

D a n i e l S m i t h

# A RECORDING HISTORY THE JOURNEY TO “PINETOP’S BOOGIE WOOGIE”

Whilst it is **impossible to be exhaustive**, here are some of Daniel's personal picks:-  
**Research this content further; find YouTube footage; documentaries; & histories on the net!**  
*References are provided in the Bibliography at the end of this document.*

## 1887 THOMAS EDISON

The American inventor's technological discovery of how to record audio via **The Cylinder Phonograph** paved the way for recorded music. **Edouard-Léon Scott de Martinville**, a French inventor, had already devised his '**phonograph**' in 1857 (inscribing the vibrations of sounds onto a permanent medium, like ink on paper). But, Edison's technology not only recorded sounds - it allowed them to be reproduced at will. This was so astounding that the **phonograph singularly established Edison's** reputation as the prominent inventor of the *technology that would ultimately record our holy grail of "Pine Top's Boogie Woogie"*.

## 1895 ERNEST HOGAN

The recognition of African-American jazz-related music, via it being **published**, started with **Ernest Hogan's ragtime composition**, called "LA PAS MA LA".

## 1899 SCOTT JOPLIN

Next, Joplin, having already published several 'Rags', **published "MAPLE LEAF RAG"**, which was subsequently **soon to be recorded**, initiating the journey of African-American music records... including, eventually, boogie woogie!

## 1901 ELDRIDGE JOHNSON

In 1901, IN N. Jersey, Johnson founded the **Victor Talking Machine Company**, which quickly became the leader in **phonographs** ("**phonograph**" the USA term for what was really a **gramophone**) and in record sales. *In 1906 Victor introduced the Victrola, that hid the trumpet-like speaker & turntable into a cabinet, turning the machine into nice-looking furniture.* The device proved popular with masses that were eager to listen to, e.g. famous stars. Consumers would **soon be offered ragtime, blues & boogie woogie!**

## 1902 WILBUR SWEATMAN

Clarinetist, Sweatman, recorded SCOTT JOPLIN'S "MAPLE LEAF RAG" onto a Phonograph Cylinder. *This seminal recording has sadly been lost to time.*

## 1906 SCOTT JOPLIN (again!)

The US Marine Band, record SCOTT JOPLIN'S "MAPLE LEAF RAG" – a recording that still exists! Momentum is growing towards recording the related musical forms of Blues and Boogie Woogie.

## 1912 W.C. HANDY

William Christopher Handy ('The Father Of The Blues') publishes his composition, "Memphis Blues", calling it a 'Southern Rag'. **The number is not a Blues, musically**, but was important in that it was soon recorded as an instrumental and then with vocals (see below). It is important to recognize that there were also other **published compositions** with the name 'Blues' (before and after 1912) in the title, but they also were not Blues in any way that we today would understand, musically. The significant difference, though, was - **Handy's imminent two RECORDINGS, of a tune CALLED A 'BLUES'...**

## 1914 & 1915 "MEMPHIS BLUES"

And here it is - the first **hit 'blues' recordings** were instrumental renditions of the "Memphis Blues" by **Prince's Orchestra (Columbia)** and **The Victor Military Band (directed by Walter Rogers)**, both released in 1914...

It then became the **FIRST VOCAL BLUES RECORDING**, interpreted by **Morton Harvey** with accompaniment by the **New York Philharmonic Orchestra (Victor)**, released **January 1915**. A giant step in our journey!

## 1917 ORIGINAL DIXIELAND JASS BAND

In 1917, an all white group called the **Original Dixieland Jass Band** made what is accepted as the **first jazz recording**. But it is also part of blues history since the **first number recorded by the band was the "LIVERY STABLE BLUES"**. It **was, broadly, a 12-bar blues** format... though with more jazz-like chord progressions.

## 1919 AL BENARD

**Al Bernard's** 1919 recording of "**Hesitation Blues**" (whilst Bernard was white), was important in that it represented the **FIRST PURE 12-BAR BLUES VOCAL RECORD**... with majority subsequent releases now being by black artists.

## 1920 MAMIE SMITH

The next huge step forward was the first blues vocal cut by a black artist... and that was **Mamie Smith**, backed by the Rega Orchestra. Whilst not a 12-bar blues, "That Thing Called Love"/"You Can't Keep a Good Man Down" represented the first recognition of an African-American vocal on record and were thus monumental in importance. Mamie would go on to achieve considerable success with a succession of Okeh recordings, notably "**Crazy Blues**" (1920). *All a huge step to the seismic 1923, 'Bessie-phenomenon'...and beyond!*

## 1923 BESSIE SMITH

Columbia's signing of Bessie in 1923 represented a watershed event for all African-American artists – blues to boogie woogie alike. Smith immediately established herself as the top-selling blues singer, stimulating many other labels to enter the "race records" market – generally, to all such artists' benefit. **In 1923 she recorded 'Down Hearted Blues'/'Gulf Coast Blues'; 'Baby Won't You Please Come Home Blues';** and the hit, "**Taint Nobody's Biz-Ness If I Do**". Whilst the latter was written by Porter Grainger & Everett Robins (recorded by Anna Meyers in '22), it was Bessie's '**Empress Of The Blues**' star-quality, including featuring in the **1929 film, 'St Louis Blues'** (another new technology!); **plus** the sheer quantity of record-sales, that makes her version and this year... 'watershed' – for her, as well as all forthcoming black blues and boogie woogie artists... now being taken seriously, financially, as well as artistically.

## 1923 SYLVESTER WEAVER

The first black male country BLUES musician to record, did so **as a guitarist**. Weaver, from Kentucky, went to Okeh's New York studio Oct 1923 to **accompany Sara Marlin** on a two songs:- "**Longing for Daddy Blues**" and "**I've Got to Go and Leave My Daddy Behind**". The following month he recorded two of his own tunes, "**Guitar Blues**" and "**Guitar Rag**," proving inspirational both to black blues musicians and white country musicians. It wasn't long before black male guitarist / vocalists were making records... artists such as **Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Skip James, Big Bill Broonzy and Bumble Bee Slim**.

## 1924 PAPA CHARLIE JACKSON

This first commercially successful male blues artist SANG and played an unusual six-string guitar-banjo. He began recording for Paramount in 1924, producing nearly three dozen 78s by 1930. His versions of "**Salty Dog**," "**Shake That Thing**," "**Alabama Bound**" and "**Spoonful**" set the template for many covers to come. Playing finger-style or with a flat pick, he conjured a strong, staccato attack on his big guitar-banjo. His unstoppable rhythms were **perfectly suited for dancing – just as boogie woogie was**.

## 1924 JIMMY BLYTHE

So that takes us on to **BOOGIE WOOGIE!** The first known recording of a true boogie-woogie piano solo is:- **Jimmy Blythe's 'Chicago Stomp' in 1924.** *Note the term 'boogie woogie' is not yet used in the title.* Likewise, the boogie woogie recordings now starting to be issued by artists like **Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis and Jimmy Yancy**, if they had any word 'tagged on'... tended to have '**Blues**', '**Stomp**' or '**Rocks**' in the title.

## 1925 CHARLES 'COW COW' DAVENPORT

Vocalist, **Dora Carr** recorded **Cow Cow Davenport's "Cow Cow Blues"** in New York in October 1925 for OKEH Records. Davenport's piano accompaniment is another **early example of boogie woogie on record**, again without utilizing the words 'boogie' or 'woogie' in the title. **Davenport**, who recorded 40+ boogie & blues piano tracks (later collated into 2 volumes) is **intrinsic to the 'boogie woogie story'** as he *claims to have passed on the term 'boogie woogie'* **Clarence 'Pine Top' Smith**. In his capacity as a talent scout for Vocalon Records, **Davenport recommended that Smith do a recording session.** This, he (Pine Top Smith) did, in Chicago, **as per the next entry.** *Sadly, Smith never made it to his subsequent session and only issued 8 numbers. No photos exist of him.*

## 1928/9 CLARENCE 'PINE TOP' SMITH

Smith had moved north to **Chicago in 1928**, with his young family. He **recorded a boogie woogie number there**, with verbalized instructions, in late December that year. The record was **released in 1929, under the title that Pine Top had given the track:- "Pine Top's Boogie Woogie"**. It was a hit; the title-label was stenciled on the records; it was duly registered; and **"BOOGIE WOOGIE" was officially 'Christened'**.

## 1938 PETE JOHNSON & BIG JO TURNER

"**Roll 'Em Pete**" is a song, originally recorded in December 1938 by **Big Joe Turner & Pete Johnson**. The recording is regarded as **one of the most important precursors of what became known as 'rock and roll'**. It was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2018. Johnson, a **boogie-woogie pianist** in Kansas City, in the early 1930s developed a partnership with Turner, working as a bartender. Turner would shout blues rhymes to Johnson's music. In 1938, the pair were invited by John Hammond to the first **From Spirituals to Swing concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City**. While in New York, they had a session with Vocalion, recording the 12-bar blues "**Roll 'Em Pete**" on December 30, 1938. The song was an **UP-TEMPO BOOGIE WOOGIE**, which, with Turner's shouted blues verses, may well be regarded as the first rock'n'roll record. And there, **having started with Edison – our boogie woogie odyssey ends... for now!**

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