

The
FLUTE
of
WAYMAN ALEXANDER
CARVER

Born: Portsmouth, Virginia, Dec. 25, 1905
 Died: May 6, 1967

Introduction:

From the very first day I heard Wayman Carver's flute on the Spike Hughes sessions, I have been a great fan. Not only was he the first (together with Alberto Socarras) to improvise on flute, but he was more than just a pioneer on that instrument. His soli certainly have lasting qualities for musical and not only for historical reasons. He might have recorded more extensively, if he had chosen an instrument less 'modest'! His sound was probably not among the loudest ones on Chick Webb's dancing nights, therefore he never became a 'name' to the public, not even the general jazz public. I sincerely believe he deserves a solography, although it is much too brief.

Some years after writing Wayman Carver's solography in 1983 (Jazz Solography Series, Vol. 14), I met his daughter Avis and the whole family in Atlanta, a great pleasure for me! Together we made a website for his 100 years anniversary in 2005.

History:

Wayman Alexander Carver was bom December 25,1905 in Portsmouth, Virginia. His parents were Alexander and Catherine Carver. Wayman was the second bom of eight children – four boys and four girls.

At an early age, Carver showed not only an interest in but talent for music. Both his father and uncle were accomplished musicians who played in the Metropolitan Marching Band of Portsmouth. The band was a combined jazz and marching band composed largely of "earmusicians". Carver's uncle, Derrick Copeland, had some musical training and was the leader of the band as well as the town's music teacher. Copeland gave Carver his first instrument and directed his music training. Carver related that his first flute was one that was found in the thrash at the navy yard where his father worked. He was then 14 years old.

During Carver's formative years, he played with the Metropolitan Band and small combos that played for social functions. Meanwhile, Carver's mastery of instruments expanded to include the clarinet, saxophone, and flute.

Carver's elementary and high school education were completed in Portsmouth.

Mr. Sykes, a local resident, who was a professor of music at the small Mississippi College, was attracted by the music potential of young Carver. Sykes secured him a scholarship at the college, where Carver got his first experience as a concert performer and as a soloist. When Sykes received an offer to join the music faculty at Clark University, Atlanta, Georgia, he took Carver with him and continued to guide his musical training.

While a student at Clark's, Carver was not only active but outstanding in the Music Department. He assisted with instrument and band direction. Carver often gave band concerts with voices added. Although Carver played other wind instruments, he played flute most of the time. He is remembered for having accompanied Madame Evanti with the flute when she appeared at Clark University for a concert.

Carver's talent ran the gamut from classical flutist to jazz instrumentalist. During his college years. Carver organized a group known as the Collegians. (The name, Collegiate Ramblers has been used to identify a group organized by Carver during his college years, but it is not clear as to whether this is the same group as the Collegians. There was also a Neal Montgomery's Collegiate Ramblers). The Collegians was composed of Clark University students as well as other players from the city. The group, composed of six or eight instrumentalists, would play for social events on and off the campus.

Wayman Carver graduated from Clark University in 1929. Not too many of the Afro-American musicians of the swing era had formal educational background. He then moved to New York City. He formed a band which played in New York City and Atlantic city, New Jersey. The formation of this band is obscure. It is not certain whether it included Collegians or whether it was a new entity.

While in New York, Carver married his college sweetheart, Savannah Joyce Sinkler. Before marriage he wrote to her the song "Won't Be Long Before I'll See My Sweetie". It was never published, but the handwritten manuscript exists. One daughter was born, Avis Joyce, in 1931. Exactly when Carver gave up his own band is not known, but in 1931, Carver recorded with other bands.

Although Carver played clarinet and saxophone, his outstanding contribution to jazz history was as a flutist. Carver recorded with Elmer Snowden in 1931-1932, Benny Carter in 1932 and with the Spike Hughes orchestra in 1933.

In 1934, Carver joined the Chick Webb orchestra. While a member of this orchestra, Carver wrote several of the orchestral arrangements, of which "Spinning The Web" was among the most notable. While with Webb, he also wrote and copyrighted an original, "Swinging on The Reservation". In 1938 he wrote "All's Fair At The World's Fair", but it is not known if any orchestra ever played it.

His most notable flute contributions during the Webb era came as a part of an interior ensemble of the Webb orchestra which included clarinet, piano, bass, drums and Carver on the flute.

After the death of Chick Webb (June 16, 1939), Ella Fitzgerald took over the Webb orchestra. Carver remained for awhile but left the orchestra in 1940. (He is not listed in Brian Rust's "Jazz Records" among the personnel of the recording session of Feb. 14, 1940).

After leaving the orchestra, Carver established a music repair and accessory business in New York City, and was arranging for various bands during this time. As the big band era drew to a close, Carver accepted a position as Associate Professor of Music at his Alma Mater, Clark College, Atlanta, Georgia, 1942.

Carver's short but impressive career as a jazz musician earned for him an outstanding recognition. International Musician, April, 1963 cited Carver as being known internationally as the first and only jazz musician to play the flute (which with regard to Socarras is not quite true). Time Magazine, January 3, 1944 cited Carver as being a brilliant hot flutist who had played with some of the best jazz bands.

The life of Wayman A. Carver, after becoming Associate Professor of Music at Clark College, was perhaps as noteworthy as his life during the big band era. While a professor at Clark's, Carver directed the marching and concert bands, composed an overture "Road To Metropolis" (dated April 12, 1948), a march "Jolly Roger", and wrote the music to the College fight song "Hail Roaring Panther".

In 1950, Clark College presented a musical "Paradise Park" written by Clark College Professor M. Carl Holman with music written by Carver. The musical, performed by Clark College students, was presented at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium, the only large auditorium in the city at that time. One song from that musical was an especially beautiful ballad "Dark Song". Avis remembers that her father sent a copy of the ballad to Ella Fitzgerald asking her if she would sing it and push it for him, and she can recall the deep disappointment that her father felt when he received absolutely no reply from her. The family heard no more about that song nor any other song from the musical.

The entire handwritten musical score for "Dark Song" with different instrumental parts written in pencil on manuscript paper exists (and is now in the possession of "Christiania 12", a Norwegian swing orchestra looking at it). The piano score is written separately on manuscript paper, and the words "Copyright date, 1961" appear at the bottom of the score. The family was disappointed that Ella did not respond to Wayman's request. Several of Ella's autographed photos to him referred to him as her "brother".

Carver did further study at Juilliard School of Music, NYC.. Carver received the Master of Music Education Degree from Vandercook College of Music in 1952.

Wayman Carver's impact was felt not only in the college world but in the outer community as well.

Acting upon the request of Mrs. Jessie Wartman, Atlanta Public School Music Educator, Carver organized the first elementary school bands of the City Schools of Atlanta. This pioneer feat brought together students from elementary schools

throughout the city. The performance of these students, under the direction of Carver was heralded as a major breakthrough in public school education.

Carver played local engagements sometimes with a band, "The Troubadours", lead by Ralph Mays. Some of the band members were in Clark College in the 1950's.

Throughout his years in Atlanta, Georgia, Wayman Carver was a member of Warren Memorial United Methodist Church and participated faithfully as a member of the choir. He was also an active member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.

As a music educator, Wayman Carver inspired and molded many young musicians. The musician graduates of Clark College were often in demand to fill positions as teacher-band director throughout the public school systems of the Atlanta Metro Area and other cities as well. Through these men and women the impact of Wayman Carver continues today. His significance in the jazz world and as a music educator is most ardently kept alive by Clark Atlanta University under the auspices of Associate Professor James Patterson, former student of Carver, an accomplished musician in his own right, and present director of the Clark Atlanta Jazz Orchestra.

Wayman Carver died May 6, 1967, after serving twenty-five years as professor at Clark College.

Avis Carver Turner
 Daughter
 Decatur, Georgia, 2005,
 in connection with Wayman Carver's 100 years anniversary

Plaque with inscription:

WAYMAN CARVER
 (1905 – 1967)

PRESENTED POSTHUMOUSLY
 FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO MUSIC AND MUSIC EDUCATION

NATIONAL BLACK MUSIC CAUCUS EFFIE T. GARDNER
 PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT
 ATLANTA, GEORGIA, MARCH 8, 1997

WAYMAN CARVER SOLOGRAPHY

DAVE NELSON & THE KING'S MEN **NYC. Jan. 14, 1931**

Dave Nelson (tp, vo, dir), Melvin Herbert, Harry Brown (tp), Wilbur De Paris (tb), Buster Bailey, Glyn Paque (cl, as), Charles Frazier (ts), Wayman Carver (fl, ts), Sam Allen (p), Arthur Taylor (bj), g), Simon Marrero (tu), Gerald Hobson (dm).

Three titles were recorded for Victor: "I Ain't Got Nobody", "When Day Is Done" and "Some Of These Days" but no flute soli.

DAVE'S HARLEM HIGHLIGHT **NYC. June 9, 1931**

Personnel as above but Clarence Brereton (tp) replaces Herbert or Brown, and Danny Barker (bj) replaces Taylor.

Four titles were recorded for Timely Tunes, no WC on "Somebody Stole My Gal", "Rockin' Chair" and "St. Louis Blues" but:

69907-2 Loveless Love Solo 16 bars. (M)

The very first flute solo in jazz? Certainly the very first important one. Somewhat heavy backing gives the solo a slightly sluggish start, but the nice trills of bars 3-4 warm the listener's heart, and in bar 7 he really starts to swing. The solo is not a mere casual improvisation but a very coherent one, almost a composition. Postscript: This is not quite correct, Alberto Socarras beat him by a few years, he also with high quality jazz flute playing.

ELMER SNOWDEN & HIS ORCHESTRA **1932**

Leonard Davis, Roy Eldridge (tp), George Washington, Dicky Wells (tb), Wayman Carver, Otto Hardwick (reeds), Don Kirkpatrick (p), Richard Fulbright (b), Sid Catlett (dm), unknown female (vo).

Warner Brothers' film "Smash Your Baggage", four titles, but no flute soli.

BENNY CARTER & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. June 23, 1932**

Louis Bacon, Frankie Newton, unknown (tp), Dicky Wells (tb), Wayman Carver (fl, as), Benny Carter (cl, as), Chu Berry (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), unknown (g), Richard Fulbright (b), Sid Catlett (dm), unknown female (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Crown, only one issued, "Tell All Your Dreams To Me", but no flute soli.

SPIKE HUGHES & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. April 18, 1933**

Shad Collins, Leonard Davis, Bill Dillard (tp), Dicky Wells, Wilbur De Paris, George Washington (tb), Benny Carter, Wayman Carver, Howard Johnson (cl, as, fl), Coleman Hawkins (cl, ts), Rod Rodriguez (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), Ernest Hill (b), Kaiser Marshall (dm-13257,58), Sid Catlett (dm-13259,60), Benny Carter (vo-13258), Spike Hughes (arr).

Four titles were recorded for British Decca, 13257 "Nocturne", 13258 "Somebody Stole Gabriel's Horn", 13259 "Pastorale" and 13260 "Bugle Call Rag", but no soli by WC.

NYC. May 18, 1933

Henry Allen, Leonard Davis, Bill Dillard (tp), Dicky Wells, Wilbur De Paris, George Washington (tb), Benny Carter, Howard Johnson (cl, as), Wayman Carver (fl, cl, as), Coleman Hawkins (cl, ts), Chu Berry (ts), Luis Russell (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), Ernest Hill (b), Sid Catlett (dm), Spike Hughes (arr).

Four titles, no WC soli on 13353 "Fanfare", 13354 "Sweet Sorrow Blues" and 13355 "Music At Midnight" but:

13352-A Arabesque Breaks 2 and 2 bars. (M)

NYC. May 19, 1933

Personnel as May 18 except Howard Scott (tp), Rod Rodriguez (p) replace Dillard or Davis and Russell.

Four titles, no WC soli on 13359 "Air In D Flat", 13360 "Donegal Cradle Song" and 13362 "Music At Sunrise" but:

13361-A Firebird Solo 8 bars. (FM)

NYC. May 18/19, 1933

Henry Allen (tp, vo), Dicky Wells (tb), Benny Carter (as), Wayman Carver (fl), Coleman Hawkins, Chu Berry (ts), Rod Rodriguez (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), Spike Hughes (b), Sid Catlett (dm).

Two titles:

13356-A Sweet Sue, Just You Solo 32 bars. (F)

13363-A How Come You Do Me Like You Do? Solo 16 bars. (M)

I believe there can be no argument when I state that the smallband sessions here constitute the most important evidence of WC's greatness as a flutist and as an improviser in general. His chorus on "How Come ..." is a masterpiece of relaxed swing combined with the most sovereign musical logic, a lovely solo! I consider this item to be the very best one, but the rear side of the 78, "Sweet Sue ..." gives it hard competition! Also "Firebird" has a brief but well constructed solo, while "Arabesque" has fill-ins only, brief but yet impressive.

BENNY CARTER & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Oct. 16, 1933**

Eddie Mallory, Bill Dillard, Dick Clark (tp), J. C. Higginbotham, Keg Johnson, Fred Robinson (tb), Benny Carter (cl, as), Wayman Carver (fl, as), Glyn Paque (as), Johnny Russell (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), Ernest Hill (b), Sid Catlett (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Columbia, one has WC:

265160-1 Devil's Holiday Solo 16+8 bars, (as) on bridge. (F)
265160-2 Devil's Holiday As above. (F)

A very nice and driving solo on take 1, note for instance how he enters after Carter's altosax bridge! And take 2 demonstrates WC's improvisational capabilities, the soli are very different!!

CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. July 6, 1934 – March 24, 1937**

Bigband personnels including Wayman Carver (fl, cl, ts).

Numerous recording sessions for Okeh and Decca but only one WC item:

NYC. June 12, 1935

39615-A Down Home Rag Straight in orch. (FM)

The opening arrangement gives his flute an important role, but the item has slight interest from a soloistic point of view.

NYC. Feb. 1936

Radio transcriptions, two titles possibly have WC:

Keepin' Out Of Mischief Now Possibly clarinet solo 22 bars. (M)
Go Harlem Possibly clarinet solo 8 bars. (FM)

These clarinet soli, which are pale and far from interesting, have some details which suspiciously sound Carver-like. What do you think?

WILLIE BRYANT & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. April 9, 1936**

Bigband personnel, some sources give Wayman Carver (fl), but he was with Chick Webb, and Charles Frazier is more likely.

Four titles were recorded for Bluebird; there is one flute item: 99974-1 "The Right Somebody To Love" with Soli 4, 4 and 4 bars. (FM). Interesting anyway!!

THE GOTHAM STOMPERS **NYC. March 25, 1937**

Four titles, "My Honey's Lovin' Arms", "Did Anyone Ever Tell You?", "Alabama Home" and "Where Are You?" were recorded for Variety, Wayman Carver (arr).

CHICK WEBB & HIS LITTLE CHICKS **NYC. Sept. 21, 1937**

Chauncey Haughton (cl), Wayman Carver (fl), Tommy Fulford (p), Beverly Peer (b), Chick Webb (dm).

Three titles were recorded for Decca:

62618-A In A Little Spanish Town In ens. Solo 14 bars. (FM)
62619-A I Got Rhythm In ens. Solo 8 bars. (F)
62620-A I Ain't Got Nobody In ens. Solo 32 bars. (M)

NYC. Nov. 1, 1937

Same. One title:

62737-B Sweet Sue, Just You In ens. Solo 32 bars. (F)

These examples of early jazz chamber music are really something special! One may easily find the combination flute/clarinet somewhat fragile and the ensembles not too interesting. However, the opportunity to study Chick's work in a small group setting is alone enough to make these items noteworthy. And Wayman Carver, not too much recorded, makes some very nice contributions. "... Nobody" is the weakest item, he does not quite seem to get a firm grasp of this song, but the opening is very charming. In "... Rhythm" he is shamefully given only a bridge, however, to great success, ericdolphy-esque in his eagerness.

“... Spanish Town” has a very good, inventive solo, comparable with those of the great pre-Chick days. At last, “Sweet Sue ...”, the highlight! Although I find the flute solo here a bit more routine than the famous predecessor with Spike Hughes, it is yet of very good quality and admirably different!!

CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Oct. 27, 1937 – Oct. 6, 1938**
 Mario Bauza, Bobby Stark, Taft Jordan (tp), Sandy Williams, Nat Story (tb), George Bushell (cl, as), Louis Jordan (as, ts, bar), Wayman Carver (fl, ts), Tommy Fulford (p), Bobby Johnson (g), Beverly Peer (b), Chick Webb (dm, ldr), Ella Fitzgerald (vo).

Large number of sessions but only a few WC items:

NYC. Dec. 17, 1937

62886-A I Want To Be Happy Duet with (cl). Solo 8 bars. (FM)
 62886-B I Want To Be Happy As above. (FM)
 62888-A If Dreams Come True Possibly tenorsax solo 8 bars. (M)
 62889-A Hallelujah! Straight in orch. (FM)

“... Happy” is a mixture of orchestra and ‘chicks’, and WC takes a brief but nice flute solo, in two variations. In “... True”, where Ted McRae takes the intro, another tenorsax takes some modest, almost straight eight bars, most likely to be WC.

CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Jan. 9, 1939**

Personnel similar to that above.

Thesaurus radio transcriptions, one has WC:

Dinah Solo with orch 32 bars. (FM)

A reasonably good solo but not quite with the sting of five years earlier. One shall not, however, draw any general conclusions from one item only.

CHICK WEBB & HIS LITTLE CHICKS **NYC. Jan. 1939**

Chauncey Haughton (cl), Wayman Carver (fl), Tommy Fulford (p), Beverly Peer (b), Chick Webb (dm).

Saturday Night Swing Club program, one title:

Stompin’ At The Savoy In ens. Solo 32 bars. (F)

A very pleasant surprise, to encounter WC with an agile Chick Webb drumming as if he knew the end was coming close. The flute solo, which seems to be the last one preserved (postscript: turned out to be wrong!!), is brilliant, both technically and conceptually, and it only shows what a waste of talent the recording policy of Decca and the Webb organization represented.

CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Feb. 10 – May 4, 1939**

Bigband personnel including Wayman Carver (fl, ts).

Three recording sessions for Decca and two broadcasts but no flute soli.

ELLA FITZGERALD
& HER FAMOUS ORCHESTRA **NYC. June 29, 1939 – Jan. 26, 1940**

Dick Vance, Bobby Stark, Taft Jordan (tp), George Matthews, Nat Story, Sandy Williams (tb), Garvin Bushell (cl, sop), Hilton Jefferson (as), Wayman Carver (fl, as, ts), Ted McRae (ts), Tommy Fulford (p), John Trueheart (g), Beverly Peer (b), Bill Beason (dm), Ella Fitzgerald (dm).

Four recording sessions for Decca but no flute soli.

1939 – early 1940

Same. Various broadcasts, one has WC:

NYC. Aug. 26, 1939

Broadcast from Savoy Ballroom:

I’ve Found A New Baby Solo 16+8 bars, orch on bridge. (FM)

A magnificent “new” discovery, appearing on CD many years after the “old” solography was published. WC gives us his last flute solo here and shows that he still is at the top of his creative powers! Maybe there are more examples around with flute from Ella Fitzgerald broadcasts?

No further recording session on flute, and a decade out of studio, but then a final recording session:

“BLOW TOP” LYNN & HIS HOUSE ROCKERS Atlanta, May 10, 1951
W. Bostic (tp), Clyde William “Blow Top” Lynn (as, ts), Wayman Carver (ts), C.
Lyons (p), George Miller (b), James Jackson (dm), Melvin Smith (vo).
Four titles, “Rampaging Mama”, “Home Sick Blues”, “Come Back My Darlin’”
and “Real True Gal” were recorded for Victor, three have tenorsax soli, but there
is no reason to believe they are played by our famous jazz flute maestro.

No further recording sessions.

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