

The
CLARINET
of
JERRY BLAKE
“JACINTO CHABANIA”

Born: Gary, Indiana, Jan. 23, 1908
Died: ca. 1961

Introduction:

Jerry Blake was a truly original player but mostly recording at a time when black clarinet dominance had been conquered by the whites with Benny Goodman in front. Reason good enough to present his rather brief but interesting solography.

History:

School in Nashville, Tennessee. Started on violin, then altosax and clarinet, tuition from Lt. Eugene Mikell Snr. Joined Sells-Floto Circus Band in 1924, left in Chicago and joined Al Wynn's orchestra, subsequently worked for four months with Bobby Lee in Philadelphia, briefly with Charlie Turner's Arcadians, then sailed to Europe with Sam Wooding in June 1928. Left Wooding in Europe ca. November 1929 and returned to New York. Spell with Chick Webb, then toured in Zack Whyte's Chocolate Beau Brummels. With Don Redman from late 1933 until late spring 1934, then sailed to Europe to join Willie Lewis. Returned to New York ca. May 1935. Worked with Claude Hopkins, then joined Fletcher Henderson in late 1936. Left in April 1938 to join Cab Calloway as musical director. Remained with Cab until June 1942, briefly with Count Basie (June 1942), Earl Hines (September 1942), Lionel Hampton (February 1943), Don Redman (1943). Suffered mental breakdown and spent many years in a sanatorium, where he died ca. 1961 (ref. John Chilton: "Who's Who Of Jazz?").

JERRY BLAKE SOLOGRAPHY

MAESTRO SAM WOODING

Y SUS CHOCOLATE KIDDIES

Barcelona, Spain, July 3, 1929

Sam Wooding (dir), Bobby Martin, Doc Cheatham (tp, vo), Albert Wynn, Billy Burns (tb), Willie Lewis (cl, as, bar, vo), Jerry Blake (cl, as, vo, arr-76518), Gene Sedric (cl, ts), Freddy Johnson (p, vo), John Mitchell (bjo, g), Sumner Leslie "King" Edwards (b, tu), Ted Fields (dm, vo).

Ten titles were recorded for Spanish Parlophone, four have (cl):

76517-2	I Can't Give You Anything But Love	Break. (M)
76518-1	Bull Foot Stomp	Solo with ens 8 bars. (F)
76518-2	Bull Foot Stomp	As above. (F)
76520-2	Tiger Rag	Solo 4 bars. (F)
76524-1	Mammy's Prayer	Straight 6 bars. (FM)
76524-2	Mammy's Prayer	As above. (FM)

Competent but not remarkable clarinet playing here. Compared to later examples, we are confident that all soli are played by JB.

JB has been assumed to participate in the sessions JELLY ROLL MORTON & HIS RED HOT PEPPERS, NYC. March 5&30, 1930, but aurally nothing supports this idea.

DON REDMAN & HIS ORCHESTRA

NYC. Jan. 5&9, 1934

Don Redman (as, vo-14559, arr, dir), Henry Allen, Shirley Clay, Sidney De Paris (tp), Gene Simon, Fred Robinson, Benny Morton (tb), Edward Inge, Rupert Cole (cl, as), Jerry Blake (cl, as, bar), Don Kirkpatrick (p), Talcott Reeves (bjo, g), Bob Ysaguirre (tu, b), Manzie Johnson (dm, vib), Harlan Lattimore (vo-14536).

Two titles were recorded for Brunswick, no JB on "I Wanna Be Loved" but:

14559-A	Got The Jitters	(as)-Solo 8 bars. (M)
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Good growling altosax solo here. There is also a clarinet solo but played by Ed Inge.

BENNY MORTON & HIS ORCHESTRA

NYC. Feb. 23, 1934

Henry Allen (tp, vo-152720), Benny Morton (tb), Edward Inge (cl, as), Jerry Blake (cl, as, vo-152717,18, arr-152717), Don Kirkpatrick (p), Bobby Johnson (g), Billy Taylor (b, arr-152719), Manzie Johnson (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Columbia, no JB on 152719-1 "Taylor Made" but:

152717-2	Get Goin'	(as)-Solo 8 bars. (M)
152717-3	Get Goin'	As above. (M)
152718-1	Fare Thee Well To Harlem	(cl)-Solo 16 bars. (M)
152720-2	The Gold Digger's Song	(cl)-Solo 16 bars. (FM)

Hopefully we got the identification of the clarinet and altosax soli right. The two clarinet soli belonging to JB are in a growl-style and quite original.

WILLIE LEWIS & HIS ENTERTAINERS

Paris, April 23, 1935

Bobby Martin (tp), Jerry Blake (cl, ts), Willie Lewis (as, dir), Joe Hayman (ts), Herman Chittison (p), John Mitchell (g), June Cole (b), Ted Fields (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Pathe, no (cl)-solo on 1984 "I Can't Dance" but:

1983	Nagasaki	Solo with ens 32 bars. (FM)
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In fact this growling clarinet solo can be used as a model for identification in the previous session.

TEDDY WILSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. March 17, 1936**
Frankie Newton (tp), Benny Morton (tb), Jerry Blake (cl, as), Ted McRae (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), John Trueheart (g), Leemie Stanfield (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Ella Fitzgerald (vo-18830,32).

Four titles were recorded for Brunswick, three issued, no JB on 18829-1 "Christopher Columbus" but:

18830-1	My Melancholy Baby	Solo 16 bars. (M)
18832-1	All My Life	Obbligato 32 bars. (SM)

With "... Melancholy ..." JB presents himself for the first time as a real clarinet swinger, a candidate for a solography! Note also the fine background he creates for Ella's vocal.

FLETCHER HENDERSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. March 2, 1937**
Emmett Berry, Russell Smith, Dick Vance (tp), Ed Cuffee, J. C. Higginbotham, George Washington (tb), Jerry Blake (cl, as, vo-20754), Hilton Jefferson (as), Chu Berry, Elmer Williams (ts), Fletcher Henderson (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), Israel Crosby (b), Walter Johnson (dm), Dorothy Derrick (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Vocalion, two have JB:

20754-1	Slumming On Park Avenue	Vocal 32 bars. (M)
20754-2	Slumming On Park Avenue	As above. (M)
20755-1	Rhythm Of The Tambourine	Solo with orch 30 bars. (F)

NYC. March 12 or 22, 1937

Same. Four titles, three have JB:

20858-1	Back In Your Own Backyard	Solo 16 bars. (M)
20858-2	Back In Your Own Backyard	As above. (M)
20859-1	Rose Room	Intro 4 bars. Solo 18+6 bars, (tp-EB) on bridge. (M)
20859-2	Rose Room	As above. (M)
20860-2	Great Caesar's Ghost	Soli 4 and 2 bars. (FM)

After the roaring twenties when the clarinet was one of the main instruments of jazz, black and white alike, the situation changed in the thirties. White bigband leaders like Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw fronted their organizations with the clarinet, while the instrument seemed to have reduced popularity among the black jazz artists. JB was one of the exceptions, playing fine clarinet with the Henderson orchestra, although even he had a background role compared to all-time greats like Chu Berry. Here we can particularly enjoy the elegant introduction on "... Backyard", as well as his fine contribution on "... Room". Postscript of Nov. 2021: Alternate takes have appeared! The differences in the clarinet soli are not very great, particularly not in "... Backyard" where he has an important introduction role, but nevertheless charming discoveries!

FLETCHER HENDERSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **Chi. June 30, 1937**
Emmett Berry, Russell Smith, Dick Vance (tp), Ed Cuffee, John McConnell, Albert Wynn (tb), Jerry Blake (cl, as, vo-1957, arr), Hilton Jefferson (cl, as), Chu Berry, Elmer Williams (ts), Fletcher Henderson (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), Israel Crosby (b), Pete Suggs (dm), Chuck Richards (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Vocalion:

1955-1	If You Ever Should Leave	Solo 8 bars. (M)
1956-1	Posin'	Solo 8 bars. (M)
1957-2	All God's Chillun Got Rhythm	Vocal. 32 bars. Solo 16 bars. (FM)
1958-1	Chris And His Gang	Solo 16 bars. (M)

Following up here with four highly competent soli of which my favourites are "... Leave" and "... Gang".

FLETCHER HENDERSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Sept. 22, 1937**

Bigband personnel as June 30, except Ben Webster (ts) replaces Chu Berry. Jerry Blake (cl, as, vo-21731, arr-21733).

Four titles were recorded for Vocalion, two have JB:

21731-1	Let 'Er Go	Vocal. Solo 8 bars. (FM)
21731-2	Let 'Er Go	As above. (FM)
21733-1	What's Your Story?	Vocal 32 bars. Solo 8 bars. (M)

NYC. Oct. 25, 1937

Same. Four titles, two have JB:

21941-1	Sing You Sinners	Solo 16 bars. (M)
21943-1	Stealin' Apples	Solo with orch 32 bars. (M)

The final Henderson sessions also have fine clarinet soloing, and "... Sinners" seems to be the most exciting, but his rounding off "... Apples" is also excellent. Note also that JB was a very competent singer!

TEDDY WILSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. April 29, 1938**

Bobby Hackett (cnt), Jerry Blake (cl), Johnny Hodges (as), Teddy Wilson (p), Allen Reuss (g), Al Hall (b), Johnny Blowers (dm), Nan Wynn (vo-22822-24).

Four titles were recorded for Brunswick:

22822-1	If I Were You	Solo 8 bars. (M)
22822-2	If I Were You	As above. (M)
22823-1	You Go To My Head	Weak obbligato parts. (SM)
22824-1	I'll Dream Tonight	Weak obbligato parts. (M)
22824-2	I'll Dream Tonight	As above. (M)
22825-1	Jungle Love	Solo 16 bars. In ens. (FM)
22825-2	Jungle Love	As above. (FM)

JB is allotted only a minor role here, understandable with this great personnel, but his soloing on "Jungle ..." and "If I ..." is of high class.

CAB CALLOWAY & HIS ORCHESTRA **1938-1942**

Bigband personnels including Jerry Blake (cl, as, arr).

Numerous recording sessions (first March 8, 1940, last Feb. 2, 1942, according to Brian Rust). However, according to John Chilton, JB joined Cab as musical director when he left Fletcher Henderson April 1938. Thus we should look for JB soli already from May 1938. This results in the clarinet discoveries below. Note however that Chauncey Haughton (cl, as), present on recording sessions from Dec. 10, 1937 was not replaced by JB but continued to stay in the band, thus increasing the sax section by one man, and it is unclear when he left the band for Ella Fitzgerald's orchestra (Rust includes him in the personnel for Feb. 1940). We therefore have to sort out the identity of the clarinet soloists.

Minneapolis, May 28, 1938

Broadcast from The Orpheon Theatre, one title with (cl), China Boy Solo 32 bars. (FM) but this is CH.

NYC. Aug. 30, 1938

Personnel given in Rust: Shad Collins (wrong), Doc Cheatham, Irving Randolph, Lammar Wright (tp), Keg Johnson, Claude Jones, DePriest Wheeler (tb), Andrew Brown, Chauncey Haughton, Chu Berry, Walter Thomas (reeds), Bennie Payne (p), Danny Barker (g), Milt Hinton (b), LeRoy Maxey (dm), Cab Calloway (vo). Recording session for Vocalion, four titles with (cl), 891-1 "Miss Hallelujah Brown" Soli 4, 4 and 4 bars. (FM) is by CH (note also that the "Shout ..." on 78 Vo 4369 gives composer credit to JB) but:

892-1	The Conga Conga	Solo with orch 14 bars. (FM)
893-1	The Boogie Woogie	Solo with orch 16 bars. (M)
895-1	Shout, Shout, Shout	Solo 24 bars. (FM)

NYC. Oct. 17, 1938

Broadcast, Bill Savory collection:

	Shout, Shout, Shout	Solo 24 bars. (FM)
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NYC. Oct. 31, 1938

Broadcast, Bill Savory collection:

Big Mouth Minnie	Solo 8 bars. (FM)
Papaya	Solo 8 bars. (FM)
Basin Street Blues	Solo with orch 16 bars. (SM)

NYC. ca. Oct. 1938

roadcast, Bill Savory collection, one additional title found:

Bugle Call Rag (NC)	Solo 20 bars. (F)
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Postscript of Feb. 12, 2018: Did not notice this nice item on earlier visits to the National Jazz Museum in Harlem.

NYC. Nov. 2, 1938

Recording session for Vocalion, three titles with (cl), 911-1 "Angels With Dirty Faces" Soli with orch 6 and 6 bars. (SM) is by CH but:

909-1	Deep In A Dream	Soli with orch 4 and 4 bars. (SM)
910-1	Tee-Um, Tee-Um, Tee-I, Tahiti	Solo 4 bars. (FM)

NYC. Feb. 20, 1939

Personnel as above except Cozy Cole (dm) replaces Maxey.

Recording session for Vocalion, one title with (cl), 971-1 "Afraid Of Love" Solo 8 bars. (M) is by CH.

NYC. March 28, 1939

Recording session for Vocalion, one title with (cl), 1012-2 "Floogie Walk" Solo 8 bars. (FM) is by CH.

NYC. July 17, 1939

Personnel as above with Mario Bauza (tp) added.

Recording session for Vocalion, one title with (cl):

1054-A	Trylon Swing	Solo 16+ 6 bars, orch on bridge. (FM)
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NYC. Nov. 20, 1939

Personnel as above except Dizzy Gillespie (tp) replaces Randolph.

Recording session for Vocalion, one title with (cl), 1067-A&B: "Pluckin' The Bass" Solo 8 bars. (F) are by CH.

Quite some efforts were msde to sort out this, but hopefully we got it right! The best JB contributions are definitely "Shout ..." and "Trylon ...".

CAB CALLOWAY AND HIS ORCHESTRA**Chi. March 8, 1940**

Mario Bauza, Dizzy Gillespie, Lammar Wright (tp), Tyree Glenn (tb, vib), Quentin Jackson, Keg Johnson (tb), Jerry Blake, Andrew Brown, Hilton Jefferson, Chu Berry, Walter Thomas (reeds), Bennie Payne (p), Danny Barker (g), Milt Hinton (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Cab Calloway (vo).

Note: This is the first session where Rust's disco acknowledges JB's presence (no JB solo here), and this has obviously been used extensively by others, lately in the Chu Berry Mosaic set. All (cl)-soli found are played by JB:

NYC. May 15, 1940

Recording session for Okeh, one title with (cl):

27298-1	Feelin' Tip Top	Solo 8 bars. (M)
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Chi. June 27, 1940

Recording session for Okeh, one title with (cl):

3162-A	Come On With The "Come On"	Solo 16+8 bars, (tb) on bridge. (F)
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Cedar Grove, NJ. July 27, 1940

Broadcast from Meadowbrook (date also given as Jan. 21), three titles with (cl):

Limehouse Blues	Solo 14 bars. (FM)
I'll Pray For You	Solo 8 bars. (SM)
King Porter Stomp	Solo 16 bars. (FM)

