

Belle Davis and Her Piccaninnies: a Preliminary Bio-, Disco-, and Filmography

Belle Davis was an Afro-American song and dance artist, entertainer, choreographer, and director. She was a recording pioneer who toured Europe extensively during the period 1901-1929. Not only did she record on disc as early as 1902, she also performed in front of a movie camera at least twice during the early years of this century. In spite of these extraordinary achievements, little has been written about her; her biography, her discography and her filmography remain sketchy.

Belle Davis shares the fate of many American performers who chose to pursue their career overseas and consequently tended to be overlooked by researchers and historians at home. As an example, there is no entry for her in *Biographical Dictionary of African and Afro-American Musicians* (Southern, 1982).¹ Afro-American trumpeter Arthur Briggs, who came to England in 1919 as a member of Will Marion Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra, met Belle Davis in Europe. Briggs describes her as a dancer-organizer with the authorization of the American Government to train and stage teenagers' shows. Pickaninny shows were often used by unscrupulous operators to exploit orphans, but Briggs made it clear that Davis was different.² In 1901 she took a piccaninny group to Europe which included Irving 'Sneeze' Williams (age 9), and Fernandes 'Sonny' Jones (age 7). In later years her troupe included Walter Humphrey, Louis Douglas, Archie Ware, and possibly Harry Flemming. According to English-born Black entertainer Gordon Stretton, Belle Davis 'was a mezzo-soprano; tall black girl, native from New Orleans, very beautiful... The piccaninnies used to tap-dance and play harmonica.'³ By other accounts, Belle Davis was light-complexioned and it is said that in the U.S.A. it was not uncommon for booking agents to encourage Miss Davis to "darken dow."⁴ Her photograph on sheet music bears this out and made serious researchers believe that she was white.

Although I have been unable to locate Davis' birth certificate, and although I have not seen an obituary, it seems reasonable to deduce from other evidence that she was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, between June 1873 and September 1874. She was last heard of in Paris, France, in 1929 and may have died there. In Europe her name was often spelled Davies, with an "e." As there were several other Afro-American song-and-dance performers of similar spelling in turn-of-the-century Europe, there is a danger of confusion. In particular she should not be confused with Ma Belle Davies, who toured Europe in partnership with Chas. Hooker as "Hooker & Davis."

When Belle Davis first visited Europe in 1901 she was already 27 years of age.



Belle Davis (1/1 portrait). Undated, signed postcard (Collection: Lotz).



Miss Belle Davis and her 'Pickchicks'. Full page illustration in *The Variety Theatre*, Vol. 1, No. 13, p. 24. (The British Library).

and could look back on a long and varied professional career. She was known as the "Queen of ragtime singers" and the important music publisher E.B. Marks remembered her as a "coon shouter."⁶ She was a member of Sam T. Jack's *The Creole Show* (1891), alongside Chas. Johnson, Dora Dean, Mattie Wilkes, Bob Cole, and other famous black performers. The advance man of this show was John W. Isham, who organized his own Octoroons in 1896(?). By 1897(?) the popularity of this company had become so great that Isham put out two additional companies of "Octoroons." The original cast included Belle Davis. During 1896/97 the cast also included Mattie Wilkes, Inez Clough, J. Rosamond Johnson, Strut Payne, and The Hyer Sisters. "Among the many features of the great show were ... the maids of the Oriental Huzzars, led by Miss Belle Davis ... Miss Belle Davis gave a pleasing imitation of May Irwin in 'I Want You, Ma Honey' and other popular songs."⁶ Davis, a Black, was thus praised for imitating a white singer imitating Blacks as conceived by white tunesmiths ...

After Isham's retirement, the last Octoroons company continued "under the management of Will Isham, starring Billy Kersands in a farcical vaudeville comedy entitled *King Rastus*, with the Mallory Bros. and Brooks, and Smart and Williams as features, with scenery owned by Miss Belle Davis, who later foreclosed on the company because of nonpayment on the scenery and closed the show."⁷

Davis was one of the principal persons in the transition from the operatic to the ragtime finale. She had moved from a position of an ordinary singer in the 1896 production of the Octoroons to a full fledged vocalist of the new rag art. By 1899 she had also toured on her own and appeared at the New York Venetian Terrace with four pic-

caninnies. In the 1900 Octoroon program of *Seven-Eleven-Seventy-Seven*, she concluded a performance of 'Thirty Minutes Around The Opera' with 'Oh, Listen To The Band.' However, the black music critic Alex Rogers reviewed the program and pointed out Miss Davis' inability to deliver. He found her singing quite unsatisfactory and the opera scenes "butchered."⁸

For her European adventure in 1901 she selected Sneez Williams, age 9, and Sonny Jones, age 7, both of whom continued a career as jazz musicians in 1920s Europe, as members of the International Five. In Vienna in 1904 Davis toured with three juveniles. Although one of Davis' 1907 silent movies was advertised as "Belle Davis and her three Negroes," only two youngsters can be seen cajoling about. A fourth child was with the troupe in 1909.

It has been claimed that, in 1902, Belle Davis married Eddie Whaley, of the famous Scott & Whaley comedy team, forerunners of the Williams & Walker team. I have found no evidence to support this.⁹ In June 1904 Belle Davis married Troy Floyd. According to Afro-American musician/composer Perry Bradford, Belle Davis was Henry Troy's first wife. As a singer and actor, Troy was in the cast of *In Dahomey* (1903), *Rufus Rastus* (1906), *Bandanna Land* (1908), *Mr Lode of Koal* (1909), *Dr Beans From Boston* (1912), and *The Frog Follies* (1913). He also provided the book for *Darkydom* (1915).¹⁰ The marriage certificate, located by researcher Howard Rye, describes Davis as a spinster.¹¹ However, Davis did marry Whaley at an unknown later date. When she arrived from New York City at Southampton in 1919 the passenger list included Whaley, Belle, artist, aged 45.¹²

Davis continued to tour Europe until at least December 1917, although she appeared only in Britain during the war years. She then went home to the U.S.A. (in 1918?) and returned after the war, in 1919, but presently nothing is known about her activities at that time. Between about 1925 and 1929 Belle Davis became choreographer at the prestigious Casino de Paris, and was responsible for the annual revues. Curiously, this position was later (during the 1936/37 season) held by another Afro-American - Louis Douglas.¹³

The following chronology is an attempt to document the known movements of Belle Davis in Europe. It presents: a) the dates of her appearances (European style: DD/MM/YY, thus 10.06.01 would mean June 10th, 1901); b) the city (most place names are spelt in the language of the respective country, e.g., Wien instead of Vienna); c) the venue (the word "theater" has been omitted in most cases, e.g., Apollo means Apollo Theater); d) the billing (mostly in English translation); e) selected contemporary reviews (with sources in square brackets []). Whenever quotation marks are used (" ") spelling and punctuation are preserved as in original.

It should be borne in mind that many of the details listed below are vague, unconfirmed, or tentative, and it is hoped that readers will be motivated to check any contemporary sources available to them for further details and confirmation. Indeed, the chronology is meant as a research tool to provide future researchers with clues about where to look for reviews which might contain relevant information. The main sources for the information presented in this essay are English language theatrical papers researched by Howard Rye, and German language theatrical papers researched by myself. With the exception of Berliner 3244 and Gramophone Concert Record GC-3273, which are in my possession, the other recordings listed were not available for visual or aural inspection. The two movie films have been rediscovered and an attempt was made to have them partly restored.

- c.08.99: New York City, Venetian Terrace. "Belle Davis, a mulatto girl assisted by four half naked negro boys, sang several nigger songs which were favourably received. In spite of the previously paid admission the spectators liberally threw coins on stage for which the boys fought and, at the same time, put on an extra show" (by: Isidor F. Wolfing, *Der Artist*, 760, 03.09.99).
- c.04.00: Indianapolis, Park Theater, with Isham's Octoroons. "The grotesque dancing of Mr. Britton being the best ever seen in this city, followed by Miss Belle Davis, who is billed as the star of her race, and that title justly belongs to her in the handling of a 'coon' song" (*The Indianapolis Freeman*, 21.04.00).
- c.05.00: New York, Brooklyn Music Hall, with Isham's Octoroons. "John W. Isham's Octoroons furnish the entertainment which Manager Williams offers this week. They begin their performance with an absurdity called '7-11-44', an Ethiopian satire. The olio: Belle Davis, Smart and Williams, comedians; The Brittons, buck and wing dancers; William Mozambique English, negro songs; and Billy Miller, monologist. As a closing number, the entire troupe is seen in the operetta 'Thirty Minutes Around the Opera'" (*New York Clipper*, 05.05.00).
- c.09.00-c.10.00: San Francisco, Orpheum. "Belle Davis, Songstress, assisted by her piccaninnies."
- early 05.01: New York, New York Theater. Belle Davis and Ernest Hogan play a duo engagement
- 05.06.01: Arrived in Southampton from New York by s.s. St. Paul. Extract from passenger list: Jennie Jacobs, age 39; Belle Davis, age 27; Irving 'Sneeze' Williams, age 9; Fernandes 'Sonny' Jones, age 7. Theatrical. (Public Record Office Ref: *BT26/189* [Rye to Lotz, 06.08.89]).
- 10.06.01-23.06.01: Islington (north London), Collins's M.H. "Engagement Extraordinary. Debut of America's Greatest Coon Cantatrice Of The Century: Belle Davis, assisted by her two Piccaninny Actors" (*The Referee* ad 09.06.01, p.6).
- 17.06.01-23.06.01: dblg Brixton (south London), Empress. "Special Engagement of Belle Davis and Two Piccaninnies" dblg Drury Lane (London), Middlesex Music Hall. "Belle Davis (Assisted by her two Piccaninny Actors). In consequence of enormous success, Belle Davis, America's Greatest Coon Cantatrice with her two Piccaninny Actors, is Re-Engaged for 6 nights longer."
- 24.06.01-30.06.01: London, Middlesex Music Hall (2nd week)
- 22.07.01-02.09.01: London, Metropolitan. "Belle Davis with her marvellous Pocket Piccaninnies"
- 26.08.01-02.09.01: dblg London, Tivoli. "Belle Davis and Her Piccaninnies"
- 03.09.01-09.09.01: London, Tivoli <unconfirmed: Davis was featured at the Tivoli on 03.09.01 on the occasion of The Tivoli 10th Anniversary Celebrations, but no regular engagement for the week is noted in *The Referee*>. "Belle Davis and Her Marvellous Pocket Piccaninnies"
- c.09.01: London, The Canterbury. "Belle Davis and Her Clever Piccaninnies"
- 28.10.01-03.11.01: Brighton, Alhambra. "Special Engagement of Belle Davis and Her Piccaninnies"
- 04.11.01-10.11.01: Edinburgh, Empire (Moss Tour)
- 11.11.01-17.11.01: Glasgow, Empire
- 18.11.01-24.11.01: Newcastle, Empire
- 16.12.01-22.12.01 Stratford (east London), Empire (Moss). "Belle Davis and Piccaninnies, in Southern Melodies" [Program, Märkisches Museum, Berlin].
- 23.12.01-29.12.01: Walham Green (west London), Granville. "Bella Davis."
- 30.12.01-05.01.02: Clapham (south London), New Grand. "Miss Belle

- Davis - with her two entertaining piccaninnies - plays for all she's worth" (The Encore, 02.01.02, p.9).
- 06.01.02-08.01.02: London, Drury Lane, Middlesex Music Hall. "Belle Davis"
- 13.01.02-19.01.02: Leeds, City Palace. "The star turn is that of Belle Davis and her two Senegambian piccaninnies, whose efforts were accorded a hearty reception" (*The Stage*, 16.01.02, p.12). Davis is listed as donor of 10/- to Music Hall Benevolent Fund (*The Encore*, 16.01.02, p.10).
- Miss Belle Davis and her Piccaninnies, London**
Belle Davis (mezzo-soprano voice); accompanied by probably Irving "Sneeze" Williams and Fernandes "Sonny" Jones (vocal); unidentified (piano).
15166 The Rainbow Coon (My Rainbow Coon*) Gramophone GC-3278, Zonophone X-43029*
- 17.03.02-23.03.02: London, Hammersmith Palace. "Belle Davis and her Pleasing, Peculiar and Popular Pet Piccaninnies"
- 14.04.02-20.04.02: Brixton (south London), Empress. "Belle Davis and Her Piccaninnies"
- 19.05.02-25.05.02: London, Paragon, Mile End Road. "Belle Davis and Pics"
- c.05.02/c.06.02: London, recording session for the Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd. **Miss Belle Davies and Piccaninnies, London [sic]**
Belle Davis (mezzo-soprano voice); accompanied by probably Irving "Sneeze" Williams and Fernandes "Sonny" Jones (vocal); unidentified (piano). 4596a The Honeysuckle and the Bee, Berliner 3244
4643e Just Because She Made Dem Goo-Goo Eyes, Berliner 3245



Gramophone Concert Record No. G.C.-3273. *The Honeysuckle and the Bee*, sung by Miss Belle Davies and Piccaninnies. (Collection: Lotz)

- 24.01.02: London, recording session for The Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd. **Miss Belle Davies and Piccaninnies (with duet chorus), London**
Belle Davis (mezzo-soprano voice); accompanied by probably Irving "Sneeze" Williams and Fernandes "Sonny" Jones (vocal); unidentified (piano).
1337 The Honeysuckle and the Bee, (Penn) Gramophone GC-3273
- 20.01.02-26.01.02: London, The Canterbury, Westminster Bridge Road. "Belle Davis and Her Piccaninnies"
- c.02.02: London, recording session for The Gramophone & Typewriter Ltd.



The etched "label" of E. Berliner's Gramophone disc No.3244. *The Honeysuckle and the Bee*, sung by Miss Belle Davies and Piccaninnies, London. (Collection: Lotz)

- 02.06.02-08.06.02: London, Gatti's, Westminster Bridge Road. "Belle Davis and Her Piccaninnies"
- 09.06.02-15.06.02: London, The Tivoli. "Belle Davis And Her Two Comical Piccaninnies"
- 21.07.02-27.07.02: London, Middlesex Music Hall. "Belle Davis"
- 11.08.02-17.08.02: London, Metropolitan, Edgware Road. "Belle Davis and Her Pocket Piccaninnies." ? dblg at Gatti's Palace of Varieties <unconfirmed>
- 25.08.02-31.08.02: London, Metropolitan. "Belle Davis and Her Pocket Piccaninnies" ?dbl South London Palace <unconfirmed>
- 22.09.02-28.09.02: London, Hammersmith Palace<unconfirmed>
- 29.09.02-04.10.02: Bradford Empire (Moss Tour)
- 06.10.02-12.10.02: Sheffield, Empire
- 20.10.02-26.10.02: Hull, Palace
- 27.10.02-02.11.02: Edinburgh, Empire
- 03.11.02-09.11.02: Glasgow, Empire
- 10.11.02-16.11.02: South Shields, Empire
- 24.11.02-07.12.02: London, Camberwell Palace of Varieties (*The Referee*, 23.11.02, p.6)
- 22.12.02-28.12.02: Dublin, Empire
- 29.12.02-04.01.03: Liverpool, Empire
- 12.01.03-19.01.03: Birmingham, Empire
- 26.01.03-01.02.03: London, The Tivoli. "Belle Davis and Piccaninnies"
- 16.02.03-22.03.02: London, Drury Lane, Middlesex Music Hall. "Belle Davis and Her Piccaninny Actors"
- 23.02.03-01.03.03: London, Commercial Street, Cambridge. "Belle Davis"
- 02.03.03-08.03.03: London, Camberwell. "Belle Davis & Her Piccaninnies." dblg: Holloway Empire (Moss & Stoll)
- 01.06.03-30.06.03: London, The Oxford. "Belle Davis." dblg: London, Metropolitan. "Belle Davis and her Piccaninnies (1st fortnight); "Belle Davis and Her Pocket Piccaninnies" (2nd fortnight). trblg: London, Paragon, Mile End Road. "Belle Davis and Piccaninnies"
- 16.03.04-31.03.04: Wien, Orpheum. "Miss Davis has to be singled out, an original English song and dance artist who is more a humorous than a serious specialty. She is accompanied by three tiny Negro boys, called Picaninnies in the program, very young lads of astonishing suppleness and comic power, the smallest in particular can't get enough in artful jumps, enforced gestures, and incredible distortions of the face. A great deal of the burst of applause was, therefore, aimed at him" (by: 'Exbl.-' *Der Artist*, 997, 20.03.04).
- 09.05.04-15.05.04: London, Shepherds Bush Empire (Moss & Stoll)
- 16.05.04-21.05.04: London, Holloway Empire
- 23.05.04-29.05.04: London, New Cross Empire
- 06.06.04-12.06.04: London, Hackney Empire
- 09.06.04: Belle Davis, age 31, daughter of the deceased George Davis, married Henry Troy, age 28, professional singer, son of the house decorator and painter Samuel Troy, at St. Pancras, London, in the presence of Floyd G. Gibbs, Ed. McCabe. Residence at the time of marriage: 3 Grenville Street. (Copy of entry of marriage, HR, 28.03.90)
- 20.06.04-26.06.04: Swansea, Empire
- 27.06.04-02.07.04: Newport, Empire
- 04.07.04-10.07.04: Nottingham, Empire
- 11.07.04-17.07.04: Leicester, Empire (Stoll)
- 18.07.04-24.07.04: Manchester, Ardwick Empire
- 01.09.04-15.09.04: Düsseldorf, Apollo. "La Belle Davis mit ihren drei Negerknaben. La Belle Davis, whose

- name is very appropriate, is being assisted in her strange and grotesque nigger songs and dances by three very agile negro boys. The passion of her 'assistants' is quite understandable, considering the beauty of their instructor. The number is arranged according to Anglo-American tastes and is also successful here" (by: E.P., *Der Artist*, 1022, 11.09.04).
- 19.09.04-25.09.04: Hastings, Hippodrome (Brill & Graydon)
- 26.09.04-02.10.04: Brighton, Alhambra. "Belle Davis & Her Pickchicks". Jack Humphrey was described as one of the "pickchicks" on a postcard.
- 01.05.05-15.05.05: Berlin, Wintergarten. "La Belle Davis and her three Negro boys in their original dances and grotesque movements, all the pièces are funny, but without much variation" (by 'V.H.' [=Victor Happrich], *Der Artist*, 1057, 07.05.05). Oskar Klein, Berlin amüsiert sich, *Bühne und Brettl*, 1905, unpag.
- 26.06.05-02.07.05: Paris, Alhambra (Barrasford Tour)
- 03.07.05-09.07.05: Glasgow, Pavilion (Barrasford Tour). A full page photograph of "Miss Belle Davis and her 'Pick-Chicks'" is published in *The Variety Theatre*, 04.08.05, II, 16, p.21.
- 10.09.05-16.09.05: Middlesborough, Empire (Brill & Graydon Tour)
- 02.10.05-08.10.05: Amsterdam, Circus Carré. "Belle Davis and her Precocious Pick Chicks" (sic)
- 09.10.05-15.10.05: Rotterdam, Circus Variété Pfläging. "Belle Davis met hare vlugge Negertjes"
- 30.10.05-05.11.05: Plymouth, New Palace (Livermore Tour)
- 06.11.05-12.11.05: Bristol, People's Palace
- 27.11.05-23.12.05: London, Palace, Shaftesbury Avenue. "Belle Davis and Picaninnies." The same program also featured Abbie Mitchell & Her Tennessee Students. A photograph of "Miss Belle Davis and her Piccaninnies" was printed in *The Variety Theatre*, 15.12.05, II, 24, p.152.
- 25.12.05-30.12.05: London, Chelsea Palace. The Palace in Shaftesbury Avenue advertizes only Abbie Mitchell this week, or Glasgow, Palace (Barrasford Tour) (unlikely and unconfirmed)
- 01.01.06-07.01.06: London, Palace, Shaftesbury Avenue. "Belle Davis and Picanninnies. So many real coons figure in the current programme at the Palace Theatre, that one is almost tempted to describe it as an 'All-Black Bill.' Miss Belle Davis introduces a trio of the quaintest and cleverest picaninnies imaginable. All three are expert dancers, and the smallest is a comedian to boot. In appearance he is just the sort of little nigger-boy you find in children's picture books. The ebony youngsters appear to enjoy the show just as much as kind friends in front and rouse the usually undemonstrative Palace audience to much enthusiasm" (*The Variety Stage, The Referee*, 07.01.06, p.4). A photograph captioned "Miss Belle Davis, with her Piccaninnies, is also a favourite" appears in *The Variety Theatre*, 05.01.06, III, 33, p.186.
- 08.01.06-14.01.06: Glasgow, Palace (Barrasford Tour)
- 15.01.06-11.01.06: Newcastle-on-Tyne, Pavilion (Barrasford Tour). "A wonderful improvement has been made by the Picaninnies introduced by the charming Miss Belle Davis and their turn is now second to none; nothing funnier could be imagined than the wrestling bout indulged in by two miniature members of the company" (*The Era*, 20.01.06, p.10). A booking planned for the Prague Théâtre Variété for January 1906 was apparently cancelled.
- 22.01.06-28.01.06: Leeds, Tivoli. "Scoring the usual solid success" (*The Era*, 27.01.06, p.9).

- 12.02.06-18.02.06: Liverpool, Hippodrome
- 19.02.06-25.02.06: Birmingham, Hippodrome
- 26.02.06-04.03.06: Brighton, Hippodrome
- 12.03.06-31.03.06: London, Coliseum (Moss)
- 02.04.06-08.04.06: Bristol, Empire dblg: Bristol Hippodrome (Barrasford)
- 09.04.06-15.04.06: London, The Camberwell
- 07.05.06-13.05.06: Dublin, Tivoli
- 14.05.06-20.05.06: London NE, Hackney Empire (Moss)
- 28.05.06-03.06.06: London SE, New Cross Empire
- 04.06.06-10.06.06: London E, Stratford Empire
- 11.06.06-17.06.06: London W, Shepherds Bush
- 18.06.06-24.06.06: Cardiff, Empire
- 25.06.06-01.07.06: Swansea, Empire
- 09.07.06-15.07.06: Walsall, H.M.
- 16.07.06-22.07.06: Leicester, Palace
- 23.07.06-30.07.06: Manchester, New Hippodrome
- 01.09.06-15.09.06: Hannover, Mellini. "Belle Davis mit ihren drei Piccaninnies"
- 19.09.06: Berlin, Circus Busch. "The song and dance sketch as performed by la belle Davis and her 3 Piccaninnies convinces more by the comedy appearance and the magnificent costumes of this elegant representative of the Creole race, and also by the comic of her little black pupil, rather than by the various cakewalks (which lasted for too long) and Negro dances which become more and more strange, and which are the backbone of this turn" (by: 'Th.M.jt,' *Der Artist*, 1129, 30.09.06).
- 25.09.06-30.09.06: Den Haag, Scala
- c.10.06-c.11.06: Paris, Alhambra
- 06.12.06-15.01.07: Wien, Apollo. "La Belle Davis, with her three black Piccaninnies"
- c.late 1906: Unknown location, possibly Paris. Production of two silent short movies.
- Die schöne Davis (75m) Pathé Films
- Die schöne Davis mit ihren drei Negern (72m) Pathé Films
- Both films were shot in front of the same backdrops. The first was advertised in Germany in February 1907 as a "Naturaufnahme," the latter was advertised in Germany as late as February 1911. One of the three boys also appears dressed as a girl to perform a cakewalk parody with another boy dressed in high hat and tails. There is a remarkable similarity in dress and appearance between these two and a girl and boy depicted on a series of 10 French postcards entitled simply "Le Cake-Walk. Dansé au Nouveau Cirque. Les Enfants Nègres." The earliest postmark found on this series of cards is 31.05.1903. The same pair is also shown on a different postcard which bears the information "Prime du journal 'Le Sans-Souci.'" I have been unable to identify this source for verification. It is thus possible that Belle Davis and her Piccaninnies performed at the Nouveau Cirque, Paris, at some date prior to May 1903.
- 25.02.07-04.03.07: Birmingham, Hippodrome
- 24.03.07-30.03.07: London, Hammersmith Palace
- 06.05.07: Berlin <unconfirmed>. "Johnson & Dean write under date of May 6, 1907, from Berlin, Germany, that five noted colored acts will make their first appearance in Russia May 14, all booked to open at different theaters in St. Petersburg and Moscow at the same time. The colored head liners have created a sensation among the Russian managers, as each roster is as follows: Miss Belle Davis and Picks, Miss Abie Mitchell, Miss Morcashani, The Black Troubadours and Johnson & Dean" (*The Indianapolis Freeman*, 25.05.07).

- 14.05.07-30.06.07: St. Petersburg, Krestowsky. "La Belle Davis, with her Negro Boys. American Dances. La Belle Davis is received with rich applause. This artist now performs in the company of three Negro lads. The original quartet executes grotesque American dances with immense agility (by: 'A.B.' *Der Artist*, 1168, 30.06.07). The same program also featured Bobbie Hopkins; Henry Williams; George Carr; The 6 Empire Stars (*Der Artist*, 1175, 18.08.07).
- 16.09.07-22.09.07: Newport, Empire (Moss)
- 23.09.07-29.09.07: Nottingham, Empire
- 30.09.07-06.10.07: Leicester, Palace
- 07.10.07-13.10.07: Manchester, Hippodrome
- 05.05.08-11.05.08: London, Palace Theatre of Varieties <or 1907?>. "Belle Davis and Her Southern Piccaninnies." This turn was number 3 of a total of 13, and lasted from 8.15 to 8.25 pm (Program dated 5/5/1908).
- 28.09.08-04.10.08: Bruxelles, Alhambra (Barrasford Tour)
- 01.11.08-30.11.08: Hamburg, Hansa. "Belle Davis with her piccaninnies"
- 22.02.09-28.02.09: Hackney, Empire (Moss Tour)
- 01.03.09-07.03.09: Holloway, Empire
- 08.03.09-14.03.09: New Cross Empire
- 15.03.09-21.03.09: Stratford Empire
- 05.04.09-11.04.09: Swansea, Empire
- 12.04.09-18.04.09: Newport, Empire
- 26.04.09-02.05.09: Walsall, H.M.
- 10.05.09-16.05.09: Nottingham, Empire
- 07.06.09-13.06.09: Edinburgh, Empire
- 21.06.09-27.06.09: Liverpool, Olympia
- 05.07.09-11.07.09: Bradford, Empire
- 19.07.09-25.07.09: Leeds, Empire
- 26.07.09-01.08.09: Sheffield, Empire
- 01.09.09-15.09.09: Hannover, Mellini
- 16.09.09-30.09.09: Magdeburg, Central.
- "La Belle Davis with her 3 Piccaninnies. The dancer La Belle Davis with the 4 *[sic]* Piccaninnies (4 youthful niggers and a young negresse of repulsing ugliness), sang in English language but did not dance; or else one had to call those few waltz steps and trips a 'dance.' On the other hand, the youthful blacks developed a fabulous suppleness and agility which, although admirable, is anything else but graceful or beautiful - to each his own!" (by: 'A.L.' *Der Artist*, 1285, 26.09.09). The fourth child was probably added to the act during this engagement.
- 01.10.10-15.10.10: Wien, Apollo. "Mad. Davis and her Piccaninnies. One may count Madame Davis with her four Negroes among the good fill-numbers. As for herself, she parades as an elegant appearance while her four Negroes try to be funny, and, more often than not, they are successful. Several of their many grotesque ideas are not at all bad (by: Rudolf Huppert, *Der Artist*, 1340, 16.10.10).
- 01.11.10-15.11.10: Prag, Variété
- 01.02.11-15.02.11: Hannover, Mellini. "La belle Davis with her Negroes and little Negroes who dance madly - a real American number" (*Hannoverscher Courier*, no details).
- 01.03.11-15.03.11: Magdeburg, Zentral. "A pleasant change in the program was brought about by La bella Davis *[sic]*, the beautiful dancer with her piccaninnies, who create high spirits in their crazy capers and eccentric dances" (by: 'A.L.' *Der Artist*, 1361, 12.03.11).
- 16.03.11-31.03.11: Hannover, Mellini
- 10.04.11-16.04.11: Glasgow, Coliseum (Moss & Stoll)
- 24.04.11-30.04.11: Liverpool, Olympia
- 21.08.11-27.08.11: Glasgow, Empire
- 28.08.11-03.09.11: Croydon, Hippodrome
- 04.09.11-10.09.11: Hackney, Empire

- 25.09.11-01.10.11: Stratford, Empire
 02.10.11-08.10.11: Shepherds Bush, Empire
 09.10.11-15.10.11: Dublin, Empire
 16.10.11-22.10.11: Belfast, Empire
 01.12.11-15.12.11: Elberfeld, Thalia. "Belle Davis 5 Piccaninnies"
 26.02.12-03.03.12: Birmingham, Grand (Moss & Stoll). "Belle Davis and Her Cracker Jacks"
 04.03.12-10.03.12: Leicester, Palace
 11.03.12-17.03.12: Newcastle, Empire
 25.03.12-31.03.12: Edinburgh, Empire. "Belle Davis and Her Cracker Jacks in Southern Pastimes"
 01.04.12-15.04.12: St. Petersburg, Villa Rode <unconfirmed>. "Belle Davis and her Negro children"
 08.04.12-14.04.12: Liverpool, Empire (Moss & Stoll)
 29.04.12-05.05.12: Sheffield, Empire
 06.05.12-12.05.12: Bradford, Empire
 13.05.12-19.05.12: Hull, Palace. "Belle Davis and her Cracker Jacks"
 10.06.12-16.06.12: Nottingham, Empire. "Belle Davis and her piccaninnies"
 17.06.12-23.06.12: Swansea, Empire
 24.06.12-30.06.12: Newport, Empire
 22.07.12-28.07.12: Boscombe, Hippodrome (VTCC Tour)
 29.07.12-04.08.12: Southampton, Hippodrome
 19.08.12-25.08.12: Middlesex, The New Theatre (Moss & Stoll)
 16.09.12-22.09.12: Chatham, Empire
 23.09.12-29.09.12: Wood Green, Empire
 07.10.12-13.10.12: Hackney, Empire
 14.10.12-20.10.12: London, Coliseum
 04.11.12-10.11.12: Stratford, Empire
 11.11.12-17.11.12: Shepherds Bush, Empire. "Belle Davis Cracker Jacks, Negroes and Negresses of youthful age, let us see the most impossible body-twistings in their dance (by: 'S.,' *Der Artist*, 1451, 01.12.12).
 09.12.12-15.12.12: Plymouth, Palace (VTCC Tour)
 16.12.12-22.12.12: Bristol, Hippodrome (Stoll)
 1913: "In 1913 Archie Ware (age 21) left 'Cozy Smith and her Piccaninnies' to join Mayme Remington in a trip abroad, stayed on for a while with Belle Davis, playing Germany and Holland, and returned to the US a few months before WWI" (Marshall Stearns, *Jazz Dance*, p.264).
 06.01.13-12.01.13: Chiswick, Empire (Stoll). "Belle Davis' Cracker Jacks"
 03.03.13-09.03.13: London, Coliseum
 24.03.13-30.03.13: Liverpool, Hippodrome (VTCC). "Belle Davis & Piccs"
 31.03.13-05.04.13: Sheffield, Hippodrome
 21.04.13-27.04.13: Leeds, Hippodrome
 12.05.13-18.05.13: Brighton, Hippodrome
 26.05.13-01.06.13: Southend, Hippodrome
 02.06.13-08.06.13: Southampton, Hippodrome
 01.07.13-15.07.13: St. Petersburg, Villa Rode. "La Belle Davis"
 01.08.13-15.08.13: Riga, Casino Theater. "Belle Davis, Universalakt"
 15.09.13-21.09.13: Birmingham, Hippodrome (VTCC). "Belle Davis & Piccs"
 16.10.13-31.10.13: St. Petersburg, Aquarium. "The clou of the evening, La bella Davis and her five Negro boys, culminates in grotesque Negro dances" (by: 'A.B.,' *Der Artist*, 1499, 02.11.13).
 01.11.13-15.11.13: Hannover, Mellini. "Belle Davis and her ensemble"
 16.11.13-30.11.13: Magdeburg, Central. "A quite amusing number was presented by Belle Davis with her funny Negro boys. The 'beutiful' [sic] Davis, an imposing and interesting appearance, let her agile Negro lads execute extremely original dances and various

- acrobatic capers. The funny and supple dances were performed in the typical drôlerie of the Negroes and found plenty applause" (by 'AL,' *Der Artist*, 1502, 23.11.13).
 09.03.14-15.03.14: Manchester, Palace (VTCC Tour). "Belle Davis and Piccs"
 04.05.15-10.05.14: London, Coliseum (Stoll Tour). "Belle Davis' Cracker Jacks in Southern Pastimes"
 11.05.14-17.05.14: Chatham, Empire
 18.05.14-24.05.14: Brighton, Hippodrome (VTCC Tour)
 10.05.15-16.05.15: London, The Euston. "Belle Davis & Her Cracker Jacks"
 17.05.15-13.05.15: London, Tottenham Palace
 24.05.15-30.05.15: London, Brixton Empress
 31.05.15-06.06.15: London, Chelsea Palace dblg London, Metropolitan. "Belle Davis & Her Cracker Jacks"
 12.07.15-18.07.15: London, Southport Palladium. "Belle Davis & Company"
 02.08.15-08.08.15: Huddersfield, Palace
 16.08.15-22.08.15: Salford, Regent. "Belle Davis & Company"
 01.11.15-07.11.15: London, Finsbury Park Empire
 15.11.15-21.11.15: Newport, Empire
 22.11.15-28.11.15: Liverpool, Olympia
 13.12.15-19.12.15: Glasgow, Coliseum
 20.12.15-26.12.15: Bradford, Empire
 10.01.16-16.01.16: Liverpool, Empire. "Belle Davis"
 24.01.16-30.01.16: Hull, Palace
 31.01.16-05.02.16: Birmingham, Empire
 14.02.16-20.02.16: London, Hackney, Empire. "Belle Davis' Cracker Jacks"
 13.03.16-19.03.16: London, Chatham Empire
 20.03.16-26.03.16: London, Shepherds Bush Empire
 01.05.16-07.05.16: London, Chelsea Palace
 15.05.16-21.05.16: London, South London Music Hall
 22.05.16-28.05.16: London, Tottenham Palace
 29.05.16-04.06.16: London, Brixton Empress. "Belle Davis & Piccs"
 05.06.16-11.06.16: London, Euston Palace. "Belle Davis And Her Cracker Jacks"
 19.06.16-25.06.16: London, Chiswick Empire
 26.06.16-02.07.16: Doncaster, Palace. "Belle Davis presents Her Crackerjacks. Southern Pastimes" (2nd on bill to Sonia Seal).
 24.09.16: "Belle Davis and Crackerjacks have been in London, oh so long! Her act, like gin, improves with age" (letter by Norris Smith from London, *Chicago Defender*, 21.10.16, p.5).
 25.09.16-01.10.16: Ayr, Pavilion. "Belle Davis & Her Crackerjacks"
 23.10.16-29.10.16: Portsmouth, Hippodrome. "Belle Davis & Piccs"
 11.12.16-17.12.16: London, Stratford Empire. "Belle Davis & Co"
 18.12.16-25.12.16: London, Chiswick Empire. "Belle Davis's Cracker Jacks"
 26.12.16-01.01.17: London, Kingston Empire. "Belle Davis & Her Cracker Jacks"
 08.01.17-15.01.17: Newport, Empire. "Belle Davis & Company"
 05.02.17-11.02.17: Manchester, Ardwick Green Empire. "Belle Davis and Her Cracker Jacks"
 26.02.17-04.03.17: Hamilton, Hippodrome. "Belle Davis & Piccs"
 26.03.17-01.04.17: Hamilton Hippodrome. "Belle Davis & Piccs"
 02.04.17-08.04.17: London, Chelsea. "Belle Davis & Her kerjacks"
 09.04.17-15.04.17: London, Stratford Empire. "Belle Davis"
 16.04.17-22.04.17: Bradford, Alhambra. "Belle Davis & Company"

- 30.04.17-06.05.17: Swansea, Empire
 07.05.17-13.05.17: Hull, Palace
 14.05.17-20.05.17: Edinburgh, Empire
 21.05.17-27.05.17: Walthamstow Palace
 28.05.17-03.06.17: London, Euston Music Hall
 04.06.17-10.06.17: London, Tottenham Syndicate Hall
 25.06.17-01.07.17: London, South London. "Belle Davis and Her Cracker Jacks is just a scramble. No one seems to have any method or order in this act - we get broken scraps of songs, bits of dances, odds and ends of tumbling. It is like a go-as-you-please rehearsal. And I don't care much for the exploitation of the mediocre and dubious eccentricities of niggers anyway" (by 'Jackdaw,' *The Encore*, 28.06.17).
 09.07.17-15.07.17: Ilkeston, Hippodrome
 30.07.17-05.08.17: Salisbury, Palace
 06.08.17-12.08.17: Weymouth, Jubilee Hall
 13.08.17-19.08.17: London, dblg: East Ham Palace and Chelsea Syndicate Hall
 20.08.17-26.08.17: London, Brixton Empress
 03.09.17-09.09.17: London, Collins Music Hall
 10.09.17-16.09.17: London, Shepherds Bush Empire
 24.09.17-30.09.17: London, East Ham S.H.
 01.10.17-07.10.17: London, East Ham Palace
 08.10.17-14.10.17: London, Chatham Empire
 15.10.17-21.10.17: Southsea, King's
 05.11.17-11.11.17: Southampton, Palace (Macnaghten Tour)
 12.11.17-18.11.17: Manchester, Hippodrome
 19.11.17-25.11.17: Glasgow, Empire
 26.11.17-02.12.17: Carlisle, Palace
 03.12.17-09.12.17: Huddersfield, Palace
 10.12.17-16.12.17: Warrington, Palace
 24.12.17-30.12.17: London, Brixton Empress
 08.04.18-14.04.18: London, The Chelsea. "Belle Davis and Her Cracker Jacks"
 15.04.18-21.04.18: London, The Euston.
 06.05.18-12.05.18: London, The Metropolitan. "Belle Davis and Pics in Southern Pastimes"
 03.06.18-09.06.18: London, Kingston Empire. "Belle Davis' 'Cracker Jacks'"
 30.09.19: Arrival at Southampton, from New York City, aboard the White Star's 'Adriatic.' Extract from passenger list: WHALEY, Belle, artist, aged 45, address: 4 Lynton Mansions, Kensington (Public Record Office, Ref: BT26/665).
 16.01.20-15.02.20: Paris, Alhambra
 1925-1926: Paris, Casino de Paris, with revue Paris En Fleurs. "Danses réglées par Bell Davis"
 1926-1927: Paris, Casino de Paris, with revue Paris Qui Chante. "Danses réglées par Bell Davis"
 1926-1927: Paris, Casino de Paris, with revue Paris. "Danses réglées par Bell Davis"
 1927: Paris, with revue Paris - New York. "Danses réglées par Bell Davis"
 1928-1929: Paris, with revue Tout Paris. "Danses réglées par Bell Davis"

Rainer E. Lotz is with the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. He is a record collector and has edited LP and CD albums of gramophone recordings and authored books on ragtime, jazz, radio broadcasting, the recording history, black history, and individual musicians as well as many journal articles. He was special adviser to the New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, to which he contributed numerous articles. He currently edits the German National Discography.

Endnotes:

1. Eileen Southern, *Biographical Dictionary of Afro-American and African Musicians* (Westport: 1982). The first attempt to document Davis' biography, discography and filmography is probably: Rainer E. Lotz, *German Ragtime & Prehistory Of Jazz. Volume 1: The Sound Documents*, (Chigwell: 1985): pp.72-73. Illustrated articles about Belle Davis are reported to have been published before World War I in two German periodicals - *Nimm mich mit*, Berlin, and *Deutsche Illustrierte Zeitung*, also published in Berlin. I have been unable to verify these sources.
2. Briggs to Lotz, in an interview, Paris, 26.05.78.
3. Stretton (real name: Bill Masters) to Guillermo Olliver, taped interview, Buenos Aires, 03.04.1978.
4. Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks*, (Metuchen: 1982): p.284.
5. Edward Bennett Marks, *They All Sang. From Tony Pastor to Rudy Vallee. As told to* Abbott J. Liebling, (New York: 1935): p.282.
6. *Washington Morning Times*, 09.11.96.
7. Sylvester Russell, *The Indianapolis Freeman*, 03.08.04.
8. *Howard's American Magazine*, 1900, pp.345-; quoted by Arthur LaBrew, *Afro-American Music Review*, 1985;2(2):111.
9. Green JP., "In Dahomey' in London in 1903," *The Black Perspective in Music*, 1983;11(1):22-40.
10. Bradford, P., *Born With The Blues*, (New York: 1965): p.104.
11. Certified copy of an entry of marriage. Given at the General Register Office, London, Application Number 7112081. (Courtesy Howard Rye.)
12. *Public Record Office*, Ref: BT.261/665. (Courtesy Howard Rye.)
13. Lotz, RE., "Four Decades In Europe - Louis Douglas, King of Dancers," paper presented at the *African Americans in Europe Conference*, Paris, 5-9 February 1992.