

The First KID CLAYTON Session: 1952
with Kid Avery and Albert Burbank

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FJ 2859

Recorded in New Orleans by Alden Ashforth and David Wyckoff, August 20-21, 1952
Produced by ALDEN ASHFORTH, assisted by Steven Teeter and David Wyckoff



PHOTO BY ALDEN ASHFORTH COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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**The First KID CLAYTON Session:
1952**

with Kid Avery and Albert Burbank

Jimmy "Kid" Clayton, trumpet

Albert Burbank, Clarinet

Joe "Kid" Avery, trombone

George Guesnon, tenor banjo

"Sweet Emma" Barrett, piano

Sylvester Handy, bass

Alec Bigard, drums

SIDE ONE: Total Timing: 22:31

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. The Sheik of Araby (Snyder-Smith-Wheeler) | 3:25 |
| 2. See See Rider (Arant-Rainey) | 4:45 |
| 3. Gettysburg March (S.B. Stambaugh) | 2:45 |
| 4. Coquette (Lombardo-Green-Kahn) | 8:10 |
| vocal: Guesnon | |
| 5. The Sheik of Araby (Snyder-Smith-Wheeler) | 2:55 |

SIDE TWO: Total Timing: 23:33

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. Bye Bye Blackbird (Dixon-Henderson) | 1:20 |
| 2. See See Rider (Arant-Rainey) | 3:37 |
| 3. Corrine, Corrina (Williams-Chatman) | 3:00 |
| 4. In the Groove | 5:43 |
| vocal: Clayton | |
| 5. Jimmy's Blues | 5:01 |
| vocal: Clayton | |
| 6. Shake It and Break It (Mattheus-Arty) | 4:25 |

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August 20-21, 1952

PRODUCED BY ALDEN ASHFORTH (assisted by Steven Teeter
and David Wyckoff)

Original engineering: Bill Russell
Re-engineering and post-production: Alden Ashforth
Photos by Alden Ashforth and David Wyckoff
Cover photo: Alden Ashforth
Notes by Alden Ashforth

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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RECORDING KID CLAYTON

By the fall of 1951 David Wyckoff and I had recorded, for the first time, four trumpet players who were born within the same decade of the turn of the century: Lawrence Toca, DeeDee Pierce and Kid Thomas Valentine (all with Emile Barnes on clarinet), and Percy Humphrey (leading the Eureka Brass Band). We had planned to record yet another of that same generation, Jimmy Clayton, whom we had often heard playing with pick-up marching bands, but who was not regularly playing with a dance band at the time. Bill Russell was especially anxious to have Clayton's playing documented, but had no recording equipment and was in no position to fund a session.

We had great difficulty in even arranging a rehearsal, as Clayton was quite elusive. He could sometimes be reached by phone while working at an uptown school on Poydras Street, but only at precisely 12:30 pm, and he couldn't stay on the line for long. Or he could be reached late at night at his downtown home at 2334 Iberville Street, but the phone was rarely answered, and was eventually disconnected: he had moved. Perseverance at 12:30 sharp resulted in a new home phone number, and it was at Clayton's new address, 2232 St. Ann Street, that a rehearsal was finally held. By then both time and money had run out, so the event was not recorded. A few photos which I took, including the cover of this album, remain to document the occasion. Only a quartet was assembled – Clayton and Barnes, with George Guesnon on banjo and Abby Williams on drums – but it was a grand evening, and Clayton enjoyed himself hugely.

The next time I saw Clayton was on parade at Mardi Gras in 1952; I had taken an unauthorized week off from Harvard to attend the carnival (and was promptly suspended for so doing). I did manage to shoot some 16mm footage of Clayton wearing a snappy double-breasted jacket with brass buttons, mugging at the camera and flamboyantly waving his ornately-etched trumpet with customary bravado. Alas, this documentation is again only visual; the film (which also includes footage of the Eureka and Young Tuxedo marching bands, and Emile Barnes playing on a truck) is silent.

Early in the summer of 1952 I was able to return to New Orleans with my Magnecord PT-6 tape recorder and moved into an apartment on Burgundy Street directly across from the Tunnel Bar, which blared rhythm-and-blues (then known as "race music") from a juke box at high levels and at late hours. David Wyckoff was living nearby, Jim McGarrell arrived from Indiana, and Bill Russell came down from Chicago with Barbara Reid.

Now with enough time, tape, and money for a major session, we set about lining up a full band to complement Clayton. To George Guesnon on banjo we added three

superb and hitherto unrecorded players to form the rhythm section: "Sweet Emma" Barrett on piano, Sylvester Handy (older brother of saxophonist John) on bass, and Alec Bigard (older brother of clarinetist Barney) on drums. (According to Barney's widow, Dotty Bigard, he was named Alex but everyone called him Alec.)

With plans afoot to record Emile Barnes with Charlie Love later in the summer, we decided to look for a different clarinetist, and felt the strong and sinewy tone of Albert Burbank would match Clayton well.



Ernest Rogers and Joe Avery

For a trombonist we turned to a man who had recorded commercially only once, despite his popularity and reputation: Joe Avery, who played regularly with the Young Tuxedo. At almost sixty, he was the oldest member of the band; Burbank and Clayton had both just turned fifty, Guesnon at forty-five was the youngest, and the others were in their early fifties.

Finding a suitable place to record was, as always in New Orleans, a problem; fortunately we were able to secure the large room at Filiberto's music store. A gang of friends turned out, including Barbara Reid and Bill Russell, who volunteered to operate the Magnecord.

At the appointed hour all the musicians had arrived save Clayton himself, so it was decided to try a few test numbers without him. It was a wise decision, as the playing on these takes is especially compelling.

The Shiek of Araby is an eruption of unbridled energy and a *tour-de-force* for Burbank. On the first chorus he plays not only the lead but the phrase-end fill-ins as well, with

scarcely a pause for breath. As he moves to a normal clarinet role in the second and third choruses, Avery in turn manages to weld both lead and trombone roles into a single part. After a piano solo, Burbank displays his chalumeau register over double-time banjo chords, and Avery sneaks in softly before riding out full-blast in the final chorus.

The nine choruses of *See See Rider* are hauntingly beautiful with Burbank playing lead at first before moving to a more florid style. Avery's two-chorus solo virtually defines the older trombone style: directly melodic, but with a crisply articulated staccato inflection that imbues even a plaintive blues with latent rhythmic power.



Jimmy Clayton and Albert Burbank

Gettysburg March (previously released on Folkways FA 2463) is one of the few remaining standards in the New Orleans repertory that retains the 6/8 "cavalry" meter (it was first published in 1911). The performance here is in the traditional unhurried yet buoyant tempo, with Clayton playing a straightforward lead and Burbank accompanying with arpeggiated triplets. At the end of the twelve-bar interlude preceding the out-chorus, George Guesnon gets carried away and happily sings along with the trumpet.

There is a noticeable change in Clayton's tone along with the change from march to dance style in the extended version of *Coquette*. It opens languidly but, as Guesnon's vocal (accompanied by the full band spinning a rich polyphonic web) begins to underscore the essential bitterness of the lyrics, the playing takes on a more aggressive character. Evidently pleased with the result, Guesnon comments "that's it, gang" at the close.

The second *Sheik of Araby* (previously released on Folkways FA 2465) presents a vivid contrast to the opening version on this recording. It is at a much slower tempo, which allows Sylvester Handy to do some fancy double-timing on the bass. In the second chorus the clarinet takes the lead with the trumpet in an accompanying role; Clayton returns in his most florid style for the final chorus.

The take of *Bye Bye Blackbird* is quite short, as Clayton, apparently dissatisfied with some wayward notes, led the band right on out with the second chorus. But the performance has a wonderful bounce to it, and it is included here so that at least one version of every number from the session is represented. (And, excepting the two instances noted above, all the takes are previously unissued.) The miking of the trumpet is erratic on this and some other tracks; Clayton was used from parade work to pointing his instrument around in different directions, not to pointing it consistently at a microphone.

The relaxed rendering of *Corrine, Corrina* is unfortunately marred by tape drop-outs at the opening, but it features a splendid solo by Burbank, urged on with Guesnon's "oh blow, blow, blow". In *the Groove* is actually based on *I Can't Escape from You*, with lyrics added by Clayton: they include a surprising interpolation of "Mary had a little lamb" during the bridge section. The rhythm section takes a chorus, allowing Handy to display some unusually high bass-work, Avery follows with a "shouting" solo, and Clayton closes the final chorus with an excited yip on the high F.

The lengthy *Jimmy's Blues* features a three-chorus vocal by Clayton, backed by some fine counterpoint between low-register clarinet and single-string banjo. Sweet Emma's piano solo is accompanied by a verbal exchange—Guesnon: "Ah, smack that piano, gal, smack that piano!" Emma: "I hear you, I hear you."

The concluding *Shake It and Break It*, like some other fine takes, was beset with level changes which have been compensated for as best as possible. The opening twelve-bar strains are taken in the usual order, with Burbank solo in the first break but in duet with Clayton on the subsequent two. The band rips into the sixteen-bar third strain supported by crackling woodwork from Alec Bigard, with Clayton becoming particularly feisty and introducing the two clarinet choruses with a splendid growl. Avery follows in such fine form that Guesnon urges him into a second chorus with "one more, one more", and then



Joe Avery and Jimmy Clayton

plays two chorded choruses of his own. he introduces Sweet Emma with "watch that piano" and instructs the band: "let's go out on two choruses." Riding out Clayton ties over the choruses with a high Bb, then at the close climbs even higher, first to a C and finally to a D. And the irrepressible Guesnon adds: "That's it gang, that's it - make it like that . . ."

After three decades, here it is - made like that.

Alden Ashforth
Music Department
University of California,
Los Angeles
July, 1983



listening to playbacks (left to right): Bill Russell, Joe Avery, Alec Bigard, Jimmy Clayton

TAPE LOG AND DISCOGRAPHY

CLAYTON, Jimmy "Kid"
Jimmy Clayton's Band

New Orleans, August 20-21, 1952

Albert Burbank (clarinet) Joe "Kid" Avery (trombone)
"Sweet Emma" Barrett (piano) "Creole" George Guesnon (banjo)
Sylvester Handy (bass) Alec Bigard (drums)

Folkways FJ 2859:

1. Can't Escape
(test: two brief fragments only)
 2. See See Rider (4:45) Side One, Band 2
 3. Sheik of Araby (3:45) Side One, Band 1
- Add Jimmy Clayton (trumpet)
4. Sheik of Araby (2:50)
(opening missing)
 5. Sheik of Araby (2:55) Side One, Band 4
(also Folkways FA 2465)
 6. See See Rider (3:37) Side Two, Band 2
vocal Clayton
 7. See See Rider (4:04)
vocal Clayton
 8. Gettysburg March (2:45) Side One, Band 3
(also Folkways FA 2463)
 9. Jimmy's Blues (5:28)
vocal Clayton
 10. Jimmy's Blues (5:23) (Folkways FA 2463)
vocal Clayton
 11. Shake It and Break It (4:25) Side Two, Band 6
 12. Shake It and Break It (3:50) (Folkways FA 2465)
 13. Corrine, Corrina (3:00) Side Two, Band 3
 14. Corrine, Corrina (4:16) (Folkways FA 2463)
vocal Clayton & Guesnon
 15. Bye Bye, Blackbird (1:20) Side Two, Band 1
 16. In the Groove (3:05) (Folkways FA 2463)
vocal Clayton
 17. In the Groove (5:43) Side Two, Band 4
vocal Clayton
 18. Coquette (4:25)
 19. Coquette (8:10) Side One, Band 4
vocal Guesnon
 20. Jimmy's Blues (5:01) Side Two, Band 5
vocal Clayton