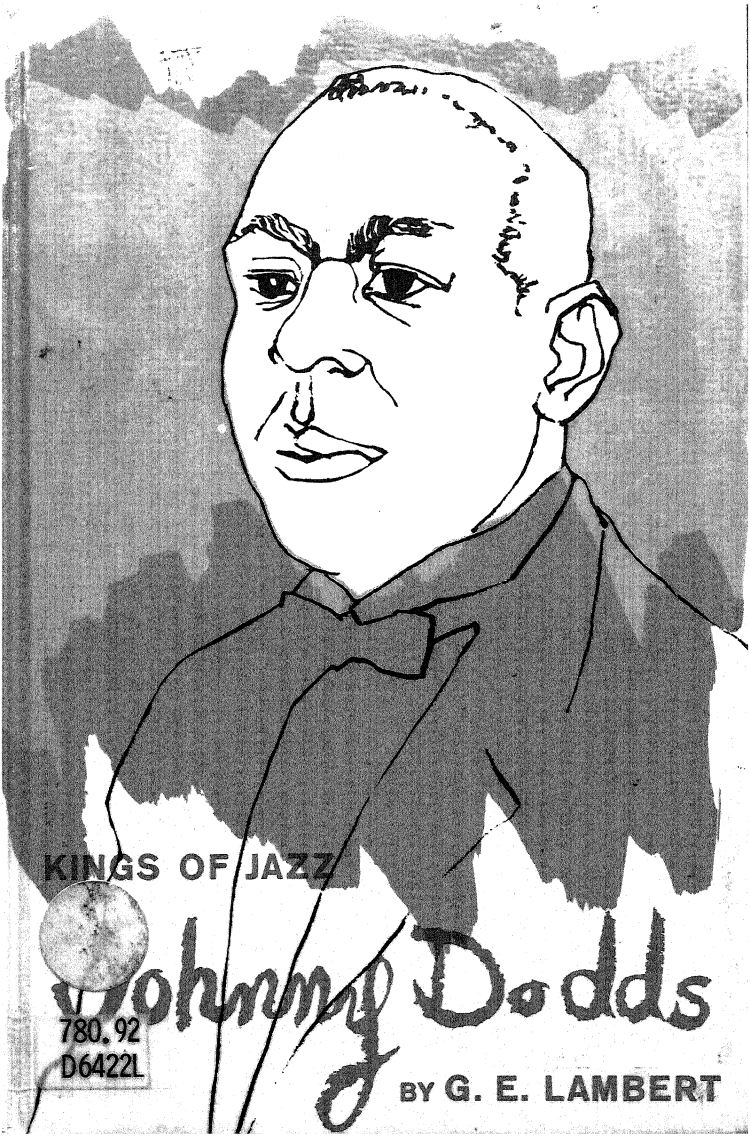


KINGS OF JAZZ

Johnny Dodds

BY G. E. LAMBERT

A Perpetua Book 

A. S. BARNES AND COMPANY, INC.
NEW YORK

PERPETUA EDITION 1961

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

I

HIS LIFE

In the years when New Orleans was the premier centre of jazz—that is from around 1900 to the closing of the Storyville red light district in 1918—it was a city flooded with music. Every possible occasion—picnics, advertising, trips on the Mississippi—was provided with music; every place of diversion—the bars, theatres, brothels and gambling joints—had its musicians. Parades by the various organizations had their brass bands, which also played for the unique New Orleans funerals, and dance orchestras of all types were to be heard within the city limits. In the Creole and Negro districts there was scarcely a family who did not boast of several part-time musicians, and there were hundreds of skilled local professionals playing in the various parade bands, jazz bands, society bands and riverboat orchestras. To judge from the material collected by later historians, the doings of the favourite musicians of the city were looked upon with the same interest which

the mass of people today accord to sporting heroes and popular cinema or television personalities. There were trumpet players known for their vivacious playing and stamina on the long parades, and others who specialized in the dirges played on the way to and at the graveside; one trumpet player will be remembered for his volume and exuberance in the lower-class dance-halls, another for his unique ability and power of expression on the blues. A musician who was supreme in his field was known as a 'King' to his contemporaries; a fast, likeable young musician with what would today be called 'stage presence' would be nicknamed 'Kid'. But unlike the parallels which can be drawn with contemporary heroes of entertainment or of professional sport, these men were not remote figures to be seen only when performing, but neighbours with whom one would associate in everyday life. Music was an integral part of the lives of the city's inhabitants, and in the days before the standardizing influence of radio, gramophone and TV, the sounds of New Orleans music were peculiar to that city. Not many recordings of importance were made in New Orleans during the first boom in jazz recording in the 1920s, but the New Orleans musicians who moved north, particularly those who emigrated to Chicago, recorded prolifically.

On records, it is usually possible to recognize a New Orleans band, and almost always to pick out a New Orleans musician of the old school. Although there is an amazing

richness of individual style among these men, they are always superb ensemble musicians. Making music together was a part of the New Orleans heritage when they were young, and the principal band styles of the city offered ample scope to the ensemble musician, without ever demanding that he gave up his musical identity. All the older New Orleans musicians remember the great days of jazz in the city, but they remember it in a rather amazed sort of way. When Henry Allen, the great New Orleans trumpet player, visited this country in 1959, I asked him about the old days. 'Well, we didn't *think* a great deal about it then, we were too busy just playing. But when I look back to my early days in New Orleans, well it just seems wonderful. It seems fantastic to have been a part of something like that, you know, but it didn't seem anything special to us kids at the time.'

Johnny Dodds was born on 12 April 1892, and his childhood environment was a musical one; his father and uncle were violinists, his sister played melodian, and in adolescence Johnny sang high tenor in the family vocal quartet. His instrumental skill was developed (as was the case with several other famous New Orleans musicians) on a toy flute. According to one story, the flute originally belonged to his brother Warren 'Baby' Dodds, four years Johnny's junior, who was shamed into parting with it when he realized his elder brother's natural flair for the instrument. When Johnny was in his late teens, his father

bought him a clarinet, and the skill he had acquired on the toy flute was put to further use. He took occasional lessons from Lorenzo Tio, Senior, a member of a famous musical Creole family, who were noted for their skill in clarinet playing. Another musician who is said to have given instruction in clarinet playing to the young Dodds, is Charlie McCurdy or McCurtis, whose clarinet playing seems better remembered than the exact spelling of his surname. Indeed, regarding Dodds's own surname, we are informed by no less an authority than Samuel B. Charters, a historian who has made an extensive study of jazz in New Orleans, that before moving north in 1918, Dodds himself was known as Johnny Dot! Whether it is meant that this was the actual surname of Johnny's family, a corruption accepted through usage, or simply a nickname, it seems impossible to say.

As his clarinet playing approached mastery, the young Dodds started to accept semi-professional engagements, one of the first of these being with Frankie Dusen's Eagle Band. This was the group which was taken over by Dusen when the famed Buddy Bolden was committed to the asylum in 1907, and it is significant that Dodds's first musical engagement was one with a rough 'uptown' Negro blues-playing group. 'Downtown' the Creole orchestras with their more polite and much more academic approach to music-making held forth. Dodds himself was a Negro, of course, but by this time a good degree of mixing

was standard in the New Orleans bands. For example, when Johnny took his first full time professional engagement, it was with Kid Ory's band; Ory is a Creole from La Place, a small town near New Orleans, who first brought his band into the city in 1913. Ory's natural showmanship soon made the band a success and gradually his hometown musicians were replaced by New Orleans men, many of them destined to become world famous names in jazz. King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Mutt Carey, Wade Waley, Lawrence Duhé, Big Eye Louis Nelson, Kid Rena, Ed Garland and Pops Foster all played at different times with the Ory band during this period, although some old-timers state that Oliver was the leader of the group during the height of his local fame. What appears to have happened was that while Ory retained the actual leadership he gave maximum publicity to the famous cornetist, who is said to have been nicknamed 'King' during his stay with the Ory band. According to a popular New Orleans story, it was the bassist Pops Foster who got Dodds his engagement with the Ory band, after hearing him practising clarinet as he passed the Dodds's house. This sounds rather fantastic, although Johnny's playing must have been really outstanding for him to have been offered a place in the famous Ory band as his first professional engagement. The circumstances in which Dodds left New Orleans are given differently in the various histories of this period. Certainly he travelled to Chicago

with a Mac and Mac Minstrel Show around 1917 in the company of the trumpet player Mutt Carey, but there is some doubt as to whether he remained in Chicago or returned for a further period to New Orleans. A photograph used in several books concerned with New Orleans jazz, shows Dodds as a member of the Fate Marable band aboard the S.S. *Sidney Streckfus* along with his brother 'Baby', Louis Armstrong, Johnny St. Cyr and Pops Foster. The date usually given to this photo is 1918, which would seem to indicate that Dodds did return to the Crescent City after his first visit to Chicago. Certainly, Mutt Carey returned and told the locals that the Chicago weather was intolerably cold. Dodds apparently did not think so, for within a few months he returned to the north, spending most of his life in Chicago and never returning to New Orleans.

In 1920 Johnny replaced Jimmy Noone with the King Oliver band in Chicago and travelled to the West Coast with the group the following year. On their return to Chicago for a long engagment at the Lincoln Gardens, Oliver brought with him the nucleus of the famous band which was to have such a profound influence on jazz musicians and which made the first really important jazz recordings. By this time Johnny's younger brother had joined Oliver on drums and thereby hangs another of those curious tales which abound in the mythology which has grown out of the New Orleans jazzmen's reminiscences of their

early days. This oft-told story is that when Baby Dodds was learning drums he used to sit in from time to time with the Ory band in New Orleans, whereupon the band filed off the stage one by one, invariably headed by brother Johnny, who had the lowest possible opinion of Baby's ability. Johnny is also reputed to have advised Oliver strongly against hiring his brother, while Kay Thompson (*Jazz Journal*, March 1951) quotes Baby as saying that Johnny walked off the bandstand in disgust when he joined the Oliver band, only to return and congratulate him on the improvement in his drumming. Yet against this we have the evidence of the photograph of the S.S. *Sidney Streckfus* band, containing both the Dodds brothers before either left New Orleans. Whatever the true facts are on this matter, they are probably lost for ever now that both the Dodds brothers are dead.

The King Oliver Creole Jazz Band must have been a fine band before Oliver sent to New Orleans for Louis Armstrong to join him as second cornetist, but with the arrival of Armstrong the group acquired a new and distinctive ensemble sound which placed it (in the opinions of those who heard the band in the flesh, and of later-day record collectors) among the very greatest in the entire history of jazz. The band's first recordings were made in 1923 for the Gennett Company, which had a reputation for poor recording even in those low-fi days. The Oliver recording sessions are also the subject of many stories

of dubious authenticity. According to some authorities, the powerful sound of the Oliver brass (Joe himself and Louis Armstrong on cornets and Honoré Dutrey on trombone) knocked the needle clean off the cutter of the primitive recording machine, and they were all relegated forthwith to the back of the studio. It was impossible to record Bill Johnson's bass for this same reason and he is believed to have played banjo on some of the sessions. On the other hand Baby Dodds (on page 70 of *The Baby Dodds Story*) claims that Johnny, Louis and Honoré Dutrey were at the back of the studio with everybody else including Oliver close to the horn. As the recorded sound is very even in respect of the balance between the two cornets, this would make Oliver a very weak player indeed, especially as the two-cornet line is often lost behind the clarinet *obligato*! We must remember that Louis and Joe were the rage of Chicago at this time with their two-cornet duets and breaks, which would hardly have been the case if Oliver had been so weak a player that his cornet, placed right up to the acoustic recording horn, could have been drowned out by a clarinettist operating from the back of the studio! In addition to the sessions for Gennett, the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band also recorded for Paramount and Okeh, the latter company providing them with the best recording quality to be found on any of their sides. On the stand at the Lincoln Gardens they were heard and admired by all the jazz musicians active in Chicago, which

at that time was the centre of the jazz world. Pretty well everyone who heard the band speaks of it in words of the highest praise and claims that the recordings give a totally inadequate picture of the band's capabilities.

In 1924 several of the musicians left the Creole band—one of the reasons given is that some of the bandsmen suspected that Oliver was pocketing a larger share of the record royalties than he would admit—and Johnny Dodds was asked to take a band into Kelly's Stables, a cabaret on Chicago's South Side. Johnny took with him three other members of the Oliver band, Honoré Dutrey, Bill Johnson and Baby Dodds—adding Freddie Keppard on trumpet and Charlie Alexander on piano. Dutrey left as the management wanted a five-piece group and Baby Dodds soon followed after a disagreement with Burt Kelly, the owner, Baby claiming that this was because Kelly did not like his drumming. Zutty Singleton appears to have played with the band for a while around this time. Kelly's Stables was another of the favourite haunts of the Chicago jazz musicians, both white and coloured, and Baby Dodds recalls that many of the younger white musicians used to frequent the place and sit in with the band. It is said that Frank Teschmaker, whose playing is not notably Negroid on the few recordings he made, used to play in a style very similar to Johnny's when he sat in with the band.

Freddie Keppard was, according to many musicians, the finest cornet during the great years of New Orleans jazz,

but by the time he came to record, his playing was on the decline. Kid Ory—who maintains that Keppard was foremost among jazz cornetists in New Orleans—says that he could not believe his ears when he heard Keppard in Chicago in the mid-'twenties, so different and inferior was the cornetist's style. Freddie was afraid that other musicians would steal his phrasing and, according to Ory, he used to play with a handkerchief over the valves so that his fingering could not be seen by other musicians. He was also a heavy drinker and it seems probable that his heavy consumption of whisky accounted for the decline in his playing; it should be noted that Keppard never had the reputation in the north that he had in his earlier New Orleans period. It was his drinking which caused him to be fired from his job with the Johnny Dodds group at Kelly's Stables, where he was replaced by Natty Dominique. During these years at Kelly's, Johnny Dodds made the famous recordings with Louis Armstrong and with Jelly Roll Morton, in addition to a number of lesser known titles with bands of his own, and with that strange group of musicians headed by the pianist Jimmy Blythe.

Johnny was a regular member of what could be called 'the washboard circuit', a group of men who appeared with small bands on countless Chicago recordings for the 'race' labels of the 1920s—a group including Dodds, Blythe, Keppard, Dominique, Roy Palmer, Stomp Evans, the Chicago clarinettist Jimmy O'Bryant, and the percus-

sionist Jimmy Bertrand. The standard percussion instrument on these sessions, which were made as a rule by a four- or five-piece band, was usually the washboard, and the man responsible usually Jimmy Bertrand. Bertrand was very friendly with Jimmy Blythe, who organized most of the sessions. Baby Dodds occasionally played washboard, for example on the 1927 recordings by the Blythe 'Dixieland Thumpers' (Dominique, Blythe and the Dodds Brothers), and also on a couple of washboard sessions under Johnny's name. In April 1927 a session was recorded by Johnny Dodds and his Black Bottom Stompers, a group which included Louis Armstrong and Baby Dodds. This was the first of a series of band sessions under Johnny's name for Brunswick and Victor, which was continued for two years, during which time he also continued to record with Armstrong for Okeh, and with the various Blythe/Bertrand groups for the minor labels. A couple of months before the first of these band sessions, Dodds recorded two clarinet solos for Paramount which were therefore the first recordings to appear under his name.

Like almost all New Orleans reed players of note, Johnny Dodds was primarily a clarinettist, but during his stay at Kelly's Stables he had a brief flirtation with a saxophone. According to Baby Dodds the rest of the band did their utmost to dissuade Johnny from using this instrument, even going so far as to tell him repeatedly that he was playing badly, although they knew that he was in fact

quite good on the instrument. Neither Baby nor Natty Dominique wanted a saxophone in the band and were prepared to go to any lengths to keep Johnny on clarinet. He did, as a matter of fact, record a couple of titles with the Louis Armstrong Hot Five on alto saxophone, *Come Back Sweet Papa* and *Don't Forget to Mess Around*, and a session with a Bertrand group, using the rarely heard sopranino sax, an instrument pitched above the soprano which has the highest range of any instrument in general use in the saxophone family. None of these recordings is of outstanding merit, although they certainly have a curiosity value.

After a couple of years Baby Dodds was back in the band at Kelly's Stables and stayed with the group until the closing of Kelly's in 1930. This year can be said to be the last in which Johnny Dodds had any reasonable degree of fame, or even of security, as a musician. By this time Chicago had ceased to be the jazz centre it had been in the middle 'twenties, and many of the famous jazz musicians had left the city. In the preceding year the New Orleans trumpet player Herb Morand had come to Chicago, and his first engagement was a recording session with the Dodds brothers and pianist Frank Melrose, the quartet calling themselves the Beale Street Washboard Band; it was, however, Johnny's last session for nine years, and his absence from the recording studios was symbolic of his lapse into obscurity. Moreover, the Depression was at

hand, and the Negro audience for which the Dodds boys had played in Chicago were among the hardest hit by the slump and had little money to spend on music. However, Johnny Dodds was a conscientious leader and managed to keep his group playing during most of the Depression, although the money was often poor, and at one point Johnny and Baby were on the point of joining their elder brother Bill in his taxi business. Johnny kept the band occupied, and throughout the 'thirties they worked in various obscure night spots in Chicago. For a time the brothers had a trio with pianist Arthur Campbell, but generally the personnel, which altered surprisingly little, was built around a nucleus of Johnny, Baby and trumpeter Natty Dominique; sometimes Baby took other jobs, causing Johnny to call on a substitute drummer. During the early 'thirties, Ralph Tervalon and Stirling Todd were on piano, but in 1934 the latter was replaced by Little Brother Montgomery, who seems to have played fairly regularly in the band up to the time of Johnny's death in 1940. For a while Herb Waters played with the band on tenor sax, and Baby Dodds considers that he fitted in quite well, but on the whole the group remained a four-piece combo, with the occasional addition of a string bassist. For a good deal of the time they were playing for a white clientele and there was little demand for blues, which was unquestionably the music which Johnny loved and played the best. Popular tunes were learnt from stock

arrangements and then given the band's distinctive treatment; sometimes students would call for numbers like *Anchors Aweigh*, while at one engagement at the K-Nine Club the group was called upon to play selections from *Faust* and an arrangement of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody*! Baby recalls that Johnny was a very strict leader and insisted that the band should master the various types of music required by the clientele. For all that, the sound of the Dodds boys, Dominique and Little Brother rendering a selection from *Faust* must have been a pretty fantastic one!

When the swing era got under way in the late 'thirties, there was a slow awakening of interest in the earlier forms of jazz, but the full flood of this revival in New Orleans jazz came too late for Johnny Dodds, although his brother Baby was to play on many of the better New Orleans style recordings of the 1940s. In the later years of the preceding decade the change of wind must have become noticeable to the members of Johnny's little band. They were invited to jam sessions frequently, being honoured guests at the famous series run by the white New Orleans trumpet player, Paul Mares. At a benefit concert in 1937 for the pianist Joe Sullivan, who was seriously ill, the Johnny Dodds band appeared in what must have been one of the very first jazz concerts in Chicago. In 1938, at the instigation of Lil Armstrong, the Decca Company invited Johnny to New York for a recording session. This was Johnny's

only visit to New York, but it could hardly be termed a successful one. With an insensitivity typical of the recording companies of those days, Decca used a number of musicians who played in a manner totally alien to Dodds's New Orleans blues style, and although he contributes some good solos to the six titles recorded, his so-called 'Chicago Boys' do not even attempt to bridge the gap between their own concept of music-making and that of Dodds.

In 1939 Johnny played his last full engagment as a bandleader when he led a six-piece group at the Hotel Hayes, Chicago, with a band consisting of Lil Armstrong, Lonnie Johnson, and Sudie Raymond, in addition to the Dodds brothers and Natty Dominique. During this time Johnny had his first stroke, and when the engagement came to an end he opened with a quartet at the 9570 Club, again using Baby, Natty and Little Brother Montgomery. Baby Dodds claims that he held the contract for this job, and that at the request of the management had Johnny, who was still feeling the effects of his stroke, along to play week-ends. According to Walter C. Allen (see the list of Natty Dominique's engagements in *Hot Notes*, October 1947), the quartet opened at the 9570 in January 1940, but by February Johnny was too ill to play other than on Saturday nights. 'On the other nights Baby Dodds took over the leadership,' says Allen. In July of that year the Decca Company organized a couple of recording

sessions at the Opera House in Chicago as part of the *New Orleans Jazz Album* they were making up as a response to the renewed interest in earlier jazz. Two sides each were cut by groups (virtually the same band in actual fact) under the direction of Jimmy Noone and Johnny Dodds. Johnny was concerned as he had just had all his teeth out, but despite imperfections in the music of the group as a whole, he played very well on what was to be the last of his many notable recording sessions. At this time, according to Baby, 'Johnny was pretty weak and he didn't walk too well. He wasn't crippled by his first stroke but he didn't walk too well.' On 8 August, Johnny had a second stroke at 10.30 in the morning; he never recovered consciousness and died shortly before noon.

The biography of Johnny Dodds is a tragic one, rising through his quick success in New Orleans, on to the triumphant years in Chicago with the Oliver band, and the many fine recordings he made while leading his own group at Kelly's Stables, only to fade suddenly into the twilight obscurity of the last ten years of his life. He was admired by all the musicians who heard him in the early days—even Benny Goodman, a musician far removed in style and temperament, has said that he never heard anyone get a finer tone out of the clarinet than Johnny Dodds—while the majority of his 1920 recordings are numbered among the ageless classics of jazz. But in the following decade he was forgotten, only to die just as the interest

in New Orleans jazz, of which he was one of the greatest masters, was reviving. Most of the New Orleans musicians who lived through the thin years of the 1930s saw at least some degree of recognition in the following decade. Johnny Dodds died just too soon for such recognition, and for the many fine recordings he would unquestionably have given us.

2

HIS RECORDINGS

Several bands contributed to the classic series of New Orleans style recordings which were made in Chicago during the 1920s, but the only one which was a regular unit outside the recording studios was the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band, which was playing its famous engagement at the Lincoln Gardens at the time of the recordings. These King Oliver discs were the first instrumental jazz recordings of real importance, and they remain among the very greatest of all jazz records. In 1923, when the Gennett, Okeh and Paramount companies recorded the band, Oliver's regular personnel was: King Oliver, Louis Armstrong (cornets), Honoré Dutrey (trombone), Johnny Dodds (clarinet), Lil Hardin (piano), Bill Johnson (bass) and Baby Dodds (drums). Later in the year Bud Scott (banjo) and Charlie Johnson (bass saxophone) were added. Owing to the primitive recording techniques the string bass was never used on records, Bill Johnson playing

banjo on the earlier sessions; on some of the Okeh sides Johnny St. Cyr was used on banjo in place of Scott, although he did not play with the band outside the recording studios.

One of the main virtues of the Oliver records is the beautiful ensemble playing of the band. Their superiority to later bands, even such groups as Morton's Red Hot Peppers and the New Orleans Wanderers/Bootblacks unit, lies partly in the fact that they played together regularly; this band relied less on soloists than any of the others, and Oliver realized the potential of the New Orleans ensemble style more than any other leader. The New Orleans musicians were *natural* ensemble players, their whole environment having been that of collective music-making, in contrast to the emphasis on soloistic jazz in later decades. Even in such fine ensemble music as that of the Modern Jazz Quartet there is a certain feeling that the musicians are bending over to meet the other men half-way, a studied and self-conscious submission to the conception of the leader. In New Orleans jazz the musicians can be playing in a fully individual style, yet the ensemble will remain perfect. There was no apparent contradiction for the early New Orleans player between individuality and the needs of the group. The attitude of the musicians toward their fellow-bandsmen, and toward music in general, was such that a full blooded, expressive performance could be given by each man in the band without in any way impairing the

balance of the ensemble or the shape of the overall conception. The mechanics of the New Orleans style had been developed under the influence of the magnificent spirit of the pioneer jazzmen and never fettered the creative fire of the individual musicians. In the past fifteen years we have had untold demonstrations of the fact that it was not merely the *mechanics* of the style which was responsible for this remarkable manner of music-making. It was, above all, the attitude of humanity and warmth held by the pioneer musicians which made New Orleans jazz the great music it was, and in many ways the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band epitomizes the music perfectly.

King Oliver was a strong leader who knew what sort of a band he wanted, was prepared to get the best men available to play in it, and then to see to it that they followed his conception of music-making. As a result the Oliver band was one of the most disciplined groups in jazz history. This may seem to contradict what was said in the last paragraph, but in fact this is not so. Initially Oliver selected men whom he knew would instinctively fall in with his ideas on music, and who would relish the discipline required to give a firm and secure basis to their own individual playing. This willingness to submit to Oliver's discipline is borne out by the fact that all the band's musicians who have discussed the matter recall their days with the Creole Jazz Band as among the happiest in their lives. Oliver had a bunch of young, temperamental

jazzmen working with him, yet he held a firm grip on the band and gave each one of them an experience which is reflected in their playing in subsequent years and in the high esteem in which they hold their memories of the Oliver band.

The two-cornet lead, allied with Oliver's imagination as a band leader, gave the Creole band a variety of textures to work with, while in Armstrong and Johnny Dodds he had soloists of a stature equal to his own. Joe Oliver's musical outlook was never a merely decorative one. On some numbers—*Just Gone* is a good example of this—one steady texture is held throughout the performance; and the magnificent variety within this basic palette, along with the superb rhythmic buoyancy of the playing, is allowed to carry the performance to its balanced conclusion. On other numbers the contrast between Oliver's lead and that of Armstrong is stressed; some passages have the cornets playing in thirds, others feature Oliver's muted horn leading a four-part polyphony, while occasionally the ebullient Louis Armstrong is given the lead. Then there are those unique passages—for example the central ensemble choruses on the Okeh version of *Riverside Blues*—when both cornets play independent melodic lines within the ensemble polyphony.

To play a clarinet part in such a band called for a musician of remarkable ability, one who could adapt himself to the different textures with understanding and who could

perform well on the various types of number used by Oliver's band—the stomps, rags, New Orleans marches, popular songs and blues. Johnny Dodds was a musician who not only fulfilled the role required of him, but did so with such a wealth of understanding, of strong and independent counter-melody, that his performances alone would be sufficient to raise the music to the stature of great jazz.

On the stomps and rags, Dodds's part is a tremendous stimulus to the other musicians, his counterpoint continually apt, the clarinet moving with ease round the lead in a continual line of singing melody. The rhythmic drive of the group is tremendously enhanced by Dodds's biting, stomping up-tempo manner, while the natural blues inflections of his playing keeps the music away from the shallow, novelty sound of a clarinettist like Larry Shields, Dodds's counterpart in the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

Oliver's treatment of popular songs can be heard on such a recording as *Mandy Lee Blues*, in which the musicians break down the original melodic pattern into blues phrases; this practice is very common among jazz musicians, a classic example being Count Basie's opening piano solo on his 1937 recording of *Honeysuckle Rose*. Of course the Oliver band's achievement in adopting such songs for New Orleans band performance was thoroughly successful and Oliver's placing of breaks for different musicians on such numbers is comparable with Jelly Roll Morton's mastery

of this device. On *Mandy Lee Blues*, Johnny Dodds plays the verse as written, yet simply by intonation transforms the melody from a trivial tune into quite a masterpiece of introspective music, his clarinet tone dark and brooding. By contrast Dodds's two breaks on this number demonstrate a mastery of a different kind, as the clarinet sings out momentarily in solo.

On a composition by Armstrong and Hardin, *Where Did You Stay Last Night?*, Oliver features a series of breaks, first by Dodds and then by the two cornets, which are unusual in that each uses the same break on every appearance. This has a unique effect, and the breaks played by Dodds are notable for the superb rhythmic timing and the crystal-like tone. The ensemble clarinet on this side is worthy of study, for here Dodds uses all registers of the instrument, enhancing each stage of the performance with perfectly fitting counterpoint.

The rags which were recorded by the Oliver band all have superb ensemble clarinet by Dodds, which give the lie to the assertion that he was simply a blues specialist. *Just Gone* and *Weatherbird Rag* both contain clarinet playing of a mobility and fluidity of execution which would be less remarkable in a musician of the Creole school, who were pre-eminent at this type of playing. On the latter title Dodds takes two breaks, the second of which is a perfect take-off of the rooty, white clarinet style which was prevalent at this time. This is an obvious piece of humour

by Johnny, for throughout the remainder of the performance he plays in his usual highly musical manner. On *Snake Rag* and *Froggie Moore* the clarinet playing is of a forceful order rhythmically, as Dodds pierces the brass texture with his magnificent attack and his constantly creative counterpoint.

Another remarkable performance is that of Richard M. Jones's *Southern Stomps*, where the clarinet plays a highly 'orchestral' part against the rest of the group. Here Dodds abandons his usual mobile manner in favour of constant treble comments on the determined, rolling phrasing of the brass. This is a very unusual and rather under-rated performance by the band, which shows fully the effect of Oliver's strict discipline. Here, the fervent blues-playing of Dodds is welded perfectly into the unusual texture of the performance. The clarinet breaks are played with a superb tone and blues phrasing of the most moving kind.

By contrast, the Paramount *Mabel's Dream* (recorded at the same session as *Southern Stomps*) shows Dodds taking a less prominent role within the band. In all New Orleans performances the clarinet part is of considerable importance, and on *Mabel's Dream* Dodds's ensemble work is of his usual impeccable standard, constantly adding to the music, but never clashing with the playing of the rest of the band; the clarinet breaks, too, are taken in magnificent style, though they are of a 'functional' type after the manner of the breaks of *Where Did You Stay Last Night?*

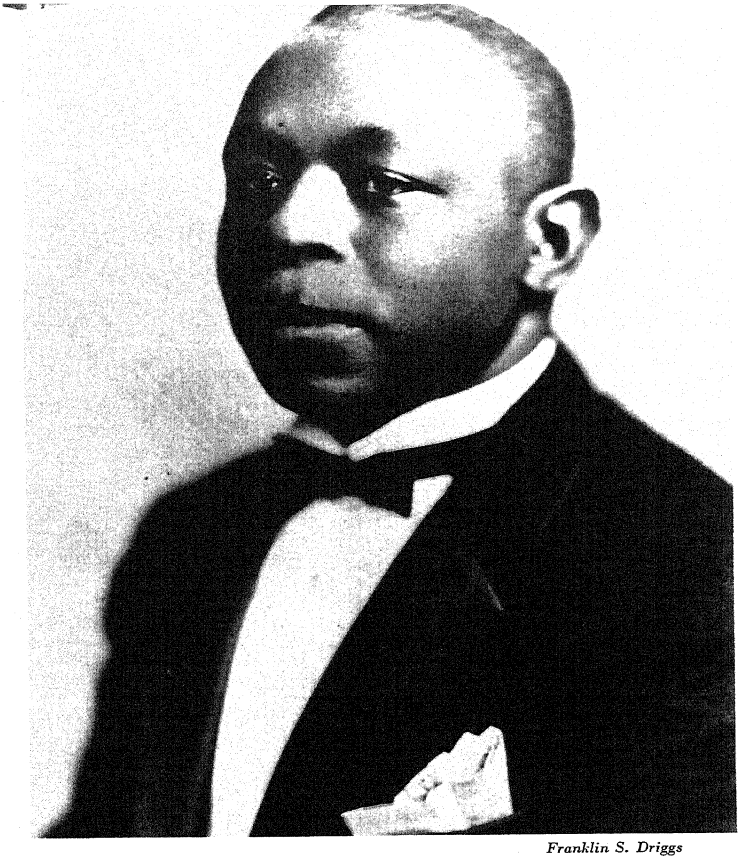
The primary role on *Mabel's Dream* is played by Oliver himself, and though he may have been past his prime when these recordings were made (and most of his contemporaries assure us that this was the case), such performances as this, on which he plays a fine open solo and then leads out the final ensemble in his plaintive muted style, are sufficient to indicate that here we were dealing with a jazz cornet player of the highest quality. On *Mabel's Dream* the clarinet is not 'featured' at all, yet it is significant to note how much Dodds contributes to the music. The performance is at once a tribute to Dodds's superb musicianship and a reminder of how much scope for the creative musician there was in the genuine New Orleans ensemble style. How infinitely more rich is this music than the skimpy ensembles of the 'dixielanders' and the 'revivalists'!

Mention must be made too of the Oliver recording of *High Society*, or *High Society Rag* as he called it. This was the only occasion on which Johnny Dodds recorded this famous New Orleans march, with its traditional virtuoso clarinet solo. Dodds gives a satisfactory account, but it must be granted that he was not at his best on this type of performance and that his solo has been surpassed on recordings of *High Society* featuring clarinettists of lesser stature. It is not so much, as some writers have imagined, that Dodds was solely a blues musician, but rather that displays of so showman-like a nature were foreign to his personality. On the rags previously mentioned, Dodds gives

the lie to the assertion that he was a mediocre musician when not playing blues, but it must be said that on such material he was invariably at his best, a blues clarinettist whose recordings have never been surpassed. Needless to say the Oliver blues performances feature Dodds at his very finest.

It would be impossible to pick out the best of Dodds's blues recordings with the Oliver band, for within this infinitely variable idiom each is a unique creation, each an incomparable masterpiece. Perhaps the Okeh recording of *Working Man Blues* is a good introduction, for here, in one of the Oliver band's finest performances, Dodds is at his greatest. The two themes are both excellent, and are played with great feeling and power by the band. Dodds's role here is a constantly changing one. At times he plays in the lower register, filling out the sound of the band and adding a surging rhythmic momentum; in other choruses his soaring descant is of such melodic strength that the clarinet part vies with the cornet lead in melodic interest. In his breaks on *Working Man Blues*, Dodds creates a series of melodic gems each perfectly dovetailed into the performance, each delivered with perfect timing and a glowing tone.

At the Gennett sessions which inaugurated the Oliver discography, three blues were recorded, all taken at a medium tempo. Of these *Chimes Blues* is the least interesting, though Dodds can be heard to fine effect during the



Franklin S. Driggs

Johnny Dodds about 1925

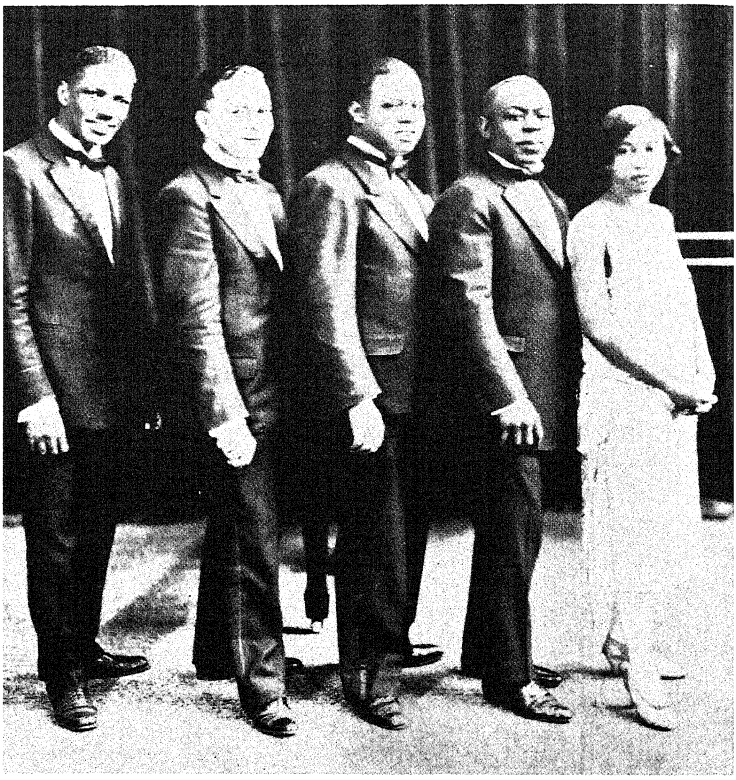


Photo from Johnny St. Cyr

Louis Armstrong's Hot Five, about 1926. *Left to right*—Johnny St. Cyr, Kid Ory, Louis Armstrong, Johnny Dodds and Lil Armstrong

opening choruses, but the band's approach to the second theme offers little scope for creative playing by the clarinettist. *Dippermouth Blues* is a classic recording, and Dodds contributes fully to its success. The ensemble clarinet is constantly on hand with a superb second melody line to the cornets, while below Oliver's classic solo Dodds and Dutrey provide a sensitive foundation. It is worth listening closely to the accompaniment to this solo in order to realize how much musical depth there is in New Orleans jazz of the best quality. Dodds's own solo, which equals the Oliver in its constant melodic creation, is a superb two-chorus blues improvisation. On the Okeh recording of *Dippermouth Blues* Dodds plays virtually the same solo in each of his two choruses. This is generally a rather inferior performance to the Gennett (though still a very great one) and is taken at a faster tempo, thus sacrificing some of the superb relaxation and assurance of the earlier recording in favour of a stronger attack. An equally great performance is that of *Canal Street Blues*, a typical Oliver blues composition with its contrasting themes and stomping last chorus. Johnny Dodds plays a two-chorus solo here which must be considered among his finest achievements, melodically simple but perfect in construction and in delivery. It is worth observing the difference here in the approach to the solo by Oliver's musicians on the Creole Jazz Band recordings and in their later discs made after they had left Oliver. This is noticeable even in so ensemble-conscious a musician as

Johnny Dodds. On the New Orleans Wanderers/Bootblacks recordings for example, which certainly contain no virtuoso elements, the solos stand apart from the ensemble in quite a marked manner. But in the Oliver band a solo seems always a firmly rooted part of the total performance, in a way which is only equalled in the very best recordings of the Morton and Ellington bands, and a limited number of 'pure' New Orleans groups. Some jazz critics have used this phenomenon as a stick with which to beat later virtuoso jazz, claiming that the latter was a decadent development. Without in any way wishing to depreciate the superb music of such soloists as Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins or Charlie Parker, it does seem a remarkable tribute to the New Orleans idiom—and to Oliver's approach to it—that in the Creole Jazz Band recordings a musician such as Johnny Dodds, who, with all his fine qualities, had not the melodic inventiveness of these men, could produce solos equal in value to theirs.

Mention must also be made of the Oliver Okeh of *Sobbin' Blues*, which has fine Dodds in solo and ensemble, and a most delicate clarinet accompaniment to the peculiar swannee-whistle solo. This side illustrates as well as any, Dodds's contribution to the Oliver band, the constantly shifting emphasis of the clarinet part, the constantly imaginative and creative outlook of Johnny as an ensemble musician. I do not think that any New Orleans band has been filled with musicians equally creative on

every instrument. Indeed, the nature of the parts for banjo and bass, and to a large extent for piano and trombone, in the New Orleans ensemble structure, hardly allow for highly creative playing on every instrument. On piano and drums, for example, only Jelly Roll Morton and Baby Dodds have really exploited the possibilities of their instruments in New Orleans jazz. On the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band recordings the poor recording standards of 1923 prevent us from hearing the drums perfectly, while of the other instruments the piano playing is merely adequate, and the trombone work extremely variable. The banjo usually makes up for the rhythmic weakness of the piano playing, but most of the really creative playing comes from the two cornets and from Dodds's clarinet. In saying this we must remember that the performances are collective creations, and without Dutrey's adequacy the rest of the front line would have been quite unable to sustain their superb standard. On a recording on which Dutrey is really poor, the Okeh *Tears*, he pretty well ruins the whole performance, and only Armstrong's prophetic excursion into cornet virtuosity remains memorable. King Oliver must be given full credit as a bandleader for the remarkable discipline under which he held his men, but tribute must also be paid to the invaluable contributions of Armstrong, and more particularly of Johnny Dodds. The clarinettist was, indeed, one of the corner stones of the greatness of the Oliver group, and the value of his personal contribution should

never be overlooked when we consider this most remarkable of all New Orleans bands.

A final word concerning the recordings of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band must be addressed to those who are new to the music. In 1923, recording standards were low-fi in the extreme, and on the earliest of Oliver's recordings the quality is poor even for that date. At times it is all but impossible to pick out the two-cornet lead on first hearing some of the Gennett titles. A degree of imaginative listening is required here which would scarcely be justified if the music were not of so rewarding a quality. Most listeners find the sound of the Oliver records unbearably weak and 'tinny' and it is very easy for an uncritical listener to ascribe these qualities to the music itself. After all, in these times when 'progress' in art and entertainment is given such a high premium, it is all too easy to brush off recordings of nearly forty years ago as being quite outclassed in every way by more recent forms of music-making and of mechanical reproduction. In the case of minor jazz recordings of this period an argument can be sustained that they are of interest only to historians of jazz or specialists in the styles or musicians concerned. This is not so with the recordings of the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band, for they are a part, and a major part, of the jazz heritage, and those who will not take the trouble to pierce through the period recording to the music itself are missing jazz of a quality second to none. As the original masters of the Oliver re-

cordings were destroyed long ago, present day re-issues have to be re-recorded from old pressings, some of them in none too healthy a state. As a result, not only is the music faint and rather flat in tonal quality, but it is also heard through a variable sieve of surface noise, even on the most carefully engineered microgroove re-issues. Among the devotees of the Oliver band there is a school of thought which considers that the only satisfactory way of listening to the music is to own the original issues, which have a tonal richness superior to any dubbed copies. This would be all very well if there were unlimited supplies of Oliver Gennetts, Okehs and Paramounts, but these are so rare that only those able and willing to spend very large sums of money on an Oliver collection are able to enjoy this pleasure. For the rest of us the re-issues will have to suffice. The best advice I can offer to a newcomer to these recordings is always to bear in mind that the weak twitterings heard on some of the Gennett sides were actually two very powerful cornet players, and always to remember the true tonal qualities of the instruments rather than the distorted versions heard on the discs. It also helps to play long sessions of such records, for it is surprising how the ear adjusts to the old recordings when not constantly reminded of more recent standards of quality. The Okeh sides are better recorded than the Gennetts, with the Paramounts somewhere in between, but as much of the band's finest music is to be heard on the Gennetts (e.g. *Canal Street*

Blues and the finer of the two *Dippermouth Blues*) these also are essential listening. Most certainly the Olivers repay a hundredfold any attempt to overcome the technical disadvantages under which they were recorded.

Some two years after his final session with the Oliver band (a rather mediocre date for the Gennett label) Johnny Dodds recorded three titles with a group comprising four of the Oliver musicians—Louis and Lil Armstrong, Johnny St. Cyr and Dodds himself—plus the New Orleans trombonist, Kid Ory. The group was under the leadership of Louis Armstrong, and this proved to be simply the first of the famous series of recording sessions by Armstrong's Hot Five. The performances resulting from these sessions constitute a large slice of the Johnny Dodds discography, and they are, along with the Olivers, the most important recordings in which Dodds participated. In the standard of the music many of the Hot Fives equal the earlier Oliver discs, but the qualities they display are not those of the Oliver band, nor on the majority of the sides is Johnny Dodds heard at his best. The emphasis has moved from the ensemble basis of the Oliver discs, to a state where the ensemble is often less important than the solos. The value of these performances lies chiefly in the cornet playing of Louis Armstrong, who dominates every chorus in which he plays with his extraordinary virtuosity and unique creative genius. Even an ensemble which is mediocre by comparison with the Olivers—or with Morton's contem-

porary Victor recordings—is lifted into the realm of magnificent music by the sheer quality of the cornet lead. Armstrong's playing on these sides was revolutionary for the whole of jazz, and it is hardly surprising that the musicians with whom he recorded did not always seem completely at their ease. The blending of a clarinet part into the texture of an ensemble music such as Oliver's, with a well rehearsed and disciplined band, was a totally different proposition to fitting such a part to a lead cornet style which was far more complex musically than had been the solos in earlier days.

If we listen to the earliest Hot Fives, we notice two changes in the clarinet role in comparison with the Oliver recordings: it has diminished in importance and has become less melodic in ensemble style. Mention must be made of the recording quality of the sides, which is often extremely poor so far as Dodds's work is concerned. It would be easy to claim that Dodds's tone had deteriorated since the Oliver period, for if we listen to the whole of the initial Okeh series by the Hot Five—that is, from *My Heart* of December 1925 to *Irish Black Bottom*, recorded in the following November—the obvious conclusion to be drawn is that Dodds had lost the purity of tone heard on the Olivers, and in general had become a rather untidy musician. The recording balance always finds the clarinet well in the background on these sides, which again enhances the view that Dodds had become a less potent force than of

old. However, on the titles made during this period away from the Okeh studios (for example on the two sides recorded for Vocalion under the name of Lil's Hot Shots) we find that, although there has been a change in Dodds's style, the quality of his music is unimpaired and, above all, his tone is as fine as ever. One can therefore put down the weak tonal sound of the clarinet on the early Hot Fives to the work of the Okeh recording engineer. This is all the more marked as the cornet and trombone are adequately recorded.

Yes, I'm in the Barrel from the first Hot Five session is a fairly average example of their early recordings, without reaching the heights of some better known sides, but also avoiding the pitfalls of the vaudeville routines on others. Dodds turns in a reasonable solo, though the tone sounds poor, but it is in his ensemble playing that the most noticeable change is to be heard. The legato style of the King Oliver days has given way to a less flowing, altogether more 'bitty' melodic line. To some degree the clarinet has become an *accompanying* instrument, ceasing to carry out a role equal in importance to the lead cornet. Although this was a trend in ensemble jazz throughout the Chicago era, Dodds himself was rarely reticent in his conception of the clarinet's role. The reason for the unobtrusive clarinet on the early Hot Fives seems to be that although he was formulating the more forceful manner of the later Hot Five and Seven recordings at this time, he had not yet

mastered this extension of his style. On *Gut Bucket Blues*, from the same session as *Yes, I'm in the Barrel*, Johnny sounds more assured, but even on the blues Armstrong's phrasing sometimes finds Dodds without a suitable antiphonal answer. Armstrong's playing is so magnificent that his work alone would make *Gut Bucket Blues* a classic of jazz, but the Chicago show business environment, reflected here in the preoccupation with novelty and with individual virtuosity, was obviously an unhealthy one.

On the next session Dodds played alto for the theme statement of *Come Back Sweet Papa*, and although the vibrato and phrasing are unmistakable, the experiment cannot be counted a success; the tone is as one would expect when played by a musician unused to the instrument, but it is doubtful if the alto saxophone would have suited Dodds's approach to music even had he persevered with it. Four days later the Hot Five recorded a session which produced several masterpieces, notably Armstrong's superb showpiece *Cornet Chop Suey* and the original version of Kid Ory's *Muskrat Ramble*. On the latter title, which has a stronger emphasis on the ensemble than many of these records, Dodds plays well both in solo and with the band, but again Armstrong easily dominates the music. To judge from these recordings Louis could carve any musician in sight at this time, and most of his New Orleans bandsmen seem to have regarded anything more than a purely mechanical approach to ensemble work largely as a forlorn

hope. On *Georgia Grind* from this session Dodds plays some fine blues clarinet, but again Armstrong stands out during the ensembles.

The next Hot Five session was the one for Vocalion under the name of Lil's Hot Shots, and the difference in the recording quality is at once noticeable; Armstrong's tone is brighter and more vivid, and Dodds is heard to much better effect. Were it not that the later Okehs slip back into the old mould, one would have dated Dodds's solution of the problems posed by Armstrong's lead trumpet from this session. The first of the two titles is *Georgia Bo-Bo*, a medium tempo performance of *Royal Garden Blues*, with a superb vocal by Armstrong. At the very outset it is obvious that Dodds's clarinet has been far more strongly recorded than on the Okehs and that he is determined the clarinet shall play a true second part rather than a mere accompaniment. After the vocal Dodds takes a solo chorus of such magnificently intense blues-playing that one wonders what had happened to the clarinet on the earlier Hot Fives. In the two-chorus ensemble which follows Dodds's solo, and concludes the record, he provides a lashing counterpoint to Armstrong's lead, and with the strong support of Ory and St. Cyr the passage is probably the finest example of group playing in all the Armstrong Hot Five and Seven recordings. Of course, Armstrong's lead is simpler than on some of the other records, while Johnny Dodds is at his most forceful; the balance between the trumpet and clarinet is

impressive here, and Armstrong's every phrase finds its perfect counterpart in Dodds's imaginative clarinet. One cannot mention *Georgia Bo-Bo* without calling attention to the superb banjo playing of Johnny St. Cyr, who plays with an inspiring swing. This is all the more commendable when we remember that the other half of the two-piece rhythm section was a virtual passenger. On the second title from this session, a stomp entitled *Drop That Sack*, a mood of considerable exuberance is given full reign, and the ensembles are less closely knit. Armstrong and Dodds again have good solos, which stand out in contrast to Ory's somewhat pedestrian effort and the insipid piano chorus. The less melodic style of ensemble clarinet used here by Dodds was the more influential of his different styles—more than his manner with the Oliver band, for example, or the intense blues style of the Washboard Band titles. One can sense a certain opportunism in the clarinet playing as Dodds plays a harsh, attacking arpeggio style, whipping in a melodic phrase when there is some chance of it cutting through the richness and volume of the cornet lead. This is the pattern followed by Dodds on the subsequent Hot Seven recordings, but before these were made four further Okeh sessions were recorded by the Hot Five.

Surprisingly the style of the band went back to the manner of the previous releases by the Hot Five on this label, with Armstrong using a dryer, less brilliant tone and Dodds relegated to the background, with again a thin,

'gaspipe' tone, quite unlike that of the clarinet on the Vocalion session. *Lonesome Blues* from 23 June 1926, is a feature for Johnny's clarinet, but the recording does not help his tone and his playing is uninspired. Much happier is his playing on *Skit-Dat-De-Dat* from the next session, one of the very finest of all Hot Five recordings. This is a slow blues with liberal breaks for each member of the band; Louis uses scat-singing on some of these breaks in addition to playing trumpet of a most poignant beauty. Dodds plays a perfect ensemble part, while Kid Ory once more proves that for all his obvious limitations his seemingly intuitive understanding of the idiom makes him a peerless trombonist on this type of performance. It is notable that although Ory and sometimes Dodds play poorly on the less inspired selections for Okeh, on material such as *Skit-Dat-De-Dat* and *Muskrat Ramble* their contributions are generally excellent.

Ory was missing from the final Hot Five session of the first series, a comparatively unimportant group of titles being made that day, including *You Made Me Love You* and a version of *Where the River Shannon Flows* under the title of *Irish Black Bottom*. The trombonist is thought to be John Thomas, and the falling off in rhythmic strength due to Ory's absence is noticeable. Armstrong plays superbly, of course, but the band work is of a mediocre quality compared with the best of the Hot Five recordings.

This session was made on 27 November 1926, and when

Armstrong next assembled the group the following May he added tuba and drums to the rhythm section, the Hot Five thus being augmented to become the Hot Seven. There is a good deal of doubt as to who plays the trombone part on the first two sessions, and most certainly it does not sound like Ory, who was accepted for years as the trombonist on these recordings. It has been suggested that Johnny St. Cyr is also absent from the first session, but this seems rather improbable when we compare the guitar solo on *Willie the Weeper*, the first title recorded by the Hot Seven, with that on *Alligator Crawl* (on which St. Cyr is known to have played), for they are obviously by the same man, and are close in style to St. Cyr's guitar solos on some Jelly Roll Morton titles. The drumming on these dates is most untypical of Baby Dodds, the first two sessions in particular containing no sounds from the drummer other than cymbal playing of an unsubtle, though swinging nature. This is odd, as Baby plays in his most characteristic manner on a Jelly Roll Morton session only a month after the Hot Seven sessions, with the typical use of woodblocks and other accessories, along with a careful marking of breaks, flare ups and chorus endings. In his autobiography Baby recalls playing these Hot Seven sessions, but it is strange that his drumming should be so reticent, as the recording of the Hot Sevens is remarkably good in other respects for the period. Armstrong's tone is caught at its most brilliant and powerful, and Dodds can be heard to

better effect than on the earlier series. The addition of Pete Briggs brought a greater fullness to the rhythm section and he is a remarkable performer on tuba, although the lugubrious quality which this instrument usually brings to a band is not altogether avoided.

The first Hot Seven session produced two numbers, *Willie the Weeper* and *Wild Man Blues*, both titles being dominated by Armstrong's superlative trumpet work. By this time any comparison with the Oliver band would be futile, for in Armstrong's playing we find a fullness and richness quite equal in musical substance to any ensemble jazz. Johnny Dodds's solo on *Willie the Weeper* is a very fine one, notable for the way in which he transforms the march-like melody into the purest of blues, but from Armstrong's entry after the guitar solo and through the final ensemble the music is swept along by the incomparable brilliance of the trumpet playing. In the opening ensemble Dodds can be heard playing well, but he is completely submerged by Louis's brilliant final outburst. This is not to suggest that Dodds's contribution was second rate, for it is certain that no jazz clarinettist could contribute a second part to trumpet playing so brilliant and self-contained as Armstrong provides here. The second Hot Seven title was a version of *Wild Man Blues*, reputed to have been Johnny's favourite theme. The record consists almost entirely of two extended solos, by Armstrong and Dodds, the former audacious in manner, with a golden

tone and superb assurance, the latter in the lower register, the tone dark, the phrasing almost secretive when compared with Armstrong's. The very fact that Dodds could follow Louis without any sense of anti-climax reveals his very considerable stature as a soloist, for Louis here is at his very best. *Willie the Weeper* and *Wild Man Blues* are two recordings which rank among the finest ever made in the jazz idiom, but even they are slightly overshadowed by the two titles from the following session, *Alligator Crawl* and *Potato Head Blues*. On *Alligator Crawl* (issued on some labels as *Alligator Blues*), after an unaccompanied introduction from Armstrong, Johnny Dodds enters with one of his most intense solos, but again this is Louis's record, and the opening chorus apart, it is the trumpet which dominates the performance. *Potato Head Blues* contains some of the best playing of Armstrong's entire career and is considered by some authorities to be his finest achievement. Dodds is at his most forceful here, and provides a dancing counterpoint to Louis's trumpet in the opening chorus and then contributes a hard, forceful solo before St. Cyr's banjo introduces Armstrong's masterly final solo. Again the final ensemble is virtually a continuation of the trumpet solo. The later Hot Sevens are great jazz classics, but they do not quite equal the first four sides. The most notable items for Dodds's clarinet are *Weary Blues*, with a masterly low-register solo, and *S.O.L. Blues*, with extended blues clarinet solo work by Dodds. On this latter title the closing

ensemble is very good, with Armstrong and Dodds achieving a unity which is not exactly commonplace on these discs. *S.O.L. Blues* was never issued on Okeh and is actually a rejected version of a tune which was titled *Gully Low Blues* on its release, while *S.O.L. Blues* was only put out years later as part of an American Columbia re-issue project. *Gully Low* is a similar performance with more superb clarinet, different in detail to that on the first version. The other title recorded at the *Gully Low Blues* session was *That's When I'll Come Back to You*, with a diverting vocal duet by Lil and Louis Armstrong which receives a very fine backing from Dodds's clarinet. This was the last Hot Seven title to be recorded, and when the band assembled again the original Hot Five instrumentation and personnel were used.

The last Hot Seven session had taken place on 14 May 1927, and when the Hot Five reassembled in the September of that year the character of the band is seen to have changed again. The rhythmic approach (the absence of Pete Briggs no doubt being a contributary factor) is lighter than before, and Armstrong's playing seems to reflect this. The complexity of his lead work has increased yet again, and in all but a few instances the later Hot Five ensembles can be described as being by Armstrong *accompanied* by the other four members of the group. This effect, is enhanced by the recording balance which gives the clarinet less prominence than on the Hot Sevens. As a band

Duncan Schiedt

Johnny Dodds in King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, 1921, in California. *Left to right*—Minor Hall, Honoré Dutrey, King Oliver, Lil Hardin, David Jones, Johnny Dodds, Jimmy Palao, Ed Garland

King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, 1924. *Left to right*—Baby Dodds, Honoré Dutrey, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Will Johnson, Johnny Dodds, Lil Hardin

Duncan Schiedt

performance the best of these recordings is *Ory's Creole Trombone*, a very fine number once the tiresome trombone breaks are through. Here Armstrong's playing sticks close to the melody with simple elaboration, and both Dodds and Ory contribute to the general excellence of the side. Dodds has a good solo on *Once in a While*, but generally speaking the pop-tune type numbers seem to have found Dodds content to turn in a routine performance, as on *The Last Time*. This was not always the case with him as can soon be realized if one compares the New Orleans Bootblacks performance of this tune (re-titled *Mad Dog*) on which Dodds turns in a magnificent solo. The final recordings which featured Armstrong and Dodds together were cut by the Hot Five in December 1927, and on the first title, *Struttin' with Some Barbecue*, there is a good low-register clarinet solo. This is a rather interesting session in that it shows the Hot Five reflecting some of the habits of the white bands of the period, in the coda of *Struttin'* and in the diminuendo and crescendo effects in the final ensemble of *Got No Blues*. The last two sessions were augmented by Lonnie Johnson on guitar, and contain some fine work by him. *Once in a While* has already been mentioned, and Dodds also plays well on the blues *I'm Not Rough*; but most symbolic of the direction in which Louis Armstrong was travelling is the very last side he recorded with this New Orleans style band, *Savoy Blues*. In place of the old concept of ensemble blues this performance is

largely a sequence of solos, with only the final chorus given over to band playing in the New Orleans manner, the previous two ensemble choruses being harmonized riffs. Even more astounding is the fact that on a blues performance so little is heard from Dodds. The fact is that in many ways the Hot Fives indicate why Dodds and many other New Orleans musicians were unable or unwilling to adapt their playing to the new solo-dominated concept of jazz, and gradually lapsed into obscurity. In making this observation I do not suggest that the newer manner produced inferior music—this is manifestly not so—nor that it was anything but an inevitable change in the social context of jazz of the 1920s. The Hot Fives and Sevens are among the finest jazz records extant, but on many of these almost the whole musical interest is to be found in Louis's trumpet work. When Armstrong next organized a recording band he used Jimmy Strong on clarinet and Fred Robinson on trombone, two musicians vastly inferior to Dodds and Ory in jazzcraft, yet the musical results are hardly inferior to the later Hot Fives with the New Orleans musicians. One need only reflect how much difference such changes would have made to the Oliver recordings, or the more traditional of the Armstrong-Dodds-Ory numbers, such as *Skit-Dat-De-Dat* or *Georgia Bo-Bo*, to realize how the altering pattern of popular jazz styles was putting the virtues of a Johnny Dodds at a discount. Although he continued to record regularly with other bands

for another two years (as indeed he had throughout the Hot Five/Seven period) such sides were well off the mainstream of jazz development and were aimed, I think, at a dwindling section of the Negro record-buying public. By 1930 New Orleans style jazz was not a commercial proposition, nor was it to be so for another fifteen years. By the time New Orleans style sessions were commonplace again, Johnny Dodds was not around to participate.

A recording session which should be considered along with the Hot Fives and Sevens is the first of the two under Johnny's own name for Brunswick, in which he used Louis Armstrong on trumpet. The remainder of the band has always been doubtful, but it seems to consist of Louis, the Dodds brothers, Barney Bigard (on tenor sax) and Earl Hines, along with unknown trombone and banjo. On one occasion the French critic Hugues Panassié vehemently denied that the trumpet to be heard on two titles from this session—*Weary Blues* and *New Orleans Stomp*—was by Armstrong. Certainly the trumpet playing is below Louis's usual standard, but even the greatest of musicians occasionally have their off moments. Louis plays pleasantly on *Melancholy Blues*, and approaches his real form on *Wild Man Blues* with a solo of great restraint, in marked contrast to the Hot Seven recording of this number. As on that version Dodds follows with a long clarinet improvisation, and here his more limpid tone and legato phrasing contribute to a solo which is the equal to that on the Hot

Seven version, though quite different in character. Despite the personnel (which looks good enough on paper) this was a somewhat stodgy session, with only *Wild Man Blues* of really classic stature, although Johnny's clarinet is consistently good on all titles.

This session by 'Johnny Dodds and his Black Bottom Stompers' was recorded in April 1927, and the following October this band title was used for another four items for the Brunswick label, this time featuring an instrumentation identical to that of the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band. Unfortunately, the band was somewhat stiff, particularly the brass team, and the clarinet provides the most memorable moments. Constantly adding to the ensembles, Dodds here is on superb form, whether driving the band along in the exciting *Come On and Stomp, Stomp, Stomp*, or adding his inimitable blues countermelodies to *Joe Turner Blues*. The former title has a fine Dodds contribution with the hard pure tone of the *Potato Head Blues* solo, while *After You've Gone* by contrast, features a delicate subdued clarinet, with the soft tone of the Black Bottom Stompers version of *Wild Man Blues*.

In 1926, the year of the early Hot Five sides, Johnny Dodds recorded two sessions with similarly constituted bands which, without Armstrong's eruptive (and often disruptive) genius, were typical examples of New Orleans band playing of the period. On Paramount he appears in the only important recordings made by the famous New

Orleans trumpeter Freddie Keppard. This is one of the items on which the identity of the clarinet has been argued for some years, some collectors being of the opinion that a somewhat obscure Chicago musician by the name of Jimmy O'Bryant was responsible. Similar doubts have been expressed as to which of these two clarinettists play on certain titles by Jimmy Blythe and Lovie Austin. O'Bryant recorded frequently with Blythe at this time and seems to have been a popular musician among the Negro audiences of the Chicago South Side. Like some other northern musicians he was influenced by Johnny Dodds, but his approach is altogether less intense than that of the New Orleans man and he seems quite happy in using novelty effects for the amusement of his audience. What seems to have happened is that on some of the informal Blythe sessions, Dodds returned the compliment by using some of O'Bryant's mannerisms. This is a subject which has been insufficiently explored by specialists of this period, but any extended consideration of the matter here would be out of place. On the Freddie Keppard titles the clarinet is unmistakably that of Dodds in the phrasing, the tonal variations and the rhythmic attack. Only two titles were recorded, *Stockyard Strut* being good average New Orleans jazz of the looser variety, with forceful trumpet from Keppard and a busy counterpoint from the rather thinly recorded clarinet. The blues *Salty Dog* is a masterpiece, with really 'lowdown' blues playing from both Dodds and

Keppard, and a full ensemble part from the little known trombonist Eddie Vinson or Vincent. Keppard reveals a perfect mastery of blues trumpet style and is far better here than on any of his other recordings, while Johnny Dodds, as always, excels in this idiom, the interplay between trumpet and clarinet being typical of New Orleans jazz at its finest.

Slightly earlier in the year, Dodds's clarinet was the prominent voice on two Columbia sessions organized, apparently, by Lil Armstrong. The variable standards of recording at this time can be seen when we consider that the Keppard Paramounts were made three months *after* these Columbia New Orleans Wanderers and Bootblacks sides, though to judge from the recording one would place them a good few *years* earlier. The band on the Wanderers/Bootblacks sides consists of the Armstrong Hot Five line-up with George Mitchell replacing Louis, and Jimmy Walker added on alto sax. The first title, *Perdido Street Blues*, was actually cut without Walker, and despite three choruses of mediocre solos by piano, banjo and trombone, it is a classic performance, with Dodds's clarinet featured in several solo passages against stop-time figures for the rest of the band. He utilizes all registers of the clarinet, and his bold melodic conception combines with his expressive tone and superb timing to produce one of the greatest jazz solos on record. *Too Tight*, though not a blues in form, contains long passages of Dodds in similar style though mainly in the high register. I can think of only a handful of Bessie

Smith's finest recordings and some of Sydney Bechet's blues which are comparable in their simple yet direct majesty with Johnny Dodds's work on *Too Tight*. For all the considerable advances in melodic and harmonic thought among jazz soloists, few of them have been able to create a music so eloquent and moving as does Johnny Dodds here. If human values of expression are to be considered paramount, as I believe they should, then Dodds's playing on such records places him among the greatest of jazz soloists. The final ensemble on *Perdido Street Blues* is a masterpiece of New Orleans band playing, with each voice perfectly balanced within the texture yet adding its own distinctive contribution to the total sound. The cornetist on these titles, George Mitchell, was not a New Orleans musician, but he assimilated perfectly not only the style but also the spirit of the Crescent City men. He was not a very creative musician, nor a very forceful one, but on these titles, and on the famous Morton sessions of the same year, he made a contribution the value of which is not always obvious behind the modest simplicity of his style. Whereas a Louis Armstrong will constantly parade his genius before our astounded ears, the virtues of a musician like George Mitchell are not so obvious. At all times the part played by the cornet on these records is in perfect accord with the total concept of the band, and Mitchell's solos, simple enough it is true, always have the incomparable virtue of absolute fidelity to their context. The alto saxophone of

Jimmy Walker, who is a pleasant though not outstanding player with a style similar to some of the Kansas City reed players on the earliest Benny Moten records, imposes certain problems in the ensemble. In considering the use of the saxophone in such music as this, it should always be remembered that the musicians were never so puritanically minded about this instrument as certain latter-day critics —it is illuminating here to note that *every single side* recorded by a bard in New Orleans in the 1920s featured this instrument! None the less, it should be realized that the better New Orleans style ensembles are those without any saxophone, and a noticeable result of the addition of this instrument on the Wanderers/Bootblacks sides is that in the ensembles Dodds is forced to remain in the higher register. Walker appears to have had a good deal more ensemble sense than, say, Stomp Evans, and the band playing on such titles as *Gatemouth* reaches a quite classic perfection. Dodds is at his best here, his clarinet never failing to add to the beauty and variety of this exuberant music. There are fine solos too—Dodds has an outstanding chorus on *Mad Dog*, but like all great New Orleans jazz it is the total effect of the group, rather than the outstanding virtuosity of any one member, which gives these records their true greatness. To this Johnny Dodds contributes in a way which is at once fully individual, yet perfectly judged as a part of the overall performances.

The following year Johnny recorded a couple of sessions

with Jelly Roll Morton, the only occasions on which these two masters of New Orleans jazz recorded together. Jelly's recordings are, with the Olivers and Armstrongs, the greatest of the New Orleans sessions made in Chicago in the 1920s. On his finest titles the clarinet was played by Omer Simeon, an extremely fine musician who is said to have been Morton's favourite on the instrument. The two Morton sessions with Johnny Dodds featured a band much inferior to the Red Hot Peppers of the previous year. George Mitchell was retained, but the trombone playing of George Bryant cannot be compared with that of Kid Ory, who was at his very best on the Morton 1926 sides. But much the worst feature of the band was the addition of Stomp Evans on alto sax. Evans was a musician who recorded frequently in Chicago in the 1920s—so frequently that at one time discographers seemed to think that all recorded saxophone playing emanating from the Chicago of this decade was by him. As a result he was blamed for some poor playing for which he was not responsible, but it is doubtful if any of this was worse than his contribution to these Morton sessions. Evans's playing combines all the rooty effects of the popular saxophone styles of the 1920s to a remarkable degree, and a break by him is liable to start with rhythmic incoherence and end with cackling slap-tongue effects. Jelly Roll's arrangements on these 1927 records are elaborately fussy, with breaks and flares occurring with such regularity that the telling effect these

devices had on the earlier Peppers sessions is quite lost here by their over-use. About the only musician to benefit from these arrangements is Baby Dodds, and his drumming can be heard to very good effect here. Brother Johnny is in particularly fluent form, although he sticks mainly to the lower register, probably on Morton's instructions. The best titles are *Wild Man Blues*, *Jungle Blues* and *The Pearls*, although all suffer from an overdose of Evans's alto. *Wild Man Blues* has good Dodds, although the device of including alto-sax breaks during the clarinet solo is not one of Morton's happier ideas; indeed, the whole performance sounds over contrived when compared with the classic simplicity of the Armstrong-Dodds versions, or indeed with Jelly's own *Smoke House Blues*, his finest blues recording. *The Pearls* is one of Morton's most important compositions, and the record is of great interest because it is the only band version of the piece, but it is doubtful if the performance itself adds anything to the composition. At the second of these two Morton sessions a couple of trio numbers were recorded with just Jelly and the Dodds brothers, and on these Johnny again plays exclusively in the lower register, as Morton wanted the clarinet to play a second part to the piano. These two titles—*Wolverine Blues* and *Mr. Jelly Lord*—are not quite so fine as the trio titles Jelly made with Omer Simeon or Barney Bigard, and one feels that Dodds, though he plays well, is not altogether in sympathy with Morton's ideas.

Johnny Dodds also recorded, at various times in his career, a number of trio titles under his own name, in addition to one session for Paramount with just piano accompaniment. He rarely is found at his best in such surroundings, appearing to have preferred at least one other front-line instrument in a band. On the session with Tiny Parham for Paramount he sounds peculiarly uncertain, and sticks to the melody of *Loveless Love* throughout the performance. The best of these Johnny Dodds Trio recordings are the 1929 sides he made with Lil Armstrong and Bill Johnson for Victor, although Lil's piano work is hardly substantial as a second solo voice, and Dodds is thrown into a prominence which is hardly ideal for such a group-conscious musician.

On one trio session we hear Dodds in unusual but apparently congenial surroundings; this is a session with the blues singer and guitarist Blind Blake and that unusual character Jimmy Bertrand. The latter was known best for his washboard playing but was not adverse to turning his talents to such unusual instruments as the xylophone and, as on this occasion, the swannee whistle! The session was actually under Blind Blake's name, and on one title the other two musicians accompany his singing of *C. C. Pill Blues*, but another title, *Hot Potatoes*, is purely instrumental apart from Blake scat-singing an odd chorus. Blake was fond of guitar rags and skiffle numbers, and certainly there is hardly a recording in the latter category which equals

Hot Potatoes in sheer good spirits and natural exuberance. Bertrand doubles on woodblocks and swannee whistle, and although his playing is of little worth in itself he fits perfectly in this excellent atmosphere. Johnny Dodds is superb; his constantly weaving clarinet and easy, yet inspiring phrasing, gives the record a rare musical distinction.

A very high proportion of Johnny Dodds's recordings were done with washboard bands, and there is some fine clarinet playing on many otherwise mediocre sides by such musicians as Jimmy Blythe and Jimmy Bertrand. Pianist Blythe recorded hundreds of titles with washboard bands under his direction and most of the casual recordings by small groups of the time contain Blythe or some of his associates. Johnny was apparently friendly with this musician and appears on a good proportion of the Blythe output. The merits and the character of the music produced by these bands is somewhat difficult to define. The general sound of the Blythe/Bertrand groups is easy to recognize—but its defining feature is not so much the presence of a washboard player as a sort of general musical disorganization, a sloppiness of approach which is only occasionally relieved by the sort of good-humoured playing which is found on the Blind Blake *Hot Potatoes*. Blythe and Bertrand were a somewhat pedestrian rhythm team, and the groups almost always featured a poor trumpet player—usually Natty Dominique. Keppard is present on some titles, but does not play well. Typical of the recordings

of this group of musicians are the titles cut under the band name of the 'Dixieland Thumpers'. Dominique's lead is abominable here and the rhythm section heavy handed; the only really interesting moments are during Dodds's clarinet solos. Dominique's limitations are woefully evident on *Weary Way Blues* where he commences out of tune and finishes off key. Even in the carefree days when almost anyone who could blow a note could record for the race lists, such excruciating sounds were rare.

Much better are the Blythe/Dodds sides recorded for Okeh under the name of the Chicago Footwarmers, although again Dominique's playing leaves much to be desired and only the clarinet is constantly worthy of attention. On an unusual Bertrand date for Vocalion in April 1927 Louis Armstrong is on trumpet, and with Bertrand, Blythe and Johnny Dodds making up the quartet they produce some lightly swinging jazz of excellent quality. Two of these titles, *I'm Goin' Huntin'* and *If You Want to be My Sugar Papa*, were re-issued some years ago on English Vocalion, and are well worth obtaining.

Among the best of all the Johnny Dodds washboard recordings are the two titles cut in July 1929 by the Beale Street Washboard Band, consisting of Herb Morand on trumpet, the white pianist Frank Melrose and the Dodds brothers. Morand sounds rather nervous, for this was not only his first recording session but also his first engagement of any kind outside New Orleans, and the trumpet is hardly

comparable with his easy, mellow playing on the better Harlem Hamfats sides. For all the stiffness and jerky phrasing, however, the trumpet playing here is a considerable advance on that of Natty Dominique on the Blythe records. As on the slightly earlier recordings for Victor by his own Washboard Band, Johnny Dodds here seems to play in a fashion closer to his King Oliver style than the sharper, more forceful manner of the Hot Seven recordings. The balance between Morand's trumpet and Dodds's clarinet is excellent as the lead changes from one to the other. In particular the clarinet throughout both *Piggly Wiggly* and *Forty and Tight* maintains a quite miraculous flow of magnificently melodic music.

The Victor sides by the Johnny Dodds Washboard Band fall into a different category than the records we have just been discussing. The characteristic sound of all these titles is the thin trumpet lead with loose *obligato* by the clarinet and a heavy beat from piano and washboard. On the Dodds Victors, however, we have a much fuller band sound and also a less casual approach to the music. The band assembled by Dodds in the Victor studios on 6 July 1928 was virtually his regular band of the time with Baby Dodds switching to washboard. Natty Dominique, Honoré Dutrey and Bill Johnson play trumpet, trombone and bass respectively, but the pianist has never been established for certain, Lil Armstrong and Jimmy Blythe being the players usually nominated for this chair. The

four titles cut by this group were all blues, two of them fast, *Blue Washboard Stomp* and *Bull Fiddle Blues*, and two slow, *Bucktown Stomp* and *Weary City*. Dominique is at his best here, and although he was far from being an ideal player in many respects, he certainly has the virtue of a very acute awareness of the function of the trumpet in such a group as this. His tone has an unpleasantly thin and rather nasal quality, while his phrasing is often jerky in a manner which belies his considerable reputation as a blues player. Yet his solos on the slow blues here have a certain nostalgic quality which fits well with the general mood of the performances, and it must be granted that for all his limitations Dominique fits better into the pattern of this band than would such a musician as Louis Armstrong or Henry Allen. Dutrey and the pianist are adequate, the former filling out the ensembles well without having the rhythmic strength of the best New Orleans trombonists. The records flow over a superb foundation provided by the bass of Bill Johnson whose playing here constantly informs the whole band with a loose, swinging, supple beat. Baby Dodds plays well, although naturally enough the full force of his remarkable musicianship can hardly be heard when he is performing on washboard—an instrument for which he had little affection.

The sound of the Johnny Dodds Washboard Band is a very distinctive one, with a certain rawness of texture which is quite unmistakable. Dodds's own playing on these sides

—particularly on *Weary City* and *Bucktown Stomp*—is among his finest on record, a contribution of almost virtuoso style yet welded firmly to the playing of the other musicians in the band. There is little of the angular, hard phrasing of the Armstrong Hot Sevens here, and the clarinet is much closer to that on the Oliver recordings, with a pure yet vibrant tone, limpid yet forceful phrasing. The agile runs through the various registers of the instrument are in a way reminiscent of such representatives of the Creole school of New Orleans clarinet playing as Jimmy Noone, Albert Nicholas or Barney Bigard. The instrumental and rhythmic style is different, and appears to be largely Dodds's own personal concept rather than any established way of playing among New Orleans clarinettists. Johnny Dodds's tone was beautifully rounded and full in all registers of his instrument, and nowhere can this be heard to better effect than on the Washboard Band sides. Moreover the numbers recorded by the band were all in Johnny's favourite form, the blues, and his playing on these sides has rarely been equalled and never surpassed by a clarinettist of any school of jazz.

The same band—with Baby Dodds reverting to drums—later recorded a further six titles for Victor under the name of Johnny Dodds's Hot Six, and they contain some fine clarinet work without achieving the classic quality of the Washboard Band sides. The band sounds fuller with Baby reverting to drums, but the material was, on the whole, less

suitable than that of the washboard recordings. On all these Victor sessions the freedom of style and the general relaxation of Dodds's own playing is very noticeable when compared with the majority of his recordings of the mid-'twenties, and it is no doubt due in part to the fact that he was recording with a regular band for the first time since he left Oliver. What superlative music may have resulted had Dodds lived to play in the days of the New Orleans revival can only be conjectured, although it must be stressed that his approach to music, with its strong accent on the blues, is unlikely to have made as great an impact on later audiences as that of Kid Ory. Certainly Dodds's music had little in common with the superficial sort of Dixieland playing which constitutes a large part of the revivalist output. In fact Johnny Dodds did make one session in 1940, with most of his regular band, as a result of the increased interest in New Orleans jazz. But two and a half years before this in January 1938 he made a visit to New York to front a group at a session which Lil Armstrong had arranged for him with the Decca people.

The band assembled for him was probably the most incongruous jazz unit which could have been selected at this time to play with a New Orleans musician, consisting for the most part of a group of musicians from John Kirby's little combo, who were used by Decca as a sort of 'house band' to record with a considerable variety of artists. John Kirby's group featured a light, sophisticated sort of jazz which was

pleasant enough in its way, though superficial and rather slick. The shallow style of the Kirby musicians was a direct contrast to the forthright, expressive manner of a Johnny Dodds. From the Kirby band the session featured trumpeter Charlie Shavers, drummer O'Neill Spencer and Kirby himself on bass, along with Dodds, Lil Armstrong and Teddy Bunn. The latter was an acoustic guitarist and a good if sophisticated blues-player whose solos are acceptable in themselves without really being in sympathy with the clarinet. The themes were, for the most part, numbers associated with Dodds's earlier recordings, and a comparison of the 1938 version of *Wild Man Blues* with the three interpretations from the 1920s shows up the limitations of this band in a glaring manner. Even worse is *29th and Dearborn*, an alternative title to Richard M. Jones's *Riverside Blues* which Dodds had recorded twice with the Oliver band. This piece, so excellent a platform for a band performance, is treated as just another 12-bar blues, although Dodds plays the two themes in his opening solo. This title was available for a long time on Brunswick 78 r.p.m., backed by a number called *Blues Galore* which featured the mediocre blues singing of the drummer O'Neill Spencer. On the whole, Johnny Dodds plays very well during his lengthy solos on this session, although at times his playing sounds a shade hesitant and certainly lacks the rhythmic force of almost any of his other recordings. This is probably due to the rhythm section, a good one of its

kind but not of a type to which Johnny was accustomed, nor with which he was likely to feel relaxed. By far the greatest mistake on the session was the use of Charlie Shavers on trumpet. Shavers is an erratic, sometimes brilliant trumpeter in the jam session or big band styles of the 1930s and early 1940s, but he was a poor choice for such performances as these. It is odd that so incongruous a musician should have recorded with three of the great New Orleans clarinettists around this time, for his outlook was particularly insensitive to the requirements of group improvisation. One need only compare the playing of Rex Stewart and Sidney de Paris with Bechet to Shavers's work on his sessions with Bechet, Dodds or Noone, to realize that it was not so much a matter of style, but of temperament, which prevented Shavers from fitting in with such groups. On the opening chorus of *Stackalee Blues*, Shavers plays a sober, simple lead, but for the rest his playing is erratic, over busy, unmelodic and completely without concern for what anyone else in the group may be playing. All the ensembles are a jumble, but the last two choruses of *Blues Galore* are particularly notable for the utter chaos which prevails. This session (unfortunately titled as by Johnny Dodds and his Chicago Boys) should have remained an object lesson to record supervisors on how not to organize a jazz session. Unfortunately the mixing of stylistic elements here has often been emulated, almost always with similarly dire results.

It cannot be claimed that the two titles Johnny Dodds recorded at his last session (as a contribution to the Decca 'New Orleans Jazz' album) are a complete success, but they are certainly records of a different kind from those of the New York session. A band of New Orleans musicians resident in Chicago was assembled, and the presence of such men as Preston Jackson, John Lindsay, Lonnie Johnson and the Dodds brothers promised music of a high quality. Unfortunately two very poor arrangements were contributed by Richard M. Jones, who played piano on that date, and what little may have been extracted from these by a good trumpet lead was completely lost on Natty Dominique, whose playing is unpleasant in the extreme. There is a very strained atmosphere about both *Red Onion Blues* and *Gravier Street Blues*, and though Johnny Dodds plays well, one cannot help but notice that the band plays below its potential. For all that, there is a certain harshness and bitterness about the emotional climate which seems a direct expression of feeling rather than simply the reflection of an obviously unhappy session. Johnny Dodds, one Boyd Senter-like yelp apart, plays wonderfully, and his mastery of the blues is as notable as ever. The sides recorded by Jimmy Noone with virtually the same band are much smoother (Dominique improves for one thing), but they do not have the emotional impact of these two unusual Dodds titles. Altogether Johnny Dodds's last recording session is one of the most paradoxical in jazz and

the individual listener must decide for himself whether these two titles are simply examples of musical crudity or whether they narrowly miss, in their elemental rawness, a greatness which is rare even in blues recordings.

The recorded output of Johnny Dodds covers a wide range of musical forms within the jazz idiom, from the closely knit work of the King Oliver Creole Band, through the earliest examples of jazz virtuosity in the Armstrong Hot Fives to the loose and sometimes crude music of the washboard and jug bands. On almost every title he recorded, Johnny Dodds adds considerably to the music, whether as an ensemble musician with Oliver or as the only soloist on the Armstrongs whose work is comparable with that of Louis himself. Yet to some writers and collectors he is simply an historical figure, a worthy pioneer but hardly a jazzman of major stature. With the vast changes which have come over jazz in the three decades since Dodds's finest recordings were made, his music cannot always be easily approached by listeners accustomed to later values. In the remaining pages of this book some attempt must be made to assess Johnny Dodds's contribution to jazz, and to examine his music in relation to the jazz scene as a whole. To newcomers to jazz whose taste is inclined toward what are loosely referred to as traditional styles, Johnny's playing will have an obvious appeal. But it is this writer's view that we are dealing here with an artist whose value transcends that of a particular style and whose

contribution to jazz is of a value far above the narrow limits of stylistic fads. As a creative artist and as a musician with a dedicated approach to his art, Dodds can in many ways be an example and an inspiration to those who follow him as 'name' musicians in jazz, even though their music may be many moves from his so far as details of style are concerned.

3

HIS CONTRIBUTION TO JAZZ

In a discussion of the contribution of the blues idiom to jazz in his book *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, André Hodier, a noted French critic, makes the following observation: '. . . on the other hand, some very fine players of the blues, like Johnny Dodds, may be mediocre jazzmen, as we have seen.' Hodier is a brilliant musical analyst and in the book from which I have just quoted he makes a valued contribution to jazz literature in his analytical studies. Unfortunately, Hodier's understanding of the background of jazz and of the work of the early New Orleans groups is lacking to a truly astounding degree, while his appreciation of vocal blues—so essential to a true understanding of jazz—is non-existent. Hodier's intelligent and lucid book expresses ideas which, in the hands of other writers, often remain semi-articulate. It is for this reason that I have chosen to discuss his attitude here, for it provides a classic example of a totally unsuitable approach to such musicians

as Johnny Dodds. It is also (although this is incidental to our purpose here) an approach which makes the realization of the essence of jazz, after which Hodier so earnestly strives, quite unattainable.

One of the most scathing dismissals in *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence* is of a clarinettist 'to whom even Johnny Dodds could have shown a thing or two about getting the notes in the right place rhythmically'. Hodier is much concerned about what he considers to be the rhythmic deficiencies of early jazz, and finds it hard to conceive that anyone could accept such jazz recordings as a satisfying aesthetic experience after 'fifteen years of perfected rhythm'. It is certainly true that until the lessons of Count Basie's original rhythm section had been absorbed by the 'middle period' jazzmen their work was sometimes shaky in this respect. But what eludes Hodier is the fact that the New Orleans concept of swing was quite different from that of the post-Basie musicians, and that, contrary to the opinion of many writers, the King Oliver group was rhythmically one of the most accomplished in the entire history of jazz. Almost any of the breaks by Oliver or by Dodds on these records are as perfected rhythmically as anything in later jazz, but the emphasis and the style were different, and unless we realize this we cannot help but fall into the error of constantly undervaluing the work of the New Orleans musicians. They were not simply pioneers whose place in jazz history was to pave the way for Louis

Armstrong and his successors, but men with a fully developed and valid way of playing. It is true that an approach to this sort of jazz can be made neither with the techniques of the European academy, nor if one wishes to find in jazz a pleasant appendage to European culture.

Hodier's writing on Johnny Dodds, who is the only important New Orleans musician discussed in the book apart from Louis, is insensitive in the extreme. To start with he selects for analysis a number of the early Okeh Hot Fives, because 'they were all issued in France during the same month'! This remarkable method of selection (even from Armstrong's own playing, these are not among the better titles by the band) allows Hodier to pinpoint a number of sides on which Armstrong easily outplays his sidemen, and on which Johnny Dodds sounds altogether uncomfortable. Presumably such titles as *Skit-Dat-De-Dat* or the later Hot Sevens, on which Dodds makes a major contribution to the music (and on which Louis plays better too) were released in France in different months! By selecting these sides on which Dodds is under-recorded and uncertain, Hodier is able to prove that even so noted a pioneer musician as he is little more than an historical figure, vastly overrated by the majority of jazz writers as a musician. Dodds is criticized for not playing his harmony part exactly along with Armstrong on one record—he doesn't, of course, because New Orleans clarinettists hardly ever did phrase exactly with the trumpet. They used a

technique which lent a greater rhythmic and melodic variety to ensemble jazz by playing *almost* the same melody as the lead but not quite. With Louis Armstrong this does not come off, but Hodier's taste must be questioned here if he imagines that Dodds's part would have sounded better if he had phrased along with Armstrong's lead. For all the excellence of his use of this manner of playing with Oliver, Dodds soon abandoned it when recording with Louis, but we must remember that his playing on these early Hot Fives is in part an attempt to solve the problem of fitting a clarinet part to Armstrong's lead. Of course, this criticism of Hodier's is a part of his general thesis that early jazzmen in general, and Johnny Dodds in particular, were incapable of precise rhythmic placing, of 'getting the notes in the right place'. It is true that Dodds and Ory make rhythmic mistakes on these records, but on countless others their playing is superbly balanced rhythmically—one only needs to listen to Ory's recordings with Morton to realize that he was not quite the blundering fool his detractors would have us believe. Could a man so deficient in rhythmic qualities have made quite the difference that Ory does to the Hot Fives and Sevens on which he is present, compared with the rest?

So far as Johnny Dodds is concerned, any such criticism shows an almost incredible ignorance of the qualities of his recorded output as a whole. For one gem among many, take Dodds's unaccompanied introduction to the Hot Five

recording of *The Last Time*; the rhythmic placing here is quite perfect, and swings in a most excellent manner. Could the great, long melodic lines of *Perdido Street Blues*, *Too Tight* or *Georgia Bo-Bo* have been maintained if the clarinettist had constantly fumbled rhythmically? Without rhythmic placing and swing of a high order the clarinet part in the final two choruses of *Georgia Bo-Bo* would have been swept aside by Armstrong's trumpet in no uncertain manner. It can honestly be argued that on only a small number of the Hot Fives and Sevens does Dodds provide a clarinet part which adds an interest equal to that of Armstrong's lead. This is true enough, but it is a greater achievement than that of any of the other clarinettists Louis has recorded with in collective ensembles, a list which includes such great names as Sidney Bechet, Barney Bigard and Edmond Hall. The fact is that this 'mediocre jazzman' remains the only player who could even occasionally match Armstrong in ensemble jazz, and one of the very few who could create solos of a calibre not to be completely outshone by Louis's supreme genius.

To some younger listeners the tone of the early jazz musicians is a deterrent to the appreciation of their music. To those grounded on the near academic tone of Goodman and his contemporaries, let alone symphonic clarinet players, the work of such musicians as Dodds and Bechet (particularly when the latter played clarinet) sounds unbearably crude, and, in the case of recordings from the

1920s, quite unmoving. When heard under tolerable recording conditions, Dodds's tone is a magnificent one for jazz, full, rounded and thoroughly personal. The roughness of much early jazz and blues-playing is inexplicable by academic standards, but to the understanding ear it is one of the music's greatest virtues. For allied to the expressive use of varied timbre and rough tone is an emotional honesty which is the greatest strength of this music. Among instrumental performers, none used these devices in a more eloquent and unsentimental manner than Johnny Dodds. Generally speaking, the New Orleans jazzmen were divided into two groups, the 'downtown' Creoles with their background of French academic practice, and the rough untutored 'uptown' Negroes. Many of these musical distinctions had worn thin by the time the musicians from the Crescent City came to record in Chicago, but some of the difference is still noticeable, particularly among the clarinettists, on which instrument the Creoles had a long and distinguished tradition. The Creole manner of playing is perhaps best known to present day listeners from the work of Albert Nicholas and, in a modified form, Barney Bigard, although the greatest exponent of this school on records was Jimmy Noone. The pure tone of these players was matched by a superbly fluent style of phrasing, and the 'hot' qualities of their playing comes more from the rhythmic placing and melodic style rather from the tone itself. The Johnny Dodds manner is in many ways different from

theirs, although it is not the complete antithesis that some critics have maintained. For example, Dodds's superb *arpeggio* work on many of the Olivers, or the fluidity of his line on the Beale Street Washboard Band sides, is quite close to the *legato* Creole manner. On the other hand Dodds's tone is harder, the *vibrato* more pronounced and more Negroid and his attack far more forceful. The tone and *vibrato*, moreover, are part of the expressiveness of the style in a more personal sense than is the case with Noone or Bigard. Sometimes Dodds will insert a deliberately sour note into his melodic line and the effect of this device is often most moving. Johnny Dodds rarely featured 'growl' devices, his use of tonal variety being a very subtle one within the context of a standard timbre. His use of *vibrato* similarly is carefully judged and never excessive; the Johnny Dodds *vibrato* is one of the most personal sounds in jazz, and is an immediately recognizable one. On some records (e.g. the opening chorus of the Hot Seven's *Alligator Crawl* or the New Orleans Wanderers' *Perdido Street Blues*) the *vibrato* gives the music a remarkable intensity of expression without ever sounding a superficially imposed ornament.

To move from the quiet introspective musing of the clarinet solo on the Black Bottom Stompers' *Wild Man Blues* to the fierce, attacking entry of the solo clarinet in *Come on and Stomp, Stomp, Stomp*, is to cover a considerable range of mood, and any suggestion that Dodds was a limited

artist can soon be dispelled by considering the very varied emotional range in his recordings. His tone was a pliable and expressive one, and he exhibited certain individual characteristics in each of the various registers of the clarinet. In the higher register the clarinet tone is crystal clear and hard enough to cut through the texture of the brass instruments, as in the Oliver band, or the complex weave of the four-part polyphony of the Wanderers/Bootblacks recordings; on slow blues in the higher register he played usually in the 'singing' manner of the *Perdido Street Blues* solo, on fast titles in the attacking style of *Come on and Stomp . . .* or *Potato Head Blues*. In the middle register his tone was less brilliant (unlike Noone for example, whose tone was equally clear in any register) and his solo style more likely to be of the fluid, flowing variety as on many choruses on the Beale Street Washboard Band or Oliver sides. In the low register his tone became darker still, the blues inflexions which were never absent from his playing giving to some of his solos in this register a most unusual emotional quality when allied to his unusual timbre. A good instance of this is on the Oliver *Mandy Lee Blues* where Dodds plays the melody of the verse pretty well as written, yet transforms the piece into a remarkably original evocation of mood. At other times he would play low register solos with a powerful rhythmic attack as on both the Black Bottom Stompers and the Hot Seven versions of *Weary Blues*.

Johnny Dodds was a fairly influential musician during the Chicago period, while since the New Orleans revival there have been many imitators of his style, although several of the musicians who started their careers with revivalist bands as Dodds imitators have changed over to following the path of Sidney Bechet, or the style of the Noone/Nicholas school. In the early days of the revival in England both Wally Fawkes and Ian Christie were Dodds men, although one would hardly think so when listening to their present-day work. Of the British revivalists Sandy Brown, on occasion a very fine blues player, has learned much from Johnny Dodds's records without ever, except perhaps at the very outset of his career, being simply an imitator. In recent years other influences have affected his playing too, and much of the directness of the early Sandy Brown band has given way to a more sophisticated approach. None the less, Brown remains one of the most interesting of European jazz musicians, and it will be worth noting how much of the basic Dodds idiom remains in his playing as his style moves away from a pseudo-New Orleans context. Of American revivalists two of the clarinettists who recorded with the Lu Watters band were influenced by Dodds, but their playing was inept to a remarkable degree. Perhaps the clarinettist to come nearest in sound to Dodds among his revivalist followers was the French musician Claude Luter, who before becoming a mediocre Bechet imitator used to lead a very crude but enthusiastic

bunch of musicians in an imitation of the King Oliver band. So rudimentary was most of the playing by this band that the one service which they might have rendered to jazz—in giving an aural approximation of the actual Oliver sound, which we know only from accoustic recording—was quite ruined by the abominable tone of the cornets and trombone, not to mention the lugubrious rhythm section. Luter himself was not a very accomplished musician, but his Dodds imitations were occasionally quite life-like, as in his solo on his band's recording of *Sweet Lovin' Man.* Like the majority of revivalist bands the group had no creative artistic policy and the Oliver imitations soon gave way to a more anonymous, though no less derivative, style.

The musicians whom Dodds influenced during his Chicago days were a group who would never have entertained the idea of a mere imitation, but a number of clarinettists from the 1920s show traces of the Dodds manner in their playing, and he seems to have been as influential as any reed player during the Chicago period. The case of Jimmy O'Bryant has already been mentioned, but Dodds's influence with coloured musicians seems to have been slight during the Chicago period, partly because of the trend towards big band playing, in which Dodds's clarinet style would have been an anachronism. In New Orleans he was a famous and no doubt much imitated musician, but we lack the evidence to chronicle the details of this period. Among the white Chicagoans Dodds was a prime influence,

although some of the results were peculiar in the extreme. The clarinettist Frank Teschmaker was a great admirer of Johnny's and often used to sit in with the band at Kelly's Stables. Tesch was an unusual musician who was influenced by many diverse kinds of music, but he died too young to get the elements of his highly personal style into perspective. His violent attack was no doubt in part an adaptation of the Dodds *Potato Head Blues* style, while his melodic manner was often a weird juxtaposition of Dodds's phrasing and melodic ideas derived from the white cornetist Bix Beiderbecke. The clarinettist who succeeded Teschmaker as the leading representative of the Chicago school on this instrument, Pee-Wee Russell, is a musician whose work is characterized by various distortions of tone. But Russell, like Rod Cless and other members of the later Chicago school, seems to have built his style, particularly in an ensemble sense, mainly on that of Dodds. Unfortunately the aspect of Johnny Dodds's playing which the Chicagoans utilized was the least valuable of his several ensemble styles, namely that of the Hot Five and Seven performances and of the informal Washboard Band sides.

The development of more complex solo styles in jazz and the lessening opportunity for disciplined band work, ensured that many of the most valuable aspects of Johnny Dodds's playing would go unused by his successors. Like the work of Sidney Bechet and Duke Ellington, Dodds's individual manner of playing was such that it proved a

difficult style for other creative jazzmen to assimilate, compared with the music of such influential figures as Louis Armstrong or Count Basie.

There were many admirable aspects of Johnny Dodds's playing and his approach to music. He was a diligent performer and his contribution to any band he played with was invariably a notable one. He was a perfect *band* player, never forcing his role on our attention above the dictates of the group. Many of the ensembles he played with were rough by present-day technical standards, but they have an expressive power which overcomes any crudities. Above all the *spirit* of the bands with which Johnny played comes over on his records with an ageless vitality and warmth.

As an individual musician Dodds was also a 'rough' player. I do not mean by this that he made a lot of mistakes, but rather that his whole style and concept of music-making was different from that of musicians who aim to produce a smooth, unruffled sound. Johnny Dodds was an expressive musician who played music in a wholehearted way; his generation never thought of themselves as 'artists', but they put everything into their playing. On a blues Johnny Dodds will play with a roughness of tone, of attack, which is a moving aesthetic experience because of the complete honesty of his work—the whole man is in this music, not just a cultivated part of the man called 'artist'. It is perhaps best to let Johnny's brother, Baby Dodds, have the last word, for in this quotation from his auto-

biography, *The Baby Dodds Story*, he expresses perfectly the spirit of the music of Johnny Dodds and his generation of New Orleans jazzmen. The roughness of their music may offend the ears of those concerned with the more sophisticated styles of later jazz, but the qualities of which Baby Dodds speaks here are more fundamental than questions of musical complexity or an over-cultivated 'good taste'. 'The musicians of those days were remarkable men. When the leader of an orchestra would hire a man, there was no jealousy in the gang. Everybody took him in as a brother, and he was treated accordingly. If a fellow came to work with anything, even a sandwich or an orange, the new man would be offered a piece of it. That's the way they were. They believed in harmony. That's how they played music, in harmony. And that's the way the fellows were, those old-timers.'

JOHNNY DODDS
RECOMMENDED RECORDS

The following listing includes most of Johnny Dodds' finest recordings, along with a small number of items below his best which serve to give a rounded picture of his career and his music. No attempt has been made to give the full contents of any LP cited, nor the backings of old 78's, as the constantly shifting pattern of the re-issue of old jazz material would soon render such data obsolete.

It is regretted that the current unavailability of many of Dodds' most important records has resulted in the necessity to include quite a few items that are not at present in the catalogue. These are marked with a star. It would not be possible to give anything like a summary of Dodds' output unless one included deleted records. In a few cases foreign releases, at present in catalogue in their respective countries, have been given rather than the numbers for rare out-of-print American items.

Key to Instrumental Abbreviations:

(*alt*)	alto saxophone	(*p*)	piano
(*bj*)	banjo	(*tbn*)	trombone
(*bs*)	string bass	(*ten*)	tenor saxophone
(*bs-sx*)	bass saxophone	(*tpt*)	trumpet
(*clt*)	clarinet	(*tu*)	tuba
(*cnt*)	cornet	(*vcl*)	vocal
(*d*)	drums	(*wbd*)	washboard
(*g*)	guitar		

Key to Label Abbreviations:

LP 33 1/3 r.p.m. Long Playing Record
EP 45 r.p.m. Extended Play Record
78 78 r.p.m. Standard Record

Abbreviation	*Label*	*Prefix*	*Type*
Bb	Bluebird	B	78
Br	Brunswick	BL	LP(10″)
Co	Columbia	CL	LP(12″)
De	Decca	DL	LP(12″)
Epic	Epic	LN	LP(12″)
Od(F)	Odeon(French)	XOC	LP(12″)
Pa(E)	Parlophone (English)	GEP	EP
RCA	RCA	LPM	LP(12″)
RCA(E)	RCA(English)	RD	LP(12″)
Riv	Riverside	RLP12 series	LP(12″)
Riv	Riverside	RLP1000 series	LP(10″)
Vo(E)	Vocalion(English)	V	78
"X"	"X" Label	LX	LP(10″)

KING OLIVER AND HIS CREOLE JAZZ BAND:

Joe "King" Oliver, Louis Armstrong (*cnt*); Honoré Dutrey (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Lil Hardin (*p*); Bud Scott or Mill Johnson (*bj*); Warren "Baby" Dodds (*d*).

Richmond, Indiana, March 31, 1923

Just Gone
Canal Street Blues
Mandy Lee Blues
Chimes Blues
} Riv RLP12–122

As above, with Johnson definite on *bj*.

Richmond, Indiana, April 6, 1923

Weather Bird Rag *Dippermouth Blues* *Froggie Moore* *Snake Rag*	Riv RLP12–122

Bud Scott (*bj*) replaces Johnson.

Chicago, June 22, 1923

Snake Rag *Sweet Lovin' Man* *High Society* *Sobbin' Blues*[1]	Epic LN3208

[1] Slide whistle solo by Baby Dodds on this number.

Chicago, June 23, 1923

Dippermouth Blues	Epic LN3208

Charlie Johnson (*bs-sx*) added; Johnny St. Cyr (*bj*) replaces Scott.

Chicago, October, 1923

I Ain't Gonna Tell Nobody *Room Rent Blues*	Epic LN3208
Sweet Baby Doll *Working Man Blues* *Mabel's Dream*	Epic LN3208

St. Cyr out.

Chicago, November, 1923

Mabel's Dream *Southern Stomp* *Riverside Blues*	Riv RLP12–122

Note: Louis Armstrong and pianist Lil Hardin were married in 1924, and the latter subsequently used the name Lil Armstrong on all engagements.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG HOT FIVE:

Louis Armstrong (*cnt, vcl* [1]); Kid Ory (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Lil Armstrong (*p, vcl* [2]); Johnny St. Cyr (*bj*).

Chicago, November 12, 1925
Gut Bucket Blues [3] Co CL851

[3] Verbal introductions to solos by Armstrong and Ory.

Dodds also plays *alt* on next title.

Chicago, February 22, 1926
Come Back Sweet Papa Od(F) XOC170

Same personnel.

Chicago, February 26, 1926
Georgia Grind [1,2] Od(F) XOC170
Muskrat Ramble Co CL851

LIL'S HOT SHOTS (actually the LOUIS ARMSTRONG HOT FIVE):

Same personnel.

Chicago, May 28, 1926
Georgia Bo-Bo [1]
Drop That Sack } Br BL58020 *

NEW ORLEANS WANDERERS:

George Mitchell (*cnt*); Kid Ory (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Jimmy Walker (*alt*); Lil Armstrong (*p*); Johnny St. Cyr (*bj*).

Chicago, July 13, 1926

Perdido Street Blues [1]
Gatemouth
Too Tight
Papa Dip
} Epic LN3207

[1] Walker does not play on this number.

NEW ORLEANS BOOTBLACKS:

Same personnel.

Chicago, July 14, 1926

Mixed Salad
I Can't Say
Flat Foot
Mad Dog
} Epic LN3207

FREDDIE KEPPARD'S JAZZ CARDINALS:

Freddie Keppard (*tpt*); Eddie Vincent (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Arthur Campbell (*p*); Jasper Taylor (*woodblocks*); Papa Charlie Jackson (*vcl* [1]).

Chicago, September, 1926

Stockyard Strut
Salty Dog [1]
} Riv RLP1005 *

LOUIS ARMSTRONG HOT FIVE:

Previous Hot Five personnel.

Chicago, November 16, 1926

Skid-Dat-De-Dat — Co CL851

JIMMY BERTRAND'S WASHBOARD WIZARDS:

Louis Armstrong (*cnt*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Jimmy Blythe (*p*); Jimmy Bertrand (*d*).

Chicago, April 20, 1927

I'm Goin' Huntin'
If You Want to Be My Sugar Papa } Vo(E) V1032 *

JOHNNY DODDS' BLACK BOTTOM STOMPERS:

Louis Armstrong (*cnt*); unknown *tbn* (possibly Honoré Dutrey); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Barney Bigard (*ten*); Earl Hines (*p*); Bud Scott (*bj*); Baby Dodds (*d*).

Chicago, April 22, 1927

Weary Blues
New Orleans Stomp } Br BL58016 *
Wild Man Blues — De DL8398
Melancholy — Br BL58004 *

LOUIS ARMSTRONG HOT SEVEN:

Louis Armstrong (*tpt, vcl* [1]); unknown *tbn* (possibly John Thomas); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Lil Armstrong (*p, vcl* [2]); Johnny St. Cyr (*bj, g*); Pete Briggs (*tu*); Baby Dodds (*d*).

Chicago, May 7, 1927

Willie The Weeper
Wild Man Blues } Co CL852

Honoré Dutrey definitely on *tbn.*

Chicago, May 10, 1927

Alligator Crawl Blues
Potato Head Blues } Co CL852

Kid Ory (*tbn*) replaces Dutrey.

Chicago, May 11, 1927

Melancholy Blues
Weary Blues } Co CL852

Chicago, May 13, 1927

Keyhole Blues
S.O.L. Blues [1] } Co CL852

Chicago, May 14, 1927

Gully Low Blues [1]
That's When I'll Come Back To You [1,2] } Co CL852

JELLY ROLL MORTON'S RED HOT PEPPERS:

George Mitchell (*cnt*); George Bryant (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Stomp Evans (*alt*); Jelly Roll Morton (*p*); Johnny St. Cyr (*bj, g*); Quinn Wilson (*tu*); Baby Dodds (*d*).

Chicago, June 4, 1927

Wild Man Blues — Bb B10256*
Jungle Blues — RCA LPM1649

JELLY ROLL MORTON TRIO:

Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Jelly Roll Morton (*p*); Baby Dodds (*d*).

Chicago, June 10, 1927

Wolverine Blues
Mr. Jelly Lord } RCA(S) RD27184

JOHNNY DODDS' BLACK BOTTOM STOMPERS:

Probably: George Mitchell, Reuben Reeves (*tpt*); Gerald Reeves (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Charlie Alexander (*p*); Johnny St. Cyr or Bud Scott (*bj*); Baby Dodds (*d*).

Chicago, October 8, 1927

Come On And Stomp, Stomp, Stomp
After You've Gone
Joe Turner Blues
When Erastus Plays His Old Kazoo } Br BL58016 *

LOUIS ARMSTRONG HOT FIVE:

Louis Armstrong (*tpt, vcl*[1]); Kid Ory (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Lil Armstrong (*p*); Johnny St. Cyr (*bj*).

Chicago, December 9, 1927

Once In A While Pa(E) GEP8730

Chicago, December 10, 1927
Lonnie Johnson (*g*) added.

I'm Not Rough[1] Co CL851

BLIND BLAKE:

Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Blind Blake (*vcl, g*); Jimmy Bertrand (*woodblocks, slide whistle*).

Chicago, *c.* March 1928

Hot Potatoes — Riv RLP1002 *

JOHNNY DODDS' TRIO:

Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Lil Armstrong (*p*); Bill Johnson (*bs*).

Chicago, July 5, 1928

Blue Clarinet Stomp
Blue Piano Stomp
} "X" LX3006 *

JOHNNY DODDS' WASHBOARD BAND:

Natty Dominique (*tpt*); Honore Dutrey (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Jimmy Blythe or Lil Armstrong (*p*); Bill Johnson (*bs*); Baby Dodds (*wbd*).

Chicago, July 6, 1928

Bucktown Stomp
Weary City
Blue Washboard Stomp
Bull Fiddle Blues
} "X" LX3006 *

JOHNNY DODDS' HOT SIX:

Same personnel, except Lil Armstrong is definitely on piano and Baby Dodds switches to drums.

Chicago, February 7, 1929

Goober Dance
Too Tight
} Bb B10240 *

BEALE STREET WASHBOARD BAND:

Herb Morand (*tpt*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Frank Melrose (*p*); Baby Dodds (*wbd*).

Chicago, July 24, 1929

Forty And Tight
Piggly Wiggly } Br BL58016 *

JOHNNY DODDS' CHICAGO BOYS:

Charlie Shavers (*tpt*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Lil Armstrong (*p*); Teddy Bunn (*g*); John Kirby (*bs*); O'Neil Spencer (*d*).

New York City, January 21, 1938

Wild Man Blues
Melancholy
29th And Dearborn } Br BL58046 *

JOHNNY DODDS AND HIS ORCHESTRA:

Natty Dominique (*tpt*); Preston Jackson (*tbn*); Johnny Dodds (*clt*); Richard M. Jones (*p*); Lonnie Johnson (*g*); John Lindsay (*bs*); Baby Dodds (*d*).

Chicago, June 5, 1940

Red Onion Blues
Gravier Street Blues } De DL8283

-5121