

ANTHONY BARNETT, ED

*fallen from the moon*

ROBERT EDWARD

JUICE WILSON

*his life on earth*



*a dossier*

*A·B*

Anthony Barnett, ed.  
Fallen from the Moon: Robert Edward Juice Wilson  
His Life on Earth: A Dossier

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Juice Wilson, born 1904, was a truly remarkable violinist, who grew up alongside Eddie South in Chicago, and reed player. He recorded just two violin solos with the Noble Sissle Orchestra in London in 1929. He then worked, as far as the wider jazz community is concerned, in some obscurity, in France, Italy, Spain, North Africa, Malta, before returning to USA, via Paris, to Chicago, for the first time, in 1963 – scroll down for that year’s update to the book.

He died in 1972, whatever wildly inaccurate date may be read elsewhere. This dossier collects accounts of him by those who knew him, including in Barcelona and Malta, and other documents, such as letters from him. Many previously unpublished photos are included, along with transcriptions of his two solos.

The title of the book is drawn from an article in which Antoni Tendes, who knew him in Barcelona in the 1930s, said: “He gave me the impression of a man who had fallen from the moon.” Tendes could not have known of our cover photo, taken later in Malta, yet there is the moon.

Some YouTube postings of the titles with his two solos, “Kansas City Kitty” and “Miranda”, should be treated with caution in respect of incorrect speed/pitch. An excellent CD, which also includes all but one of the other titles on which Wilson is heard in the ensemble, is Jazz Time [FR] 2527142 *Black Jazz in Europe, 1926–1930*. Purchasers of the book who cannot access this CD are welcome to request transfers of the two titles with his solos from [ab@abar.net](mailto:ab@abar.net) from whom the book is available.

*Scroll down for updates to this book and for reviews*

A·B

ANTHONY BARNETT, ED

*fallen from the moon*

ROBERT EDWARD  
JUICE WILSON

*his life on earth  
a dossier*

*To Bossard.  
Wishing him every thing  
that I wish my-self.  
Juice.  
Wilson.  
Pgt.*

PHOTO CICLIO

A.B

## UPDATES

Formal publication date 21 January 2021, anniversary of Juice Wilson's birth. Book available October 2020

*The paper used for the book turns out not to have been the best for the images, for which apologies*

*pages 11-13 - added February 2021*

Scroll down to Nick Dellow's *VJM* review for further consideration of the name "Little Juice", later just "Juice"—i.e. youthful energy—and for speculation about a reason for leaving Chicago in 1919 - *with thanks to Nick Dellow*

*pages 12, 16 - added October 2020*

Juice Wilson's complete certificate of death arrived too late for consideration in the book. It reveals that he died in Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital following the onset of emphysema and bronchitis, and other complications, about one year earlier. It is likely that he was admitted to the hospital on 25 June 1972. Informant of his death Madie M. Cannamore was a clerk at the hospital and doubtless would not have known anything about his last years - *with thanks to Alfred Ticoalu*

*page 12, 16, 71, 74, 75, etc - added November 2020*

It has now been established that Wilson returned to Chicago some two years earlier than previously thought. He applied for his Social Security number on 23 December 1963, at which time his address was 4720 South Parkway. This means that Jean-Marie Masse is mistaken in believing that Wilson played with him in Limoges for "three, four years." It was for one year - *with thanks to Howard Rye*

*page 12, paragraph 4, line 2 - added October 2020*

The Noble Sissle recordings took place at Hayes, Middlesex, so the line should *read*: Sissle while in London [*not*: Sissle in London]

*page 14, line 2 - added November 2020*

*read*: playing. [*not*: playing?]

page 15, photo - added October 2020

*A few copies have wide bands of over-inking - let us know if this applies to your copy*

pages 17, 28, 29, 42 - added December 2020

“As I said in my article on comic bull-fighting in Spain, one of the most popular bands, perhaps the most popular, is composed entirely of Negroes, and is known as Las Estrellas Negras, or Black Stars. / Its 25 members are chiefly Central and South Americans, but there are five American Negroes: Robert E. Wilson, of Chicago, Albert M. Barnes, of Washington D. C., Joseph Jones, of Baltimore, James Holmes, of Glencoe, Ill., Albert E. Holman, of New York City.”—J. A. Rogers “Baltimore Boys Fight Bulls in Madrid”. *Baltimore Afro-American*, 24 September 1932, p.10 - with thanks to Hans Pebl

pages 17, 28, 29, 42 - added January 2023

An article about the Blac [sic] Star Band appeared in the Spanish newspaper *Abora*, 3 May 1932. It includes three photos of the musicians playing about with a young bull. The photos are believed to include Wilson. Thomas Chase reported that they joined the orchestra late 1932, which would appear to contradict Wilson’s presence. However, it is known that Chase’s chronology is inaccurate in several respects - with thanks to Konrad Nowakowski

pages 17, 28, 29, 42 - added March 2024

The drummer is Joe Jones, not Joe James - with thanks to Konrad Nowakowski

page 19, par. 3, line 1 - added November 2020

read: tells us [not: tell us]

page 23, intro line 1 erratum - added October 2020

read: In his letter [not: Ian his letter]

pages 27, 83, 85, Noble Sissle’s drummer - added January 2021

read: Jesse Boltimore [not: Baltimore]

according to his hand-written name, Jess Theodore Boltimore, and signature, Jesse T. Boltimore, on his New York social security registration card. Local 802 directories confirm this spelling - with thanks to Chris Barry via Nick Dellow

pages 27, 83, 85 - added January 2021  
read: Demas Dean [not: Demus]

page 28, line 3 - added January 2021  
read: 1918 [not: 1928]

page 31, photo - added October 2020 - updated January 2020

The photo taken at Sliema, spring 1942, does not show Alec Boswell shaking hands with Juice Wilson. The man is Norman Jenkinson and the photo is taken by Alec Boswell - with thanks to Alison Adamson and Jean Boswell Barnett [no relation to AB]

page 35, 69–70 - added March 2023

It is now established that Wilson arrived in Paris by June 1962, not in the autumn as previously thought. “Juice Wilson à Paris”, *Combat*, 25 June 1962, reports that he is homesick and desperately searching for work - with thanks to Konrad Nowakowski

pages 51–53 - added July 2021

scroll down for new photo of Wilson with ten-piece Jimmy Dowling orchestra

pages 58, 87 - added January 2021

A most enthusiastic, colorful review, by Gerard H. Boedijn, of Louis Douglas's *Louisiana* performance at Veendam, 14 October 1931, appeared in *De Noord-Ooster*, 15 October 1931. Although musicians are not named, it is certain that this refers to Juice Wilson: “violin notes as if from the most glorious Stradivarius” - with thanks to Konrad Nowakowski, and Ate van Delden for translation assistance

page 67, penultimate line - added November 2020  
read: à Tanger [not: a Tanger]

pages 74, 75, photos - added May 2021

read: Juice Wilson, Paris, c.December 1962, photos copyright © Milton H. Mesirow

The two portrait photos were not taken in Limoges. The credit is completely wrong. It is now known that they were taken in Paris, c.December 1962. The photographer is Milton Mesirow (son of Mezz Mezzrow) who has kindly supplied four more photos from the same shoot, along with two snaps of Wilson with Buck Clayton and Bill Coleman, backstage at the thirtieth

anniversary concert of the Hot Club de France, 16 December 1962. Wilson must have given copies of the two photos in our book to the Hot Club de Limoges during his one year sojourn there and the true credit was overlooked.

In May 2021 emails to Patrick Dorian and AB, Milt Mesirow writes: “What a blast from the past . . . Yes ‘JUICE’ came to Paris [in 1962]. I met him at the Kentucky Club, a trad club [with] the Hot Club of France band, The New Orleans Dippers (who used to back Mezz on occasions) and I played drums with also. Juice, at that time, would fill in, comping on piano. He later hired me to go play with him in a band playing for American GIs, on bases. I also took some photo portraits for his publicity file. . . . I have a couple of pics that I took with Juice, Buck Clayton, and Bill Coleman. . . . Juice wouldn’t stop moving around so it’s a bit of a blur. The story about Juice is something that should be a part of jazz history. . . . He was a grand ‘little man’ and I was grateful to have been a part of his ‘gigantic’ life.”

The new photos are posted on the following pages - *with grateful thanks to Milt Mesirow and his partner Gwen, Caralyn Taylor, and Patrick C. Dorian, who kindly put us in touch with Milt Mesirow, thus establishing the true origin of the photos*

*page 85 - added November 2020 / June 2021*

*read: courtesy Daniel Vernhettes [not: Vernettes]*

*read: Edmund Sayag [not: Saya]*



*Jimmy Dowling ten-piece orchestra incl. Juice Wilson & vocalist  
Grand Poppy Day Ball, Hotel Phoenicia, 9 November 1950  
Times of Malta, 11 November 1950  
with thanks to Joseph Camilleri*



*Noble Sissle Orchestra with Juice Wilson on the left, Ostend, 1929, photo Antony  
AB Fable Archive - additional restoration Nick Dellow*



*Juice Wilson, Buck Clayton, Bill Coleman  
l'École Normale de Musique, Paris, 16 December 1962  
Photos courtesy and copyright © Milton H. Mesirov*



*Four more photos from the same shoot as the two on pages 74, 75  
Paris, c. December 1962  
Photos courtesy and copyright © Milton H. Mesirov*

## REVIEWS

Michael Steinman, 6 February 2021, online at  
<https://jazzlives.wordpress.com/2021/02/06/inspired-cartography-fallen-from-the-moon-robert-edward-juice-wilson-by-anthony-barnett-2020/>

### INSPIRED CARTOGRAPHY

Because many life-changes are marked by chronological milestones: first tooth, first day of school, first love, first job—we see life as a series of such events. Most biographies of jazz musicians follow a familiar dramatic arc: childhood, musical epiphany, practice and finding a sound, success, public life, and sometimes a drama or several. Documentation of these events depends on first-and-secondhand accounts, surviving friends, paper trails, and the like, even though too much detail is a proven soporific.

Charting a life as if the reader could move from one bead to the next on a narrative string doesn't work when beads are missing and the string has frayed and broken. Such a book, however, while offering an incomplete record, may be much more lifelike, more enthralling. This is the case with Anthony Barnett's new book—the only book on the subject—tracing the dots and lines and spaces that form what we know of the life of the violinist/clarinetist Juice Wilson, 1904–72.

Barnett's previous work and publications—primarily on violinists Eddie South and Stuff Smith—are frankly astonishing. He is an indefatigable researcher, but his books are never indiscriminate upendings-of-the-waste-basket onto the reader. He loves what in other hands might seem trivial, but always finds a relevant place in the narrative. He isn't burdened by ideology (although he is irked when other writers have gotten it wrong) and he doesn't fabricate. Barnett is also a poet, and that sometimes eerie sensitivity to nuance raises the texture of his work far above anything else in jazz literature. And he's been researching Wilson for thirty years.

So, if you're in a hurry: this little book, delightfully ornamented with photographs and more, is a gem. Buy it here. (You'll notice that this post does not contain the usual YouTube clips—because they are suspect for many reasons. Barnett will supply links—clean, speed-corrected, and so on—to purchasers.)

Incidentally, the book is beautifully done: a pleasure to see as well as to read.

But let us return. Barnett calls himself the *editor* of this “dossier” on Juice, which is both modest and accurate, and the whole title of this dense little book is *Fallen from the Moon: Robert Edward Juice Wilson: His Life in Earth: A Dossier*. That evocative beginning comes from someone who saw the subject at close range, Antoni Tendes, “He gave me the impression of a man who had fallen from the moon.”

With rare exceptions (Bolden, Florence Mills) a jazz musician has a discography, a collection of recordings for succeeding generations to analyze. Juice Wilson was a member of the 1929 Noble Sissle orchestra, a fourteen-piece ensemble including Buster Bailey and Rudy Jackson. Juice solos on two titles recorded in England: “Kansas City Kitty” and “Miranda”. And that's it. Barnett's book offers transcriptions, for those who want to try these things at home.

A flattened map—like a bus route—of Wilson's life might look like this, although mine is intentionally monochrome and one-dimensional:

Born in St Louis, 1904. Playing with Jimmy Wade in Chicago in 1916, with Freddie Keppard (alongside Eddie South) in 1918. Working with bands in Toledo, Ohio, and Buffalo, New York, alongside Jimmy Harrison, Budd Johnson, J. C. Higginbotham. In New York City, 1928–29, working with Lloyd Scott’s big band, alongside Frank Newton, Dicky Wells, Bill Coleman, other jobs with Luckey Roberts and James P. Johnson. Left for Paris with Noble Sissle, played in England, then work with Edwin Swayzee, Leon Abbey, in Switzerland and elsewhere. Arrived in Malta, late 1937, played at the Cairo Bar for five years, but stranded in Malta until the end of the war, remained there until 1954. Gave up violin in 1950; postwar gigging on saxophone. Returned to Chicago in 1963. Died there in 1972.

That’s a thrilling life in music, with gaps more numerous than the spatters of evidence: newspaper reports and clippings, photographs, letters to and from Juice, reminiscences. What Barnett does with those precious bits and pieces is as fascinating as the bits and pieces themselves. I have intentionally not quoted from the book to keep readers’ appetites whetted for the stories. And photographs: Juice seems to have avoided opportunities to be recorded, but he delighted in posing for photographs, and he is delightful to the eye.

It’s a fascinating book, for its subject, its editor, and its balance between what can be known and what remains unseen. Here you can see Barnett’s complete works—as of now—learn how to purchase this book and those on Eddie South and Stuff Smith . . . since Barnett is immensely thorough, there is also a brief *errata* section with material received too late for publication and corrections.

An afterthought. Certain stories and novels first read forty years ago have stayed with me, and passages bubble up to the surface when the stimulus is strong. While I was writing this essay, I kept thinking of these lines from the first paragraph of Melville’s *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*—where the narrator speaks of a former employee, now dead, who remains mysterious:

*I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him.*

Substitute “Juice Wilson” for “Bartleby” and you enter the world of this book.

—

Juice Wilson n'est connu des amateurs que parce qu'il a enregistré, en 1929, deux solos de violon (« Kansas City Kitty » et « Miranda ») au sein de l'orchestre de Noble Sissle. C'est ce musicien « tombé du ciel » (selon la formule d'un critique des années 30) qu'Anthony Barnett s'est donné pour tâche de sortir de l'ombre en retraçant sa carrière à partir des témoignages de ceux qui le rencontrèrent.

En effet, il s'agit moins d'une biographie détaillée que d'un recueil (« A Dossier ») de tous les documents qu'a pu réunir l'auteur : articles de presse, courriers, transcriptions de conversations téléphoniques, interviews, jugement de Bill Coleman (dans son autobiographie *Trumpet Story*), extraits du *Bulletin du Hcf*, etc. Cet important corpus dessine la personnalité attachante d'un musicien talentueux reconnu par ses pairs.

L'ouvrage contient par ailleurs une riche iconographie (une trentaine de photographies, des reproductions d'articles, d'affiches, de lettres ou de programmes), ainsi que la transcription et l'analyse des deux fameux chœurs de violon de 1929. Au final un remarquable travail de recherche qui rend hommage à un artiste méconnu de l'histoire du jazz.

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in *Bulletin du Hot Club de France*, 694, Janvier 2021, pp.2, 22–24, print

François Desbrosses “Propos”

Le petit livre (en anglais) d'Anthony Barnett, consacré au violoniste Juice Wilson, a suscité deux chroniques, qui vous feront mieux connaître cet obscur mais sympathique personnage.

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Jacques Canérot

Voici, parvenu d'Angleterre et destiné à la parution en janvier prochain, un ouvrage consacré à Robert Edward Juice Wilson, musicien « tombé de la lune » (dixit un critique barcelonais des années 30), pionnier à jamais célèbre dans l'histoire du jazz pour avoir, le 10 septembre 1929 outre-Manche, enregistré au violon de brillants chœurs dans deux faces de Noble Sissle, seuls solos de lui connus sur disque<sup>1</sup>. Après quoi, le violoniste-clarinettiste-saxophoniste-pianiste voyagea ou résida en divers pays durant des décennies, jusqu'à une fugace réapparition en France au début des années 60, sitôt suivie d'un départ pour les États-Unis vers le Chicago de sa jeunesse<sup>2</sup> où il décéda le 7 juillet 1972.

C'est ce parcours labyrinthique qu'Anthony Barnett, auteur et éditeur, s'est donné pour gageure de retracer en s'adonnant, des années durant, à la quête de tous les documents possibles concernant son « héros ». On trouvera ainsi, regroupés pour la première fois, d'abondants articles parus dans la presse—musicale ou non—, plusieurs courriers<sup>3</sup>, parfois adressés à l'auteur, des transcriptions de conversations téléphoniques, d'interviews ou de courriels, un passage louangeur de l'autobiographie (*Trumpet Story*) de Bill Coleman et quatre lettres rarissimes rédigées par le jazzman lors de son séjour maltais. Parmi les références figurent des extraits du *Bulletin* traduits en anglais—propos de Juice Wilson (cf. *BHCF* 121), relation d'un concert par Hugues Panassié (cf. *BHCF* 124), fragment d'un article sur le violoniste (cf. *BHCF* 683)—ainsi qu'un rappel du livre de Claude-Alain Christophe *Jazz à Limoges: La Saga du Hot Club et de Swing FM*.

Exploitant ce matériau, Anthony Barnett, loin d'œuvrer en historien rédigeant une biographie exhaustive, propose une sorte de puzzle reconstituant le trajet de Juice Wilson à partir des témoignages de ceux qui le rencontrèrent ou le fréquentèrent, principalement lors de ses installations en Europe (en Espagne pendant près de cinq ans, à Malte pendant dix-sept ans), sans que soit négligé pour autant le reste de sa carrière. En résulte un attrayant « dossier » dont l'aspect « désordonné [...] reflète la vie itinérante de son sujet », comme l'écrit le chercheur (p.13). Ce choix de cheminement permet aussi d'esquisser, par touches successives, le portrait d'un artiste talentueux, « respecté et admiré » (p.49) de ses pairs, doublé d'un homme courtois mais solitaire, modeste et réservé, voire « énigmatique » (p.82), souffrant d'un dépaysement largement dicté par les circonstances (c'est la Seconde Guerre mondiale qui l'avait fait s'installer à La Valette). Dans cette quête par délégation, Anthony Barnett ne s'efface pas totalement : rédacteur de l'introduction d'ensemble et présentateur des contributeurs de l'ouvrage, il lui arrive d'intervenir pour commenter en détail un document, apporter une précision, voire corriger une erreur.

Une riche iconographie (dont on regrettera ici et là les aléas de la reproduction) retiendra l'attention avec une trentaine de photographies inattendues du musicien, appartenant parfois à des collections privées, saisies en studio ou au cœur d'orchestres divers, mais aussi avec des illustrations de toutes sortes: photocopies d'articles de presse, d'affiches, d'aquarelles, de lettres, de cartes postales—voire d'un programme dans un journal maltais de 1938 annonçant imprudemment : « Mr. Juice Wilson, Swing Saxophone from the Ellington's Band » ! Quant aux lecteurs musiciens, ils trouveront la transcription (avec analyse) des deux légendaires choros de violon de 1929. Pareil ensemble d'archives visuelles largement inédites devrait pouvoir tempérer les réticences des lecteurs passionnés par l'histoire du jazz et la vie de ses acteurs, mais gênés par la langue anglaise.

Au total, un bel hommage à un artiste largement méconnu, dont la personnalité attachante et la carrière singulière méritaient considération.

1 - Juice Wilson avait confié qu'il avait, en 1928 ou 1929, gravé à New York quelques 'race records' avec des vocalistes dont il avait oublié les noms (cf. p.16 et 27), enregistrements restés pour l'heure introuvables.

2 - Le musicien était né le 21 janvier 1904 à Saint-Louis, Missouri, mais avait vécu à Chicago dès sa petite enfance.

3 - Dans ces fragments de correspondance, les lecteurs assidus du *Bulletin* retrouveront des noms familiers, comme ceux de Jean-Pierre Batestini, Jean-Marie Masse, Jacques Pescheux.

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Claude-Alain Christophe

Voici un ouvrage qui s'apparente à une enquête très émouvante, menée sur un musicien jouissant d'une réputation qui a traversé le ciel du jazz tel un météore dont la trajectoire n'aurait pu être suivie que par une poignée d'observateurs successifs. C'est ainsi qu'il faut comprendre son surtitre, « *Fallen from the Moon* », et ses sous-titres, « *His Life on Earth* » et « a dossier ». Le petit livre d'Anthony Barnett (90 pages, en anglais) s'apparente en effet à un dossier comprenant de nombreuses illustrations (pas très bien reproduites) et dans lequel la participation écrite de l'auteur apparaît fort modeste, son grand mérite étant d'avoir réuni des témoignages qui permettent de penser que Juice Wilson fut un excellent musicien et un talentueux jazzman méconnu.

Au fil des pages, on parvient à reconstituer le parcours de cet artiste, à saisir sa personnalité et à comprendre les raisons de cette méconnaissance. En 1929, Juice Wilson à 25 ans quand il quitte les États-Unis sans aucun enregistrement en solo à son actif. Pourtant, le livre s'ouvre sur le témoignage de Bill Coleman qui, dès 1927, découvre Juice Wilson à Buffalo, va l'entendre tous les soirs et dit son admiration pour ce superbe violoniste. On apprend ensuite que si Lionel Hampton a engagé en 1940 l'excellent Ray Perry, son premier choix pour le violon avait été Juice Wilson qu'il avait apprécié à Chicago dans sa jeunesse mais qui se trouvait alors à Malte. Le nombre de jazzmen célèbres avec lesquels il a joué dans les années 20 suffirait d'ailleurs à établir l'estime dont il jouissait auprès de ses pairs.

Ce fut en 1929 à Landres que Juice enregistra au sein de l'orchestre Noble Sissle deux solos de violon qui firent sensation auprès des amateurs et des grands critiques de jazz, dont Hugues Panassié. Hélas, c'est sur ces seuls enregistrements que l'amateur d'aujourd'hui pourra juger de la qualité du jeu de Juice Wilson qui ne sera plus jamais enregistré en tant que soliste. On apprend dans cet ouvrage qu'il était un musicien accompli dont la batterie fut le premier instrument et que, outre le violon, il a pratiqué brillamment le piano stride, la clarinette, le saxo alto et la trompette, et, dans une moindre mesure, le ténor et le trombone ! il fut aussi le chef et l'arrangeur de nombreuses formations, dont un big band.

Plusieurs témoignages et des correspondances entre lui et certains de ses partenaires et admirateurs ainsi que de nombreuses photos permettent de découvrir le parcours atypique de Juice Wilson. Ils autorisent le lecteur à le suivre dans les années 30 à Londres, à Paris, puis dans un périple européen se terminant à Barcelone où il demeure plusieurs années. On le retrouve ensuite en Afrique du Nord et au Proche-Orient, notamment à Malte où il passera toute la guerre. Ce n'est que dans les années 60 qu'après un nouveau séjour en France, il regagne les États-Unis où il semble totalement oublié et où il terminera sa vie dans l'anonymat. Juice Wilson apparaît comme un personnage sans doute trop modeste et traînant avec lui une sorte de mélancolie, voire de tristesse qui disparaissait dès qu'il parlait de jazz ou qu'il jouait « avec grande chaleur et émotion » (p.20) et plusieurs lettres reproduites montrent des relations chaleureuses avec ses amis musiciens.

Parmi les nombreux témoignages réunis, tous admiratifs de ses talents, on retiendra celui d'Alec Boswell qui fit paraître en 1946 une biographie de Juice. Elle nous apprend que Freddie Keppard lui donna des leçons de trompette et qu'il se produisit avec nombre de grands jazzmen à Chicago avant de rejoindre Lloyd Scott au Savoy de Harlem en 1928. On trouve quelques renseignements complémentaires sur sa carrière dans une interview publiée dans *Jazz Magazine* en janvier 1960 qui précise que Juice demeura 17 ans à Malte où il abandonna le violon vers 1950, et qu'à l'alto, dont il jouait lors de son retour en France, son style se situait entre Benny Carter et Willie Smith, tandis que sont cités des propos provenant d'un *Bulletin HCF* d'octobre 1962 dans lesquels Juice déclare que Darnell Howard fut le père de tous les violonistes de jazz. On retiendra encore le portrait sensible brossé par Antonio Tendes et confié à Alfredo Papo. C'est Tendes qui la vu comme « tombé de la lune », d'où le « fallen from the moon » repris par Anthony Barnett en page de couverture de son ouvrage.

1 - Dans un récent *Bulletin HCF* (N° 683 d'octobre 2019), un article de Jacques Canérot citait ces témoignages et appréciations. Ce texte se retrouve en partie traduit dans le livre d'Anthony Barnett.

2 - Juice avait joué avec James P. Johnson et Luckey Roberts qui lui avaient sans doute servi de modèles.

3 - Alfredo Papo, qui fut président du Hot Club de Barcelona, ami d'Hugues Panassié et collaborateur du *Bulletin*, considère Antonio Tendes comme le pionnier de la critique de jazz en Espagne. Il a recueilli les souvenirs de Tendes qui fréquenta beaucoup Juice Wilson durant son séjour à Barcelona.

Jazz musicians who did not record, or who rarely recorded, are often relegated in status by collectors and researchers, sometimes being defined as “obscure” or “little known”, even though they may have had long and successful careers outside the confines of the recording studios. In other words, we tend to judge jazz musicians of the 1920s and 1930s, and beyond, by the recordings they have left rather than by the wider musical lives they may have led.

One such musician is the violin and clarinet player Juice Wilson. With a name like that, he is unlikely to go completely unnoticed, but with few records to flesh out his body of work, he remains a relatively unknown figure in the pantheon of jazz. There are, however, two recordings amongst the few he made during his life that have saved him from oblivion, one of which is outstanding in almost every respect, providing a beacon that guides us to him like moths around a candle. Every last drop of Juice Wilson’s considerable talent is clearly in evidence in his violin solos on Noble Sissle’s 1929 recording of “Kansas City Kitty”, with the band’s version of “Miranda” not far behind. Recorded in England at the Gramophone Company’s studios in Hayes, these represent an apotheosis in the oeuvre of one musician’s meagre recorded output. The band itself is also electrifying, as is the quality of the HMV recording.

These two recordings alone are enough to get our collecting juices going and beg the question: “Who is that guy and why didn’t he record more?” The author, publisher, poet and jazz violin specialist Anthony Barnett sets out to provide some of the answers as the editor of this collection of essays on Juice Wilson, written by those who knew him and those who were, and are, inspired by him. The enlightening text is illustrated by many previously unpublished photographs—though sadly the reproduction of these isn’t always of the highest quality—along with transcriptions of his violin solos on “Kansas City Kitty” and “Miranda”.

Born in St Louis, Missouri on 21st January 1904, Robert Edward Wilson was orphaned very early on in his childhood and was subsequently raised by his half-brother and his wife in Chicago. He stayed in the Windy City until 1919, during the crucial, nascent years of jazz. One might say that Wilson and jazz grew up together in Chicago. He cut his jazz teeth alongside Eddie South, often working with him as a youngster. Others he worked with during this early Chicago period included Jimmy Wade (his engagement as a violinist in Wade’s band was his first professional job, aged 14), and Freddy Keppard (he was a member of Keppard’s band in 1918, again on violin). Around this time, he also took up the clarinet, and later the alto sax.

By this stage in his life, Wilson had gained the nickname “Little Juice”. The reason why this moniker was applied has been lost in the mists of time; the book offers several suppositions, with references to alcohol and even fruit juice drops. I spoke to the author about this conundrum and offered a further suggestion, also uncorroborated: Although “Juice” was (and still is?) a slang term for alcoholic drinks, in the vernacular sense the word also means “full of energy and motivation” (possibly with an etymology similar to jazz itself, having a sexual connotation originally). I think that might be a possible explanation for the nickname, especially considering how motivated Wilson was musically as a kid, and how full of energy he was as a jazz soloist. Later on the “Little” was dropped and he became Juice Wilson, though close friends and colleagues always called him “Bob”.

In December 1919, Wilson suddenly left Chicago to join a group in Toledo. The book doesn’t question this move, but I find it rather odd that he left at such an important time, for if he had stayed, he could very well have become a key player in the burgeoning market for jazz in Chicago, and we may have benefitted from recordings as a result, at least from the mid 1920s onwards. Of course, Wilson didn’t know any of this in 1919,

but was there really so little work for him in Chicago at that time that he felt the need to leave the city? His prospects were hardly better elsewhere during this period, and in-between musical engagements hardened circumstances sometimes forced him to entertain more prosaic activities, such as washing pans and dishes!

Jazzmen from all over the South and Mid-West blew into Chicago at this time, finding well paid work in the Windy City at the very time Wilson set sail from it. I'm wondering if he left Chicago to get away from the mob. The gangsters that ruled the city's clubs and other entertainment venues usually respected musicians, but not if they messed around with their molls or did something else to get their trigger-happy fingers twitching. Was this the case with Wilson? Or did he simply have a severe case of wanderlust?

Whatever the reason, when jazz spread its wings further afield, Wilson followed, from Chicago to Toledo and from Toledo to Buffalo (in 1921), then Atlantic City (1928) and then New York (1929), the Northern powerhouse where jazz met tin pan alley and was catapulted around the world. Here Wilson came to the attention of Noble Sissle, a highly successful bandleader, singer, songwriter, producer and all-round convivial showman. Sissle was one of the first internationally known black bandleaders to successfully traverse the precariously swaying bridge between the black and white worlds of entertainment, and was generally supported and respected on both sides.

Noble Sissle's band of the late 1920s was more than a dance band but less than an out-and-out jazz unit. Sissle was keen enough, though, to have key jazz soloists in his band, and when Juice Wilson turned up in New York he grabbed him, persuading him to join the band for its trip to Europe, which included an engagement at the exclusive Les Ambassadeurs club in Paris and a bonus in the form of recording sessions at HMV's studios in England (September/October 1929), during which Wilson committed to wax his outstanding solos on "Kansas City Kitty" and "Miranda".

Wilson left Sissle's band in April 1930 and joined Thomas Chase's small outfit at the Music Box in Paris (a club run by Bricktop). During the 1930s, he also worked in bands led by Ed Swayze (in The Netherlands), Leon Abbey in Italy, and various others in Spain (staying in the country for over five years), before crossing to Malta with singer/drummer/entertainer Levy Wine at the outbreak of the Second World War. Wilson stayed in Malta until 1954, becoming well established and highly appreciated. Here, as elsewhere in Europe, Wilson promulgated real jazz to mainly white audiences who were, by and large, more appreciative of the genuine article (i.e. black jazz) than those back home in the States. Drummer Tony Carr said:

"Juice Wilson was the best thing that ever happened to Malta. A player like him, my God, he was such a player. [...] They [Juice Wilson and Levy Wine] were the first black players we ever had in Malta and that's where I learnt to play that style."

After leaving Malta, Wilson played in bars (often haunts of American and British services personnel) in the Lebanon, Italy, Gibraltar, Tangier, and France, before returning home to Chicago in 1963, dying there in 1972, virtually forgotten.

The book's title "Fallen from The Moon" is drawn from an article in which Antoni Tendes—who knew Juice Wilson in Barcelona in the 1930s—said:

"He gave me the impression of a man who had fallen from the moon. [...] Juice's weird and ghostly appearance hid a sensitive soul. [...] His daydreams—melancholic and remote—put him in a bad humour and, at the same time, sustained him, but when he could no longer bear it he gave himself to drink. Music and liquor were his sweet tyrants."

Shades of Bix Beiderbecke! Though Wilson seems to have been a man of few words, he could be a witty and wry observer, albeit one who viewed the world through a wistful, darkened veil.

The author states that as a musician, Wilson had “A unique voice of formidable violinistic accomplishment and rugged, horn-like, improvisation.” Accounts of his musical prowess given by musicians and others who knew and worked with him are unequivocal in describing Wilson as an extraordinarily gifted violinist. In 1934, Hugues Panassié succinctly summed up Wilson’s technique and emotional impact: “There is another hot violinist, less well-known than South or Venuti, whose style I like better. He is a Negro, Juice Wilson. His melodic line is not the agile, rapid and sinuous line used by Venuti and South. It is, instead, composed of fragmentary phrases less immediately attractive but much more hot. Juice Wilson plays with much more vitality than other violinists, and his improvisations—always filled with a dark accent—move me much more profoundly.”

The essays contained within the 90 or so pages of this aptly named dossier function more as didactic eulogies to Wilson rather than seamless chapters with a chronological structure, as one might find in a biography, so as the author explains: “There is a method to the seemingly disparate, disorganized state of this dossier. I think it reflects the itinerant life of its subject, and the intermittent search over many years to uncover the facts of his career.”

Even if one only fishes in and out of its pages at random, one always emerges from this book having hooked onto fresh information about a musician that would otherwise have been yet another one who got away . . . and there are plenty of those. We thank Anthony Barnett for trawling through a disparate range of sources to assemble a veritable collection of interesting details on a fascinating and underrated jazz musician, Juice Wilson. I savoured every drop!

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Editor Barnett is widely recognised as the premier authority on jazz violin. His many publications, notable among them studies of the great Stuff Smith, coupled with his *AB Fable* violin reissues and CD compilations, have set new standards for scholarship and research. He'll look far and wide to identify violinists with a jazz orientation, sometimes locating them in the highways and byways of early jazz history. Hence the shadowy figure of Robert "Juice" Wilson, a little-known African-American multi-instrumentalist, and, yes, a violinist of note, but also a true jazz itinerant, who plied his trade in European cities and other far-flung outposts for 30 years or more.

It turns out that Wilson's rating as a jazz violinist of consequence is largely based on hearsay, for there are just two recordings, both made with Noble Sissle's band in 1929 in London, which bear out the French critic Hughes Panassié's assessment of Wilson as "one of the greatest jazz violinists". He might well have added "one of the greatest wanderers too"; for Wilson, who was born in St Louis in 1904 but raised in Chicago—where he played with pioneer cornetist Freddie Keppard—was in New York by the late 1920s, joining Sissle in time for his European tour. Having initially resolved to stay put, Wilson then began his travels, the violin mostly kept in its case while he performed on clarinet, piano and alót, or trumpet and drums, in and out of bands, moving from Spain to Latvia and back to Barcelona where he stayed for five years playing in theatres and for bull-fights.

Then it was Morocco and North Africa before he settled in Malta from 1937 to 1954, usually leading trios in clubs favoured by servicemen, writing arrangements, fronting an occasional big band, teaching aspiring musicians, and proving inspirational if a touch cool at times. After hanging out in Paris in the early 1960s, he returned finally to the US in 1963 and died in Chicago a decade later.

Barnett accumulated material on Wilson via US and European archives, located contemporary reports and searched for direct memories from onlookers and musicians alike, stitching in Wilson's letters and occasional interviews, the results like the palimpsest of a life. Present-day readers may have to take this obscure musician's reputation on trust; to those who encountered him he was clearly seen as an "extraordinarily gifted" if somewhat reserved master musician. Meticulous in its presentation, copiously illustrated, wonderfully enlightening, Barnett's "dossier" disappoints only in the quality of its image reproduction [he apologises for the paper choice]. Why "Juice"? No one's sure, but it seems he liked a drink.

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Wolfram Knauer, March 2021, online at  
<https://www.jazzinstitut.de/new-books-2020/?lang=en#2020barnett>

Es gibt nur zwei Soli von Juice Wilson auf Platte, beide aufgenommen 1929 mit Noble Sissles Orchester in England: "Kansas City Kitty" und "Miranda". Es gibt Aussagen von Kollegen, die ihn als den größten Jazzgeiger bezeichnen, der je gelebt habe. Es gibt wenige biographische Details—geboren 1904 in St. Louis, gestorben 1972 in Chicago, zwischen 1929 und 1963 vor allem in Europa aktiv. Erinnerungen. Es gibt Pressemitteilungen, die ihn oft nur am Rande erwähnen, Gerüchte und Spekulationen. Anthony Barnett hat sich wahrlich kein einfaches Sujet gewählt für sein neuestes Buch. Barnett ist, wenn man so will, ein Jazzviolin-Historiker.

Er gab das Magazin *Fable* heraus, das sich bekannten sowie oft vergessenen Vertretern dieses Instruments widmete, und hat Bücher über Eddie South, Stuff Smith und andere insbesondere afro-amerikanische Jazzgeiger geschrieben. Für das Buch zu Juice Wilson aber bezeichnet er sich selbst nur als "Editor", als Herausgeber. Zu disparat sind die Quellen, die er präsentiert und die er nebeneinander stehen lässt, wie die Teile eines Puzzles, das ein ganzes Bild errahnen lässt. Also verzichtet er auf verbindende Worte und lässt stattdessen die Vergangenheit sprechen.

In Barcelona macht man sich Mitte der 1940er Jahre Gedanken darüber, was wohl mit Juice Wilson geschehen sei. Man habe von diesem hochmusikalischen Künstler mit Poesie und Charme, mit der Gabe der Überraschung, seit acht Jahren nichts mehr gehört. Angeblich sei er 1938 nach Malta gezogen, habe davor mit verschiedenen, wenig bekannten Ensembles in ganz Europa gespielt und eine Weile in Barcelona gewohnt. Der Kritiker Antonio Tendes habe ihn in Spanien gehört, 1932 oder ein wenig später, und eigentlich habe er damals wenig Eindruck auf ihn gemacht. Er habe die ganze Zeit über Altsaxophon gespielt, das er bei weitem nicht so gut beherrschte wie die Geige. Auf der aber sei er ein Meister gewesen, voller Wärme und Gefühl. Auch am Klavier habe er seine spanischen Mitmusiker beeindruckt, nicht so sehr durch seine Technik als durch den harmonischen Ansatz. Sein Repertoire habe vor allem aus den Klassikern des Jazz bestanden. Er sei nicht gerade gesellig gewesen und habe unter Heimweh gelitten, das er oft genug in Alkohol ertränkte. Sie hätten gern in einem Plattenladen auf der Rambla abgegangen, wo ihm die Aufnahmen Fletcher Hendersons besser gefielen als die Ellingtons oder Luncefords. Und dann sei er einfach verschwunden, und niemand wusste, wo er abgeblieben war.

Ein ausführlicheres biographisches Portrait aus der Feder Alec Boswells erschien 1946 in der britischen Zeitschrift *Jazz Music*, außerdem erinnert sich der Gitarrist Nevil Skrimshire an seine Begegnung mit Wilson in Malta, wo Wilson gut 20 Jahre lang gelebt hat, und Barnett druckt Auszüge aus der Korrespondenz zwischen Boswell und Charles Delaunay sowie zwischen Boswell, Nevil Skrimshire und ihm, Anthony Barnett, ab, die weitere Details zutage fördern. Auch andere Zeitzeugen erinnern sich an Wilsons Zeit in Malta, und Fotos zeigen ihn in Jimmy Dowlings Orchester, der Ende der 1940er Jahre auch für Prinzessin Elisabeth und Prinz Philip zum Tanz aufspielte. In den USA erinnerte man sich 1942 kurz an ihn, als die *New York Amsterdam News* berichten, Lionel Hampton sei ein Bewunderer des Geigers und habe lange nach ihm gesucht. Schließlich kommt Juice Wilson aber auch selbst zu Wort, in einem Interview für das *Bulletin du Hot Club de France* von 1962. Darin erzählt er von seinem Kindheitsfreund Eddie South, von seiner Bewunderung für den Klarinettenisten Darnell Howard und von seinem Ideal eines beidhändigen Klavierspiels. Um 1960 arbeitete Wilson im *Safari Club* in Tanger, danach zog es ihn nach Paris, und um 1962 spielte er als Altsaxophonist in *Jean Marie Masses Hot Club de Limoges*. Ein Jahr später ging er schließlich zurück nach Chicago.

Barnetts kleines Büchlein öffnet ein Fenster ins Leben und Wirken dieses afro-amerikanischen Musikers, der den Krieg über in Europa blieb und sich insbesondere in Malta einen Namen machte. Zusammen mit den beiden einzigen auf Platte veröffentlichten Geigensoli macht seine Geschichte neugierig auf die Entwicklung seines Stils sowie darauf, welchen Einfluss wohl Europa auf ihn als Künstler gehabt haben mag. All das aber wäre Spekulation, was erklärt, warum Barnett sich lieber auf größtenteils unkommentiert präsentierte Fakten und Dokumente beschränkt. Diese wiederum lassen den Musiker Juice Wilson wie auf einem stark vergilbten Foto erstehen, auf dem man einiges deutlich erkennt, anderes zu erkennen vermeint, während man an anderen Stellen nur noch Fragen hat. Auch so etwas also kann Jazzforschung produzieren, eine Studie, der es weniger um die Antworten geht als um das Eingrenzen von Fragen, die selbst dann deutlich werden, wenn der Autor sie gar nicht selbst stellt.

Anthony Barnett's riveting *Fallen from the Moon: Robert Edward Juice Wilson: His Life on Earth: A Dossier* is an intriguing odyssey of an esoteric and brilliant jazz artist of the 20th century. Barnett's title refers to an article by Antoni Tendes, who wrote, "He gave me the impression of a man who had fallen from the moon." The mystery of what Tendes's words mean, and the perplexity of Juice Wilson's poignant journey are at the heart of the intriguing nature of Barnett's dossier. Barnett creates a portrait of Wilson's life through anecdotes, violin improvisations, letters, timelines, photographs, collective accounts and more.

Robert Edward Juice Wilson ("Juice" referring to alcohol) was a musician of remarkable ability. Early in Wilson's career, he was known primarily as a violinist, with a brilliant ability akin to Eddie South. In addition, he played clarinet, alto saxophone and occasionally piano. He grew up in Chicago, played and recorded with Noble Sissle in London in 1929, and then lived and worked for decades throughout Europe, North Africa and in Malta. In the 1960s he returned to Chicago. Wilson played with renowned jazz artists throughout his life.

Accounts of his life have contradictory and perplexing contrasts. It's difficult to ascertain truth versus opinion. Wilson was haunted by melancholy, perhaps this being at the core of his musical emotional language. It's apparent Wilson's life contained high artistic realizations, while simultaneously he suffered from multiple negative circumstances unbeknownst to others.

Anthony Barnett has provided a path of intrigue, a reminder that all lives at times find themselves fallen from the moon.

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