its scored part, or with the trumpet in harmony or unisono. But I hear a tenor sax in the ensemble all through, very evident and distinct.

Notes:

- BGR*2: unknown cnt, tbn, vln, ten, pno, bbs

- BGR*3, *4: unknown cnt, tbn, vln, pno, bbs

- Rust*3: unknown t; tb; cl; vn; p; bb.

- Rust*4, *6: acc. by c; tb; cl; vn; p; bb.

003 ESTHER BIGEOU

New York,

c. Nov. 15, 1921

Esther Bigeou – voc;

unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn;

unknown – clt; unknown – ten;

unknown – pno; unknown – bbs

70318-A Nervous Blues

OK 8029,

Document DOCD-5489

70318-B Nervous Blues

OK 8029

not on LP/CD

70319-B If That’s What You Want, Here It Is

OK 8025,

Document DOCD-5489

Again, we have the accompaniment as before – some sort of OKeh house band probably – behind Miss Bigeou’s voice.

On the first side the tenor sax is very prominent, while the brass players are much in the background. I wonder what the cause for this bad sound might have been.

The second side then has a very good band sound, rather jazzy for this early time of recording. It looks like this is a regular and usual band accompaniment of blues/vaudeville singers of the very early 1920s, probably based on the ragtime bands of the years before, and the cradle of young jazz stars whose names we unfortunately do not know. Perhaps, we do, but we hear no connexion with their later musical work in the 1920s.

On both sides Miss Bigeou sings with drive and rhythm and good voice.

Notes:

- BGR*2: unknown cnt, tbn, vln, pno, bbs

- BGR*3, *4: unknown cnt, tbn, ten, pno, bbs

- Rust*3: unknown t; tb; cl; ts; p; bb.

- Rust*4, *6: acc. by c; tb; cl; ts; p; bb.

Notable differences of takes:

60318: As one take of matrix 70318 only has been reissued, for me comparison is impossible.

004 ESTHER BIGEOU Rickett’s Stars

New York,

Mar. 1923

Esther Bigeou – voc;

unknown – tpt; unknown – tbn;

unknown – clt; unknown – alt;

Bob Ricketts – pno; unknown – bbs; unknown – dms;

unknown – cuckoo-flute (2)

71322-B Aggravatin’ Papa (Don’t You Try To Two-Time Me)

OK 8053,

Document DOCD-5489

71323-C Four O’Clock Blues

OK 8054,

Document DOCD-5489

This recording of Ester Bigeou is accompanied by a group led by pianist Bob Ricketts. All men are skilled musicians, well trained in playing with a certain approach to early jazz, but none of them might be identified by his personal style as everything played is from written scores with very few instrumental breaks to show individual features. I feel unable to attach any names to the band’s musicians.

Again, Miss Bigeou proves to be a jazzy and swinging singer of the early jazz age. She owns a strong voice and shows blues feeling and good performance.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3: Presumably Bob Ricketts, pno; unknown cnt, tbn, clt, alt, bbs, bjo, dms
- BGR*4: Rickett's Stars: unknown, c; unknown, tb; unknown, cl; unknown, as; presumably Bob Ricketts, p; unknown, bj; unknown, bb; unknown, d
- Rust*3: Acc. by Ricketts' Stars: presumably Bob Ricketts -p; remainder unknown.
- Rust*4,*6: Presumably Bob Ricketts -p; and unknown c, tb, cl, as, bb, bj, d

005 ESTHER BIGEOU	New York,	c. Mar. 15, 1923
Esther Bigeou – voc;		
Clarence Williams – pno		
71329-C I'm Through With You (As I Can Be)	OK 8057,	Document DOCD-5489
71330-B Beale Street Mama	OK 8057,	Document DOCD-5489
Composer credits: 71329 (Billy Higgins); 71330 (Roy Turk, J., Russell Robinson)		

Clarence Williams now obviously has got Miss Bigeou under his wings, and he accompanies her on piano – as so many of these vaudeville/blues singers. He might even be enjoyed to co-work with a beautiful young lady from his home-town.

Williams' presence is un-doubted and underlined by Mr. Tom Lord's identification of several piano phrases comprised in Williams' pianistic repertoire (see Tom Lord, Clarence Williams, p. 36).

Miss Bigeou sings with aplomb and confidence. She shows a nice vibrato, blues feeling, and works with talk-singing.

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Clarence Williams – pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Clarence Williams -p
- T. Lord, Clarence Williams: Clarence Williams (pno)

006 ESTHER BIGEOU	New York,	c. Mar. 20, 1923
Esther Bigeou – voc;		
unknown (not Clarence Williams) – pno		
71341-B Outside Of That, He's Alright With Me	OK 8056,	Document DOCD-5489
71342-B The Gulf Coast Blues	OK 8056,	Document DOCD-5489
Composer credits: 71341 (Clarence Williams); 71342 (Clarence Williams)		

Miss Bigeou's performance is as before, secure and strong.

The accompanist shows a more varied performance on piano than Clarence Williams' does. Tom Lord, author of the famed Clarence Williams book (Storyville Publications, 1976), has this to say on the pianist: "*The style is a little too "pushy" and strong for Clarence. The bass is more prominent and moving than Williams played at this time. Certain treble runs that Clarence would play as a single note melodic line, are harmonised by this pianist. There are fewer breaks than Clarence seems to use. WCA (Walter C. Allen – KBR) states that the piano accompaniment is "possibly a little too active" for Williams. Along with all this can be quoted a news item from the Chicago Defender (CD), March 31, 1923, which states that "Clarence Williams is seriously ill in the Harlem Hospital, in New York City".*" I – KBR – would wholeheartedly support Mr. Lord's view on this problem and follow his description of the player's musical dissimilarities to Clarence's style.

Notes:

- BGR*2: Clarence Williams – pno
- BGR*3,*4: Poss Clarence Williams – pno
- Rust*3,*4: Clarence Williams -p
- Rust*6: Acc. by unknown p (probably not Clarence Williams)

007 ESTHER BIGEOU	New York,	c. Mar. 28, 1923
Esther Bigeou – voc;		
unknown (not Clarence Williams) – pno		
71374-A Beale Street Blues	OK 8058	not on LP/CD
71374-B Beale Street Blues	OK 8058,	Document DOCD-5489
71375-A The Hesitating Blues	OK 8065,	Document DOCD-5489
Composer credits: 71374 (W.C. Handy); 71375 (W.C. Handy)		

Miss Bigeou's performance is as before, convincing and in parts even dramatic.

The problem with the accompanist is as before: Clarence Williams in hospital, and a pianist with a similar style sitting at the piano. This man might be searched for in the personal of Clarence Williams Music Publishing Company, as documented in Lord's fantastic book..

Notes:

- BGR*2: Clarence Williams – pno. It has been reported that the pianist on 71374-B is not Clarence Williams. Rev. OK 8058, 8065 Sara Martin.
- BGR*3: Poss Clarence Williams – pno
- BGR*4: Clarence Williams – pno
- Rust*6: Acc. by unknown p (probably not Clarence Williams)

008 ESTHER BIGEOU	New York,	c. Dec. 02, 1923
Esther Bigeou – voc;		
Clarence Williams – pno		
72131-B That Twa Twa Tune	OK 8118,	Document DOCD-5489
Composer credits: 72131 (Aaron C. Thompson)		

This is Clarence Williams on piano again, without doubts – and recovered from his ailments. His piano-style may be compared with the pianist's style on sessions 006 and 007.

Esther Bigeou sings beautifully, with urgency, fire, and style.

This title's composer obviously is the trombonist recording with 'Clarence Williams' Blue Five' and the 'Red Onion Jazz Babies' from November 1924 on until 1925, also being composer and band-manager of Williams' far-reaching company.

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3, *4: Clarence Williams – pno.
- Rust*3, *4: Clarence Williams -p
- Rust*6: Acc. by unknown p (probably not Clarence Williams)

009 ESTHER BIGEOU	New York,	c. Dec. 13, 1923
Esther Bigeou – voc;		
Clarence Williams – pno		
72173-A Panama Limited Blues	OK 8125,	Document DOCD-5489
72174-B You Ain't Treatin' Me Right	OK 8125,	Document DOCD-5489
Composer credits: 72173 (Esther Bigeou); 72174 (Esther Bigeou – Clarence Williams)		

Esther Bigeou's last recording session with Clarence Williams, this is. 'Panama Limited Blues' is her own composition on a railroad worker who arises her sorrow and troubles. The second title – a co-work of singer and pianist - even goes further in buying a razor for threatening her lover.

Clarence Williams plays with relative fire and swing.

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3, *4: Clarence Williams – pno.
- Rust*3, *4: Clarence Williams -p
- Rust*6: Acc. by unknown p (probably not Clarence Williams)

010 ESTHER BIGEOU Piron's New Orleans Orchestra	New York,	c. Dec. 14, 1923
Esther Bigeou – voc;		
Peter Bocage – cnt; John Lindsey – tbn;		
Lorenzo Tio Jr. – clt; Louis Warnick – alt; Armand J. Piron – vln;		
Steve Lewis – pno; Charles Bocage – bjo; Bob Ysaguirre – bbs; Louis Cottrell – dms		
72175-B West Indies Blues	OK 8118,	Document DOCD-5489

On this single side, accompanied by 'Piron's New Orleans Orchestra', Miss Bigeou shows her homesickness for the South and her longing for the West Indies. This she does with her strong voice and in shout-style, different from her former performances.

The Piron band might have been a familiar partner for her singing, as both were part of the New Orleans Afro American group of musicians/singers for at least a decade.

Notes:

- BGR*2: Acc by Piron's New Orleans Orchestra: Peter Bocage, cnt; John Lindsey, tbn; Lorenzo Tio Jr., clt, ten; Louis Warnecke, alt; Armand J. Piron, vln, ldr; Steve Lewis, pno; Charles Bocage, bjo; Charles Seguirre, bbs; Louis Cottrell, dms
- BGR*3, *4: Acc by Piron's New Orleans Orchestra: Peter Bocage, c; John Lindsey, tb; Lorenzo Tio Jr., cl; Louis Warnick, as; Armand J. Piron, vn, ldr; Steve Lewis, p; Charles Bocage, bj; Charles Ysaguirre, bb; Louis Cottrell, d
- Rust*3, *4: Peter Bocage -t; John Lindsey -tb; Lorenzo Tio Jr. -cl; Louis Warnecke -as; Armand J. Piron -vn -ldr; Steve Lewis -p; Charles Bocage -bj; Charles Seguirre -bb; Louis Cottrell -d
- Rust*6: Armand J. Piron, vn, dir; Peter Bocage, t; John Lindsey, tb; Lorenzo Tio Jr., cl; Louis Warnick, as; Steve Lewis, p; Charles Bocage, bj; Bob Ysaguirre, bb; Louis Cottrell, d

011 ESTHER BIGEOU Clarence Williams Blue Five	New York,	Dec. 21, 1926
personnel unknown, presumably including Clarence Williams - pno		
80258 Midnight Stomp	OK unissued	not on LP/CD
80259 Zulu Blues	OK unissued	not on LP/CD

Lacking any recording ledger or any other documents, this session must remain in absolute obscurity.

Notes:

- BGR*2: prob Ed Allen, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ben Waters, clt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian or Leroy Harris, bjo.
- BGR*3, *4: poss Ed Allen, c; Charlie Irvis, tb; Ben Waters, cl; Clarence Williams, p; Buddy Christian or Leroy Harris, bj.
- Rust*3, *4, *6: prob: Ed Allen -c; Charlie Irvis -tb; Benny waters -cl; Clarence williams -p; Buddy Christian or Leroy Harris -bj.
- Storyville 20: prob personnel: Ed Allen (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ben Waters (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian or Leroy Harris (bjo).
- Lord, Clarence Williams p193: possibly Ed Allen (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ben Waters (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian or Leroy Harris (bjo).