

James Boucher with Wooding

Bo Lindström

In the book *Traveling Blues*, we have stated that violinist James Boucher joined the Sam Wooding Orchestra before going to Sweden in 1925. The identity of this musician could not be 100% verified prior to the printing of the book. Recent information has now showed that the violinist joining Wooding in Sweden and Denmark really was James Boucher.

According to Herb Flemming, British black violinist Jimmy Boucher joined the Wooding Orchestra while in Berlin. Flemming does not state when this was – Wooding came to Berlin three times during 1925-1926 – but according to Bushell, this happened prior to the Russian tour early in 1926. Probably, Bushell did confuse the Berlin appearances; the presence of a violinist in the Scandinavian tour speaks for this.

Another cause for the mistake could be that when Garvin Bushell's wife left the show in Prague prior to the Russian tour, she was replaced by Enid (Ena) Boucher, James Boucher's sister. It is very plausible that James Boucher, who was then well known by the ensemble, arranged her engagement. Thus the name Boucher appears in the listings from the Russian tour, but there is no evidence at all that James Boucher took part in this Russian tour.

Violinist, clarinetist and alto sax player James "Jimmy" Boucher's mother was Nanette Horton Boucher, daughter of Surgeon-Major James Africanus Beale Horton of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Africanus Horton had qualified in medicine after studying at King's College, London, and at Edinburgh University. Sierra Leone was at that time a British Protectorate and did not become an independent state until 1961. Africanus Horton was a Krio (Creole), Africans with substantial European ways who numbered about sixty thousand and lived in Freetown and the villages of the colony of Sierra Leone. Africanus Horton stemmed from the Igbo ethnic group, and died in Africa in 1883. His daughter Nanette Horton married one William Henry Boucher. Boucher's father was Reverend Henry Boucher of St. Lucia and his mother was a Scottish lady. Nanette and William Henry settled in London and they had three children: Madeleine, born in Sierra Leone in 1900, Jimmy, born in London sometime between 1900 and 1906, and Enid, born 1906. James Boucher thus was an English citizen and rather light-skinned.



Africanus Horton

Jimmy Boucher became a professional musician as a member of the legendary Southern Syncopated Orchestra touring England in 1919-1921. This orchestra, originally formed in U.S.A. by Will Marion Cook, comprised 27 musicians and a choir of 19. The musicians came from New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Guyana, Barbados, among other places. The most renowned of these musicians was Sidney Bechet. After periods of inactivity and leadership fights, the Southern Syncopated Orchestra tour ended in disaster: on the night of October 9, 1921, the company was on board *S.S. Rowan* from Glasgow, Scotland to Derry, Ireland, when the ship sank after a collision, drowning eight members of the orchestra. James Boucher was dramatically rescued and he subsequently played all over Europe during the 1920s and in Paris in 1930. Later on he lived in Switzerland during WWII and recorded with orchestra leader Hazy Osterwald in 1949. He is said to have died in 1973.

Some sources state that Boucher came from Kingston, Jamaica. Indeed, one colored James Boucher immigrated to the United States in 1917 and he was drafted in New York in 1918. This other Boucher also had English citizenship but he was born in 1874. The information on Boucher's death comes from Arthur Briggs and Fletcher Allen in an interview by Frank Driggs in 1974. This information was then given to Karl Gert zur Heide in 1980

There is a photo of the Wooding Orchestra showing a violinist. This photo was shot somewhere in Europe, but most probably in Berlin or Hamburg. Provided this photo was taken before the Russian tour, it might very well have been shot in Berlin or Hamburg since all evidence points at a Boucher presence in the Northern Europe tour only. Strangely enough, the trumpet section in this picture only has two members since Maceo Edwards is missing. Furthermore, the sax section is not shown in this photo but either this is a cut out from a larger photo or the saxophones were caught in another photo. It is strange that one mellophone is standing in front of Tommy. He did not play this horn; other photos clearly show that only Maceo Edwards and Bobby Martin played French horns.



The Sam Wooding Orchestra in Hamburg 1925

Newly found pictures of James Boucher from his Paris engagements around 1930 clearly show that the violinist shown with Wooding in 1925 was Boucher.



James Boucher in 1925 and 1929

The *Chocolate Kiddies Show* performed successfully for eight weeks in Berlin. They then relocated to Hamburg on July 22, 1925 and opened at the Thalia-Theater on July 28th at 8 p.m. The show was, just as in Berlin, a public success but the press critics were once again reserved. The *Chocolate Kiddies Show* made 32 Hamburg performances until August 24, 1925.

The Stockholm Cirkus premiere was on Friday, August 28, 1925. One lengthy and thorough review of the *Chocolate Kiddies Revue* was given in *Scenen* by the musical scholar Gunnar Jeanson. It must be considered as one of the first attempts to give a reasonably serious review of jazz in Sweden. After some criticism of the sometimes tiring dancing and acrobatics in the show, he writes:

*... the Cirkus jazz concert. I do not know how much was rehearsed and how much was improvised at the spur of the moment. These men always showed a striking interplay. In the middle of all rhythmic tensions, when the **violin**, independent of the measures, played alone; when the discontinued trumpet tottered away, unconcerned about the saxophones or the tuba...*

It is reasonable to assume that the “tottering” trumpet player must have been Tommy Ladnier. Another very interesting aspect is the mentioning of a violin, showing that James Boucher played in Stockholm.

A photo from the Stockholm show published in a Swedish magazine shows that the Sam Wooding Orchestra at this time was composed of twelve musicians. This photo, only found in the printed magazine and taken at a distance is rather blurred, but a somewhat light-skinned man is sitting behind Sam Wooding. Although his instrument is not visible, his stage position and the fact that the features of this man very much resemble the violinist in the “Hamburg” photo reveals that this is violinist James Boucher.



Figure 1 The Sam Wooding Orchestra on stage in Stockholm

One letter from Tommy Ladnier appears in *Chicago Defender* in The Musical Bunch column. It is not stated if this letter was mailed directly to *Chicago Defender* or to somebody else; usually letters sent directly to the editors were quoted exactly:

Tommy Ladnier in Sweden

*Tommy Ladnier, the world's jazziest cornet player, writes that all is well in the Old World, and he could stay there forever. Tommy says that any musician who gets the opportunity to go abroad should take it. The band that Tommy is with is out of New York and is composed of **12 members** under the leadership of Sam Wooding.*

It is interesting that Tommy here states the number of musicians in the band as 12, again showing the presence of a violinist.

From Stockholm the *Chocolate Kiddies Show* entourage traveled south to Malmö on Monday September 14th and continued with a ferry to Copenhagen.

The Copenhagen premiere was on Tuesday September 15, 1925 at Cirkusbygningen. Originally, the contract for the Copenhagen appearance stipulated seven days. However, when

the agents then, just like in Stockholm, tried to extend the stay and the show dancers and singers learned that there would be three additional shows without extra payment, they left the company and embarked by boat for Germany on September 22nd. The Wooding Orchestra was offered a contract for performances at Scala Theatret and perhaps the well-known Copenhagen photos are from one of these concerts. There are two different photos from this occasion. The only difference seen is that John Mitchell is strumming his banjo in one picture while his left hand rest on his knee on the other. The orchestra appeared in concerts for three nights and made their last Danish performance on Thursday, September 24th. On the 25th, the Wooding band left Copenhagen by train for Hanover, Germany.



The Sam Wooding Orchestra on stage in Copenhagen

It is worth noting that no violinist is seen in these Copenhagen photos. In spite of this, Copenhagen press reviews write of a **twelve-piece jazz** band that might be either printing errors or a fact in case the violinist was in the band during the initial appearance at Cirkusbygningen. It is therefore plausible to assume that James Boucher left the band with the rest of the show, probably for good.

The author is greatly indebted to Rainer E. Lotz, Karl Gert zur Heide, Howard Rye, and Robert Hitchens for information regarding Boucher.