

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FJ 2863

The Perry Bradford Story

PIONEER OF THE BLUES

As told to Noble Sissle by Perry Bradford / With 12 re-issues from 1920 to 1924



PHOTOGRAPH BY WALKER EVANS, VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI, 1936

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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- as told to Noble Sissle by Perry Bradford
- with 12 re-issues from 1920 to 1924

DAYBREAK BLUES jazz band	I AIN'T PLAYING SECOND FIDDLE LOUIS (satchmo) armstrong
THAT THING CALLED LOVE jazz band	MY HOME AIN'T HERE ITS FARTHER DOWN THE ROAD bessie smith
DON'T CARE BLUES p. bradford phoons	YOU NEED SOME LOVIN' jelly roll morton & johnny dunn
HOW LONG HAS THAT TRAIN BEEN GONE roy evans	MAKE ME A PALETTE ON YOUR FLOOR j.p. johnson-pops foster
IT'S RIGHT HERE FOR YOU dorsey brothers	WE'LL BE READY WHEN THE GREAT DAY COMES 5 spirits of rhythm

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PB 101



Annotated by David A. Jansen

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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PERRY BRADFORD: PIONEER OF THE BLUES

Notes by David A. Jansen

His full name was John Henry Perry Bradford and he was born on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1893 in Montgomery, Alabama. His father, Adam, was a bricklayer and tile setter, and his mother, Bella, a cook. When Perry was six years old, the family (including his two sisters, Bessie and Clara) moved to Atlanta, Georgia. When he completed the sixth grade, he went to Atlanta University at the age of twelve and attended for three years. Then he struck out on his own. As early as twelve, however, he began going to Decatur Street, the black District in Atlanta, and got to know the entertainers and bosses. He sang, danced and played piano, joined the New Orleans Minstrels in 1906 for a short tour and by the time he left school, he was a professional entertainer and a seasoned trouper.

Perry went to Chicago in 1908 where he played the piano and sang his Blues. There, he met famed black composer Charley Warfield (Baby Won't You Please Come Home) and actor-playwright Flournoy Miller ("Shuffle Along"). He toured the Gus Sun Vaudeville Circuit with an act called "The Chicken Trust." He stayed with this act until he came to New York City in 1918, where he settled in and started selling his songs to Frederick V. Bowers, a white songwriter who had just opened up his own publishing company. Lonesome Blues was quickly followed by Broken Hearted Blues. It was the chorus of this last named song which became part of

the verse of his famous Crazy Blues, which he published himself in 1920. Two years later, he published it again as Wicked Blues.

He got a lot of mileage from his blues!

For almost two years, Perry waged a one-man campaign to get the major record companies - Victor and Columbia - to record female Blues singers. Just before he opened up his own publishing house, he sold his song That Thing Called Love to the Pace & Handy Music Company. He then boldly decided to open his own firm, Perry Bradford Music Publishing Company, to issue his new song, You Can't Keep a Good Man Down, which he got Sophie Tucker to endorse. Her photograph appears on the cover of the sheet music.

With the help of fellow songwriters Chris Smith and William Tracey, who had both been published by the firm of Helf and Hager, Perry went to see Fred Hager, now out of publishing but very much into recording - in fact the recording manager of the newly formed General Phonograph Corporation which issued Okeh Records. Perry was managing Mamie Smith, a young blues singer from Cincinnati who was being showcased in a Harlem revue. Persistence paid off and earned him the nickname "Mule" when he finally sold Fred Hager on the idea of using Mamie to sing his two Blues songs. Okeh's house band, Rega's Orchestra, led by Milo Rega, accompanied Mamie on her February 14, 1920 recording session. What a nice birthday present for Perry! Released in July of that year on Okeh 4113, Mamie Smith, Contralto, became the first female Negro vocalist to record. Before Mamie, the only black singer to make records was Ziegfeld Follies star, Bert Williams. The urban blacks and the Southern whites and blacks were quick to respond to Mamie's singing and they bought 10,000 copies within the first month of its release. This made Hager

responsive when Perry appeared in the office in early August wanting to record Mamie with more of his songs, backed by a five-piece black jazz band. So, on August 10, 1920, history was made again, when Mamie Smith and her Jazz Hounds recorded Perry's It's Right Here For You and Crazy Blues.

The exact personnel of the Jazz Hounds used on this historic session is confused. The photograph on the cover of the sheet music to Crazy Blues shows Ernest Elliott on clarinet, Dope Andrews on trombone, Willie "The Lion" Smith at the piano, Addington Major on trumpet and Leroy Parker on violin. However, in his autobiography, BORN WITH THE BLUES, Perry recounts the story of that particular recording date and claims that he played the piano himself (the piano can hardly be heard in any event). In addition, he stated that Johnny Dunn, who was cornetist on most of the other Jazz Hounds recordings accompanying Mamie Smith, played cornet on that first date also. He had remembered Johnny's playing most favorably from the years when he played with W.C. Handy's band at the Lincoln Theatre in Harlem and was happy to find him to play the down-home blues. Perry thought Johnny was one of the few musicians in New York City at that time who could play the Blues properly.

Mamie Smith's recording of Crazy Blues for Okeh was such a continuing sensation, that by June, 1921, it had sold around 800,000 copies and was still going strong. In December, 1920, Noble Sissle accompanied by Eubie Blake at the piano recorded it for Emerson Records, Pathe, and even Edison. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band recorded it for Victor in January, and Bennie Krueger and his Orchestra recorded it for Brunswick with a vocal by Al Bernard. Columbia Records, not to be outdone, signed black vocalist Mary Stafford to record Crazy Blues with her Jazz Band (a five-piece combo with Charlie Johnson leading from

the piano) early in 1921. A lawyer from Columbia, not knowing of the Okeh hit, sent Perry a letter saying that with the new Mary Stafford recording, they "would make 'Crazy Blues' a big hit for you, if you'll waive your royalties." Perry's classic answer was written the next day: "Yours of recent date received - and is so important that I'm answering right away. Which is: Please be advised that the only thing Perry Bradford WAIVES is the American Flag." The Stafford recording sold over 600,000 copies and Perry's royalties came to two cents a copy!

The phenomenal sales racked up with each recording of this number, but especially with Mamie's version (Okeh 4169), established Perry Bradford as the premier as well as pioneer black record producer.

When Perry recorded Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds (without Mamie singing) in January, 1921, he again created another recording first - the first black jazz band to record. While such black bands as Europe's Society Orchestra, Dabney's Band, Handy's Orchestra of Memphis, and Wilbur Sweatman's Original Jazz Band had recorded before Bradford's Jazz Hounds, they were Dance and Novelty bands, not real jazz bands. And, it should come as no surprise that ace businessman Bradford had selected That Thing Called Love and a retitled Old Time Blues for his band to record.

Throughout his recording career, Perry used the finest jazzmen for his sessions: Louis Armstrong, Johnny Dunn, Bubber Miley, Jimmy Wade, Jabbo Smith, June Clark, Louis Metcalf, Jimmy Harrison, Buster Bailey, Garvin Bushell, Don Redman, Edgar Sampson, James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Kaiser Marshall.

While he wrote many Blues songs, he only wrote the lyrics (to James P. Johnson's music) for one Broadway show, the 1929 musical, "Messin' Around."

INTRODUCTION ON BLACK STORYTELLING

During the twenties, Perry had four publishing companies: Acme Music Company, Blues Music Co., Perry Bradford, Inc., and Perry Bradford Music Publishing Company.

As a talent scout, Perry scored heavily when he gave Bessie Smith to fellow composer/publisher/A&R man Clarence Williams, having his hands full with Mamie Smith, Edith Wilson, Ethel Ridley, Lena Wilson and Julia Jones.

When commercial radio began to make money, Perry was there once again as he acted as agent and pioneered the use of black performers on radio in New York City.

A show biz character, Perry Bradford was born with the blues, pioneered the blues on record, and died without the blues on April 20, 1970.

RECORD ONE - Noble Sissle Interviews Perry Bradford

Side One

YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN was the second tune recorded by Mamie Smith on her first record session (the first tune was another Perry Bradford composition, That Thing Called Love) on February 14, 1920. Accompanying Mamie was the Okeh house band led by Milo Rega. The probable line-up of the Rega Orchestra for that historic session consisted of Abe Small-cornet/trombone/Nathan Glantz-alto saxophone/violin/piano/banjo/drums.

THAT THING CALLED LOVE was recorded as an instrumental by Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds on February 21, 1921. The Jazz Hounds were Johnny Dunn-cornet/Buster Bailey-clarinet/Phil Worde-piano/Chink Johnson-tuba/xylophone. This session is most important for being the first to feature a black jazz band on record.

DON'T CARE BLUES was recorded by Mamie and her Jazz Hounds on November 6, 1920. The Hounds at this session consisted of Johnny

Dunn-cornet/Dope Andrews-trombone/Ernest Elliott-clarinet/Leroy Parker-violin/Perry Bradford-piano/Mort Perry-drums.

HOW LONG HAS THE TRAIN BEEN GONE was sung by Roy Evans accompanied by James P. Johnson on piano and Garvin Bushell on clarinet on June 20, 1928.

IT'S RIGHT HERE FOR YOU was a feature for trombonist Tommy Dorsey, making his debut on records as a trumpet soloist. Here, on the November 10, 1928 session, he's accompanied by Eddie Lang-guitar/Jimmy Williams-tuba/Stan King-drums/Artie Schutt-harmonium.

Side Two

I AIN'T GONNA PLAY NO SECOND FIDDLE features the composer as vocalist. This was another of Perry's sessions as A & R man and producer. Under the name Perry Bradford's Jazz Phools, he gathered together an outstanding group of New York musicians on November 2, 1925. Louis Armstrong-cornet/Charlie Green-trombone/Buster Bailey-clarinet/Don Redman-alto saxophone/James P. Johnson-piano/Sam Speed-banjo/Kaiser Marshall-drums/Perry Bradford-vocal.

MY HOME AIN'T HERE, IT'S FARTHER DOWN THE ROAD gave Perry a chance to do something for his discovery, Bessie Smith. Well along on her recording career, this May 15, 1925 recording shows her gratitude to Perry. She is accompanied by Charlie Green-trombone/Buster Bailey-clarinet/Fred Longshaw-piano/James T. Wilson-sound effects. It was released as Dixie Flyer Blues.

YOU NEED SOME LOVIN' was another date arranged by composer-producer Bradford which featured the legendary Jelly Roll Morton at the piano with Johnny Dunn's regular band. Johnny Dunn-cornet/Herb Flemming-trombone/Garvin Bushell-clarinet/

Jelly Roll Morton-piano/John Mitchell-banjo/Harry Hull-tuba/Mort Perry-drums. This fabulous date took place on March 13, 1928.

MAKE ME A PALLET ON THE FLOOR was done under the nominal leadership of clarinetist Rod Cless. It features James P. Johnson-piano/Rod Cless-clarinet/Sterling Bose-trumpet/Pops Foster-string bass. This is the last of Perry Bradford's recording sessions

as producer and it took place during the war on September 1, 1944.

DAYBREAK BLUES, a lovely Bradford composition, was recorded by his Gulf Coast Seven on May 17, 1923. The personnel included Gus Aiken-cornet/Bud Aiken-trombone/Garvin Bushell-clarinet/Ernest Elliott-clarinet & tenor Saxophone/Leroy Tibbs-piano/John Mitchell-banjo.

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