

6-29-2016

Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Will Vodery: Materials for a Biography

Peter M. Lefferts

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, plefferts1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub>



Part of the [Music Commons](#)

Lefferts, Peter M., "Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Will Vodery: Materials for a Biography" (2016). *Faculty Publications: School of Music*. 62.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub/62>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Music, School of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications: School of Music by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

07/29/2016

Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Will Vodery:
Materials for a Biography

Peter M. Lefferts
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

This document is one in a series---"Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of"---devoted to a small number of African American musicians active ca. 1900-1950. They are fallout from my work on a pair of essays, "US Army Black Regimental Bands and The Appointments of Their First Black Bandmasters" (2013) and "Black US Army Bands and Their Bandmasters in World War I" (2012). In all cases I have put into some kind of order a number of biographical research notes, principally drawing upon newspaper and genealogy databases. None of them is any kind of finished, polished document; all represent work in progress, complete with missing data and the occasional typographical error. I invite queries, amplifications, and corrections, which may be directed to plefferts1@unl.edu. The present document is a first draft of July 2016.

Tucker (1996) and Tucker (1999) are essential starting points.

WILL VODERY (October 8, 1884 to November 18, 1951)

Arranger and orchestrator, composer, conductor; club owner.

Celebrated most as a legendary orchestrator and arranger (including a credit as the first black arranger in Hollywood), then next as a bandleader and trainer of choirs, and then as a composer. (Tellingly, he was not a member of ASCAP.) Vodery mostly worked in musical theatre, but he was also a conductor, composer, and arranger of instrumental dance music. Worked with everyone. A protege of Will Marion Cook and Bert Williams. Cook and Vodery were mentors to Ellington. Vodery was mentor to Gershwin and William Grant Still.

Tucker rightly calls him "a preeminent African-American musician of his generation" (cit. Tucker dict. art.)

Salem Tutt Whitney writes the following in his "Timely Topics" column, under the heading "Impressions of Musicians" (Chicago Defender, October 11, 1930, p. 5):

"Will Vodery heads the list of arrangers. Composer of many beautiful songs and a jolly good fellow. Knows what he knows and is getting \$35,000 a year for knowing it."

Close friends and associates included Oscar Hammerstein, Noble Sissle, Flo Ziegfeld, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Florence Mills, Jerome Kern, Don Voorhees, Billy Rose, Fannie Brice, etc. (Pittsburgh Courier, December 1, 1951, p. 5)

Vodery was loyal to a series of very enduring relationships. After his Chicago years, he had a hand in Walker and Williams productions (?Abysinnia?-- Tucker mentions this show; only Bandanna Land for sure, under Cook); composed Hogan's Oyster Man; composed many burlesques for Hurtig & Seamon; went to the Howard Theatre and composed shows for J. Leubrie Hill; composed a later Smart Set production, Dr. Beans From Boston (1911); Ziegfeld Follies; Showboat; Cotton Club shows. He worked for Hogan until his death, for Ada Overton Walker until her death, for Bert Williams until his death, for Florence Mills until her death, and for Flo Ziegfeld until his death.

The largest problem with Vodery (or Brymn, for example) is figuring out just what the primary source of income was, if there was one principal gig at all, and what were the biggest time commitments---just what single thing or small number of things took up most of his time and creative juices. Was it the arranging/orchestrating, the composing, or leading a band? The numerous and varied accounts one gets in print and through Google and Google Book are mainly harmonious, but the balance and proportion of the story is unclear.

For example, it may very well be that whatever the Ziegfeld obligations and lots of other one-off projects, the biggest steady gigs were with Hurtig & Seamon writing burlesques, and then with Florence Mills and the Plantation Review orchestra, and then with the Cotton Club.

NAME

William Henry Bennett Vodery, jr.

This becomes William H., Will, Willie, Bill, Billie; "William H." gets the fewest hits, but these appearances are in legal matters; "Will. H." gets lots more hits, including copyright entries; just "Will Vodery" gets the most; also, until 1916 or later, i.e., into his early 30s, "Willie Vodery" (e.g., 8 hits in Old Fulton NY Postcards) or Willie Vodrey (one hit in 1921), and he signs a letter of December 18, 1921 to Bert Williams with "Billie" (Smith, Williams bio., p. 217); he is "Billy Vodery" in the Pittsburgh Courier, February 13, 1943, p. 21

"Vodrey" is a very common alternative spelling of his surname throughout his lifetime (e.g., with many hits in Old Fulton NY Postcards newspapers, especially when in reference to Hurtig & Seamon productions), as is "Bill" and thus "Bill Vodrey"; NB: the Pittsburgh Courier often uses "Bill Vodery"; Vodry is also seen; Vadrey (Will Vadrey) is also seen; all of this suggests strongly that his last name is pronounced with two syllables, not three, by swallowing the middle "e", in a direct analogy to the man's name "Jeffery/Jeffrey/Geoffrey/Geoffery," which is normally pronounced with two syllables, as Jeff/ree.

PARENTS

His father, his namesake, is William H. B. Vodery, sr., a Baltimore native, and mother is Selena/Selina/Selenia/Salania H./R. Vodery of Harrisburg, Pa. In numerous Philadelphia city directories she is Selena R. Vodery, living on the 1200 block of Pine. Tucker gives Selina (Buthanna) Vodery. In Vodery's August 1937 application for a Social Security number, he gives his mother's maiden name as Selina R. Hall.

In December 1883, the Harrisburg State Journal reported that "Invitations are out for the wedding of Miss Lena Hall, of this city, to Rev. William H. B. Vodery, of Baltimore" (Harrisburg State Journal, December 22, 1883, p. 1). And in January 1884, the Harrisburg State Journal reported that "There was a large audience present at the residence of Dr. J. M. Hall, 2120 Stiles street, on Wednesday evening, to witness the wedding of his daughter, Miss Lena Hall, to the Rev. William H. B. Vodery, of Baltimore" (Harrisburg State Journal, January 12, 1884, p. 4)

His father, "The Rev. W. H. B. Vodery, who died in Baltimore on Saturday, was professor of Latin and Greek in Lincoln university" (Buffalo Evening Republic, September 25, 1884, n.p. [p. 2]); he "was an instructor in Greek at Lincoln University and also ran a boarding house where many theatrical folks stopped" (Chicago Defender, December 1, 1951, p. 2); Lincoln University is a historically black university in Philadelphia. His father died in 1884 shortly before Will was born. His mother ran the boarding house, then taught, then went into business for herself; in the US 1900 Census she is called an "Intelligence Officer." His mother gets a significant NY Age obit (NY Age, Thursday, January 28, 1915), and Freeman death notice (Indianapolis Freeman, February 6, 1915, p. 5, where she is Selena Hall Vodery).

They are a prominent Philadelphia and Baltimore family in the African American and theatrical communities. [Short obit for uncle Charles F. Vodery of Baltimore, a businessman, is New York Age, May 3, 1917, p. 7; Frederick Douglass always stayed at his mother's house when visiting Baltimore---that would be Will Vodery's grandmother on his father's side. By some accounts Vodery first met Bert Williams and George Walker at the family boardinghouse.]

EARLY YEARS

1884-1904

Born in Philadelphia, October 8, 1884. Youth and early professional career based in Philadelphia; graduated from Central High in 1902 (acc. Tucker) or 1903 (acc. Sissle, in NY Age, December 11, 1948, p. 15); a winner of a scholarship from Central High that allowed him to take a course at Penn, and so he took a course there in music, studying with the head of the department there, Dr. Hugh Clark [or Clarke] (Chicago Defender, August 30, 1924, p. 7; Sissle column); said to have worked as a librarian for the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Studied violin and piano. Began writing and arranging while in his later teens. He had three songs published in 1903 (when he was eighteen or nineteen):

"Boyhood Days" (Philadelphia: Vodery, Riley, and Mastin, 1903; cit. Tucker dict. art.)

"Cause Her Dear Face on Me to Beam" (Philadelphia: H. A. Weyman and Son, 1903; cit. Tucker dict. art.)

"My Country I Love Thee" (cit. Tucker dict. art.)

1904-1905

A TRIP TO AFRICA

1904, in November: Vodery must have been something of a prodigy and his ascent was fast, as he replaced Jim Europe after the first month (October) as musical director for a big show, the two-act musical comedy vehicle for John Larkins, A Trip to Africa, when it went on the road (November 2, 1904); Vodery, remarkably young for the job, had just turned 20; he was with the company for at least six months, from November to April;

W. C. Craine [William Crain] presents comedian Jolly John Larkins, with Dora Patterson;

James Reese Europe and Larkins write the music and lyrics for A Trip to Africa, acc. Indianapolis Freeman in October; according to Reid Badger it was not actually clear who wrote the music, but other newspaper hits now make it clear that it was Europe, who, however, was not successful in the pit; Sissle says that Vodery wrote and orchestrated the score (Sissle column, 1948); probably there is truth to both attributions of the score: a reference in the Indianapolis Freeman, March 11, 1905, p. 5 says "William A. Vodery, our musical director, has been quite successful. He has written several new musical numbers which deserve a great deal of credit";

Vodery is still touring with the company in spring 1905 (Indianapolis Freeman, December 24, 1904, p. 5, where his name is given as W. M. Vadrey; see also Indianapolis Freeman, March 11, 1905, p. 5); in Illinois in mid March, and still going into April; the tour takes him to Chicago and Columbus Theatre in April (Indianapolis Freeman, April 8, 1905, p. 5); Tucker notes (p. 129) that by one later account he gets stranded in Chicago, while by another (Sissle column, 1948) he gets stranded in St. Louis and then goes to Chicago.

Norton (2002), I: 778 (1904.38) says book and lyrics are by Larkin, music by Dave Peyton, musical direction by Will Vodery, and cites the songs:

"I wants a lovin' man"

"Zongo, My Congo Queen" [recte: Zono], Mack & Brymn (NY: Shapiro, Remick, and Co. 1904)

"Without You"

A fuller list of songs in A Trip to Africa includes those named in NY Dramatic Mirror, October 29, 1904, p. 16; Indianapolis Freeman, October 29, 1904, p. 2; Indianapolis Freeman, March 11, 1905, p. 5. It would appear that the show had a compilation score, at least in respect to the most popular items to get mentioned, which are 1904 hits:

"The Blackville Volunteers" (the chorus, perhaps just the male chorus)

"I Wants a Loving Man," sung by Dora Patterson

"Listen to the Big Brass Band" [Dave Reed, jr. march/coon big song hit for Witmark, 1904; re-publ. 1907; same title in 1908 Witmark anthology]

"Make a Fuss Over Me," Morse and Madden (NY: Haviland, 1904)

"Shame on You," lyrics by Chris Smith, music by Larkins (NY: Stern, 1904) is in some accounts the show's biggest hit of the season

"Water-melon Vine" [a big 1904 hit is "By the Watermelon Vine," Allen and Starmer, Boston: Watler Jacobs, 1904]

"Without You," words and music MacEvoy (NY: Hamilton S. Gordon, 1904), sung by Carrie Smith

"Zono, My Congo Queen," Mack and Brymn (NY: Shapiro, Remick and Co, 1904), sung by Dora Patterson

"Tilda From Old Savannah," by Smith and Larkins, is "the feature song in A Trip to Africa" and a popular song in 1904-1905 (NY Clipper, September 24, 1904, p. 716)

[NB: Larkin brings a new version of this show later to the Black Patti Troubadours as a mini in her 1908 and 1910 editions]

CHICAGO, 1905-1907

Two seasons in Chicago, 1905-1906 and 1906-1907. Worked for the Charles K. Harris Music House (Indianapolis Freeman), and as librarian for the

Chicago Symphony and is said to have studied there with Frederick Stock (acc. Sissle column (1948), etc.).

1905-1906

1906, in April: at the end of his first year in town, Vodery is said to have contributed music or a song or songs to Jordan's Pekin Stock Co. show, The Man From 'Bam in 1906: "Joseph Jordan, late of Rufus Rastus, wrote the music. Some of which is said to be the original product of Prof. William H. Vodney [sic], a well-known musician now in the employ of Charles K. Harris' Chicago Music House. Who is responsible for the brilliant music will be ascertained in the weeks to come." (Indianapolis Freeman, April 14, 1906, p. 6);
in fact, it is entirely possibly that Vodery provided some of the arrangements and orchestrations, but no songs (unless he wrote one or more of the big ensemble numbers)

1906-1907

1906, in August: The Time, the Place, and the Girl
Vodery is said to have contributed something to the huge, long-running musical comedy hit born in Chicago, The Time, the Place, and the Girl (Fletcher, p. 155; Southern, Bio. Dict.; Tucker; Badger, p. 251, n. 18); the show was new in NYC on August 5, 1907 but Chicago and Boston saw it in 1906-1907, so maybe Vodery had an early hand in Chicago (or contributed to a freshened revival?); IBDB lists all songs and none there are by Vodery; a white show; with all music by Joe (Joseph E.) Howard, acc. IBDB; the show opened in Chicago in August 1906 and played there for about a year, then toured for several seasons, 1907-1908 and onward, and was revived as late as 1942;
again, it might be the case that Vodery was involved as an orchestrator/arranger, rather than as a song composer (unless he wrote one or more of the big ensemble numbers)

NY Times obituary of Frank Adams (October 9, 1963), says this Chicago newspaperman wrote The Time the Place and the Girl in 1907 with Mr. Hough and Mr. Howard; however, Chicago Tribune, August 20, 1906, p. 6 says it is a new play, opening at the LaSalle on August 19, 1906, after a prior weeks's try out in Milwaukee. Book and lyrics by Will M. Hough

and Frank R. Adams, and music by Joseph E. Howard. Hough, Adams, and Howard are a team that has written other shows. [NB: Chicago Tribune, July 29, 1906, p. I1, says it will open on the 18th; Chicago Tribune, August 19, 1906, p. I1, says it opened last night, i.e. on the 18th.]

NOTE: the Washington Bee, January 21, 1911, p. 5 says explicitly that "the music [of My Friend From Dixie] was by Will H. Vodery, for years director of this class of show. Many white successes are using Vodery music under different names. The 'Time, Place and the Girl' being one of the many."

1906, late in the year: Vodery would have met WMC in Chicago in late 1906 or early 1907 when Cook was at the Pekin, if their paths had not already crosses in Washington, Baltimore, or New York, and he came to NYC to work on Bandanna Land with Cook and Oyster Man for Hogan.

1907 in May: the Pekin must have been a draw for Vodery, but the only specific trace of Vodery involvement at the Pekin concerns the Pekin show My Friend From Georgia; in the May 1907 revival of the November 1906 show, Vodery's "Yankee Doodle Coon" was sung; this was a number later heard in Oyster Man, which opened in the fall of 1907.

NEW YORK

1907-1908

1907, in July: leaving Chicago, he is in NYC and working under WMC to prepare the show Bandanna Land for Williams and Walker; first rehearsal called for July 16 and nearly 30 were there, taken in charge by Messrs. Will Cook and Willie Vodery (NY Age, July 25, 1907, p. 6); "Willie" was just 22.

1907, in July: no one knows if Ernest Hogan is going out on the road again, and with what show; the book for the new Hogan is being written, probably Willie Vodery or Joe Jordan will compose numbers, with lyrics by Lester Walton. Oyster Man becomes Vodery's---see below (NY Age, July 25, 1907, p. 6)

1907, in August: a company for the Hogan show is being assembled
(Indianapolis Freeman, August 24, 1907, p. 5)

OYSTER MAN

1907 in September: Oyster Man

book by Miller & Lyles; lyrics by Creamer and music by Vodery; Vodery writes the music for Oyster Man and is the show's musical director; it is his first really big break; the show is said to have anywhere from fourteen to seventeen musical numbers; the discrepancy in numbers may be the difference between counting only solo songs and also counting large ensembles; this is Vodery's big debut as a composer of songs for the stage;

Oyster Man is a vehicle for the great star Ernest Hogan, to whom John Rucker plays second fiddle; managed by Hurtig and Seamon, so this is probably Vodery's first association with them;

the show runs from September, opening at Lima, OH on September 26; Chicago in early October at the Great Northern; Detroit on October 13-19 at the Lyceum Theatre; hits NYC on November 25 at the Yorkville, tours just until January 1908, closing and then disbanding when Hogan becomes too ill; Vodery has the baton (Indianapolis Freeman, August 24, 1907, p. 5; NY Dramatic Mirror, October 26, 1907, p. 19; NY Age, December 19, 1907, n.p. [6]; Boston Journal, November 19, 1907, p. 11); NY Age spells his name Vodrey;

Hogan has to retire on account of illness in January, 1908 and the company is subsequently disbanded when it is apparent he will not be able to return; this throws over fifty people out of work (Indianapolis Freeman, January 25, 1908, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, March 7, 1908, p. 5; NY Age, July 21, 1910, p. 6)

NB: The October show on tour features some songs that do not make it through the season:

All the World Loves a Lover
The Almighty Dollar
He's On the Rock Pile Now
If I Only Had My Way
In the Land of Good Fellowship

WorldCat says sheet music for "I can't keep my eyes off of you" has a list of 11 numbers from the show (not yet seen). Nine songs from the show were published in a set (NY: Witmark, 1907); mostly by Creamer & Vodery, but some with the collaboration of Hogan and some additional lyrics by Lester Walton; a hallmark of the songs is the spelling Voderys in most LoC entries; I have not seen the set, but it probably included these nine:

- "Contribution Box," Creamer and Vodery & Hogan (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright October 25/Oct. 30, 1907 [Voderys]; a big hit for Hogan; Selection for "Songs of Olden Days," Thursday evening, Oct. 1, at the Autumn Exposition, Sept. - Oct. 1914;
- "Enough, That's Enough" (That's Enough), lyrics Creamer, music Vodery (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright November 29, 1907; a big hit for Hogan; Selection for "Songs of Olden Days," Thursday evening, Oct. 1, at the Autumn Exposition, Sept. - Oct. 1914; the NY Age Exposition supplement says that Hogan was one of the authors
- "I can't keep my eyes off of you," words by Walton, music by Vodery and Hogan (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright October 19/Oct. 30, 1907
- "Meet Me At the Barber Shop," Creamer and Vodery & Hogan (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright October 29/Oct. 30, 1907 [Voderys]
- "Mina," Creamer and Vodery & Hogan (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright October 19/Oct. 28, 1907 [Voderys]
- "To-morrow," Creamer and Vodery & Hogan (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright November 12, 1907 [Voderys]
- "When Buffalo Bill and His Wild West Show First Came to Baltimore," lyrics Creamer, music Vodery (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright November 1/Nov. 23, 1907 [Voderys]; last song in the second act, with solo plus choral refrain (NY Age)
- "Within the Shade of Morro Castle" [NB: a Havana castle] [Voderys]
- "Yankee Doodle Coon," Creamer and Vodery (NY: Witmark, 1907); copyright December 19, 1907; had been used in a show in the spring at the Pekin in Chicago

Norton (2002), I: 878 (1907.55) give this program of 15 numbers:

Act I

Fish Chorus
Mina

Yankee Doodle Coon (related to the 1907 Pekin number from "My Friend From Georgia"?)
 White Wash
 "Tomorrow"
 Contribution Box
 "I can't keep my eyes off of you"
 To Blazassus

Act II

Roll On Mighty Wave
 Enough (That's Enough)
 All Hail the King
 Dogalo (Doggielow)
 Meet Me at the Barber Shop
 When Buffalo Bill and His Wild West Show First Came to Baltimore
 Finale

Bloom (1996, I: p. 852, no. 3337) gives this alphabetical list of 18:

All Hail the King
 Contribution Box
 Dogalo
 Enough
 Fish Chorus
 I Just Can't Keep My Eyes Off You
 Meet Me at the Barber Shop
 Mermaid's Chorus
 Mina
 No You Don't, Yes I Did
 The Oysterman
 Roll On , Mighty Wve
 Suannee River
 To Blazussus
 Tomorrow
 When Buffalo Bill and His Wild West Show First Came to Baltimore
 White Wash
 Yankee Doodle Coon

Cleveland Plaindealer, October 27, 1907, p. 38, and NY Dramatic Mirror, December 7, 1907, p. 3, name thirteen which are pretty close to Bloom and Norton:

Blazasus Chorus
 Contribution Box
 Hail to the King
 I Just Can't Keep My Eyes Off You
 Meet Me at the Barber Shop

Mermaid's Chorus
 Mina
 "No You Didn't, Yes I Did"
 Suwanee River
 Tomorrow
 When Buffalo Bill and His Wild West Show First Came to Baltimore
 The Whitewash Brigade
 A Yankee Doodle Coon

LoC identifies: " Within the Shade of Morro Castle " as from Oyster Man

Sheet Music Consortium identifies:

"Enough, that's enough," Vodery, from The Oyster Man (vocal sheet music at U of Illinois)

Songs, acc. NY Age, December 19, 1907, n.p.:

"I Just Can't Keep My Eyes Off You"
 "When Buffalo Bill First Came to Baltimore" (last song in second act)

Music, acc. Adrian, MI, Daily Telegram, October 8, 1907, p. 3, includes fourteen song successes, of which the following 6 are named:

All the World Loves a Lover
 He's On the Rock Pile Now
 If I Only Had My Way
 In the Land of Good Fellowship
 Within the Shade of Moro Castle
 The Yankee Doodle Coon

Music, acc. Adrian, MI, Daily Telegram, October 11, 1907, p. 2, includes 17 musical numbers, with a very slightly different list of 8:

All the World Loves a Lover
 The Almighty Dollar
 He's On the Rock Pile Now
 If I Only Had My Way
 If That's All You've Got to Say, Goodbye"
 When I Pass the Contribution Box
 In the Shade of Moro Castle
 The Yankee Doodle Coon

Similarly in the Detroit Free Press, October 13, 1907, p. 58:

All the World Loves a Lover
 The Almighty Dollar

He's on the Rock Pile Now
 In the Land of Good Fellowship
 When I Pass the Contribution Box
 The Whitewash Brigade

Similarly in the Perrysburg Journal, October 18, 1907, p. 4:

All the World Loves a Lover
 The Almighty Dollar
 He's on the Rock Pile Now
 In the Land of Good Fellowship
 In the Shade of Moro Castle
 When I Pass the Contribution Box
 The Whitewash Brigade

Cleveland Plaindealer, October 27, 1907, p. 38 has these 13:

- *Blazazus Chorus
- *Contribution Box
- *Hail to the King
- *I Just Can't Keep My Eyes Off You
- *Meet Me At the Barber Shop
- *Mermaid's Chorus
- *Mina
- *No You Didn't, Yes I Did
- *Suwanee River
- *Tomorrow
- *When Buffalo Bill and His Wild West First Came to Baltimore
- *The Whitewash Brigade
- *A Yankee Doodle Coon

Boston Journal, November 19, 1907, p. 11 has these 10:

The Blazazus Chorus
 The Contribution Box
 Enough
 I Just Can't Keep My Eyes Off You
 Meet Me At the Barber Shop
 Mina
 Tomorrow
 When Buffalo Bill First Came to Baltimore
 The Whitewash Brigade
 A Yankee Doodle Coon

1908, in March: Henry Creamer and Will Vodery announce they will join forces to write music as a team (NY Age, March 12, 1908, p. 6); this is just when Oyster Man closes. Their very successful association will last twenty five years or more. They had been doing shows and songs since c. 1907, perhaps first with Oyster Man. Their song "Enough, That's Enough" is copyright November 29, 1907.

1908-1909

1908 in fall: Vodery is working for Hurtig and Seamon, who had produced Oyster Man; when he goes to the Howard in 1910, he is "Mr. Will Vodrey, the well-known Music Director for the Hurtig & Seamon enterprises" (Washington Bee, September 17, 1910, p. 5). Hurtig & Seamon were the management for Williams and Walker up through In Dahomey, and they produced Oyster Man. They also ran theatres and burlesque houses, including the forerunner of the Apollo. Vodery's connection means that he is writing for white as well as black companies. This is steady work for successful, long-running companies doing burlesque skits, just below the highest level.

Vodery composes all the scores for the Hurtig shows and is under contract not to publish any of the scores (Greensboro (NC) Daily Record, September 19, 1912, p. 6; Kentucky New Era, September 27, 1912, p. 8; Grand Forks (ND) Daily Herald, September 24, 1912, p. 3; NB: spelling of name as Vodrey). Thus a considerable amount of Vodery original music (perhaps the majority of his original songs) is simply lost to us.

At this time Hurtig & Seamon have three companies on the burlesque circuit, and Vodery eventually writes for all three. He could have been writing for them all in 1907-1908. They are:

The "Broadway Burlesquers," which had been around at least since 1897-1898, and ran at least into the 1920s; Vodery is still writing for it in 1916---see below. [Name gets 876 hits in genealogybank.com]

The "Social Maids," which had been around at least since 1900-1901, and ran at least into the 1920s.

The "Girls From Happyland," the youngest of the three, which had been around at least since 1907-1908 and also lasts at least into the 1920s.

1920, in August: the NY Clipper (August 4, 1920), p. 14, has an article saying that the Hurtig & Seamon rosters are set for the season, and gives the shows and their personnel. The troupes are:

Three long-running troupes:

Social Maids

Bowery Burlesquers

Girls From Happyland

and four new troupes this season

Bowery Wonder Show

Girls of the U.S.A.

Ed Lee Wroth's Best Show

Puss Puss. American Circuit

Note: The Crisis 24/6 (October 1922), p. 270, has a brief article saying that Andrea [sic; Andie] Razaf and Hughie Woolford, two Negroes in New York City, were engaged by Hurtig and Seamon to write the scores for the "Social Maids," "Step On It," the "Greenwich Village Revue" and the "Bowery Burlesque." This may identify the principal H&S companies that year.

1908, in September: Too Much Isaacs

Too Much Isaacs, a burlesque, musical review, a two-act musical comedy, a production of the Hurtig & Seamon company for the Bowery Burlesquers; book by John Raines; Vodery and Creamer provide score and lyric; the principles also contribute to the olio (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, March 14, 1909, p. 9); Variety has review of Too Much Isaacs at the Star and Garter Theater in Chicago (Variety 1908, n.d., p. 23); it is in Chicago at Eusons in earliest 1909 (Chicago Tribune, January 3, 1909, p. G 2); the show plays in NYC in March 1909; it is back there again in March 1910, when "a special vaudeville was offered between the acts" (NY Times, March 15, 1910).

1909, first half: what is he up to? Exclusively Hurtig & Seamon work?

1909-1910

1909 in October: Indianapolis Freeman, October 2, 1909, p. 5 says "Wm. Vodrey is busy all the time writing the music for all of Hurtig and Seamon's shows. Any time a Negro is intrusted [sic] with such an important task, he has got the goods, and Vodery has got them. He is one of the greatest managers of music and originator of musical selections in the world. The name Vodrey means good music."

1909 in December: Creamer and Vodery have written music for two farces for Billy W. Watson and the "Girls From Happyland" company, namely Two Hot Nights and The Man From Tiffany; these two farces make up the program; there is no olio, but instead, vaudeville specialties are inserted during the farces (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, December 19, 1909, p. 8).

1909-1910: a unnamed Bowery Burlesquers show with book by John Raines, lyrics by Henry S. Creamer, music by William Vodery, and staging by Joseph Hurtig; in 2 acts, with the scenes being a department store main floor interior and then a tropical exterior, with 16 chorus girls (Variety, 1909, n.d., p. 18; same page has review of The Arcadians, which premiered in NYC at the Liberty on Monday, January 17, 1910)

1910, in January: Big CVBA entertainment and dance at Madison Square Garden on January 28; Vodery is on the Reception Committee and arranges some of the music (NY Age, February 3, 1910, p. 6)

1910, in February: mentions he has been rehearsing a Hurtig and Seamon show (Indianapolis Freeman, February 26, 1910, p. 5)

1910, in April: He's busy rehearsing a number of summer shows (NY Age, April 21, 1910, p. 6)

1910, in April: The US 1910 Census at his mother's home records him as age 24 with the occupation of minister (conflating him with his father?); his mother is the head of an employment agency

1910 Wax Cylinder recording:

"Carolina Brown"; Vodery makes a 1910 recording for Indestructible Record Co. (Albany, NY) with the Indestructible Military Band; Indestructible Record #1322; (WorldCat)
composed by Karl Kaps, "Carolina Brown: Two-Step," had already just been recorded for Edison by the National (London) Military Band

1910, in June: ZIEGFELD

Ziegfeld Follies of 1910 opens June 20;

Vodery contributes music for comedian Leon Errol's act (Tucker, p. 130); his first contract will be for the Follies of 1911; he then writes for Ziegfeld through 1918, sees military service, and resumes in 1919.

1910, in June: Vodery conducts the CVBA Orchestra at a minstrel show in Newark on Tuesday, June 28; Dudley and Brymn wrote the First Part (NY Age, June 30, 1910, p. 6)

1910, in August: The Down in Dixie Minstrels

Vodery writes all the music for The Down in Dixie Minstrels, including "some pretty musical numbers"; this was a summer show for star John Rucker and the Southern Smart Set company (a.k.a. Rucker's "Alabama Blossoms") organized by Dudley as a second company for the Smart Set; in rehearsal in July in Chicago, for which Vodery was there; (NY Age, Thursday, July 21, 1910, p. 6; NY Age, Thursday, July 28, 1910, p. 6), and premiered in Chicago, August 10, 1910; Vodery is remembered as having written Hogan's last show (NY Age, July 21, 1910, p. 6; Indianapolis Freeman, August 13, 1910, p. 5); this show is in DC in January 1911, Atlantic City in January 1911, and in Chicago in February 1911 (Washington Bee, January 7, 1911, p. 4), etc., etc.; it has long, successful run, especially in the South; big shake-up of personnel in December 1910 (NY Age, December 8, 1910, p. 6)

1910-1911

AT THE HOWARD

1910, in August: Young but seasoned, with several years of professional work under his belt, Vodery is appointed director of the orchestra at the new and soon-to-open Howard Theater; the theater opens on August 22, 1910; its first manager is W. H. Smith, the former manager of the Pekin in Chicago, and one early plan is to present all the comedies that had been done at the Pekin (Washington Bee, September 17, 1910, p. 5); in September he's living in DC and preparing a vaudeville company for its American engagement and a tour of Europe, which surely is a reference to the Howard company (Washington, DC, National Forum, September 24, 1910, p. 2); he's in the pit at the opening of the Howard theatre in DC

In parallel to Mikell in Jacksonville at the Globe, he's simultaneously the conductor and also the musical director of the Howard Stock Company, which is the company in residence at the new Howard theater; in other words, the house company mounts its own material, but the house can offer an orchestra for travelling shows. Evidently the initial ambition was for Hill and Vodery to mount lots of original shows, as at the Pekin, but that intention did not last long. (And remember that this is the fall when the Pekin itself revives its ambitions for a stock company under Shipp and Corker).

Indianapolis Freeman, September 24, 1910, p. 5 talks about Vodery in an article on the Howard Theatre; he is "the peerless and well-known director and arranger for the Hurtig and Seamon successes"; they hope to do all new original plays with music, which he will compose [i.e., along the lines of what went on at the Pekin, though it does not say this explicitly]

Big actor figure here is J. Leubrie Hill (1869/1873-1916); Walton column (New York Age, January 19, 1911, p. 6) explains that J. Leubrie Hill has been for a number of years associated with Walker and Williams and with Hogan as a character comedian and as a producer. [John Leubrie/Lubrie/Loubrie Hill; Walton obit says born in St. Louis in 1873]

1910, in August: Opening night at the Howard on August 22, 1910 featured Abbie Mitchell and the Pekin Trio (Baltimore Afro American, August 27, 1910, p. 8); NY Age article on the opening mentions that in the program

Willie Vodery is billed as "Prof. Will Vodery" (NY Age, August 25, 1910, p. 6)

1910, in September: new Hurtig & Seamon show at the Columbia Theatre, a two-act burlesque for their "Follies of New York and Paris" company called Night Life in Two Gay Cities, with book by Frank Hatch, lyrics and music by Creamer and Vodery (NY Sun, Sunday, September 18, 1910, p. 6; NY Times, September 18, 1910, p. X2)

1910 in October: My Friend From Dixie

From October 24, for two weeks, to November 6; at the Howard; Vodery writes music for Howard Stock Co., a vehicle for J. Leubrie Hill called My Friend From Dixie, a three-act musical comedy, written by Hill, with lyrics by Alonzo A. Govern and Coleman L. Minor (Washington Bee, October 8, 1910, p. 8; Washington Bee, October 10, 1910, p. 4; Washington Bee, October 29, 1910, p. 8); note the November 1906 Pekin show My Friend From Georgia

QUESTIONS: WAS IT EVER JUST A 2-ACT SHOW?

WAS IT EVER CALLED "OUR FRIEND FROM DIXIE"? Yes, acc. a ref. in Peterson, Century of Musicals, and 14 hits in genealogybank.com (compared with 67 hits over the same time period for "My Friend")

1910, in November: Big Minstrel Carnival

At the Howard, the stock company next mounts the Big Minstrel Carnival starting November 7, staged by J. Leubrie Hill, with a big opening number, music composed by Vodery (Washington Bee, November 5, 1910, p. 1); a week later, they present a second edition of the Big Minstrel Carnival, with new songs, new jokes, new music (Washington Bee, November 12, 1910, p. 5), closing Friday, November 25 (Washington Bee, November 26, 1910, p. 8)

1910, in December: ref. in Sampson, Ghost Walks, p. 541, that in December the Howard will start to take white road company productions doing comedy-dramas, with Vodery continuing as musical director

1910, in December: The Blackville Corporation

at very end of year 1910, beginning with a Christmas matinee and

running in the week of the 26th, a new J. Leubrie Hill three-act musical comedy with Vodery music and a chorus of 35, The Blackville Corporation (Washington Bee, December 24, 1910, p. 5; NY Age, December 29, 1910, p. 6; Washington Bee, December 31, 1910, p. 5; Indianapolis Freeman, December 31, 1910, p. 5); possibly this is the same as the show mentioned in Washington Bee, November 5, 1910, p. 1, then called the Black Promoters; after kicking it off in DC, it is set aside in favor of the tour of My Friend From Dixie; apparently, by one later description, it was very indebted to Bandana Land, which is not surprising given Vodery's connection to the earlier show

1911, in January: the next show at the Howard is not by its stock company; instead, the theater hosts The Dixie Minstrels, (i.e., Vodery's show for Rucker from August, the Down in Dixie Minstrels, now revised) with star John Rucker. Vodery contributes one original and extended new number to the olio, a musical farce called "From Natchez to New Orleans" which closed the show. "This scene is a revelation, never before equalled in minstrelsy" (Washington Bee, January 7, 1911, p. 4; see also Washington Herald, January 3, 1911, p. 4)

1911, in January: Vodery resigns as musical director of the Howard Theatre (NY Age, January 12, 1911, p. 6) and goes on the road with J. Leubrie Hill and company in earliest 1911 as musical director until May. The show's tour includes Atlantic City in January (NY Age, January 19, 1911, p. 6); Baltimore in January (Washington Bee, August 6, 1910, p. 5; Washington Bee, October 15, 1910, p. 4; Washington Bee, November 19, 1910, p. 8; Washington Bee, December 10, 1910, p. 1; Washington Bee, January 21, 1911, p. 5, and etc. in the Bee for this season; Chicago Broad Axe, January 25, 1911, p. 3; Indianapolis Freeman, February 25, 1911, p. 5); the show is in Chicago at the Globe in February (Indianapolis Freeman, February 25, 1911, p. 5), in Louisville in March, and in Syracuse in May (The Syracuse Herald, May 7, 1911, p. 30]

1911, in February: In Feb-March, the My Friend From Dixie show is on the road from Chicago to Brooklyn, and while in Chicago, "Will Vodery has been called upon this week to rehearse three white shows playing in Chicago that have his music" (NY Age, March 2, 1911, p. 6). These are probably Hurtig & Seamon burlesque shows.

1911, in May: Vodery is off the road; he is called the late leader of the My Friend From Dixie orchestra; he's in Chicago to write music for and stage Madame X for the New Columbia Theater (Chicago Defender, May 27, 1911, p. 3; Indianapolis Freeman, May 27, 1911, p. 5); this is actually the Hurtig & Seamons's Bowery Burlesquers in their parody, Madame X-cuse Me; it is a parody of the courtroom scene in the famous and popular drama Madame X, which opened at the Columbia on May 28 (Chicago Tribune, May 28, 1911, p. B2; Chicago Tribune, September 3, 1911, p. B5); this was a parody of a famous and popular play: Sarah Berhardt plays in Madame X in Chicago in May as part of her US tour (Chicago Tribune, May 28, 1911, p. B3); however, it had already been playing with a local company (Chicago Tribune, May 28, 1911, p. B2)

Later history of My Friend From Dixie and The Blackville Corporation

1911-1912

1911: led by J. Leubrie Hill without Vodery, My Friend From Dixie goes into a second season on the road, 1911-1912 (Indianapolis Freeman, April 20, 1912, p. 5)

1912, in May: when My Friend From Dixie closes its two year tour in May 1912, the Howard Stock Company returns home to the Howard Theatre to present The Blackville Corporation (Washington Bee, May 18, 1912, p. 8) and then brings it to Atlantic City (Indianapolis Freeman, July 20, 1912, p. 6).

1913-1914

1913, in October: after a year off, J. Leubrie Hill's company, Darktown Follies, mounted a revised revival of My Friend From Dixie as My Friend From Kentucky, which played at the Lafayette from October 27, 1913, for two weeks (see Lester Walton column in NY Age, October 30, 1913). Then returns quickly, on November 24, and is held over until December 20.

1914, in June: In an abbreviated form, the show played at Hammerstein's for a week ending June 6, 1914; the show had just appeared on Broadway, where it was on the Victoria roof from July 1, in

tabloid form, running forty-five minutes (NY Age, May 7, 1914, n.p. [6]; NY Age, June 11, 1914)

The show was a success that drew white attention, including a positive review from Carl Van Vechten, etc. Ziegfeld added a couple of the show's numbers to his Follies of 1914. (Simonson book ref.)

Dixie returns again to the Lafayette in the summer of 1914, playing the weeks of July 20 and 27 (Indianapolis Freeman, September 5, 1914, p. 2). A great hit.

[NB: The show itself is also sometimes called Darktown Follies (especially by later secondary sources), blurring it with the name of the company.

1914-1915

1915, in February: Leubrie Hill brings his Darktown Follies company's production of My Friend From Kentucky for the two weeks of February 1 and 8, and offers Blackville Corporation for one week from Monday, February 15 (NY Age, February 4, 1915, etc.)

Leubrie Hill also revives The Blackville Corporation, as A Blackville Corporation, for the third week of the run of three weeks of his company at the Lafayette in early 1915; he puts it on right after My Friend From Kentucky, so in effect he's revisiting the two big Howard shows of fall 1910, in order. It plays at the Lafayette for a week from Monday, February 15, 1915. It is called a three-act musical comedy review, and it is described in an article and in a big Lafayette advertisement as adapted from Shipp, Rogers, and Cook's Bandanna Land (NY Age, February 11, 1915, p. [6]; NY Age, February 18, 1915, p. [6]); Petersen, A Century of Musicals (pp. 47-48), referring to 1915 revival, reiterates its relationship to Bandanna Land, and claims only Bandanna Land songs are used in it. It is worth remembering that Vodery helped WMC to prepare Bandanna Land.

1915-1916

The Follies toured into 1916, so altogether about a six-year run. Needs checking how much of the last year of the show is still Dixie/Kentucky.

February 14: first week of Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies of 1916, with new, higher prices (NY Age, February 17, 1916, n.p. [6])

February 21: second week of Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies of 1916

February 28: third week of Leubrie Hill's Darktown Follies of 1916, through March 4, after which the theatre will return to its policy of dramatic stock and popular vaudeville.

The show goes on to play the Howard in DC, where, struggling with diabetes, J. Leubrie Hill is hospitalized. He dies later the same year.

1911, in June: Ziegfeld Follies of 1911 opens June 26. This is Vodery's first show under contract with Ziegfeld.

1911 in August: the CVBA annual entertainment in NYC at the Manhattan Casino is held on August 10; Vodery, on the entertainment committee, is in charge of all music, including many bands and orchestras and musical acts, and he wields the baton over the CVBA band itself (NY Age, August 17, 1911, p. 6; Indianapolis Freeman, August 26, 1911, p. 5)

1911-1912

DR. BEANS FROM BOSTON

1911 in August: Dr. Beans From Boston

Vodery composes and prepares Dr. Beans From Boston for Dudley's Smart Set; lyrics by Creamer and book by Troy and Dudley; he's signed as musical director of Smart Set by early August, at the same time as Jim Europe has signed on to be musical director of Aida Overton Walker's company (NY Age, August 24, 1911, p. 6); Vodery is "in charge of the musical department", i.e. he wields the baton in the pit (Washington Bee, September 2, 1911, p. 6; Syracuse Journal, November 15, 1911, p. [illeg.]; Indianapolis Freeman, November 25, 1911; Indianapolis Freeman, December 30, 1911, p. 6; Indianapolis Freeman, January 27, 1912, p. 4)

Five Creamer & Vodery numbers published separately and also printed in a collection (NY: Roger Brothers, 1911):

"Cuddle up, Honey, let's make love" (NY: Rogers Bros., 1911)

"Dearest Memories" ((NY: Rogers Bros., 1911; republ. 1944; Tucker has 1943)

"Sunshine (NY: Rogers Bros., 1911)

"West Virginia Dance" (NY: Rogers Bros., 1911)

"What did I say that for?" (NY: Rogers Bros., 1911)

Rogers Bros. sheet music cover also has:

I could love a girl like you

Dr. Beans From Boston

Messenger Boy

1911 in December: Vodery wrote the music for a production for the Hurtig and Seamon burlesque company "The Social Maids" and was musical director at the Howard theater last year (Indianapolis Freeman, February 12, 1911, p. 5); NB: he writes for the Social Maids at least to 1918

1912 in the spring: still with Dr. Beans From Boston

1912, in June: Ziegfeld Follies.

1912, in June: off the road, Vodery spends the month of June in DC (Washington Bee, May 4, 1912, p. 4)

1912-1913

1912, in September: He has composed all the music for a show for the Hurtig company "The Girls in Happyland"; it is possible that this is also the name of their show, though most mentions speak of two burlettas, not always named; a.k.a. "The Girls From Happyland"---a much more common version of the name in newspapers---as company and show; this long-lived and popular company is on stage from the 1907-1908

season through at least October 1933; it is an all-white revue; the young Fanny Brice spent a year with this Hurtig & Seamon company; Peterson, Century (1993), p. 162, calls this Happy Girls, thus confusing it with the Ada Overton Walker acts discussed below; it is apparently one of Hurtig's all-white reviews, and seems to have been around since 1909/1910, so the 1912 newspaper hits may be considerably later than Vodery's involvement; Vodery composes all the scores for the Hurtig shows and is under contract not to publish any of the scores (Greensboro (NC) Daily Record, September 19, 1912, p. 6; Kentucky New Era, September 27, 1912, p. 8; Grand Forks (ND) Daily Herald, September 24, 1912, p. 3; NB: spelling of name as Vodrey); the show is in Montana and North Dakota, too, unless these are all hits from generic wire-service news about "The Stage"

1912, in December: owing to hurricane damage, Theo. L. Pankey and Willie Vodery have cancelled their concert engagement in Jamaica, B. W. I. (NY Age, December 12, 1912, p. [6])

1913, in May: Vodery is musical director for a huge Ada Overton Walker charity event on Thursday, May 15, 1913, at the New Star Casino; is this their first collaboration? Seems unlikely; the bill includes her two acts, Maggie Davis, Louis Saulsbury and the Porto Rico Girls, and "Brownie" and plus His Happy Girls, and much, much more (NY Age, May 1, 1913, p. [?]; NY Age, May 8, 1913, p. [?]).

The two acts are new in early 1913: Saulsbury and Davis and the Porto Rico Girls, staged by Walker, first appear in February (NY Age, February 20, 1913, p. [6]); "Brownie and His Happy Girls," a new act that Walker has staged, makes its debut next week, e.g., later April 1913 (NY Age, April 17, 1913, p. [6])

Vodery writes for Ada Overton Walker's vaudeville company and for two vaudeville acts that she managed, the "Puerto Rico Girls" and the "Happy Girls" [Peterson, Profiles]; Vodery is already a part of the enterprise for May 15 charity event (see above); Maggie Davis, Louis Saulsbury and the [eight] Porto Rico girls are part of her vaudeville act when she goes out in later 1913; in 1912-1913 and 1913-1914 seasons: "For the past two seasons Mrs. Walker devoted more of her time to producing acts than to appearing on the stage, and was financially

interested in the Porto Rico Girls and the Happy Girls" (NY Age, October 15, 1914, p. 1)

1913, in June: Ziegfeld Follies of 1913 opens June 16 He had contributed music for an act in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1910 [Tucker, p. 130], but then becomes a regular with Ziegfeld Follies from 1911 to 1932, esp. writing for Bert Williams. Other references to "chief arranger" and to 20 or 21 years as the arranger. (Ziegfeld dies in 1932.) Tucker points out that beyond what he designates as the 1913-1919 collaboration with Bert Williams, it is not know exactly what the Ziegfeld connection amounted to, but lots of folks repeat it over and over; Green bk cites contribution to Follies of 1931. The contribution to a 1919 Follies is suspect on account of Vodery's war service. See below.

1913, in August: JRE and Will Vodery are musical directors for the Frogs performance at the Manhattan Casino with JRE's Exclusive Society Orchestra, then this production goes on a major one week road trip (NY Age, July 31, 1913; NY Age, August 14, 1913; Reid Badger bio., p. 85)

1913 SONGS

"Carolina Romp," Vodery (NY: Stern, 1913); an instrumental fox trot; not the same as same as 1914's "Carolina fox trot"

"I certainly was going some," words Creamer, music Vodery (NY: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder, 1913), for Bert Williams, acc. Tucker dict. art.

rec. by Bert Williams for Columbia in January, 1913

"Please Take Me to the Ball Again," words Creamer, music Vodery (NY: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder, 1913)

"Poppy Land," words Creamer, music Vodery (NY: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder, 1913)

"Ragtime Craze," words Creamer, music Vodery (NY: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder, 1913)

1913-1914

1913, in the fall: After the end of Dr. Beans From Boston with the Smart Set as musical director for two seasons, Vodery goes on the road in later 1913

with Aida Overton Walker's vaudeville show as music director

The tour begins with two weeks at the Pekin in Chicago, from November 3-17, and Vodery is given many marks of honor; this is Walker's first big outing of the fall, kicking off a tour, and it is for this that Vodery signs up; it is a big deal since it is her highly anticipated first appearance in Chicago at a South Side, State Street venue "for the people of her race"; show will feature the Porto Rico Girls, with Maggie Davis and Louis Saulsbury, and the Happy Girls

(NY Age, October 16, 1913, p. [6]; Indianapolis Freeman, October 25, 1913, p. 5; Chicago Broad Axe, November 8, 1913, p. 1, 3; Chicago Broad Axe, November 15, 1913, p. 1, 2; Indianapolis Freeman, November 15, 1913, p. 1; Chicago Broad Axe, November 22, 1913, p. 1; Indianapolis Freeman, November 22, 1913, p. 1, etc., etc.)

1913, in December: Walker's vaudeville show is in Flint from December 28, in Saginaw in first week of 1914, in Springfield in March, in NYC at Manhattan Casino from July 15, 1914, and her last public appearance was at Hammerstein's in the week of August 3, 1914; she ran a benefit at the Manhattan Casino on August 16, 1914 [NB: she had been ill for a while, and she died, after two weeks in bed, on October 11, 1914; NY Age, October 15, 1914, p. 1 obit]

1914, in April: NY Age reports on a banquet at Vodery's mother's home in Philadelphia for theatrical folk who were in town (NY Age, April 16, 1914, p. [6])

1914, in June: Ziegfeld Follies of 1914 opens June 1; Norton (2002), II: 53-54 (1914.15).

"The Darktown Poker Club," words Jean Hafez, music Bert Williams and Will H. Vodery (NY: Remick, 1914); for this show?; for Bert Williams, acc. Norton and the Tucker dict. art.; he recorded it prior to the Ziegfeld Follies of 1914 (perhaps for the 1913 version?); sung by others in vaudeville in June, 1914 and in later 1914; a song that turns up as late as the 1945 movie "I Love a Bandleader" and was still being sung regularly by Phil Harris at the time of Vodery's death in 1951 (Pittsburgh Courier, December 1, 1951, p. 5); strongly identified with Vodery and Williams rec. by Bert Williams for Columbia, February, 1914

1914 SONGS

"I'm going to tell your mother," words and music by Billy Johnson and Vodrey [sic] (NY: Maurice Richmond, 1914)

"Some Chocolate Drops; Bonbons de chocolate," Vodrey [sic] (NY: Stern, 1914)

rec. by a Marimba band for Columbia in June, 1918, where it is apparently embedded in Spencer Williams's "Tishomingo blues"

"Carolina fox trot: new one-step," Vodery (NY: Stern, 1914); sheet music says "Originated by Billy Kent & Jeanette Warner, America's classiest dancers"; not the same as same as 1913's "Carolina romp";

The fox trot is a new step around now; it explodes in popularity in 1914; and "'The Carolina Fox Trot,' composed by Will Vodrey [sic], in honor of the originators of the new step, will be dedicated to Ken and Warner and issued to the public simultaneously in England and America, by the "Stern" people next week, they having purchased all rights" (NY Clipper, July 18, 1914, p. 14); a Stern hit for band and orchestra in ads for August, 1914; "The Carolina Fox Trot" will be introduced by Creamer and Christian at the Autumn Exposition on September 30, 1914 rec. by the Victor Military Band in October, 1914, and advertised for Columbia Graphophone that month

1914-15

1914 in August: Mr. Ragtime

Vodery writes music for Irvin C. Miller's hour-long musical review Mr. Ragtime; this is Miller's first big musical show; an early reference has it playing by August 8 (Indianapolis Freeman, August 8, 1914, p. 5); it played in Chicago and on the road for two years and more, at least to November 1916; it is at Lafayette in NYC for the week of September 6-10, 1914 (NY Age, Thursday, September 9, 1914, p. [6]) and two years later, in Indianapolis in September 1916 (NY Age, September 14, 1916, p. [6], etc.; (Peterson, Profiles, and Peterson, Century (1993), p. 239-40)

1914 in August: Busy Little Cupid

Vodery is preparing the music for a burlesque called Busy Little Cupid,

for Hurtig and Seaman's travelling company, "The Social Maids," with book by Leon Berg (Perrysburg (OH) Journal, August 20, 1914, p. 7); it ran for at least two seasons; it played in Cleveland in August, Chicago by late October and early November, 1914 (The Englewood (Chicago) Economist, November 2, 1914, p. 4); Jersey City in January 1915; Philadelphia, January 1915; New York, February 1915; Baltimore, April 1915; Washington, April 1915; Buffalo, May 1916

1914 in October: for the big Harlem Exposition, the Autumn Amusement and Advertising Festival Frolic and Funfest, September 28-October 2, he plays a big role. Wednesday is dance evening, with "special music written and arranged for this evening by Will H. Vodrey"; Thursday, he is part of Composers and Reminiscence Night; Friday is Children's Day and there is a big Mother Goose Pageant, with a children's chorus of 250. Sketches and rhymes by Rogers and Shipp, with musical settings by Vodery and Europe

1915, in January: a two-act burlesque, in four scenes, Girls of the Moulin Rouge, book by John Rhains (sic) and music by Will Vodery, will be presented at the Columbia Theatre (The Evening World (NYC), January 23, 1915, p. 7)

1915, in January: Vodery's mother dies Friday, January 22 at her Philadelphia home (NY Age, January 28, 1915, p. [6])

1915 in April: it is reported that with Hurtig and Seamon, Vodery is planning a revival of Hogan's The Oyster Man this month for NYC and East Coast run (Indianapolis Freeman, April 3, 1915, p. 6); Indianapolis Freeman, May 1, 1915, p. 6 says now that plans are still in the works, but not to open until "next month"; Indianapolis Freeman, July 3, 1915, p. 6 still says he's arranging to revive it

1915, in June: Ziegfeld Follies of 1915 opens June 21; Norton (2002), II: 75-76 (1915.15)

"The Midnight Frolic Glide," words Gene Buck, music Dave Stamper and Vodery (NY: Harms and Francis; Day and Hunter, 1915); for this Follies

1915, in August: Vodery has written some good songs for The Girl Trust, a burlesque Hurtig show that goes out on the circuit (Syracuse, NY Post Standard, August 14, 1915, p. 4 and many other Old Fulton hits in 1915-1916, esp. in upstate NY)

Vodery leads the orchestra at the Coconut Grove of the Century Theatre Roof Garden in 1915 [Southern, 1983, p. 346 = Bio. Dict.; Tucker, p. 132]; his Society Orchestra is there in 1917, featuring Maude Nugent's "Donkey Trot" (Variety, 1917, n.d., p. 43)

1915-1916

1915, in September: Busy Little Cupid is still running in its second season, in Syracuse in September (Syracuse Post Standard, September 25, 1915, p. 16); Cleveland, September 1915; Brooklyn (Brooklyn Eagle, November 28, 1915, p. 16); Cleveland, February 1916; Omaha, March 1916; and Boston, May 1916

1915 in September: at the Century Theatre last week, Town Topics, with a large colored orchestra under the direction of Will Vodery (NY Age, September 30, 1915, n.p. [6])

1915, in September: Two Husbands and One Wife, a two act musical farce, book by Frank Kennedy, presented by the troupe "Frank A. Burt and the Girl Trust"; new in September 1915 (NY Times, September 21, 1915, p. 11); it is at the Gayety in Tonawanda, NY, and other small upstate NY towns in the spring of 1916; this is a Hurtig burlesque; Bloom bk says Vodery contributed to this show

1916, in June: Ziegfeld Follies of 1916 opens June 12; Norton (2002), II: 97-98 (1916.10)

"The Lee Family," lyrics Alex Rogers, music Vodery; copyright June 21, 1916, and renewed June 28, 1943; for Bert Williams, acc. Norton and Tucker dict. art, etc.;
rec. by Bert Williams for Columbia in July, 1916

1916, in August: The Rag Doll of Ragland, a burlesque show in 9 scenes for George Stone and Etta Pillard; a Hurtig & Seamon show; book by Will H. Smith and George Stone; lyrics Will H. Smith, music Vodery (Variety, 1916, n.d., p. 19); it runs from the 1916-1917 season at least into the 1919-1920 season.

1916-1917

1916 in September: At Lobster Beach

the Bowerly Burlesquers present a new two-act burlesque, At Lobster Beach, at the Columbia Theatre, with book by John Raines and original music by Will Vodrey (Utica Tribune, August 20, 1916, p. illeg.; NY Evening Telegram, September 17, 1916, p. 10); in Utica in August, Newburgh in December; turns up also in August 1917 (see below)

1916, in November: NY Age calls him "one of the best orchestrators in Manhattan"; "the services of Willie Vodery are being eagerly sought after nowadays by the leading theatrical promoters in New York, including Messrs. Dillingham and Ziegfeld. He is recognized as one of the best orchestraters (sic) of music in Manhattan." (NY Age, November 23, 1916, p. [6])

1916 in December: Vodery was reported as hanging out at CBVA headquarters last Monday evening with Will Marion Cook and others (Indianapolis Freeman, December 9, 1916, p. 4)

1917, in April: Doraldina's Montmartre announces that April 2, Doraldina will be seen in "a Cherokee Indian classic of historic significance," with music by Vodrey; a big ad in Variety for Doraldina's show with American Indian Classic Dances presented at her new Indian room at Doraldina's Montmartre on Broadway at 50th, with specially created Indian music by Will Vodrey (Variety, n.d., n.p. but advertising an opening on Monday, April 9)

1917, in June: Ziegfeld Follies of 1917 opens June 12

1917, in June: Story Songs of the City running from next week, June 4, at the Colonial in NYC, with orchestrations by Frank Sadler and Will Vodery (Variety, n.d., 1917, p. 25)

1917-1918

1917, in August: the Bowery Burlesquers are at the Columbia theatre this week, doing two one-act travesties called A Day at Lobster Beach and A Night in New York Town, both written by John Raines with original music by Will Vodery (NY Sun, August 12, 1917, p. 3; NY Evening Telegram, August 12, 1917, p. 10); new last year---see above

1917, in August: Harrisburg Patriot, August 6, 1917, p. 2 says the burlesque company "Some Babies" is coming to town in a new vehicle called The Love Cure, with book by Frank Kennedy and music by Vodery; another source says the book is by Tom Coyne (Binghamtom Press, n.d. (November 1917), p. 8); it is in Baltimore in April, 1918 and gets mounted in Tulsa in April 1920 and in Miami as late as September 1920

1917, in September: Hurtig's "The Social Maids" company gets a new vehicle, The Boys From Home, with book by Leon Berg and music by Vodery; it is their show from fall 1917 onward through the war years.

1917, in October: LESTER WALTON COLUMN ON ARRANGERS SINGLES OUT VODERY AS SECOND TO ONLY ONE, and most of the music in Ziegfeld's Follies is arranged by him (Walton, "Arranger of Music," NY Age, October 4, 1917, p. 6)

1917, in November: contributed music to the Ziegfeld-produced revue, Miss 1917, which was, in fact, the show that brought Gershwin directly into musical theater, as rehearsal pianist and conductor of the pit orchestra; this begins their friendship (Chicago Defender, December 1, 1951, p. 2)

1918, in June: Ziegfeld Follies of 1918 opens June 18

1918, in June: Variety reports that Bert Williams quits the Follies during Atlantic City rehearsals and goes into seclusion in Vodery's office in the Gaiety building (Variety, 1918, n.d. [late June], p. 12)

"When I return," lyrics Alex Rogers, music Vodery (1918; score in ms at LoC); for Bert Williams, acc. Tucker dict. art rec. Bert Williams for Columbia in August, 1918

SERVICE RECORD 1918-1919

Five African American US Army regiments were formed in the Northeast in 1917-1918, and each had a band. They included the 349th and 350th Artillery, and the 367th and 369th Infantry; a little later in 1918, at the end of July, a fifth African American regiment that included men from the New York area, the 807th Pioneer Infantry Regiment, was formed at Camp Dix with draftees from New York and New Jersey, along with men from Delaware, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Its band became the fourth and final great New York area black army band, alongside those of Europe's 369th, Thompson's 367th, and Brymn's 350th. (The band of the 349th never made the same kind of splash.) Its Bandmaster, Will Vodery, is in his mid-30s, just a few years younger than Europe and Mikell.

The 807th started to be organized in July 1918 at Camp Dix. Vodery is to report on July 18 with fellow bandsmen, and he is to be bandmaster (NY Age, Saturday, July 20, 1918, p. 6); Thorpe letter to NY Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6, says that together they "enlisted at Fort Dix, for the purpose of organizing a Band, on July 29, 1918"; a note from NYC dated July 26 has Charlie Thorpe, "a well-know business and fraternal man in Harlem," joining up; Vodery is to be bandmaster and Thorpe is to be sergeant-major (Chicago Defender, July 27, 1918, p. 5)

The word spreads: he has a new appointment as bandmaster of 807th (Chicago Defender, August 17, 1918, p. 16; Trenton Evening Times, August 12, 1918, p. 11); The Crisis, 16/6 (October 1918), p. 291 has short entry that he is bandmaster of 807th at Fort Dix; ditto as picked up by Caxton's Weekly [Seattle], October 19, 1918, p. 3).

Will Vodery's leadership team in the 807th included experienced trombonist Ralph S. Redmond as Assistant Band Leader, and tenor soloist and jazz instrumentalist Opal D. Cooper as drum major. Within just three months the ensemble reached a noteworthy level of excellence. In fact, a front page 1929 obituary in the New York Age for one of its performers says "their band won

fame, second only to that of Lieut. Jim Europe's Fifteenth Hellfighters" (New York Age, January 26, 1929, p. 1, in an obituary of Charles L. Thorpe). And "at least one commanding officer pronounced them 'the best band in the A. E. F.'" (According to Mark Tucker, quoting from a 1926 Pittsburg Courier article. See Mark Tucker, "In Search of Will Vodery," Black Music Research Journal 16/1 (Spring, 1996): 123-82, at p. 134). The Band Secretary, Corporal Albert A. Smith, was not shy about declaring that "We established ourselves as one of the premiere bands in the A. E. F." (Philadelphia Tribune, June 14, 1919, p. 1).

Such renown indicates that Vodery had found amongst the regiment's draftees (or brought with him into the band as volunteer enlistees) many East Coast professionals. By one later description it was a band of 52 players, while one extant photograph shows a conductor and 47 instrumentalists. (A photo of the band taken when they were at Souilly in December (see below) was first published in the New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6) For theatrical shows they broke out a smaller group. There is a roster of Vodery's minstrel show and pit orchestra totalling 30 names, comprising about 10 actor-singers and 20 instrumentalists. (New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6 ("Making Music for the Army").) More than half of these individuals can be traced as active professional actors and musicians in civilian life. One particularly prominent subset of men who played together in the 807th---Opal Cooper, Sammy Richardson, Louia V. Jones, and Earl Granstaff---returned to France after the war and played together on-and-off for most of the 1920s.

The band moved overseas in September; by a letter to the Chicago Defender dated September 8, they left for overseas "last Wednesday," which would be September 4, 1918 (Chicago Defender, September 14, 1918, p. 6).

Will Vodery's 807th Pioneer Infantry Band began its overseas service with a taste of combat: "when we arrived in a certain part of France we were carrying ammunition to the front under fire."

The band's "climactic success" really began, though, when it was detached from its regiment to be the First Army Headquarters Battalion Post Band. This was the most distinguished and lengthiest assignment undertaken by any of the black regimental bands, in which capacity it played all over France. The opportunity was created when on October 16, 1918, General John J. Pershing turned over personal command of the million-man US First Army to General Hunter Liggett, who commanded it until April 20, 1919. Naturally, Liggett then

needed his own headquarters band independent of Pershing's, and a competition was set up for the position, which was won when Vodery's band beat out four other (white) regimental bands. (Letter from Sgt. Charles L. Thorpe, printed in the New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6.) (NB: General Pershing also determined to have a new band, a large, all-star AEF GHQ [General Headquarters] Band recruited from the various regiments. Simple racism rearing its head again, no members of any black regimental band were taken for this group.)

The band of the 807th transferred to First Army Headquarters on November 13, 1918. Based first at Souilly near Verdun and then at Bar-sur-Aube in the countryside southeast of Paris, close by to Pershing's own headquarters at Chaumont, Vodery's men served as First Army Headquarters Band for five months until the First Army was dissolved in April. In early 1919, Vodery stepped away for two months to do the Bandmasters course at nearby Chaumont, and a Vodery letter shows that after the course he expected to return to the states with First Army Headquarters personnel. Instead, in late April, he and the band were sent back to their regiment, which had missed them sorely, and who were now at Bourg, Haute-Marne. They serve Hunter Liggett's First Army November 13, 1918 to April 12, 1919, so five months exactly.

A few references indicate the caliber of event for which Vodery's band provided entertainment in this assignment. (All material in this paragraph is taken from the Chicago Defender, May 24, 1919, p. 4 and Philadelphia Tribune, June 14, 1919, p. 1, except where noted.) It represented the American Army at a reception for French President M. Poincaré and Mme. Poincaré at Verdun on November 20, 1918, when Poincaré was travelling to join Marshalls Foch and Petain for the ceremonial entries into the liberated towns of Alsace-Lorraine. Poincaré "said it was the first colored band he had ever heard and its music was astounding." (Vodery letter of Nov. 22, 1918, printed in the New York Age, December 21, 1918, p. 6; New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6) On December 5, the band played while General Liggett decorated eight aviator aces at Souilly. On January 8 it played at the services in honor of Colonel Roosevelt at which General Liggett and General Drum and staff were present (Theodore Roosevelt had died on January 6). Further, during January the band played at one of the Catholic Cathedrals, and it also played privately on January 19 for the Prince of Monaco at his chateau, at which occasion "the Prince expressed particular pleasure in Negro music." (The Crisis 17/6 (April,

1919), p. 294) And on March 21, they played for Gen. Pershing, his staff and guests, the king and queen of Belgium, at Lignol, the chateau that was Lieut. Gen. Hunter Liggett's headquarters near Bar-sur-Aube. (Cleveland Gazette, April 26, 1919, p. 3; see also New York Times, March 22, 1919, p. 3.) On April 6 they played for General Pershing at Bar-sur-Aube. And they also made tours of base hospitals, of course. (The Crisis 17/4 (February 1919), p. 194)

Vodery's outfit was very much a theater troupe as well as a concert band, and it could mount at least two different shows. A description of one of the shows performed in Bar-sur-Aube in January mentions comedy sketches, a saxophone quartet, a comedian, and a song-and-dance routine. (New York Age, January 4, 1919, p. 6; New York Herald (Paris ed.), January 29, 1919, p. 2 ("Headquarters Band of First Army Gives Show"), as cited in Mark Miller, Some Hustling This! Taking Jazz to the World, 1914-1929 (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2005), p. 54)

Walter Damrosch took the leading role in establishing an army bandmasters school in Chaumont that operated from November 1, 1918 to June 1, 1919. The course of study lasted eight weeks. (Damrosch's own detailed account can be read in The Etude 38/3 (March 1920), pp. 151-52: "The Musical Aftermath of the Great War: An interview secured especially for The Etude with the distinguished conductor Dr. Walter Damrosch.") It was attended by black army bandmasters A. Jack Thomas and Will Vodery in late 1918 and early 1919, not both at the same time, before they returned with their units to the US. Most probably, Thomas attended in November and December, while Vodery attended from February through early April. Vodery recalled being the only African American among the 40 in his class, who were drawn by competitive examination from a pool of 162 applicants. Both Thomas and Vodery did outstanding work there. (Vodery letter to Alex Rogers in the New York Age, June 7, 1919, p. 6 ["Vodery Makes Highest Mark of the Bandleaders"]; reprinted by Mark Tucker, "Vodery," pp. 181-82). Vodery, in particular, not only earned his commission there but was "the Honourman of the A. E. F. School for Bandmasters" (Philadelphia Tribune, June 14, 1919, p. 1).

Vodery was at the Chaumont course from Feb to April, judging from a letter published April 19 in the Chicago Defender that was sent "last week" and has "Leader Bill" at the musicians school.

"William H. Vodery, a colored man, has received the first scholarship granted to an American musician composer by the French High School of Musical Studies, in Paris. Last August, while stationed at Chaumont, with his 807th Infantry Band, he was among 120 competing musicians, forty of whom passed the examination. In the final test Mr. Vodery led, with an average of 98 per cent. His composition was a descriptive tone-poem, "Two Months in the Old Mill"." (The Crisis 19/2 (Christmas, 1919), p. 80)

Vodery subsequently received an offer to return to Fontainebleau for two years of study, but turned it down.

Letters home from Vodery and other members of his band allow us some insight into what it was up to in Europe. Vodery letters home to Alex Rogers, printed in NY Age:

NY Age, December 21, 1918, p. 6---Letter of November 22

NY Age, March 8, 1919, p. 6

NY Age, June 7, 1919, p. 6

plus Thorpe letter to NY Age of January 4, 1919, p. 6

plus letters in Chicago Defender from Charles Thorpe and Albert Smith, including:

December 1918, p. 5

April 19, 1919, p. 5

May 24, 1919, p. 4

Art. of March 8 with letter says he was "recently commissioned a 2nd lieutenant"

In June 1919, he's said to be expected to return shortly to the US (NY Age, June 21, 1919, p. 6); the convoy carrying the 807th is announced in late June (Chicago Defender, June 21, 1919, p. 4); the steamship Orizaha was due July 4, 1919 in Newport News with the 807th (Chicago Defender, July 5, 1919, p. 4).

Gravesite info says that he was mustered out July 29, 1919, so he served just about exactly one year---maybe one year to the day, if Thorpe is accurate---or

a little longer, acc. the hit in the NY Age. It also says he served just from April 12, 1919, but that must be the point at which he and the band were re-attached to the 807th. (A separate hit on a white lieutenant of the 807th from Wyoming, reported in the Cheyenne State Leader, July 31, 1919, p. 6, says that he arrived Tuesday [the 29th] in NYC.)

Vodery is sighted at bandsman Charlie Thorpe's cafe/soda water emporium on 135th street on August 1, 1919.

RETURN TO NYC and to BROADWAY

From May 1918 to 1920, The Boys From Home, with book by Leon Berg and music by Vodery, is the current musical of his, bracketing the war years (multiple hits in Old Fulton NY Postcards, etc.). As a long-running act for Hurtig's "The Social Maids" company, featuring George Stone and Etta Pillard (Reedy's Mirror (St. Louis) 27/3 (January 18, 1918), it was a two-act farce for this company as long back as 1911-1912 (Springfield Daily News, September 23, 1911, p. 3; Philadelphia Inquirer, April 23, 1912, p. 7); it gets freshened up with new music by Berg and Vodery in 1918: Jersey Journal, May 16, 1918, p. 7 and Jersey Journal, September 3, 1918, p. 9; other companies pick it up by 1920.

In his tribute to the just deceased Ziegfeld, Vodery recalls going back to work for him upon his return from war in 1919 (Pittsburgh Courier, July 30, 1932, p. 6, second section)

1919-1920

1919, in September: New York Clipper, September 10, 1919, p. 7 says Vodery is going back to France in October to take up a free two-year scholarship for study at the French High School of Musical Studies in the Palace of Fontainebleau scholarship, and he will leave October 15 (but he evidently does not).

1919, in September: New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 11, 1919, p. 17, says that for a show at the Lyric Theatre, Vodery has written a new number, "My Bouquet," for the continuing engagement there of Margaret Ward Thomas. This is so far the first trace of new activity.

1920, in March: Three Showers, Norton (2002), II: 209 (1920.11); orchestrations/arrangements for Three Showers (also 3 Showers), a two-act musical [IBDB; Green; Bloom]; he did the orchestral score for this show with Creamer lyrics & Creamer and Layton songs; rehearsing in February; then at the Lyceum theatre; hits Broadway in April (Chicago Defender, February 14, 1920, p. 8; NY Age, March 13, 1920, p. 6; Syracuse Herald, 1920, n.d., n.p.)

1920, in May: "Will Vodery is arranging the music for Mabel Frenyear's new vaudeville vehicle" (Billboard, May 8, 1920, p. 93)

1920 SONGS

"All for you," lyrics Harold Robe, music Vodery (NY: Ricordi, 1920); copyright August/September 1920; Tucker dict. art. dates to 1933

1920-1921

1920, in September: Vodery passport application for a trip to Haiti (stamped fee received on September 14 and issued on September 15), with the purpose of composing music for motion pictures, due to leave on September 21 on the Panama Railroad Steamship line

1920, in September: Broadway Brevities of 1920; Norton II: 227-28 (1920.33) Vodery contributes songs and orchestrations/arrangements; runs from September 29, 1920, with Eddie Cantor and Bert Williams [IBDB; Green; Bloom]

"All for You" 1920 copyright entry

"But Where?", featured in Broadway Brevities 1920," Vodery (1920; WorldCat hit; also 1944)

"Cruel and Brutal," featured in Broadway Brevities 1920," Vodery (1920; WorldCat hit; also 1944)

SHUFFLE ALONG

1921, in May: Shuffle Along; Norton II: 248 (1921.16)

Vodery does the orchestrations/arrangements for Noble and Sissle's music for Shuffle Along, which initially ran May 23, 1921 to July 15, 1922 as a summer show, and then went on the road; Vodery directs the colored orchestra (Variety, May 13, 1921, p. 14); Variety's lengthy column on the show says he staged it (Variety, December 9, 1921, p. 17)

[Florence Mills joined the show at the end of the first summer and so was with it from August 1921 to March 1922; Josephine Baker was along in the second year.]

1921, in June: Willie Vodrey [sic] brings the Shuffle Along orchestra to play at the second annual midnight review given by the Temple Club of Hiram Lodge, No. 4, F. & A. M. at the Lafayette, Thursday night June 9, an event produced by Charels L. Thorpe, Jr. with Jesse A. Shipp as master of ceremonies (NY Age, June 18, 1921, n.p. [6])

1921-1922

1921: Shuffle Along runs for the entire season with Vodery as musical director.

1921, in December: Under the Bamboo Tree

Vodery wrote the music for what became Bert Williams's last show, Under the Bamboo Tree; it was a renaming of a project originally entitled The Pink Slip, now with the title of a popular old Bob Cole number; a musical comedy, book and lyrics by Walker de Leon, with a large company; began on tour in the 1921-1922 season from Monday, December 5, in Cincinnati (NY Dramatic Mirror, December 10, 1921, p. 839), then on to Chicago and on until Williams's collapse in Detroit on February 27, 1922; Peterson, Century, p. 368

"All Mixed Up," Vodery (cit. Tucker dict. art.)

"Of What She Sees Comes True," Vodery (cit. Tucker dict. art.)

"Puppy Dog," Vodery (cit. Tucker dict. art.)

A BANDSMAN AGAIN, briefly

1921, in December: Vodery became Band Leader of the 369th Regiment N.Y.N.G for about six months, from December 1921 to June 1922; he and the 369th play for a Christmas party for the children of men currently on duty with the 369th (NY Age, January 7, 1922, p. [?]); just announcing the appointment, see also Variety, January 13, 1922, p. 25; Billboard, January 21, 1922, p. 47

On January 5, 1921 a veteran white officer of the old 15th and 369th, Col. Arthur W. Little, was appointed commander of the new 15th and began vigorously to increase the size and resources of the regiment. His initiatives included a major campaign for a new armory, the renaming of the new 15th as the 369th, and a new direction for its band (for which he had a special place in his heart, because as regimental adjutant with the 369th in France he had accompanied it on its February-March 1918 tour). For most of his first year he kept Fred Simpson as bandmaster, so that, for example, Simpson led the regimental band in the new 15th's first major parade march after the war, a huge event up 5th Avenue in May 1921. In December 1921, however, Lieut. Simpson was succeeded by Lieut. Will Vodery as band director, with Lieut. Noble Sissle as band manager. Simpson's ensemble then took on different sponsorship, immediately affiliating in a body with Monarch Lodge No. 45 of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World (colored) and becoming the Monarch Band. For the gala affair of January 20, 1922 that marked the renaming of the regiment as the ("new") 369th, the regimental band was led by Will Vodery. Just how many of the performers that night were veterans, or were simultaneously members of the Elks band, is not known.

Colonel Little, concerned for the welfare of the veteran bandsmen, began in the spring of 1922 to pursue the idea that a smaller ensemble, consisting just of veterans, might be able to find full-time work. This evidently did not mesh with the professional schedules of Vodery and Sissle, who stepped out of the picture by later May, which is when Vodery's new musical theater obligations begin to kick in in earnest.

1922, in January: on January 20, 1922 Vodery's sixty-seven piece 369th regiment band opened a blues contest at the Manhattan Casino with Noble Sissle acting as master of ceremonies (NY Age, etc.; Billboard, February 4, 1922, p. 45)

1922, in March: Vodery gives a blood transfusion to the dying Bert Williams on March 4; Williams dies later the same day

1922: Vodery made the original 156-page score orchestration of a Gershwin opera, Blue Monday, or Blue Monday Blues, with libretto by B. G. (Buddy) De Sylva, which played as part of the fourth edition of George White's Scandals, the George White's Scandals of 1922, on August 28, 1922; this show, in two acts and twenty scenes, was indebted to "half a dozen writers and inventors, with music written and adapted by George Gershwin" . . . "From an artistic point of view "Blue Monday Blues" was by far the best number of the twenty. It was a little bit of "La Boheme" with the liebestod of "Tristan" to close, burlesqued almost beyond recognition" (NY Evening Post, August 29, 1922, p. 7); see also Haywood book; also Tucker art., p. 137; Peterson, Century (1993), pp. 50-51, 143.

LEW LESLIE and the PLANTATION CLUB REVIEWS

1922, in March: alongside Ziegfeld and Hurtig & Seamon productions, a big gig for Vodery for the next seven years is with Florence Mills in shows produced by Lew Leslie, beginning with the Plantation Club review in February/March 1922 (with a show called Night Time Frolics in Dixieland); he wrote for Mills until her death in 1927 (except for 1926-1927); he continued in the pit for Lew Leslie's annual Blackbirds of 19XX series until 1929 and wrote for it until 1933; arranged and/or conducted and toured, including in Europe.

Plantation Revue 1922-23
 Dover Street to Dixie 1923-24
 Plantation Review 1924 [February]
 Dixie to Broadway 1924-25
 Plantation Review 1925
 Blackbirds of 1926
 White Birds 1927
 Blackbirds of 1928
 Blackbirds of 1929
 Blackbirds of 1933 [1933-34]
 Blackbirds of 1934

1922, in March: The Plantation Review; Norton II: 294-95 (1922.25)
 From mid-1922 Vodery is out of the pit with Shuffle Along and busy

with his Plantation Orchestra, playing for Florence Mills in The Plantation Review. The show---essentially the pioneer Negro postwar revue---began at the Plantation Cafe atop the Winter Garden in February, with Florence Mills, Edith Wilson, U. S. Thompson, Johnny Dunn, and Tim Brymn's Orchestra. Vodery then replaced Tim Brymn as conductor, apparently beginning in mid-March (but in any event by June), and presumably with Vodery's own band.

1922, in May: Vodery is choosing 16 colored girls for Ziegfeld's Follies, and they will be paid the highest salaries every offered to Negro choristers (Billboard, May 27, 1922, p. 34)

1922, in June: Vodery is busy arranging the music for Ziegfeld's new "Follies" (Billboard, June 10, 1922, p. 56); the show actually opened on June 5, 1922

1922, in June: The Plantation Review was moved and expanded into a full-fledged theatrical version at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, then on Broadway at Brady's 48th Street Theatre on Broadway (July 17, 1922), all in June and July (see, inter alia, NY Evening Post, Tuesday, July 18, 1922, p. [7]; Variety, July 21, 1922, p. 16, with big review).

1922 NYC directory puts him at 2247 7th Avenue, on the NE corner of 7th Avenue and 132nd Street.

1922 SONGS

"You Take the Sunshine, Leave the Moonshine for Me" (cit. Tucker dict. art.)

"Jig Walk," lyrics Creamer, music Vodery; not published until 1945 (NY: Mills Music, 1945), but:
rec. by Sophie Tucker for Okeh in Feb. 1922 [Okeh 4590]

1922-1923

1922, in fall: the Plantation Review moves into its second season (i.e., its first full season), with a re-vamped version.

1922, in October: Music Box Revue [1922-1923]; Norton II: 306-7 (1922.39)
Basically the second edition of the show; Vodery does orchestrations for this revue du jour at the Music Box Theatre; begins October 23, 1922 [Billboard, November 18, 1922, p. 49; IBDB; Green; Norton]

1923, in January: Vodery and orchestra will play at a private New Year's Day performance at a millionaire's residence in Woonsocket, R. I. (Billboard, December 15, 1922, p. 89)

1923, in April: How Come?; Norton II: 319-20 (1923.11)

This show opens on April 16 in NYC at the Apollo Theatre on 42nd Street west of Broadway; it ran there for forty performances, just over a month, April 16-May 19; this is an Eddie Hunter vehicle, book by Hunter and score by Ben Harris, that Tim Brymn is later involved with. Two acts and 10/11 scenes.

At this time it has come off the road, and the Harris score gets "Additional Numbers by Henry Creamer and Wm. Vodery", which greatly strengthen the show (NY Age, April 14, 1923, p. 6). Vodery is "of the Plantation Review Orchestra." There were some steps of the Charleston in it, according to Will Marion Cook (and the newspapers back him up on this). Vodery adds additional numbers, does the orchestrations, and is Musical Director, leading the orchestra of twenty [preview article and big ad in NY Age, April 14, 1923, p. 6; Lucien H. White review in NY Age, April 21, 1923, p. 6; review in NY Evening Telegram, April 17, 1923, p. 11; advertisement in NY Age, April 28, 1923, p. 6; IBDB], until he departs for Europe with the newest Plantation Review; NY Age and Evening Telegram reviews mention these numbers:

"E-Gypsy-Ann," lyrics and music Ben Harris, Creamer, and Vodery (acc. NY Age review; by Vodery acc. Tucker dict. art.; Norton; by Ben Harris, 1923 (WorldCat)); a take-off on "Egyptian"?

"Syncopated Strain"

"[The] Charleston, Cut Out" ("The Cut-Out: How Come: musical play: Charleston Swing"), by Ben Harris, 1923 (WorldCat); NY Age advertisement calls it "The Newest Dance Rage of the Cabarets of the South"

"Bandanna Anna"

"Keep the Man You've Got"

"Pretty Malindy"
 "Gingerena"
 Clarinet jazz solo by Sidney Bechet
 "Good night, Brother Green"
 "Dinah"
 "Charleston Finale"
 "Pickaninny Vamp"
 "Sweetheart, Farewell," by Ben Harris, 1923 (WorldCat)
 "Love Will Bring You Happiness," by Ben Harris, 1923 (WorldCat)
 "When I'm Blue"

1923 in April: Dover Street to Dixie

spring-summer in England with the Plantation Review, now in a show entitled Dover Street to Dixie; they leave the US on April 28 (NY Age, Saturday, May 5, 1923, p. 6) and begin in London in May; the Observer says they start the Thursday after May 27, which is May 31; Vodery would have to have left the Broadway run of How Come half way through; he actually leaves in early May and reaches Plymouth/London on May 10; the Plantation Review with Bill Vodery's Orchestra is a big hit at the London Pavilion (NY Age, June 23, 1923, p. 6); they sail for home July 26-August 4; he arrives back from Southampton to NYC on August 4, 1923 (Ancestry.com passenger lists).

1932, in July: England's Ministry of Labor rules that Vodery's Band cannot be booked "for private entertainments and cabarets" and the producer protests, since they need the work in order to make a profit (Variety, August 2, 1923, p. 2)

[NB: Book on Florence Mills says the run is from May 31-September 1, 1923.]

1923-1924

1923 in fall: Stays with Florence Mills for the third season (second full season) of the Plantation Review, essentially doing the latest version of Dover Street to Dixie

1923, in December: contributed music to the musical Kid Boots, an Eddie Cantor vehicle produced by Ziegfeld (Chicago Defender, December 1, 1951, p. 2)

1923, in December: "Will Vodery is rehearsing several specialties for the holidays at the Plantation, including "Musical Fireworks," something new to New York; while Florence Mills, Shelton Brooks, and other favorites will introduce surprise novelties" (NY Evening Post, December 1923, n.d., n.p.)

1924, in May: Round the Town; Norton II: 359-60 (1924.15)
A revue in which Vodery had a share in the orchestration.

1924-25

1924 in October: Dixie to Broadway; Norton II: 383-84 (1924.37)
Vodery stays with Florence Mills for the fourth season (third full season) of the Plantation Review, conducting and doing the arrangements and orchestrations; same show morphs into Dixie to Broadway and moves into a real Broadway house; apparently William Grant Still (who had been in the pit orchestra for Shuffle Along) was invited on to help Vodery, who also gave Still another career boost (Catherine Parsons Smith bk on Still, p. 70, 76); the show went on the road in Boston, then opens on October 29, 1924 at the Broadhurst Theatre, and after a Broadway run of two months (8 weeks, 77 perfs.), just to the end of year, it went out on the road again to late April. [A chapter of Egan's bio. of Mills; Woll has a reconstruction of this show that runs over a dozen pages.] The summer touring vaudeville version, (see below) said to be Dixie to Broadway excerpts, is said to be composed by Vodery (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 14, 1925, p. 2E)

1923, in February: Very shortly after the tenth anniversary of the death of his mother, in Philadelphia "Mr. William Vodery and orchestra will appear at Central Presbyterian Church on next Sunday afternoon at 3 o'clock, in a Memorial service in memory of his beloved mother, Mrs. Selina Vodery" (Pittsburgh Courier, Saturday, February 21, 1925, p. 5); the event takes place on Sunday, February 22 and is reviewed in a Philadelphia column in the next Courier; this is her church and the

church in which he was raised (Pittsburgh Courier, Saturday, February 28, 1925, p. 19)

1925, from April through July: Florence Mills, her Dixie Vamps, and Will Vodery's Orchestra (or Will Vodrey's Celebrated Orchestra, or Will Vodrey's Band) in her vaudeville debut in a new act; on a fairly local Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit swing, while the Plantation Days Review is touring the country without her (e.g., the review is in Seattle in July, acc. NY Age, July 11, 1925, p. 6); from Monday April 27, 1925 at the Hippodrome Theatre and elsewhere (Brooklyn Daily Star, April 25, 1925, p. 16; NY Age, May 2, 1925, p. 7; NY Evening Post, May 14, 1925, etc.); late May show at Hippodrome (for May Festival at Hippodrome, see her bio and see also NY Evening Post, Friday, May 17, 1925, p. 14); Mills and Vodery are at the Keith-Albee Riverside Theatre, NYC in May (NY Age, May 16, 1925, p. 6), the Brighton Theatre at Brighton Beach in June (NY Age, June 20, 1925, p. 6), at Keith's Palace, heading the bill (NY Age, June 27, 1925, p. 6), at the Lincoln Theatre in NYC (NY Age, July 11, 1925, p. 6)

Tucker quotes Variety reporter on May 1925 Hippodrome show (p. 139)

Meanwhile, apparently in and around the vaudeville stints, Vodery takes his orchestra to the Lincoln Theatre, and into Tan Town Topics as below (or else a different band but assembled by him and identified with his name) as below.

1925 new Plantation Cafe review, "Brown Skin Quinan Review"???; the name comes from Peterson reference works and Sampson, Blacks in Blackface (with cast), but I cannot find it in newspapers, or in Florence Mills book; it just has to be a mistake for Tan Town Topics, or a reference to the fall 1925 show by Irvin C. Miler, Brown Skin Models, a.k.a. Brown Skin Artists and Models

1925, in June: announced appearance of Bill Vodery's Band at an annual frolic of postal employees (Allen, Hendersonia, p. 143, citing Billboard, May 30, 1925, p. 48)

1925, in June: Tan Town Topics

new summertime Plantation review, Tan Town Topics, as the summer show at the roof-top cafe; opens June 23, 1925; with Ethel Waters as the star (and Josephine Baker in the chorus---with Chocolate Dandies

- having ended; Josephine is a significant member of the dance troupe and Waters's understudy, basically, I think), and Will Vodery's Plantation Orchestra; Waters plans to go out in vaudeville beginning in early September, hitting the houses around NYC on the Keith-Albee circuit while also keep her spot in the Plantation review; [an Ethel Waters biography, Donald Bogle, Heat Wave: The Career of Ethel Waters, p. 109, says Vodery conducted the orchestra in rehearsals; Tucker says he was in the pit; and Allen, Hendersonia, p. 582 agrees]; Story that opening was to be in early June but then delayed, and Will Marion Cook was brought on board to work with the material, and it is he who brings in Josephine (J.-C. Baker, Hungry Heart, pp. 82, 83); (NY Evening Post, June 23, 1925, p. 12; NY Evening Post, Friday, August 14, p. 4; NY Evening Post, August 28, 1925; Chicago Defender, September 19, 1925, p. 6)
- 1925, in July: After her appearance at the Palace, Mills takes a break and Vodery and his orchestra appear in vaudeville at the Lincoln Theatre for a week with some of the Mills show cast, featuring Alma Smith, Johnny Nit (NY Age, July 18, 1925, p. 6; Variety, July 8, 1925, p. 47, as cited in Florence Mills bio., p. 134 and p. 137, note 40)
- 1925, in July: Plantation review and Vodrey [sic] on radio, via NYC WHN at 11:30 on July 16 (NY Evening Post, July 16, 1925, p. [illeg.]); Plantation review and Vodrey [sic] on radio, via NYC WHN at 11:00 on July 23 (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, July 23, 1925, p. 10A)
- 1925, in August: The Plantation review and Vodrey's orchestra are on WHN New York at 11:00 p.m. on August 4 (NY Times, August 2, 1925, p. 13; Oswego Palladium-Times, Tuesday, August 4, 1925, p. 6) and on Thursday, August 6 at the same hour (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, August 6, 1925, p. 10A)
- 1925, in August: On the property assessment rolls for Saratoga in August 1925, Vodery owns 101 and 103 Congress (Saratoga Springs Saratogian, August 12, 1925, p. 6)
- 1925, in August: "Florence Mills, the incomparable, with Bill Vodrey's (sic) orchestra, is standing the audience on its head at the Globe theatre" (Pittsburgh Courier, August 15, 1925, p. 11)

1925-1926

1925, in August: Vodery is rumored to be writing the music for a new Miller and Lyles production (Chicago Defender, August 22, 1925, p. 7)

1925, in August: How's The King; Vodery does the orchestrations/arrangements for this 1925 book show [acc. Green; Bloom], featuring white vaudevillian Joe Cook (no NYC run), with book by Jay Gorney and lyrics by Own Murphy; casting is complete and rehearsals are underway in August (Richmond Times Dispatch, August 23, 1925, p. 9)

1925, in September: Vodery has written lyrics and music for the song numbers for a one-act comedy, Slick As Ever, a playlet or skit for vaudeville, book by Willard Mack, as a vehicle for Harry J. Conley; at Proctors and on the Keith-Albee Circuit, etc. (Mount Vernon Daily Argus, September 3, 1925, p. 8; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 22, 1926, p. 12 A; Philadelphia Inquirer, July 13, 1926, n.p. (illeg.)); it runs at least four seasons = it is still playing in 1928 in March (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 1, 1928, p. 4E) and in December 1929 and January 1930 (Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, December 22, 1929, p. 7; Buffalo Courier-Express, January 26, 1930, p. 9)

1925, in September: Florence Mills will appear in a new show this season, and she will probably have an orchestra under Vodery (Chicago Defender, September 5, 1925, p. 7)

1925, in September: Florence Mills and Vodery are at Keith's in Detroit, and then at the Palace (Chicago Defender, September 12, 1925, p. 7; Chicago Defender, September 19, 1925, p. 7; Chicago Defender, September 26, 1925, p. 7)

1925, in September: Variety, September 9, 1925, p. 11 says Gershwin is in negotiation to do the score of the new Florence Mills vehicle, Anna From Savannah; Variety, September 23, 1925, p. 19, says the Mills show Anna From Savannah has music by Vodery, Alex Rogers, and George Gershwin (white), and will go into rehearsal in October; Billboard carries notices

on October 3 and October 31 that Vodery, Alex Rogers, and Gershwin are writing a show for Florence Mills called Anna From Savannah; Variety October 14, 1925, p. 46, says Mills will open in Blackbirds of 1925 on October 30, but then move to this new show around Thanksgiving, first in Brooklyn for a week, and then on Broadway, and "It is a colored musical comedy, not a revue."

Pittsburgh Courier, October 31, 1925, p. 10 says Mills is due to open soon in both her new Plantation revue and her new show, Anna From Savannah; and a week later the Pittsburgh Courier, December 5, 1925, p. 10 says the show is expected for January with book by Lew Leslie and music by George Meyers and A. H. Woods; it then disappears from sight

1925, in October: Mills, with the Dixie Vamps and Vodery, continues in vaudeville on Keith-Albee circuit; they play the E. F. Albee Theatre in October (NY Evening Post, October 16, 1925, p. 12)

1925, in October: Ross Gordon and his Earl Carroll Vanities Orchestra, playing dance arrangements by Don Lindley and Will Vodery, broadcasting Tuesdays at 8 P. M. through WEAJ and recording exclusively for Columbia (Variety, Wednesday, October 7, 1925, p. 60)

1925, in November: Florida Girl; Norton II: 421-22 (1925.40)
Vodery did the orchestrations/arrangements for Earl Carroll's Florida Girl, running one month on Broadway, November 2 to December 5, 1925 [IBDB; Norton]

1925 in November: the Plantation Revue season begins in late fall, for its fifth season (fourth full season) with a new Florence Mills show, Blackbirds of 1925, opening November 3 as short show at the Plantation Room, with carry-over of much of the Dixie to Broadway material; it runs from November to April at the club; Vodery's orchestra is called "a feature attraction" there in Dave Peyton's column (Chicago Defender, November 21, 1925, p. 6)

1925, in December: Ethel Waters and Vodery's Band appear at Philadelphia's Forrest Theatre on a variety bill there for the Annual Actors' Fund Benefit (Philadelphia Inquirer, December 4, 1925, p. 22)

- 1925, in December: It is rumored that Ziegfeld is putting together a "monster all-race show" with music by Vodery and book by Alex Rogers (Chicago Defender, December 19, 1925, p. 6)
- 1926, in January: Flo Ziegfeld opens a revue, Palm Beach Nights, at the Club Montmartre in Palm Beach, and it will cost \$11 to get in to see it; "Two orchestras will be in action, Art Hickman's and Will Vodery's, the latter being a colored organization" (Dallas Morning News, January 24, 1926, p. 4)
- 1926, in March: Dave Peyton's column says that "after a successful ten weeks down in sunny Florida, Ford Dabney's famous band, with Will Vodery director, will head for New York March 25 (Chicago Defender, March 27, 1926, p. 6)
- 1926, in April: the Blackbirds show is revamped and extended into a full theatrical show called Blackbirds of 1926, in a limited engagement at the Alhambra from April 5, 1926 to the end of the month, and then to May 9, with material from last winter's review [the Plantation Orchestra is under a different conductor, one of its featured artists, Shrimp Jones]; it is around this time that it would appear that Vodery severs his connection with the show, and only returns in 1927
- 1926, in May: the show sails for France on May 15, plays France from May 22 through August. According to one American newspaper, Vodery is with them in Paris at the Ambassador (Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1926, p. 10). But a NY Age article and big ad for the show, the "Parisian Edition," playing in NYC at the Alhambra before they leave, mention the famous Plantation Orchestra featuring Johnny Dunn and Shrimp Jones, but not Vodery by name (NY Age, May 7, 1926, p. 6). At the end of the summer Florence Mills returned to the Ambassador in Paris before going on to London, and Will Vodery's Plantation orchestra is with her (Chicago Defender, September 11, 1926, p. 6). Then the troupe is in London from September, doing Blackbirds of 1926 version. But apparently Vodery is not with them, even if his orchestra still keeps his name (see below in 1927). He is away from the group for basically a year.
- 1926 in spring: Name Tan Town Topics is used again after 1925 in an annual or near annual series. The Tan Town Topics version of 1926 was apparently the opposition

black show, with Fats Waller in the pit, at the Lafayette, while Florence Mills and the Blackbirds were at the Alhambra, in the spring. Waller revives this show for several years in a row at Lafayette. In NY Age, April 10, 1926, p. 3, Tan Town Topics is at Lafayette.

1926, in May: in a major column by Lucien H. White (NY Age, May 15, 1926, pp. 1, 7), White writes at length about the "Status of the Negro Musician in the Entertainment Field of New York City and What is Necessary for Betterment." He says "It is not out of place just here to refer to the successes attained by such racial aggregations as those conducted by Fletcher Henderson, William Vodery, Leroy Smith, and other. Henderson, Vodery, and Smith are thoroughly trained musicians"

1926, in June: No Foolin'; Norton II: 450-52 (1926.18)

Vodery did arrangements/orchestrations for the revue No Foolin', composed by Friml and produced by Zeigfeld [IBDB; Green; Bloom]; a Ziegfeld summer show, June 24 to September 25. Evidently no Ziegfeld Follies in summer 1926, but the Brooklyn Daily Eagle calls No Foolin' just a Ziegfeld Follies by another name (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 25, 1926, p. 12A).

1926, in July: Vodery is in Philadelphia settling his mother's estate; "the old homestead was located at 1236 Pine St." (Chicago Defender, July 3, 1926, p. 5); she had died in 1915.

1926, in July: Vodery buys a property in Bennington Terrace in Saratoga (Saratoga Springs Saratogian, July 20, 1926, p. 13); perhaps he used the proceeds from his mother's estate.

1926, in August: early on Friday, August 13, Vodery was shot in the left arm in his apartment on 49th near Broadway by a robber, but was not seriously hurt (Pittsburgh Courier, August 21, 1926, p. 1)

1926-1927

1926, in November: Vodery is to be part of a Thursday, November 4 benefit at Savoy Ballroom in NYC, for disabled actors, with many stars to appear, including Will Marion Cook.

1927, in March: Vodery travels to Europe; he arrived in Southampton on March 18, 1927 and is back in NYC on June 17; then he leaves again and arrives in Southampton on July 5 and stays to later September; Blackbird orchestra conductor Shrimp Jones has resigned and Vodery agrees to come over to take back the baton. (Chicago Defender, April 16, 1927, p. 7). Vodery had severed his connection with the group just before they sailed last year for Europe: "Mr. Vodery was the original organizer of the Florence Mills orchestra, but encountered some difficulties with his crew and the management and severed his connection just before the show sailed last year for Europe. They have called on him once more to master the musical destiny of the show." (Chicago Defender, April 30, 1927, p. 6).

At that moment the company was doing Blackbirds of 1927, a revamped show which had opened in London in January. Another edition of the show opened in London on May 30. There is at least one reference that says Vodery is over there with Lew Leslie's White Birds (Bloom bk also says this); this was a white parody also run by Lew Leslie, but it folded quickly in early June, so possibly this is when Vodery returned to the US.

1927, in June: he returns to US in June, sailing 11-17 June; he's in NYC for a few days, arriving in NYC on the Aquitania from Southampton on June 17; and then quickly back to London, where he remains through mid September (passenger lists and Chicago Defender, July 2, 1927, p. 7, in Salem Tutt Whitney column from NYC; Chicago Defender, July 16, 1927, p. 6; Chicago Defender, October 1, 1927, p. 6). The second version of Blackbirds 1927 runs to August, and evidently Vodery quickly returned to England to see it through. Defender refs all indicate he is just with Blackbirds. Departs Southampton on 21 September and returns again to NYC on September 28, 1927.

1927, in August: There is a Ziegfeld Follies of 1927, running August 16, 1927 to January 7, 1928; but none for 1928 (closed by Eddie Cantor's illness), 1929, 1930.

1927-1928

1927, in September: Vodery is on vacation in London (Chicago Defender, October 1, 1927, p. 9), returning 21-28 September; he returns last Wednesday, i.e., September 28, from London (NY Age, October 8, 1927, p. 6): "Bill Vodery arrived last Wednesday from London, looking the picture of health. He has a lot of good things up his sleeve, which he will announce through these columns." Chicago Defender reports he returned during this past week (Chicago Defender, October 15, 1927, p. A6, in Bessye J. Bearden NY society "Tid-Bits" column that could be a week behind)

1927, in September: Mills is back in the US, after a European vacation, in later September 1927, and that is when Vodery also returns. NY Age, October 8, 1927, p. 6 records her return as well as his.

SHOW BOAT

1927, in October: Show Boat; Norton II: 522-23 (1927.67)

Vodery did choral arrangements for Show Boat (which toured and then opened on Broadway on December 27, 1927) and was choral director; Show Boat went into rehearsals this week [week of Monday, October 17] and Bill Vodery "has charge of the colored people", about thirty people; it will open out of town on November 14 (NY Age, October 22, 1927, p. 6; NY Age, November 5, 1927, p. 6); it is out of town in Washington, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Philadelphia, before opening in NYC on December 27 (Brooklyn Daily Star, December 7, 1927, p. 16)

1927 in November: in the midst of preparations for Showboat, a tragedy --- Florence Mills dies of appendicitis on November 1, 1927. Vodery was one of the prominent mourners and the first of eight named "active" pallbearers at Florence Mills's huge public funeral on Sunday, November 6 (NY Age, November 12, 1927, p. 1)

1927, in November: On Tuesday evening, November 8 a number of theater professionals met at the Lafayette to create a temporary organization to be incorporated as "The Florence Mills Memorial Association," and Vodery was named a member of the Finance Committee (NY Age, November 12, 1927, p. 1)

1927, in November: Vodery threw an elaborate Thanksgiving dinner for the "jubilee singers and dancers" of Show Boat when the show was in Pittsburgh (Chicago Defender, December 3, 1927, p. 8)

1927, in December: "The much talked of Ziegfeld's "Show Boat" Co. opened Tuesday, December 27, at the Ziegfeld Theatre, New York City. Julius Bledsoe has a leading part, with a group of colored singers, under the direction of Will Vodery" (NY Age, December 31, 1927, p. [?])

1928, in January: bidding between Fox and Keith Albee bookers for the services of Vodery's orchestra, but he does not want to do vaudeville and accepts an offer to go into a Lew Leslie nightclub (Chicago Defender, January 14, 1928, p. 6)

1928 in February: Keep Shufflin'; Norton II: 530-31 (1928.10) sometimes "Keep Shuffling"; by and for Miller and Lyles; producers are Con Conrad, Inc.; music by Jimmy Johnson and Fats Waller, etc.; lyrics by Creamer and Razaf, etc.; 22 numbers in all: Gershwin, Clarence Todd, Porter, Fats Waller, Vodery, etc.; orchestrations all by Vodery (who had done the Miller & Lyles Shuffling Along); with Will Vodery's Symphonic Band; at Gibson Theater in Philadelphia and then on to Broadway from late February through late May (Pittsburgh Courier, February 18, 1928, p. 2, Second Section; NY Evening Post, February 28, 1928; etc.).

Opening Chorus, Creamer & Vodery
"Dusky Love," Creamer & Vodery

1928, in April: At the E. F. Albee Theater on the Keith Albee Circuit in Brooklyn is a one act comedy by Willard Mack, Slick as Ever, with lyrics and music by Vodery (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, April 1, 1928, p. 4E)

1928, in May: Lew Leslie's Blackbirds of 1928; Norton II: 535-36 (1928.18) at the Liberty Theatre on Broadway, with Vodery's orchestra in pit, beginning a run of over a year from May 9, 1928 to June 15, 1929; Bill Vodery, "Harlem's Master of Orchestration," is said to have been commissioned to write music for Blackbirds of 1929 (NY Age, June 9, 1928, p. 7)

1928, in May: Reference to property owned by Vodery ("William H. Vodrey") in Saratoga. It is proposed that the city buy some of his land at the corner of Washington and Grand to widen the road at the turns (Saratoga Saratogian, May 18, 1928, p. 14); this is close to where he lives and owns an inn.

1928, in July: on July 24 huge benefit for the Pullman Porters Union at the Lafayette with Vodery and many, many others.

1928-1929

Vodery is in the pit for Blackbirds for this entire theatrical season.

1928, in October: Vodery does orchestrations for Earl Dancer's Deep Harlem, featuring Tutt and Whitney; music by Joe Jordan and lyrics by Creamer; at Lafayette in early October 1928, then at the Lincoln in Harlem in late December, and then Broadway premier in earliest January 1929 at the Biltmore, where it played a week.

1928, in December: contributed music to the musical Whoopee, an Eddie Cantor vehicle produced by Ziegfeld that ran for a year, from 12/89 through 11/29 (Chicago Defender, December 1, 1951, p. 2).

1929, in April: Swing Along from Monday, April 1, Will Vodery presents (or Vodery and Cook present) Swing Along (at one time to be called Swinging Along) with the Will Marion Cook Orchestra, a.k.a. Cook's "Singers and Band"; the NY Age, Saturday, April 20, 1929, p. 7 has story about Cook not having NY Union Local 802 card and Vodery helping him to get it, in order to conduct in the pit at the Lafayette; Cook needs to be in pit because Vodery is with Blackbirds; they had hopes for the show's longevity, and "Whether or not the show is to be incorporated in a Ziegfeld production or whether it is to take its place with the presentations in the motion picture palaces of the Publix Circuit, with whom Mr. Vodrey is associated, has not been disclosed" (NY Age, Saturday, March 30, 1929, p. 6)

This may have been Vodery's last big compositional effort, creating all

the new material for a show. From this point forward, it may be that he kept busy contributing to many stage ventures but not as composer of most or all of the numbers. [CHECK]

1929, in May: big social event on Sunday, May 12 in celebration of a year of the Blackbirds of 1928; hosted by Lew Leslie for the cast and guests; Vodery was one of those to speak at this occasion (NY Age, May 19, 1929, p. 10); he's clearly a central, senior figure in the Lew Leslie production world. Blackbirds runs into mid-June at the Liberty, and then goes on road; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Sunday, August 25, 1929, p. 2E says Blackbirds of 1928 has just been on Broadway 15 months at the Liberty and Eltinge Theatres, and is now coming to Flatbush, Brooklyn, as a preliminary to an extended run in Chicago; with Vodery and his Plantation Orchestra, starring Harriett Calloway, said to be a second Florence Mills. [See also Brooklyn Eagle, August 21, 1929, p. 000]; For Blackbirds on road, is Vodery with them or does he then go to Hollywood? He is on the road with them on a quick run-out to Batavia, NY in April 1929.

1929, in July: joint work with Ellington on a Gershwin review produced by Ziegfeld, Show Girl, which opened July 2, 1929, featuring Ellington's orchestra; acc. Howland, "Ellington even credited Vodery with securing the job for his band"

1929, in August: Vodery's Jubilee Singers appear in new act, "Mississippi," written into Show Girl by Vincent Youmans (Chicago Defender, August 17, 1929, p. 7)

1929, in August: columnist Dave Payton, after visiting New York City, writes: "Will Vodery of New York is about the busiest musician in that city. He is the master arranger for the Ziegfeld interests and is much sought after by all branches of the profession for service. His office at 1547 Broadway is the busiest place in New York" (Chicago Defender, August 10, 1929, p. 7).

1929, in August: Lew Leslie took the 1928 version of Blackbirds to Europe for 10 weeks over the summer, and he planned to launch a second edition of the show, Blackbirds of 1929, with two companies (Brooklyn Daily Star, August 19, 1929, p. 16; Chicago Defender, August 31, 1929, p. 7);

featured is Will Vodery and his Plantation Orchestra (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, August 21, 1929, n.p.); of course, as the 1928 show rolled into 1929 it sometimes was referred to as the 1929 show (e.g., Pittsburgh Courier, March 23, 1929, p. 3 second section)

1929-1930

1929, in September: Russell Wooding is associated with Will Vodery, "Dean of Arrangers," with offices in the Gaiety building, a.k.a. the Gayety Theatre building (NY Age, September 28, 1929, p. 7); that is the 1547 Broadway building that housed the Gaiety Theater; owned by George M. Cohan, "it has been called the black Tin Pan Alley for the number of African-American song writers who rented office space there (Wikipedia)"

1929, in September: Vodery signs with Fox Film Corporation and is to leave for Hollywood in October 15; he is to work 1929-1932 on movie music for Fox in Hollywood on three-year contract; "Will Vodery has been engaged by the Fox Film Corporation to be general supervisor of all the music at a salary of \$26,000 a year for three years. He leaves for his new position in Hollywood about October 15" (NY Age, September 28, 1929, p. 6); he's writing the music for Fox's "New Orleans Frolic" talkies (Chicago Defender, November 2, 1929, p. 6); he is the guest of honor at a fancy dinner in LA (Chicago Defender, December 21, 1929, p. 4); he is part of the passing of the era of silent film (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 27, 1930, p. 21)

1930, in May: "he is associated with George Gershwin and other noted musicians in creating song hits for the Fox Movietone reproductions" (Chicago Defender, May 3, 1930, p. A9)

In the 1930 US Census he is in California (name spelled William Vadery).

In his Ziegfeld tribute, he recalls leaving Ziegfeld to work for Fox Studios in Hollywood, 1929-1930, and then his return to Ziegfeld in 1930 to have "charge of all musical arrangements and the Ziegfeld show orchestras." (Pittsburgh Courier, July 30, 1932, p. 6, second section)

1930-1931

Second year in Hollywood

1930, in November: Vodery writes the Sergeant at Arms of the NY musician's union Local 802 from LA to say "We have completed all our musical productions for 1930-1931." The article mentions that Vodery went out to Hollywood "at a remarkably large salary" (NY Age, November 29, 1930, p. 7)

1931, in July: Ziegfeld Follies of 1931 Norton II: 647-48 (1931.19) ran from July 1 to November 21 [IBDB]; "The 1931 Ziegfeld Follies will have several colored members. They are being assembled by Will Vodrey, well known colored musician" (NY Age, May 2, 1931, p. 6); "Will Vodery and Rosamond Johnson are selecting talent for the new Ziegfeld Follies' colored section, which will open the week of June 2 at the Apollo Theatre, Atlantic City and at the Zeigfeld Theatre, New York City, the week of June 9" (NY Age, May, 1931, n.d., n.p.).

1931-1932

Third year in Hollywood

1931, in September: he's called "special representative of Florenz Ziegfeld" in "Around New York," the gossipy Bessye Bearden column (Chicago Defender, September 5, 1931, p. 5)

1932, in February: in rehearsal in September 1931, a (white) comedy coming to the National Theater in DC in February 1932, starring Leonore/Lenore Ulric in Anita Loos and John Emerson's The Social Register, with a cast of 35 and Will Vodery's Band (Chicago Defender, September 6, 1931, p. 5; Chicago Defender, January 31, 1932, p. F7; Washington Post, February 14, 1932, p. A8)

1932, in July: ZIEGFELD DIES; Ziegfeld obit in NY Age, "Harlem Mourns the Passing of Ziegfeld," by William E. Clark, saying: "Not only did he give [Bert] Williams his opportunity but he also opened up opportunities for Will Vodery, composer and arranger for the Follies" (NY Age, July 30,

1932, p. 7); Defender obit observes that Vodery wrote for all Ziegfeld productions, whether they had colored performers or not (Chicago Defender, July 30, 1932, p. 1); "Vodery Pays Tribute to Late Florenz Ziegfeld," Pittsburgh Courier, July 30, 1932, p. 6, second section

VODERY FILMOGRAPHY

This is an area that needs work. IMDB has some things.

It is implied that Vodery and others ("De Sylva, Brown and Henderson, Walter Donaldson, Will Vodery and others who stayed at the Fox studio music department") worked on the music for scenes in movies in which "Shufflin' Stepin Fetchit" has recently appeared, including ""Hearts in Dixie," "Salute," "Movietone Follies of 1929," and many others" (Brooklyn Standard Union, July 24, 1930, p. 9)

Vodery is the orchestrator of David Stamper's music for a ballet scene in Such Men Are Dangerous (Fox, 1930) (Yonkers Statesman, April 12, 1930, p. 11)

"Vodery Composes Fox Trot Music Films/ Hollywood, May 2. -- In the aggregation of song and lyric writers assembled here at the West coast studios of the Fox Film company is included Will Vodery, nationally known musician and orchestra director of Harlem, New York. Mr. Vodery is associated with George Gershwin and other noted musicians in creating song hits for the Fox Movietone reproductions" (Chicago Defender, May 3, 1930, p. A9).

A two-reel Broadway Brevities that features Will Vodery's Band, the Cotton Club Chorus, etc. (Trenton Evening Times, October 27, 1932, p. 21)

The Will Vodery Girls are a dancing ensemble featured in two shorts:

Passing the Buck (Warner, 1932)

Rufus Jones for President (Warner, 1933)

"Hills of Old New Hampshire," words and music by Vodery, copyright Nov. 26, 1929 but not published, for a Fox film White Flame, 1929; presumably intended for a sound version of the 1928 silent film White Flame also indicated as for the film I Love You Wednesday, Vodery (1933; WorldCat hit)

Acc. Southern, Dictionary, p. 384, "After completing musical arrangements for Virginia City in 1933, he resettled in New York." [NB: there is a 1940 movie by this name]

1932-1933

1932, in August: new show, Ballyhoo (i.e, Ballyhoo of 1932) is opening with two weeks in Atlantic City and then a run at the 44th Street Theatre, starring Eugene and Willie Howard, with a chorus of 16 colored singers assembled and managed by Vodery (NY Age, August 20, 1932, p. 6)

1932, in October: Vodery has his car license suspended (NY Age, October 15, 1932, p. 2)

1932, in October: At the Orpheum Theatre in Trenton, NJ, a movie bill with The Thirteenth Guest, starring Ginger Rogers as the main attraction, plus a short subject, a two-reel Broadway Brevities, that features Will Vodery's Band, the Cotton Club Chorus, etc. (Trenton Evening Times, October 27, 1932, p. 21)

1932, in November: On November 10, the Will Vodery Singers are in Pittsburgh and they entertain at the home of Elizabeth Green, a hometown Pittsburgh girl now starring in The Forward March; the event is in honor of the company of that show (Pittsburgh Courier, November 12, 1932, p. 000)

1932, in December: Shuffle Along of 1932; Norton II: 689 (1932.31) Shuffle Along of 1932 (and then renamed "of 1933"); another attempt to revive this franchise; a re-written revival, a new edition, also called a new revue; book by Flourney Miller, with music by Sissle and Blake; with Vodery's choral arrangements and orchestrations, his chorus of 30, and Noble Sissle's Orchestra; rehearsals started in October, and it was anticipated to play in Brooklyn from October 31, then Philadelphia, and then NYC (NY Age, October 1, 1932, p. 6); it played the Court Square Theatre in Springfield, Dec. 8 - December 10, on its way to a Broadway run (Springfield Republican, December 3, 1932, pp. 34, 35; Springfield Republican, December 5, 1932, p. 7; Springfield Republican, December

6, 1932, p. 9 Springfield Republican, December 8, 1932, p. 10); on Broadway at the Mansfield theatre from December 26 (Chicago Defender, December 24, 1932, p. 5; Chicago Defender, December 31, 1932, p. 5), closing in week of January 14, 1933; at Lafayette from January 21, 1933; then on the road.

1933, in March: the Will Vodery Singers appeared in the musical revue Strike Me Pink, starring Jimmy Durante, which ran on Broadway from March 4 to June 10 (Southern Dictionary, p. 384).

1933, in June: the "Will Vodery Singers"/ The Four Barons of Harmony/ Direct From Broadway's Musical Hit Show "Strike Me Pink"," perform at a Schenectady club in June (Schenectady Gazette, June 17, 1933, p. 18).

1933 NYC directory puts him at 1889 7th Avenue with wife Marie

1933-34

1933, in September: The Will Vodery Girls support a big Ethel Waters show (Pittsburgh Courier, September 16, 1933, n.p. (illeg.), second section)

1933, in November: Lew Leslie's Blackbirds of 1933-34 Norton II: 705-6 (1933.27)

opened at the Majestic in Brooklyn in November 1933; arrangements by several hands, including Ferde Grofe, Vodery, Ken Macomber, Joe Jordan (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, November 21, 1933, p. 22); hits Broadway in December.

Includes an extended sketch or scene, "Mikado in Harlem," with the music arranged by Vodery (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, November 21, 1933, p. 22; and in a 1939 Leonard Lyons "The New Yorker" column, for which see, e.g., NY Evening Post, March 4, 1939, n.p. [p. 1 of second section], and the Washington Post, March 7, 1939, p. 8; also Norton). Ethel Waters notes in her autobiography (p. 184) that Will Vodery wrote a jazz version of The Mikado for a 1924 review at the Plantation Club, a reference that must simply represent a switching of 1924 for 1934

1934, in May: Vodery is one of the leading African American musicians who heard auditions for the Chicago August pageant in New York City at the Lafayette on Thursday, May 17; the group included Noble Sissle, Will vodery, J. R. Johnson, Will. C. Handy, Charles L. Cooke, Waldo Freeman, Harry Lawrence Freeman, Willian Grant Still, and others, and they met later with Will Marion Cook at the home of J. R. Johnson to learn about the plans (Chicago Defender, May 19, 1934, p. 9); this group---including Handy, Lawrence Freeman, Will Marion Cook, William C. Elkins, Will H. Vodery, Homer Smith, Cecil McPherson, and Lucky Roberts---continues to meet twice a week at the private offices of W. C. Handy at 48th and Broadway to work on details of the pageant; Handy's son Wyer Own Handy will go early to Chicago to work on the event and will be joined there after July 4 by Vodery, Cook, Freeman, and Sissle (Chicago Defender, June 30, 1934, p. 1)

1934, in May: Blackbirds of 1934 at the Lafayette in late May, 1934

1934, in June: he's one of three who are staging a Midnight Show, a huge benefit for the YMCA, held at the Lafayette on Wednesday, June 13, 1934; he stages it with Lucky Roberts and Frank Wilson; it includes "a minstrel show trained and directed by Vodery who wrote the script and composed special musical numbers" (NY Age, June 9, 1934, p. 4)

1934, in August: Vodery is a central participant/performer in the great August 25, 1934 spectacle, the Negro Pageant at the Chicago "Century of Progress" Fair (Chicago Defender, May 19, 1934, p. 9; Chicago Defender, June 9, 1934, p. 1, 4; Chicago Defender, August 25, 1934, p. 5; Chicago Tribune, August 25, 1934, p. 5)

"O Let Us Sing (a New Song)," lyrics Sissle, music Vodery (unpublished, but copyright by Handy Brothers, August 2, 1934: "O, let us sing a new song")

1934-35

1934, in October: The Man From Baltimore rehearsals are underway for an all-colored musical comedy, The Man

From Baltimore, that will open the refurbished West End Theatre in Harlem that is run by Joe Hurtig; William Talbert, Will Vodery, and Leonzo McGovern are responsible for the book and lyrics, and John Raines is helping to lay the ground work for the production (New York Age, October 20, 1934, p. 5); at this point, Raines and Vodery have collaborated on Hurtig & Seamon productions for 25 years

1935 in spring?? preparatory Cotton Club work??

COTTON CLUB work: Cotton Club Parade revues 1935-1940

1935-1936

1935, in July: new 1935 "Cotton Club Parade" ("26th Edition"), running from Thursday, July 18, 1935, with a large chorus, has tunes and arrangements/orchestrations by Vodery and others (NY Post, July 15, 1935, p. [?]; Chicago Defender, July 27, 1935, p. 6; NY Age, July 27, 1935, p. [?]; Kansas City Plaindealer, August 2, 1935, p. 3)

[21st Edition in 1932, 22nd in 1933, 23rd in 1933, 24th Edition opened in March 1934 (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, March 19, 1934, p. 11)]

The Cotton Club closes its Harlem doors on February 15, 1936.

1936-1937

1936, in September: Ziegfeld Follies (1936-1937); Norton II: 755-56 (1936.17)
Vodery contributes some orchestrations

1936, in September: the new Cotton Club Parade from September 24, 1936 in its new digs downtown on Broadway; into its 150th performance in mid November, called Cotton Club Parade of 1937 (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, November 18, 1936, p. [?]); hits 300th performance in late December (it has been on Broadway three months and is presented three times daily) (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, December 27, 1936, p. 14 A)

1937, in January: Cotton Club Parade hits 400th performance (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 29, 1937, p. [?])

1937, in March: new [second on Broadway] Cotton Club Parade, this spring from Sunday, March 14, 1937, with Vodery score (NY Post, February 27, 1937, p. 10); re-opens for the fall on September 21 (Chicago Defender, September 18, 1937, p. 11)---see below

1937-1938

1937, in September: Vodery did the arrangements/orchestrations, and organized a choir of mixed voices, for big musical romance, Virginia, with black stars and a large number of blacks in the cast, which ran at the Center Theatre in Brooklyn on August 31, then on Broadway from September 2 to October 23, 1937; Vodery "will do the score to be used by the large colored cast" (Courier); it was said to be successful and making a sensation, but then it closed abruptly (IBDB; Southern, Dictionary, p. 384; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, July 29, 1937, p. 8; NY Times, July 30, 1937, p. 22; NY Evening Post, July 30, 1937, n.p.; Pittsburgh Courier, August 7, 1937, p. 21; Chicago Defender, October 30, 1937, p. 18)

1937, in September: new 1937 Cotton Club review, the third Cotton Club Parade, opening Tuesday, September 21, features "Will Vodery, the music arranger and director for Florenz Ziegfeld for over ten years, will present his colored choir of 50 voices"; "Will Vodery's Jubileers, 50 choir singers directed by Ziegfeld's famous music arranger"; the score is by Vodery, aided by Fred Coots and Benny Davis (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 3, 1937, p. 11; NY Evening Post, September 4, 1937, p. 11; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 17, 1937, p. 15; Chicago Defender, September 18, 1937, p. 11; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 24, 1937, p. 12; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 26, 1937, p. 24; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 1, 1937, p. 12); third edition of the Cotton Club Parade into its 107th performance (Niagara Falls Gazette, December 1, 1937, p. 17)

1938 in March: a new 1938 Cotton Club show from Thursday, March 10 or March 17, the fourth "Cotton Club Parade," at the relocated downtown

Cotton Club, music supervised and arranged by Vodery, with Will Vodery's Choir, Ethel Waters, Duke Ellington's Orchestra, etc. (NY Times, March 6, 1938, p. 15 O (150?); Chicago Defender, March 19, 1938, p. 18)

1938-1939

1938, in October: new 1938 (fifth) Cotton Club Parade has Will Vodery's Choir, and his arrangements (Pittsburgh Courier, October 1, 1938, p. 21; NY Post, October 1, 1938, p. 12; NY Post, October 8, 1938, p. 10)

1938, in November: Vodery returns to his cottage on Lake Saratoga for a week's rest and relaxation (Chicago Defender, November 12, 1938, p. 11)

1939, in March: the new 1939 Cotton Club Parade, the "World's Fair Edition," has Will Vodery's Choir, and he is directing the choral singing; it opened March 24, 1939 (NY Post, March 18, 1939, p. 10; NY Times, March 19, 1939, p. 134; NY Post, March 24, 1939, p. 12; Pittsburgh Courier, March 25, 1939, p. 20; NY Age, March 25, 1939, p. 7; NY Post, April 1, 1939, p. 10)

1939, in February-March: Vodery did some arrangements/orchestrations for The Hot Mikado, which ran on Broadway from March 23 to June 3, 1939

1939, in February: The Buffalo Courier-Express, February 19, 1939, p. 2 (AP byline dated New York, Feb. 18) says this is not the Federal Theater's Chicago production of the Swing Mikado; rather, producer Michael Todd is mounting his own independent Hot Mikado starring Bill Robinson, and it is anticipated to open March 16, and Vodery is his musical director (see also indirect reference in Pittsburgh Courier, March 25, 1939, p. 20).

1939, in late February or earliest March: On "The Pittsburgh Courier's Feature Page" (Pittsburgh Courier, n.d., n.p. [March 1939]), in the column "Out of Billy Rowe's Harlem Notebook," dated New York, March 2, it says "Bill Vodery the best showman in these here parts, walked out on the

contemplated Mike Todd's production of the "Hot Mikado" after doing but one number for the show."

1939, in March: later that month the Courier says Charles L. Cook did the arrangements, assisted by Claude Austin, -- Kent, Chappie Willet [who also arranges for the Cotton Club], and Will Vodery (Pittsburgh Courier, March 25, 1939, p. 21); Charles L. Cooke principally did the orchestral arrangements (NY Post, March 24, 1939, p. 12 and elsewhere)

The Swing Mikado ran for five months in Chicago and then moved to NYC, opening on Broadway in the week of March 4, 1939. The two versions ran opposite one another in NYC in the spring of 1939.

1939, in March: the new Cotton Club show opens Friday with Will Vodery's Choir, Bill Robinson, Cab Calloway, etc.; Will Vodery is directing the choral singing (NY Post, March 18, 1939, p. 10; New York Times, March 19, 1939, p. 124; NY Sun, Monday, March 20, 1939, p. 12)

1939, in August: on Monday evening, August 7, there was the annual boatribe of the Negro Actors Guild, with more than 2,400 people on board the "Delaware" for dancing and refreshment as it circled Manhattan, and Will Vodery, standing chairman of the entertainment committee of the Guild, headed the committee which arranged this lovely outing (NY Age, August 12, 1939, p. 1)

1939, in August: "That long low-slung car in front of the Stuyvesant Rendezvous last week belonged to Will Vodery" (NY Age, September 2, 1939, p. 6)

Tucker dict. entry calls him consultant and composer in 1939 for the NY World's Fair and in 1939-1940 for the Golden Gate International Exposition

1939-1940

1939, in November: Cotton Club Parade, sixth edition, November 1, 1939; Bill Vodery is arranger (e.g., Pittsburgh Courier, October 14, 1939, p. 21; Pittsburgh Courier, December 9, 1939, p. 21)

1939, in November: "Will Vodery and Mrs., well known musician, spent Turkey day in Chicago, former home of the missus" in Snelson column (NY Age, December 2, 1939, p. 4)

Married to Dorothy Cardoza-Vodrey of Chicago in this time frame, with mentions in Floyd G. Snelson's columns, etc. Snelson also remarks on "Bernice Dobson, former femme of Bill Vodery, the noted music master" in NY Age column (NY Age, October 8, 1938, p. 7)

Saratoga City directories put Dorothy and Will together in that city for four years, from 1938 through 1941, in Ballston Spa. One mention of Dorothy Cardoza-Vodery is NY Age, August 16, 1941, p. 4; The 1940 US Census lists Vodery twice, alone in Saratoga and with Dorothy at 419 West 141st Street in NYC. That is Will Vodrey's NYC address in his obits, and that is the address of Will jr, when given as next of kin in Will sr. Interment Control Form in 1951.

1940: In the US 1940 census, Will sr. is 54 and Dorothy (born in Chicago) is 35.

1940: He is a founding member of the Crescendo Club, whose members are Negro song-writers from Tin-Pan Alley.

1940: he is an arranger and musical director for the Cotton Club review (Southern, Dictionary, p. 384) [CHECK]

Cotton Club 7th edition in spring 1940

In 1939 and 1940, Cab Calloway takes his orchestra and the Cotton Club review on the road to clubs in Brooklyn, etc. (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 29, 1939; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 25, 1940; Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 26, 1940); Google hits say it is open downtown in the 1939-1940 season, then closes June 10, 1940; Louis Armstrong is a headliner, and there is actually an album of Louis Armstrong Live at the Cotton Club, 1939-1940

Google hit on Cotton Club Parade (7th Edition) 1940

1940, in April: Sissle and Blake, Miller and "Bill" Vodery were planning a new show that will excel Shuffle Along, or else planning to revive the original Shuffle Along, lightly revised, for summer or early fall (Chicago Defender, April 6, 1940, p. 21; Los Angeles California Eagle, April 11, 1940, p. 3-B; NY Times, April 12, 1940, p. 24)

Active in Negro Actors Guild and its social events

SARATOGA

In the later 1930s, Vodery moves full time to Saratoga Springs, where he has property that he has owned at 101 and 103 Congress since at least 1925; he's in directories from at least 1938. Peterson (Profiles) says "he was owner of several amusement places" there. He owns the "Villa Vodery" (his home, at 157 George), the Hilltop Inn (at 100 Congress)---in 1940, but not in 1938 or 1939, acc. city directories [and the Hilltop Inn is given as at 102 Congress in the 1941 city directory]---and "The Nest." [Rosana Vodery owns 103 Congress and pays taxes on 101 Congress in the early 1950s, acc. Saratoga Saratogian]

The 1940 US Census has him in two entries:

--In Saratoga, at 102 Congress as head (owner) with several lodgers, none of whom is a wife; he is a restaurant proprietor, and one lodger is the manager. An issue of the Saratoga Saratogian (August 18, 1941, p. 5) says he lives at 102 Congress. Also, the 1942 WWII Draft Registration puts his home address as 102 Congress St. in Saratoga Springs.

--In NYC, at 419 West 141st St., with wife Dorothy; he is a musician working for a publishing house.

One way to see the Saratoga picture is that for the last ten years of his life (or more), he enters his father's and mother's profession, i.e., providing accommodation and a place for African-Americans, especially performers, to eat and socialize when they come up to Saratoga. He had owned there since at least the 1920s, and a cousin is in Albany.

1940-1941

1941: he adopts William H. Vodery, jr. at some point in this year.

1941, in January: Floyd G. Snelson column about a Crescendo Club social affair in NYC, notes that "Will Vodery was absent at his hotel and night club at Saratoga Spa" (NY Age, January 28, 1941, p. 4)

1941, in July: Bricktop [Ada Smith] works for Vodery; Floyd G. Snelson column has it that "Mme. Bricktop Smith, internationally famous, has embarked for Saratoga Spa, where she will be chief hostess at the swanky Will Vodery hot spot nightery, the highlight of the gay resort . . . 'Brick' says, 'come up and see me sometime'." (NY Age, July 5, 1941, p. 10); Bricktop is in Saratoga (NY Age, August 16, 1941, p. 4);

Bricktop is "now operating a place in Saratoga" (Pittsburgh Courier, July 31, 1942, p. 18; Boston Traveler, August 3, 1942, p. 29)

Bricktop's memoir recalls that Vodery owned a couple of rooming houses and a saloon in the black part of town, and that she ran a boarding house or rooming house there (three stories, eight rooms) for two or three racing seasons in the early 1940s (Bricktop [Ada Smith Ducong e] with James Haskins, Bricktop [New York: Atheneum, 1983], pp. 218-219; cited in Tucker art). The historic and relatively short Saratoga thoroughbred racing season in this era ran for four weeks beginning in late July or early August. Snelson art puts her there in 1941 and Courier in 1942; the memoir is relatively clear that she was there in 1943 (p. 219: "Saratoga just about folded up after the August racing season, and it was after the season of 1943 that I converted to Catholicism"), so it could have been '41, '42, '43 seasons except that there was no racing in 1943!

1941 SONGS

"N.A.G.A. Marching Chorus" (NY: Negro Actor's Guild, 1941; cit. Tucker dict. art.)

1941-1942

1942, in May: Harlem Cavalcade; Norton II: 844-45 (1942.13)

Ed Sullivan presents Harlem Cavalcade, a "negro review" or variety

show, with Bill Vodery directing and conducting the music, once thought to be opening Tuesday evening, April 28, but then opens Friday, May 1 and runs to May 23; at the Ritz theater on Broadway; it is "the first all-Negro variety show to reach Broadway in more than a dozen years" . . . [and it] "will be presented as a two-a-day . . . during weekdays; Saturday and Sunday three shows a day will be given (Eagle)" (NY Post, Friday, April 25, 1942, p. 10; Brooklyn Eagle, April 26, 1942, p. E6; NY Sun, Friday, May 1, 1942, p. 26; NY Post, Friday, May 7, 1942, p. 44; NY Post, May 2, 1942, p. 10; Pittsburgh Courier, May 9, 1942, p. 21, etc., etc., and Peterson, Profiles)

1942, in June: Will Vodery owns the Hill Top Inn in Saratoga (Chicago Defender, June 27, 1942, p. 22); the address is 100-102 Congress Street

1942 SONGS

"The Unknown Soldier Lives Again," lyrics Noble Sissle, music Will H. Vodery (LoC copyright as unpubl., April 2, 1942; publ. 1943, acc. WorldCat hit; cit. as 1942 in Tucker dict. art.)

"Let's Go America," Noble Sissle and Will H. Vodery (ca. 1942 or 1943; cit. Tucker dict. art.); there are at least 6 songs with this title in LoC copyright records for spring 1942; was there a competition to set some lyrics, or on this theme?

1942-43

1943-44

"But Where?" (re-publ. 1944; WorldCat hit)

"Cruel and Brutal" (re-publ. 1944; WorldCat hit)

"When Eden Was a Garden," with Sam M. Lewis (LoC copyright July 17, 1944 as unpubl.; 1944 acc. Tucker dict. art.)

1944-45

1944, in November: During the war years Vodery was seldom in the press except as a property-owning tax payer in Saratoga, but his name will occasionally pop up, as when he attended a Negro Actor's Guild

testimonial dinner for W. C. Handy in NYC in November 1944
(Pittsburgh Courier, December 2, 1944, p. 13)

1945, in April: Vodery is elected a trustee of VFW Post 420 (Saratoga
Saratogian, April 5, 1945, p. 4)

"Jig Walk," lyrics Creamer, music Vodery (NY: Mills Music, 1945);
rec. by Sophie Tucker for Okeh in Feb. 1922

1945, in July: Police in Saratoga broke up a craps game on Congress Street,
and Vodery had to bail out his bartender at the Hilltop; further, Will H.
Vodery and Harry A. Vodery participated in incorporating the Boosters
of Saratoga Springs (Glenns Falls Post-Star, July 10, 1945, p. 6)

1945-1946

1945, in September: Bill Vodery is to be the Chorus Master for the revival of
Show Boat (NY Sun, September 28, 1945, p. 23)

1946, in January: Show Boat; Norton II: 908 (1946.01)
revival begins January 5, 1946 for 418 performances into 1947

1946-47

1947 SONGS

"Tell Me What It's All About" (cit. Tucker dict. art)

1947-48

1948-49

1948, in December: a big Noble Sissle column in NY Age praises Vodery for
revealing the mystery of a "hidden pulse" to white musicians, and
offering lots of biographical details, etc. (NY Age, December 11, 1948, p.
15)

1949, in July: Vodery's aged uncle, James R. Peters, had been living at 102 Congress, and died July 19, 1949; James R. Peters lived in Albany for many years, acc. city directories; Peters had a niece in Albany and a niece in Saratoga Springs, plus a nephew, Will H. Vodery of Saratoga Springs = our man (Saratoga Saratogian, July 20, 1949, p. 3; Saratoga Saratogian, July 21, 1949, p. 3; Saratoga Saratogian, July 22, 1949, p. 3); the Albany niece, Opal Vodery, is the wife of Harry A. Vodery of Albany; the Courier obit says Harry Vodery of Albany is Vodery's cousin, so the generations align here---Opal, Harry, and Will are of the same generation; Opal F. Vodery and Harry A. Vodery are in the Albany City Directory for at least the years 1947-1960. Opal nee Opal Florence Seabrook (1920-1998). Could Will jr. be the son of Opal and Harry?

1949 SONGS

"I.B.P.O.E. of W. March Song" (cit. Tucker, dict art.)

1949-1950

1949, in November: the shooting of Leon (Sam) Bates, a former prize fighter, by Donald Burgee outside Vodery's grill, in quarrel over a woman, causes Vodery to face possible revocation of his liquor license (Saratoga Saratogian, January 18, 1950, p. 1; Troy Times Record, January 18, 1950, p. 11; Ballston Spa Journal, January 19, 1950, p. 1; Schenectady Gazette, February 10, 1950, p. 23; Albany Knickerbocker News, March 8, 1950, p. B-1)

1950 SONGS

"Messed Up in Love" (cit. Tucker dict. art.)

1950-1951

1950, in September: Rosana Vodery is the owner of 103 Congress (Saratoga Saratogian, September 19, 1950, p. 3)

1951, in March: on account of the shooting incident, Vodery is sued for negligence in not stopping an argument in his establishment that spilled out into the street and resulted in a near-fatal shooting; however, the case against Vodery in the shooting of the heavyweight boxer Leon Bates outside his resort---the Hilltop Inn on Congress Street--is dismissed; he is called a grill proprietor (Gloversville & Johnstown Leader-Republican, March 29, 1951, p. 11; Gloversville & Johnstown Leader-Republican, March 30, 1951, p. 11; Glens Falls Post Star, March 30, 1951, p. 6)

1951-1952

1951, in October: it appears that Vodery is liquidating his real estate holdings (Pittsburgh Courier, October 20, 1951, p.)

1951, in November: death on November 18, 1951 in the Kingsbridge Veteran's Hospital in the Bronx, age 67; he had had diabetes and kidney trouble for years, but the final hospitalization---of only five days---was brief; buried November 23, 1951 in Long Island National Cemetery (Pinelawn National Cemetery) in Farmingdale, with military honors.

THE ESTATE

Vodery's 1927 will gave everything to two cousins, one of whom is Josephine Dickerson. After his death, the will was contested by his adopted son William H. Vodery, jr., whom he adopted in 1941. The case was decided in Surrogate's Court, New York County, in favor of the adopted son (February 18, 1955); an appeal to a higher court left the lower court's decision intact: "In the Matter of the Construction of the Will of William H. Vodery, Deceased. Josephine Dickerson, Appellant; William H. Vodery, Jr., Respondent." Decided March 5, 1957 by the Supreme Court of New York, Appellate Division, First Department.

Vodery is remembered into the 1950s and 60s: a tiny Jet obituary notes he died November 18, 1951 at age 67 and calls him "chief musical arranger for the Ziegfeld Follies" (Jet, Nov. 20, 1958, p. 11, in column "Yesterday in Negro History"; ditto in Jet, November 21, 1968, p. 11)

MARRIAGES AND CHILDREN

Widow Rosanne/Rosana and son Will H. Jr. Or is Roseanne his housekeeper? Will Jr. was adopted in 1941, acc. a court decision of 1955. Harry is a cousin. Vodery's private life needs work. In divorce proceedings much later, Will jr is born ca. 1922.

1927: at the time of his 1927 will he was unmarried and without children, and leaves his estate to two cousins

1933: in NYC directory, he is with spouse Marie Vodery at 1889 7th Ave.

1938-1941: no longer married to Marie; traceable with new wife Dorothy Cardoza-Vodery; their marital tiff is in Floyd Snelson's column, NY Age, September 27, 1941, p. 10, and they may indeed divorce soon after, though perhaps not until after the adoption of a son.

1941: Vodery formally adopts William H. Vodery, jr., who is evidently old enough to marry in 1949.

One Rose Johnson, age 37, lives at 106 Congress in Saratoga and is suspected of illicit activities (Saratoga Saratogian, August 19, 1942, p. 2); the same woman, evidently, is nabbed by police at 93 Congress (Saratoga Saratogian, February 9, 1948, p. 3)

1952, in August: newspaper story that Vodery was left \$20,000 in the will of a Harlem resident, Rose Johnson (Jet, vol. 22, no. 18, August 28, 1952, p. 15); this happened before Vodery died in November 1951 according to the later 1955 court decision. Rose Johnson, also known as Rosana Vodery according to the later court decision, left her estate to him as "a friend": her will said "I have in mind the many kindnesses and loans made to me during my lifetime" by Vodery. She left her husband, Charlie H. Johnson, only one dollar. Could she have been a cousin, like Harry?

1954, in November: "Will Vodery's Adopted Son Gets His \$50,000 Estate/The \$50,000 estate of the late Ziegfeld Follies composer-arranger Will H. Vodery was awarded to his adopted son, Will H. Jr., in New York. The adopted son, who lives in Los Angeles, was given property in Philadelphia, New York and Saratoga, plus insurance and bank funds that had been made out to Rose Ann Vodery, a housekeeper." (Jet, November 18, 1954, p. 59). This is the substance of the 1955 decision.

From 1950/51 to 1955 Rosana Vodery was the owner of the Congress street properties in tax records, but it seems she did not live on the property. She then appears to have lost possession.

In 1958, Mrs. Rosana Vodery put one or more items into a ceramics exhibit at the Saratoga Springs Public Library (Saratoga Saratogian, January 21, 1958, p. 5)

Rosana/Rosanna Vodery (18 July 1898 - July 1971) is his widow, by one account. She is mentioned in her old age in a biography of Langston Hughes as a friend of Hughes's wife/widow from Saratoga in a 1966 story (Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, 2 vols (1986), 2:414).

In the Saratoga Saratogian (January 15, 1965, p. 5), Rosana accompanies her friend, Mrs. Eloise B. Scott, singer and actress, on a visit to NYC; in this article it is mentioned a little ambiguously that either Scott or Rosana Vodery or their hostess, Mrs. Emerson Harper, is the cousin of the poet Langston Hughes. Is

this the visit mentioned in the biography? (Scott was a famous lady of the theater and a close friend from childhood of Ada Smith (Bricktop)---see Pittsburgh Courier, February 12, 1977, p. 24; her husband, James P. Scott, was head waiter at the old Congress Hall Hotel and the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga for many years, with a home at 46 Congress---see Saratoga Saratogian, December 21, 1954, p. 7)

It is odd that Rosana seems to leave so few traces; possibly she took the surname Vodery after the death of, or divorce from, her legal husband. Pittsburgh Courier obit says Vodery was the son of Rosanna (recte: Selina) and Will Vodery, an editorial or reportorial slip in providing his mother's name that suggests some notes got crossed (Pittsburgh Courier, December 1, 1951, p. 5).

"Rosana Vodery" gets 5 hits in "Old Fulton NY Postcards," all from the Saratoga Springs Saratogian, 1950-1968. She owns property at 101 Congress and 103 Congress, at least from 1950-1955. However, I find her in a Saratoga directory only in 1960, at 52 Washington, a short walk away, under the name Rosanria (sic) Vodery.

Seems as if Will jr. of LA (born 1922) is the adopted child and legal heir. Is he adopted because he is not a natural child, or is he perhaps an illegitimate child? By Rosana? Or a nephew to whom Vodery wanted to give his estate? Will jr. married Helen Mitchell in 1949 and divorced her in 1969; he divorced another (or the same?) Helen P. Vodery in 1984. He's otherwise hard to find. He probably did not have the Vodery surname until 1941. Could Rose have been his mother?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

OBITS

Pittsburgh Courier, December 1, 1951, p. 5

Obits in Chicago Defender, December 1, 1951, p. 2

OTHER

Tucker, Mark. "In Search of Will Vodery." Black Music Research Journal 16/1 (Spring, 1996): 123-182.

Tucker, Mark. "Vodery, William Henry Bennett ("Will"). International Dictionary of Black Composers, 2 vols. (1999), II: 1166-1168.

Egan, Bill. Florence Mills: Harlem Jazz Queen. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2004.

Southern
Grove American
Sampson
Peterson
Horwood bk