



# *New World Records*

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## Sweet and Low Blues: Big Bands and Territory Bands of the 20s New World NW 256

Writers and historians have dubbed the twenties the Jazz Age, and there is more than a little truth to that tag.

Jazz in its early forms had just begun to catch the public fancy as America went to war in 1917. That year was also the date of the first out-and-out jazz recording ("Darktown Strutters Ball," played by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band on Columbia). Two years later "the war to end all wars" had been won and the peace settlement worked out, and America went home free from foreign entanglement.

In 1920 the Volstead Act, ushered into law by Congressman Andrew Volstead and known nationally as Prohibition, was passed. It forbade the manufacture and public sale of alcoholic beverages and was considered a triumph for all right-thinking people. The flouting of the law became a national pastime. Everyone, it seemed, wanted a drink, and more people than ever began to partake.

Like jazz, dancing had begun to take hold in the prewar years. It gave rise to a new industry, the construction of large ballrooms, such as Roseland, which opened in 1919 in Philadelphia but soon moved to New York, where it is still operating. These places were built because the masses, who could not afford to dance at the posh hotels, demanded them. And the demand for good dance music initiated the dance-band era.

Musicians who were used to improvising in Dixieland combos were now learning to read music, to play music publishers' stock orchestrations of current popular songs, and to write their own arrangements. They also learned to play in harmony and to blend one trumpet with another or two trumpets and a trombone

to make a brass section.

The saxophone, in pairs and later in threes, replaced the lone clarinet of the Dixieland band. A clarinetist had to learn one or more of the saxophone family if he wished to make music his livelihood.

The Dixieland rhythm of piano and drums now became augmented by banjo and tuba to spell out the beat of the one-step, two-step, and fox trot.

These larger bands were also in demand for nightclubs, an outgrowth of the cabaret life that had started before World War I. They were also needed to play the increasingly complex scores for silent pictures in the thousands of lavish movie theaters being built across the country. Some of the smaller towns, with smaller theaters, got by with perhaps an organ or a trio of violin, saxophone, and piano, but the larger cities used large orchestras.

Nightclubs serve alcohol, and much of the financing and ownership of nightclubs, and almost all of the illicit booze, was controlled by gangsters, who flourished in every city and many smaller towns. Competition among mobs kept newspapers filled with lurid stories of shoot-outs, one-way rides, and unexplained disappearances. Many larger cities were run by dishonest politicians who worked with the gang bosses.

Some of the dances of the period, particularly the Charleston and later the lindy hop, lent themselves to jazz music. Musicians became more proficient on their instruments, which were better made than those of the previous generation. Dancing, nightclubs, and movies were our national pastimes, along with drinking illegal whiskey. Many places that became bars after Repeal in 1933 started as speakeasies, where special pass-

words whispered through a slot in the door, or “membership” cards for the better places, gained one admittance to the world of forbidden intoxicants.

The phonograph industry grew tremendously after World War I. Acoustic recording was supplanted by the electric method introduced by Columbia Records in the mid-twenties. Much of the new recording activity was devoted to jazz.

During the early twenties most jazz groups, like the Louisiana Five, the Original Indiana Five, the Original Memphis Five, the St. Louis Five, and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, were influenced by the pretwenties Original Dixieland Jazz Band. Gradually these gave way to larger bands like the California Ramblers or those led by Fletcher Henderson, Jean Goldkette, and Bennie Moten (whose first units were five-piece groups). After 1925 most of the successful bands had saxophone and brass sections. The Dixieland combination had become outmoded.

Much dance music of the twenties was “hot”—straightforward but highly rhythmic—and was played by such nonjazz orchestras as those of Vincent Lopez or even for a time Guy Lombardo. Some of their records were highlighted by “hot choruses”—improvised solos played by a capable trumpeter, trombonist, or sax player.

It was a frantic time. A staccato dance like the Charleston wasn't accompanied by soft strings but by hard banjos, saxophones, and brass.

Jazz orchestras like those led by Charlie Johnson at Smalls' Paradise in Harlem, Troy Floyd at Shadowland in San Antonio, or George E. Lee at the Paseo Hall in Kansas City could all play straight dance music but would have lost their audiences if they couldn't “get hot,” “get off” the written music and create something unusual right on the spot.

Players matured in the territories—away from the big cities like New York and Chicago, where most of the recording activity took place; where all the books, magazines, and important newspapers were printed; where the music publishers were concentrated; and where reputations were made. You could be great in Kansas City, Omaha, San Antonio, Dallas, or Oklahoma City, but it didn't mean a thing if you didn't make it in New York or Chicago.

Music was becoming more sophisticated. Players coming of age during the twenties seized on the songs of George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, Jerome Kern, and other top composers because their unusual chord structures inspired better improvisational efforts.

Erskine Tate led the large pit orchestra at

Chicago's Vendome Theatre for nearly a decade, playing overtures and the silent-film scores as well as an hour-long jazz concert at intermissions. He hired Louis Armstrong for trumpet, Paul Evans for sax, and Teddy Weatherford for piano; Tate, a college-educated and conservatory-trained musician, played violin. They all read the composed music, and they all improvised great jazz.

Not many cities had a pit orchestra of such virtuosity, so a rival leader like Carroll Dickerson (who also played violin) had to hire players like pianist Earl Hines and drummer Zutty Singleton to compete. The public was the beneficiary.

The territory bands constantly fed top men into the larger cities and the better-known (and better-managed) bands, often to their own ultimate demise. Some territory bandleaders, like Alphonso Trent, Jesse Stone, and Walter Page, could field groups every bit as good as anything further north, but their public just wasn't ready for their advanced musicianship. Even leaders like Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington tended to lose popularity once they got away from their home base.

When the Charleston gave way in the late twenties to the lindy hop, the rhythmically highly intricate dance steps further inspired the best musical improvisers. Club musicians also had their own field of unpaid and unheralded competition jam sessions held after a night of being restricted to playing set arrangements and being limited in the amount of solo work allowed. Jam sessions were the soloists opportunity to show what he could do—and at great length. They were more common in the northern cities (Kansas City being an exception) and the players there benefited enormously.

With all the marvelous music, and with the musicians' abilities growing year by year, it must have seemed as if it would go on forever.

Advertising and public relations also became adept during this time, and one of the most successfully promoted industries was the stock market. Hitherto a province of the wealthy, now it was made to seem as if anyone could get in on a good thing and become rich. Many did become rich for a while, but most of the fortunes were built on speculative margin. Inevitably the market had to collapse, and it did so in October, 1929.

The Depression was a terrible blow to jazz and the entertainment industry in general. Unable to find enough jobs to keep going, hundreds of top bands broke up. Hardest hit in many ways were men like George Lee, Alphonso Trent, and Walter Page, who might well have gone on to national renown. Few of the big jazz leaders of the twenties

could look forward to improving their status in the thirties. Many—like Charlie Johnson, Jabbo Smith, Erskine Tate, and Carroll Dickerson—survived, some in decent fashion. But by the time success came it was for newer musicians whose more sophisticated work was built on what their elders had established in the twenties.

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## THE RECORDINGS

### **Side One Band 1**

#### *Static Strut*

(Jack Yellen, Phil Wall, *and* Paul Specht)

Erskine Tate's Vendome Orchestra: Erskine Tate, leader and violin; James Tate and Louis Armstrong, trumpets; Fayette Williams, trombone; Alvin Fernandez, clarinet and alto saxophone; Paul "Stump" Evans, alto and baritone saxophone; Norval Morton, tenor saxophone; Teddy Weatherford, piano; Frank Ethridge, banjo and second piano; John Hare, tuba; Jimmy Bertrand, drums. *Recorded May 28, 1926, in Chicago. Originally issued on Vocalion 1027 (mx # C-336 and E-3140).*

Erskine Tate (born 1895) represented a vanguard of leadership that included Fletcher Henderson, Don Redman, Benny Carter, Horace Henderson, Jesse Stone, Walter Page, and Alphonso Trent. These men and many instrumentalists had a higher degree of education that enabled them to achieve greater success than musicians of the preceding generation.

Tate directed theater orchestras until the Depression and then turned to dance work until

World War II. His sidemen had to be able to read, to double on several instruments, and to play jazz. Louis Armstrong (1900-1971), Stump Evans (1904-1928), Teddy Weatherford (1903-1945), and Jimmy Bertrand (1900-1960) were among many outstanding players who worked under Tate.

Here Armstrong plays one of his greatest solos of the period. Neither Evans nor Weatherford recorded as much as Armstrong, and "Static Strut" offers a rare glimpse of their style. Tate's orchestra at this time was the equal of just about any playing.

### **Band 2**

#### *Symphonic Raps*

(Bert Stevens *and* Irwin Abrams)

Carroll Dickerson and His Orchestra: Carroll Dickerson, leader and violin; Homer Hobson and Louis Armstrong, trumpets; Fred Robinson, trombone; Bert Curry and Crawford Wethington, alto saxophones; Jimmy Strong, clarinet and tenor saxophone; Earl Hines, piano; Mancy Carr, banjo; Peter Briggs, tuba; Zutty Singleton, drums. *Recorded July 5, 1928. Originally issued on Odeon (Argentine) 193329 (mx# W 400992-B).*

Carroll Dickerson (1895-1957) worked primarily in Chicago nightclubs and ballrooms, with bands that featured many of the city's top jazzmen. Twice during the twenties he had long stints at the Sunset Cafe, and he remained active as a bandleader until after World War II.

Dickerson's bands recorded only twice. The sessions occurred within a month of one another in 1928, while Dickerson was the house leader at Chicago's brand-new Savoy Ballroom and was featuring Earl Hines (who had been with him earlier on a Pantages Theatre tour) and Louis Armstrong (who had recently failed as a band-leader).

This recording was originally made for Okeh They never issued it but shipped the masters to Buenos Aires for release on Odeon. Collectors sought this record for years, and apparently no one to this day knows why it was not released at home. A sharp-sounding band and arrangement highlight the exceptional solo work of Armstrong and Hines, the era's greatest players.

### Band 3

#### *The Boy in the Boat*

(Charlie Johnson)

Charlie Johnson and His Paradise Orchestra: Leonard Davis and Sidney DeParis, trumpets; Jimmy Harrison, trombone; Ben Whitted, clarinet and alto saxophone; Edgar Sampson, alto and baritone saxophone; Benny Waters, clarinet and tenor saxophone; Charlie Johnson, piano; Bobby Johnson, banjo; Cy St. Clair, tuba; George Stafford, drums. *Recorded September 19, 1928, in New York. Originally issued on Victor 21712 (mx# BVE-47532-2).*

Charlie Johnson (1891-1959) was born in Philadelphia and worked there and in Atlantic City cabarets until 1925, when nightclub operator Ed Smalls hired him to open his Paradise in Harlem. Johnson was an average pianist but a genial, easygoing boss with a steady job and the good sense to hire musicians like Jabbo Smith, Benny Carter, Jimmy Harrison, Edgar Sampson, and George Stafford. His soloists could play what they wanted as long as they showed up on time and could cut the music for the nightly floor show.

This tune, often credited to Fats Waller, was one of Johnson's specialties, and here it is brought to perfection by the brilliance of Sidney DeParis (1905-1967) and Jimmy Harrison (1900-1931). Benny Waters (born 1902) was with Johnson for years. Besides playing and arranging for Johnson he worked for Fletcher Henderson, Hot Lips Page, Claude Hopkins, and Jimmie Lunceford. Since 1952 he has been active in Europe.

### Band 4

#### *That's How I Feel Today*

(Fats Waller)

The Chocolate Dandies: Leonard Davis, trumpet; Rex Stewart, cornet; J. C. Higginbotham, trombone; Don Redman and Benny Carter, alto saxophones; Coleman Hawkins, tenor saxophone; Fats Waller, piano; unidentified, banjo; Cy St. Clair, tuba; George Stafford, drums. *Recorded September 18, 1929, in New York. Originally issued on Okeh 8728 (mx # 402965-C).*

*The Chocolate Dandies* was a highly successful black musical comedy on Broadway. The band of that name was one of the best small groups of the time.

This session was probably organized by Don Redman. The recording features fine solos by Rex Stewart (1907-1965), Jay C. Higginbotham (1906-1973), and Benny Carter (born 1907) in one of Fats Waller's better compositions of the period. Redman and Carter probably put together a head arrangement at the studio. There are some doubts about the personnel, particularly Coleman Hawkins, who does not take a solo.

### Band 5

#### *Sweet and Low Blues*

(Jabbo Smith)

Jabbo Smith and His Rhythm Aces: Cladys "Jabbo" Smith, trumpet; Omer Simeon, clarinet and alto saxophone; Cassino Simpson, piano; Ikey Robinson, banjo; Hayes Alvis, tuba. *Recorded February 23, 1929, in Chicago. Originally issued on Brunswick 7061 (mx # C-3004-1).*

Jabbo Smith was born in 1908 in Pembroke, Georgia, and raised in the Jenkins Orphanage in South Carolina. He came of age in Harlem in Charlie Johnson's band, where his advanced musicianship made him a formidable player well before his twentieth birthday. Smith was a restless wanderer and joined the pit band of *Keep Shufflin'*, which in 1928 brought him to Chicago.

There he quickly became the best jazz player after Louis Armstrong, and when Armstrong's Okeh recordings began selling well, the rival Brunswick firm signed Smith in an attempt to cash in on this market. Smith used better players than Armstrong did (with the exception of Armstrong's Earl Hines) and made twenty brilliant and often complicated sides for Brunswick. Unfortunately, while they were exceptional musically, they failed to match Armstrong's success, and Brunswick dropped Smith. His technique, tone, and ideas were the equal of Armstrong's, but his lack of personal discipline prevented the success his talents might have brought.

Smith led a band that replaced Armstrong at My Cellar in Chicago's Loop, led a band at the Wisconsin Roof in Milwaukee, and appeared as soloist with Carroll Dickerson and Claude Hopkins, but he seemed to be in the wrong place when opportunity might have knocked and remains an obscure figure, captured for a brief moment on records. His fellow players, like Cassino Simpson (1909-1952) and Omer Simeon (1902-1959), were equally unfortunate. Simpson, a rival in talent to Earl Hines, succumbed to mental illness and had to be placed in a sanitarium in the thirties. Simeon played lead saxophone for years

with Jimmie Lunceford and Earl Hines after a brief period of glory as a soloist on Jelly Roll Morton's famed 1926-27 Red Hot Pepper recordings.

#### **Band 6**

##### *Till Times Get Better*

(Jabbo Smith)

Jabbo Smith and His Rhythm Aces: Cladys "Jabbo" Smith, vocal and trumpet; Willard Brown, clarinet and alto saxophone; Earl Frazer, piano; Ikey Robinson, banjo; Lawson Buford, tuba. *Recorded April 4, 1929, in Chicago. Originally issued on Brunswick 7078 (MX # C-3234).*

Jabbo Smith did his greatest recorded work before his twenty-first birthday, and his precocious brilliance was the talk of Chicago. Although there were dozens of outstanding trumpet players all over the country, he was Louis Armstrong's only serious competition, and he even had the nerve to challenge Louis to a trumpet battle. Smith's ability is shown in full flight on this recording—the clean and full playing, the flawless execution at any tempo, the absolute command of his horn, and a singing style as relaxed as any professional's.

But Jabbo had come too far too fast, and because of his immaturity he missed out on some important opportunities to establish himself as a bandleader, even when a year or two later he replaced Armstrong (whose rising career had taken him away from Chicago) in a leading nightclub. He began showing up late or not at all for jobs. Other players gained the advantages Jabbo might have had if he had realized that even the greatest musician

needs good management, sensible living habits, and the desire to achieve a goal. Eventually he straightened out his personal life. Now retired, Jabbo has outlived most of his contemporaries.

Willard Brown (1905-1967) was a veteran of a dozen bands and a personal favorite of Benny Carter's in the forties. At the time of these recordings he and his friend Jabbo were in violinist Jimmy Bell's orchestra. Earl Frazer and Ikey Robinson are kept in background roles on these selections. Lawson Buford produces some of the richest, deepest sounds that can be drawn from his cumbersome instrument.

Big Nat's (?) day  
Is mighty tough.  
Nobody is making any money,  
The cops is getting rough.

Jones got out all the liquor  
And got out all the gin  
And got out all the money  
And that's a doggone sin.

Now it ain't nothin' doin'  
What you thinkin' about,  
It ain't no use in leavin'  
'Cause there're boats (?) there all year  
round.

It's dry right now  
But it's gonna get wetter,  
I'm gonna get right in  
Till times get better.

I say it's got it now  
Gonna get wetter,  
I'm gonna stay right here  
Till times get better.

#### **Band 7**

##### *Willow Tree*

(Fats Waller *and* Andy Razaf)

The Louisiana Sugar Babes; Cladys "Jabbo" Smith, trumpet; Garvin Bushell, clarinet and alto saxophone; James P. Johnson, piano; Fats Waller, organ. *Recorded March 27, 1928, in*

*Camden, N.J. Originally issued on Victor 21348 (mx# BVE-42566-1).*

Fats Waller (1904-1943) and James P. Johnson (1891-1955) collaborated on a show called *Keep Shufflin'* that ran only briefly in 1928 but contained some wonderful tunes, and on one recording date that featured the two composers plus two of the highly talented pit musicians, Jabbo Smith and Garvin Bushell (born 1900).

Johnson was one of the fathers of the stride-piano style, Waller was one of his star pupils and closest friends, and both had interesting and varied careers. Smith is discussed in the notes for "Sweet and Low Blues." Bushell had been active in small groups and big bands in Harlem since 1919. He became one of the most highly trained black players of his or any generation and was adept at flute, oboe, bassoon, and the entire saxophone family. He worked with Mamie Smith, Sam Wooding, Fletcher Henderson, Cab Calloway, Chick and the Radio City Music Hall and is now a soloist with the Puerto Rico Symphony.

#### **Band 8**

##### *What Is This Thing Called Love?*

(Cole Porter)

Leo Reisman and His Orchestra: Lew Conrad, vocal and violin; Lew Sherwood, James "Bubber" Miley, and unidentified, trumpets; unidentified, trombone; Jess Smith, clarinet and alto saxophone; unidentified, other saxophones; Eddie Duchin, piano; unidentified, banjo; unidentified, tuba; unidentified, drums. *Recorded January 20, 1930, in New York. Originally*

issued on Victor 22282 (mx # BVE-58183-8).

The sophisticated and flamboyant conductor-violinist Leo Reisman (1897-1961) led one of the period's best dance orchestras, principally in Boston and New York and later in Miami, South America, and Europe.

In 1930 Reisman was hired by Boris Morros, musical director of the Paramount Theatre in New York, to replace Rudy Vallee, who had switched to the rival RKO chain. Reisman specialized in lavish special arrangements of the newest and best songs, and had achieved signal success in 1928 by presenting the famed black trumpeter Johnny Dunn on a theater stage. Dunn had gone off to Europe, and now Reisman learned that Bubber Miley (1903-1932), brilliant trumpeter with the new Duke Ellington orchestra at the Cotton Club, had left to go out on his own. Reisman hired Miley and had him dress in an usher's uniform and begin his unorthodox trumpet solos in the theater aisle before coming on stage. This bit of razzle-dazzle was a nightly sensation. Reisman also used Miley to highlight some of his key Victor recordings of this period. Miley's direct and poignant muted style contrasts vividly with the lush orchestration and almost deliberately bland vocal chorus. [*James P. Johnson's version of this song appears on New World Records NW 274, Jive at Five.*]

Miley appeared with avant-garde dancer Roger Pryor Dodge in the revue *Sweet and Low* for several months and was backed by Duke Ellington's manager Irving Mills in a big band and show that failed to get off the ground in 1931. He died of tuberculosis the following spring.

#### Verse

I was a humdrum person,  
Leading a life apart,  
When love flew in through my window  
wide  
And quickened my humdrum heart.  
Love flew in through my window,  
I was so happy then.  
But after love had stayed a little while,  
Love flew out again.

#### Chorus

What is this thing called love?  
This funny thing called love?  
Just who can solve its mystery?  
Why should it make a fool of me?  
I saw you there one wonderful day.  
You took my heart and threw it away.  
That's why I ask the Lawd in Heaven  
above,  
What is this thing called love?

#### Verse

You gave me days of sunshine,  
You gave me nights of cheer,  
You made my life an enchanted dream,  
Till somebody else came near.  
Somebody else came near you,  
I felt the winter's chill.  
And now I sit and wonder night and day  
Why I love you still?  
(Chorus)

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### Side Two Band 1

#### *Starvation Blues* (Jesse Stone)

Jesse Stone's Blues Serenaders:  
Albert Hinton and Oliver "Slick"  
Jackson, trumpets; Druie Bess,  
trombone; Glenn Hughes and  
Jack Washington, alto saxo-  
phones; Elmer Burch, tenor saxo-  
phone; Jesse Stone, piano; Silas  
Cluke, banjo; Pete Harrison, tuba;  
Max Wilkinson, drums. *Recorded  
April 27, 1927, in St. Louis.  
Originally issued on Okeh 8471  
(mx # 80761-C).*

Pianist, arranger, and composer  
Jesse Stone was one of the great  
territory bandleaders of the twen-  
ties. Born in 1901 in Atchison,  
Kansas, Stone got his start work-

ing in Kansas City combinations  
before forming his own Blues  
Serenaders in 1926. Their base  
was St. Joseph, Missouri, and  
Stone's musicians were drawn  
largely from the area or from  
other bands that were faring less  
well. Stone stressed written  
arrangements and at one point  
even written solos for his band.  
He was surely the first in this part  
of the country to do so, and his  
bands were usually musically  
advanced. They were too far  
ahead of the public to stay suc-  
cessful for very long, and eventual-  
ly Stone disbanded and in 1929  
joined the commercially suc-  
cessful leader George E. Lee in  
Kansas City. Stone directed and  
arranged for Lee through 1932  
and then for Thamon Hayes until  
1934, when he left for Chicago.  
There he formed a fine new band  
that gave Earl Hines some stiff  
competition for a year before  
going under. Stone later led another  
fine big band in New York, but  
he achieved more success as an  
arranger and composer ("Idaho,"  
"Sorghum Switch," "Sneaky  
Feeling") and in the fifties broke  
through with some of the period's  
biggest rhythm-and-blues success-  
es ("Shake, Rattle and Roll," "Flip  
Flop and Fly").

### Bands 2 and 3

#### *Blue Devil Blues* (Walter Page)

#### *There's a Squabblin'* (Count Basie)

Walter Page's Blue Devils: Jimmy  
Rushing, vocal; James Simpson,  
Oran "Hot Lips" Page, and James  
LuGrand, trumpets; Druie Bess,  
trombone; Buster Smith, clarinet  
and alto saxophone; Ted  
Manning, alto saxophone;  
Reuben Roddy, tenor saxophone;  
William "Count" Basie, piano;

Reuben Lynch, guitar; Walter Page, baritone saxophone, tuba, and bass; Alvin Burroughs, drums. *Recorded November 10, 1929, in Kansas City. Originally issued on Vocalion 1463 (mx # 612 and KC-6137).*

Walter Page (1900-1957) had one of the greatest territory bands playing the Southwest from 1927 to 1931. It might well have gone further, but only a handful of black bands got decent management in those years. Page had played tuba with Bennie Moten and George Lee in Kansas City before going on the road with traveling shows; he assumed leadership of a traveling-show band in 1926. Hot Lips Page, Eddie Durham, Lester Young, Lem Johnson, Count Basie, A. G. Godley, and Harry Smith were among his many outstanding sidemen who challenged better-managed bands.

The Depression and other circumstances combined to put Page out of business, as one by one Bennie Moten wooed away his best men, first Count Basie, then Eddie Durham, Jimmy Rushing, and Lips Page; finally the leader himself joined Moten late in 1931. These men became the nucleus of Moten's most outstanding band.

This recording is the only one Page's band ever made, and it happened by chance. Basie, at the time a regular sideman with Moten, convinced Jack Kapp of Brunswick to record them as part of a marathon talent search conducted in November, 1929.

The recording features Buster Smith (born 1904), who was Charlie Parker's progenitor on alto sax, in rare early form on both alto and clarinet; Lips Page (1908-1954), an outstanding trumpeter in any era; and Jimmy Rushing (1903-1974), whose vocal clearly outlines a blues that

Basie would use again and again during the swing era.

That's all right, baby,  
Baby, that's all right for you.  
(Repeat)

After all I been to you,  
Baby, that's the way you do.

I'm gonna find my baby  
A brand-new happy home.  
(Repeat)

I'm gonna kill some of you blue devils  
If you don't leave my baby alone.

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#### **Bands 4 and 5**

#### *Dreamland Blues*

#### *Parts I and II*

(Troy Floyd)

Troy Floyd and His Plaza Hotel Orchestra: Don Albert and Willie Long, trumpets; Benny Long, trombone; Si-Ki Collins and Troy Floyd, alto saxophones; Scott Bagby or Herschel Evans, tenor saxophone; Allen Van, piano; John H. Braggs, banjo; Charlie Dixon, trombone and tuba; John Humphries, drums. *Recorded June 21, 1929, in San Antonio. Originally issued on Okeh 8719 (mx # W402696-B/W 402697-B).*

Troy Floyd led one of Texas' most successful territory bands from 1926 until 1933. He was an average musician but a pretty good job hustler, and he also knew good musicians. In 1926 or early 1927 he hired New Orleans trumpeter Don Albert, who quickly asserted his musicianship and helped build a band that had a decent library of stomps, blues and ballads, and stock and special arrangements. Floyd's band rose in the aftermath of Alphonso Trent's success

of the mid-twenties. The designation "Plaza Hotel Orchestra" appears on Floyd's Okeh records. The Plaza was one of the better hotels in the highly regarded Baker chain in the Southwest, and for a black band to play engagements there in 1928-29 was an achievement.

Okeh discovered Floyd in 1928 and recorded a two-part blues. A year later Okeh returned and cut some more sides, again blues. So was history served in those years. Floyd at least was lucky enough to be recorded twice, when many bands that might have been a good deal better went unrecorded. Getting on records just didn't mean that much if all else was well. There were no disc jockeys, and radio was just beginning to become powerful at the end of the twenties. Floyd may simply have decided it would be easier hustling his own pool hall than trying to keep fourteen musicians alive in 1933.

#### **Band 6**

#### *Ruff-Scuffling*

(Jesse Stone)

George E. Lee and His Kansas City Orchestra: Harold Knox and Sam Utterback, trumpets; Jimmy Jones, trombone; George Lee, Clarence Taylor and Herman Walder, alto saxophones; Bud Johnson, tenor saxophone; Julia Lee, piano; Charles Rousseau, banjo; Clint Weaver, tuba; Pete Woods, drums. *Recorded November 6, 1929, in Kansas City. Originally issued on Brunswick 4684 (mx # KC-585).*

George E. Lee (1896-1959) was a tall, barrel-chested singer who with his piano-playing sister Julia (1902-1958) led one of Kansas City's most popular big bands from 1927 to 1934. The Lees'

popular success was due to their showmanship rather than their music, although Julia could play very good barrel-house piano. George had to expand his small combo in the late twenties, and in order to keep up to rival Bennie Moten's popularity hired former leader and arranger Jesse Stone to revamp the band.

Stone wrote most of the book and brought in good new sidemen, and the band became musically interesting as well as popularly entertaining. Like most in those years, Stone's work was in part original, in part derived from hearing arrangers like Don Redman, who wrote for the Fletcher Henderson and McKinney's Cotton Pickers bands. Tricky trios, duos, and short solos with breaks abound in Stone's arrangements, which in many ways were well ahead of what Bennie Moten's group was playing and recording.

Soloists include Harold Knox, Jimmy Jones, Clarence Taylor, and Bud Johnson. Jones later played on the riverboats and with Noble Sissle, and Johnson became an outstanding arranger and soloist with Earl Hines and Billy Eckstine, among others.

Lee's career went down by 1935, and he was out of Kansas City entirely after 1940, while Julia Lee's popularity kept building until during the forties she became a national favorite, recording risqué songs for Capitol. She remained active on Kansas City's Twelfth Street until her death. George Lee was out of music altogether years before.

#### **Band 7**

##### *Black and Blue Rhapsody*

(Bingie Madison)

Alphonso Trent and His Orchestra: Chester Clark and

Herbert "Peanuts" Holland, trumpets; Leo "Snub" Mosley, trombone; James Jeter, alto saxophone; Lee Hilliard, trumpet and alto saxophone; Hayes Pillars, tenor and baritone saxophone; Leroy "Stuff" Smith, violin; Alphonso Trent, piano; Eugene Crooke, banjo; Robert "Eppi" Jackson, tuba; A. G. Godley, drums. *Recorded December 5, 1928, in Richmond, Indiana. Originally issued on Gennett 6710 (mx # 14518).*

Alphonso Trent (1905-1959) was another college-educated bandleader who could organize bands capable of playing against the very best. While he was not an exceptional soloist, he was a catalyst who wanted the best music and with the aid of his sidemen was able to realize it, at least for some part of his career.

Trent began leading combos as early as 1923. In 1925 his augmented band went to Dallas with a job offer that fell apart before their arrival. The manager of the Hotel Adolphus heard them rehearsing and hired them to play a steady engagement. For the next two years Trent's band enjoyed high pay, even higher prestige, and a degree of security unknown to most bands. And they were not playing typical bland hotel-style dance music but stock arrangements, some original compositions, and special arrangements that the band made up.

These arrangements required players of high caliber, and Trent had them. This recording is typical of their ability to play in tune as a unit or by sections and to swing and play fine improvised solos. Their intonation and precision were the equal of anyone's, and only lack of good management and Trent's inordinate fear of losing his best sidemen to

entrenched leaders in New York prevented him from taking that city by storm (although he did play the Arcadia Ballroom there briefly).

#### **Band 8**

##### *After You've Gone*

(Henry Creamer and Turner Layton)

Alphonso Trent and His Orchestra: same group as the preceding, except George Hudson, trumpet, and Charles Pillars, alto saxophone, added. *Recorded March 5, 1930, in Richmond, Indiana. Originally issued on Gennett 7161 (mx #16349-A).*

This ensemble piece, again very cleanly played, shows off Peanuts Holland and Snub Mosley in solo roles, but the poor recording quality tends to muffle Mosley (who is also playing muted). Although tuba predominates, the rhythm section is very together. The final chorus, in B, anticipates the swing era, which did not come in formally until 1935-36. By that time Trent was fronting a Little Rock combo, his own band having dispersed.

Trent's solo players all went further than their leader, although their achievements never equaled their early promise. Peanuts Holland (born 1910) spent nearly seven years off and on with Trent and later turned up in New York as Charlie Barnet's hot man from 1941 to 1946 before going overseas with Don Redman. He has been inactive since around 1960.

Snub Mosley (born 1909) was perhaps too far ahead of his time. His abundant technique and unorthodox solo style anticipated by fifteen years the bebop technique of J. J. Johnson. Mosley



later played with Claude Hopkins, Fats Waller, and Louis Armstrong but achieved some success with his own combos, which while musically excellent stressed the show-biz side in an effort to capture some of Louis Jordan's kind of audience.

Holland and Mosley appeared unsure of their gifts, masking them behind mutes that make Trent's old Gennett recordings even more difficult to discern. But one knows the talent is there.

Stuff Smith (1909-1967) was a master showman and great jazz violinist and later became a swing-era sensation on New York's Fifty-second Street during its heyday.

Hayes Pillars (born 1910) and James Jeter formed the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra, which became the house band at St. Louis' Club Plantation, a secure if uneventful job accompanying floor shows and playing for dancing.

*(As sung here:)*

After you've gone, there'll be no sighin',  
After you've gone, there'll be no cryin'.  
You'll feel blue, you'll feel sad,  
You'll miss the best pal you ever had.

There'll come a time, now don't forget  
it,  
There'll come a time, now don't regret  
it.

Oh, babe, look what you're doin',  
You're tryin' to drive me to ruin.

After you've gone, until you've gone  
away.

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## Band 9

### *I've Found a New Baby*

(Spencer Williams and Jack Palmer)

Alphonso Trent's Orchestra: Anderson Lacy, vocal and violin; Lee Hilliard, trumpet and alto saxophone; Herbert "Peanuts" Holland and Thierry "Red" Elston, trumpets; Leo "Snub" Mosley and Gus Wilson, trombones; James Jeter and Charles Pillars, alto saxophones; Hayes Pillars, tenor and baritone saxophone; Leslie Sheffield, piano; Gene Crooke, banjo; Lewis Pitts, bass; Robert "Eppi" Jackson, tuba; A. G. Godley, drums. *Recorded March 24, 1933, in Richmond, Indiana. Originally issued on Champion 16587 (mx #19081).*

The Trent orchestra's final recording was made without its leader, who had left the year before to care for his ailing parents. Most of the band's last years were spent trying to stay alive in the pit of the Depression in the Midwest and in New England, where they eventually disbanded.

Hayes Pillars' tenor work shows to some extent where Herschel Evans came from. A tight yet swinging arrangement unleashes Holland's best solo effort, but Mosley remains slightly offstage. Lacy's vocal is accompanied by the lithe alto of Lee Hilliard (1912-1966). Leslie Sheffield's piano is well ahead of Trent's own conception.

Sheffield (born 1910) became one of Oklahoma City's most successful leaders and is still active there today.

The story of Alphonso Trent is one of jazz's major losses, the story of the ahead-of-its-time territory band lacking strong management. Had Trent, or Walter Page, or Jesse Stone had a manager like Irving Mills or Joe Glaser as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong did, our musical history might have been quite different.

*(As sung here:)*

I've found a new baby,  
A brand-new baby,  
Now she's my hot-cha hot-cha broad  
from Caroline.

I've found a new lady,  
Now her name was Katy,  
Now she's my pal, my gal... from  
Caroline.

Now boys, beware to walk with care,  
When Katy comes along  
For when she struts and starts to walk,  
Oh my, oh my, oh my.

My baby, my brand-new baby,  
Now she's my hot-cha hot-cha broad  
from Caroline.

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## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Jazz Odyssey*. Vol.1: "The Sound of New Orleans"; Columbia C3L-30. Vol.2: "The Sound of Chicago"; Columbia C3L-32. Vol.3: "The Sound of Harlem"; Columbia C3L-33.  
*The Territory Bands*. Classic Jazz Masters CJM-10.

### Side One      Total time 26:10

- 1 STATIC STRUT (Jack Yellen, Phil Wall, and Paul Specht) .....2:49  
*(publ. Warner Bros. Music)*  
Erskine Tate's Vendome Orchestra
- 2 SYMPHONIC RAPS (Bert Stevens and Irwin Abrams) .....3:13  
*(publ. Paramount Music Corp.)*  
Carroll Dickerson and His Orchestra
- 3 THE BOY IN THE BOAT (Charlie Johnson) .....3:36  
*(publ. Peer International Corp.)*  
Charlie Johnson and His Paradise Orchestra
- 4 THAT'S HOW I FEEL TODAY (Fats Waller) .....2:59  
*(publ. unknown)*  
The Chocolate Dandies
- 5 SWEET AND LOW BLUES (Jabbo Smith) .....3:18  
*(publ. unknown)*  
Jabbo Smith and His Rhythm Aces
- 6 TILL TIMES GET BETTER (Jabbo Smith) .....2:58  
*(publ. unknown)*  
Jabbo Smith and His Rhythm Aces
- 7 WILLOW TREE (Fats Waller) .....3:23  
*(publ. Warner Bros. Music)*  
The Louisiana Sugar Babes
- 8 WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LOVE? (Cole Porter) .....3:19  
*(publ. Warner Bros. Music)*  
Leo Reisman and His Orchestra

### Side Two      Total Time 27:30

- 1 STARVATION BLUES (Jesse Stone) .....3:10  
*(publ. unknown)*  
Jesse Stone's Blues Serenaders
- 2 BLUE DEVIL BLUES (Walter Page) .....3:01  
*(publ. Northern Music Co.)*  
Walter Page's Blue Devils
- 3 THERE'S A SQUABBLIN' (Bill "Count" Basie) .....2:45  
*(publ. unknown)*  
Walter Page's Blue Devils

4 DREAMLAND BLUES I (Troy Floyd) . . . . .	2:28
<i>(publ. unknown)</i>	
Troy Floyd and His Plaza Hotel Orchestra	
5 DREAMLAND BLUES II (Troy Floyd) . . . . .	2:51
<i>(publ. unknown)</i>	
Troy Floyd and His Plaza Hotel Orchestra	
6 RUFF SCUFFLING (Jesse Stone) . . . . .	2:44
<i>(publ. unknown)</i>	
George E. Lee and His Kansas Orchestra	
7 BLACK AND BLUE RHAPSODY (Bingie Madison) . . . . .	2:51
<i>(publ. Denton &amp; Haskins Corp.)</i>	
Alphonso Trent and His Orchestra	
8 AFTER YOU'VE GONE (Henry Creamer and Turner Layton) . . . . .	3:26
<i>(publ. Morley Music Co.)</i>	
Alphonso Trent and His Orchestra	
9 I'VE FOUND A NEW BABY (Spencer Williams and Jack Palmer) . . . . .	3:34
<i>(publ. MCA Music)</i>	
Alphonso Trent's Orchestra	

*Full discographic information and a complete list of the performers for each selection may be found within the individual discussions of the works in the liner notes.*

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