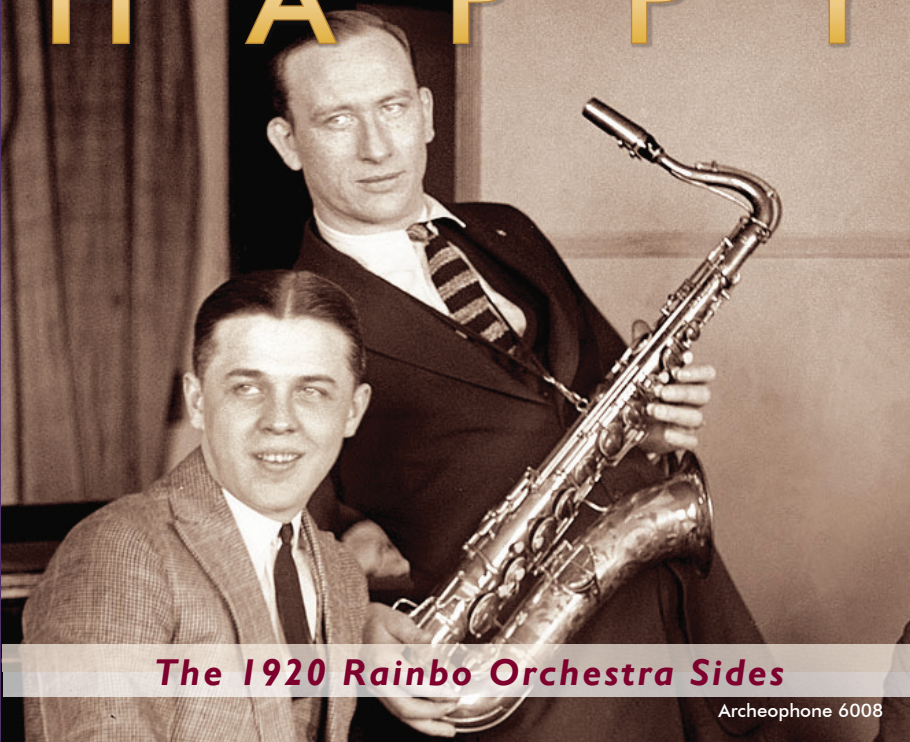


ISHAM JONES HAPPY



The 1920 Rainbo Orchestra Sides

Archeophone 6008

I S H A M J O N E S

H A P P Y

CD 1

1. Sahara Rose..... 3:09
2. Dance-O-Mania..... 2:57
3. Waiting for the Sun to..... 2:45
Come Out
4. La Veeda..... 2:57
5. So Long, Oo Long..... 3:05
6. When Shadows Fall I Hear... 2:43
You Calling, California
7. Wait'Il You See..... 2:56
8. Alice Blue Gown..... 3:19
9. Jean..... 2:49
10. A Young Man's Fancy..... 2:43
11. Idle Dreams..... 2:44
12. Scandal Walk..... 2:31
13. Happy..... 3:10
14. Kismet..... 2:47
15. Koolemoff..... 3:07
16. Sweet Woman..... 2:46
17. Dreamy Paradise..... 3:20
18. Japanese Sandman..... 3:29
19. Wishing..... 3:00

Total Playing Time..... 57:03

CD 2

1. Rose of Araby..... 2:59
2. Lovin' Lady..... 2:57
3. Jing-Bula-Jing-Jing..... 2:46
4. I Love You, Sunday..... 3:17
5. Avalon..... 3:22
6. Fair One..... 2:51
7. Sultan..... 3:29
8. Look for the Silver Lining..... 3:27
9. Rose..... 3:27
10. Whip-Poor-Will..... 3:13
11. Do You Ever Think of Me? 3:19
12. All She'd Say Was Umh Hum.. 3:10
13. My Mammy..... 3:23
14. I Never Realized..... 3:29
15. Make Believe..... 3:07
16. Underneath Hawaiian Skies . 3:30
17. Love Bird..... 3:07
18. Siren of the Southern Sea..... 3:15

Total Playing Time..... 58:51

BLOWING HIS OWN HORN— ISHAM JONES AND THE RAINBO ORCHESTRA

Tastes change. In the arts, one movement or school gives way to another; critics hail the new as modern and deride the old-fashioned. Purveyors of the new are considered trailblazers; advocates of the old are anachronisms.

But what about the artists who fall between the cracks? Isham Jones, on his earliest recordings, is such a musician who had one foot firmly rooted in the polite social dancing of the 1910s and one foot in the emerging modern dance band of the 1920s. As transitional efforts, however, Jones' first recordings from 1920—with his Rainbo Orchestra from Chicago—belong to neither school. In fact, some observers at the time lauded Jones for his *balanced* approach. Unfortunately for history, that means the records have been ignored by connoisseurs, who seem uncomfortable with gray areas in art.

Isham (with a long “I”) Jones would go on to give us some of the finest examples of American dance music on wax, and he would contribute timeless classics such as

“It Had to Be You” to the Great American Songbook. But let's pause for a moment over his first recordings and celebrate what makes them special.

Full of lively and tuneful melodies played by virtuosic performers, and arranged in a style that invited dancers rather than estranged or confused them, Jones' first 37 sides demonstrate his deep, blue-collar work ethic and his commitment to precision and excellence. He worked tirelessly arranging, composing, and playing the saxophone while making it look effortless. And he resisted the hokey gimmicks that signified “jazz,” just as surely as he disallowed his band to play a waltz in a mechanical, unfeeling fashion.

The result is bliss. The tension between the old and new is palpable. We can feel the pull of both worlds, yet Jones never goes fully toward either. And amongst these forgotten performances, we feel part of a definite place and time. That place is Isham Jones' Chicago. The time is 1920. And the feeling is happy.



The life he left behind. At left: Genesee Avenue in Saginaw, Michigan, about the time the Jones family moved there (*Library of Congress*). Right: Michigan coal mine mule drivers (*Mining Artifacts and History*, www.miningartifacts.org).

COAL MINES, FIDDLES & MULES

Isham Edwin Jones¹ was born on January 31, 1894 in Coalton, Ohio, to Richard Isham and Ida Coyer Jones. Isham was the third youngest of five boys and one girl. Before little “Ish” was six, the family moved to Saginaw, Michigan, where mining continued on as the breadwinner’s vocation. But music-making figured into the family’s

daily routine and ritual. Richard Isham, in the words of one scribe, “...Who had come North [sic] from the back woods of Arkansas, was devoted to the rustic fiddle. He could play reels and breakdowns in a way that would put a tingle in an Eskimo’s wooden leg.”²

Isham too, took up the fiddle, followed shortly thereafter by piano and eventually,



2

DEDICATED TO HIS FRIEND
MR. L.A. BURROWS

MID SUMMER EVENINGS
CAPRICE

ISHAM JONES
1878.

Copyright 1908 by Isham Jones

Isham Jones' first published work, from 1908, dedicated to his benefactor (*Library of Congress*).

the saxophone and the string bass. In his young teens Ish organized a small band to play for services and other functions at the local Methodist church. A stoic and elderly member of the congregation, a banker, apparently appreciated the music, but noticed the youngster's deprecating and shy attitude. The man beckoned the youngster and sternly told him to be more positive and forceful, exhorting, "Blow your own horn,

Sonny, and blow it hard!" The lecture made a deep impression on young Isham and helped him find his backbone. According to a newspaper obituary, this moment deeply inspired the lad, who shortly thereafter saw the first publication of one of his own tunes. As luck would have it, a search of copyright file cards led me to what seems to be Jones' first published work: a caprice entitled "Mid Summer Evenings," registered in 1908,

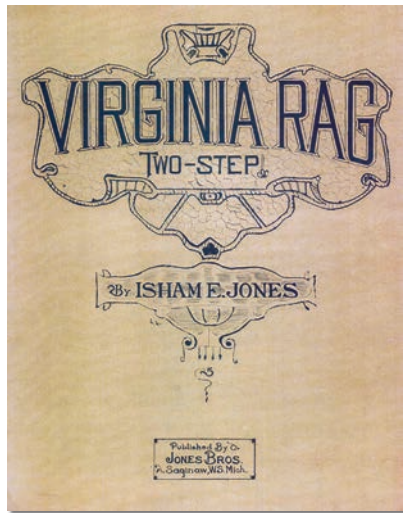
when Ish was just 14 years old—a fact boldly advertised on the first page of the sheet music. The work is dedicated: “To my friend Mr. L. A. Burrows.” A look through Saginaw death records reveals one Latham A. Burrows, ca. 1849–1913, a local banker. Most probably, this was young Ish’s benefactor.

The lecture probably came at a good time, for Jones, despite a tall and strapping visage, did suffer acute shyness, probably brought on by a terrible complexion, one that would leave his face badly pock-marked and ruddy. The words of Mr. Burrows, one surmises, steered the youth towards perfectionism and to hyper-focus on what he did best. Despite discovering his self-confidence, Ish developed an austere, unsmiling presence on the podium, conducting with a baton, looking like—in the words of Swing Era journalist George T. Simon—a “strict manual arts teacher.”³

OUT OF THE MINES—INTO THE GUARD

However, the family business came first, and in his teens, Ish was driving a mule and a string of coal cars.⁴ An accident occurred shortly thereafter—one that would suddenly shift the teen into a new life chapter. He later claimed that

his mind had wandered towards music and he crashed into a mine shaft door. Both Jones and his mule were unscathed. Nevertheless, Ish was unnerved and quickly declared the mine fields and shafts



Jones continued writing. A piano composition, “Virginia Rag,” was put out in 1914 by Jones Bros. Publishing. Perhaps this was a company Ish had started with his one or more of his many siblings, or perhaps it was a branch of the local Jones Bros. Pool Hall (York University Libraries).

off-limits; he would now pursue music with all his focus and passion.

It is not recorded what the elder Jones thought of his son's prodigious forays in the music field. Given that Ish's stern, no-nonsense demeanor was perhaps inherited, one can imagine his father's icy reception being warmed somewhat when it became apparent that his son could indeed earn a good living.

By 1913, Jones was serving in the Michigan National Guard and playing alto saxophone in the Third Regiment Band under Arthur Amsden—a name still associated with a series of well-known brass duets. While in the Guard, he met banjoist and lyricist Ole Olsen, also a Saginaw boy; the two would form a songwriting/performing partnership.

In another, more serious accident on November 22, 1914, Jones was involved in a collision between an automobile and the Michigan Central Line. Ish was out on the town with several friends, drinking and then driving to other establishments when the driver of the car pulled in front of a speeding train. Two persons were killed and Jones, along with four others, was injured; both of his legs sustained fractures. A telltale sign of this can be seen on his draft registration card dated June 2, 1917, in the

space allotted for reasons for exemption. Here Jones scrawled “right leg smashed.”

TO CHI

Isham Jones left Saginaw in 1914 or 1915 (accounts vary), his whereabouts hard to pin down. His draft registration of 1917 shows that he was employed as a musician at “Elie Park” (the illegible scrawl is most likely an abbreviation for “Electric Park”) in Kansas City, Missouri. The registration also indicates that he was married by this time. However, accounts in the *Saginaw News* from late the summer of 1916 refers to him as “Isham Jones of Chicago.” Also, somewhere in this period, Jones left the National Guard and joined the army. His injured leg apparently kept him stateside, away from the fighting.

In 1918 he formed a seven-piece dance orchestra for Tom Chamales' Green Mill Gardens on Chicago's North Side. The new Jones ensemble was under the management of Edgar Benson, whose huge umbrella booking agency had widespread representation around the Windy City. Jones would remain under Benson's strict and controlling management until 1925. Meanwhile, Chicago restaurateur Fred C. Mann had negotiated the purchase of the Moulin Rouge Gardens several blocks west of the Green Mill. Mann renamed it

~ end of booklet excerpt ~

Learn more about
Isham Jones, *Happy: The 1920 Rainbo Orchestra Sides*
at archeophone.com/cds/6008