Some Additions

Since I wrote the article on Black Bob which appeared in *Blues Unlimited* 130 (May/August 1978, pp. 18–20) there have been one or two developments.

I have had some important but confusing correspondence with Aletha Dickerson Robinson. She tells me that Alexander Robinson and Bob Robinson were one and the same person — and by implication her husband, that although he played and taught piano he never made any piano records, that he never played or owned a clarinet, that he was never known as either Robert Alexander or Bob Alexander, and that *he was not Black Bob!* Black Bob was known to her by no other name.

That Alexander Robinson and ‘Bob’ Robinson, the vocalist with the original Hokum Boys, were one and the same person is now supported by other evidence. ‘My Baby’ by Alexander Robinson (78 12649) has been re-issued on Whoopie 105 and he sounds identical to ‘Bob’ Robinson of the Hokum Boys. Also, there is an association between Alexander Robinson and the Hokum stalwart, Tampa Red: Alexander Robinson made two unissued sides for Vocalion in April 1929 with matrix numbers C3291/C3292 (*Storyville* 29, p. 164); matrix numbers C3289/C3290 are by Tampa Red. Indeed, it seems probable that Alexander Robinson was only known as ‘Bob’ Robinson to most people, as Ikey Robinson seems never to have heard of him by his real name (*Storyville* 38, p. 72).

There are, however, many unanswered questions. If ‘Bob’ Alexander Robinson did not play or own a clarinet, who plays the clarinet on those Bob Robinson sessions where he himself is said to be playing the instrument? Can it, on at least some of them, be Arnett Nelson as Ernest Virgo would suggest? Aletha Robinson says that Alexander Robinson did record for Bluebird (at Lester Melrose’s invitation) and so it appears very unlikely that there were two ‘Bob’ Robinsons — one a vocalist and the other a clarinet player.

Aletha also says that Alexander Robinson gave piano lessons but was not known as either Robert Alexander or Bob Alexander. Why then does Little Brother Montgomery refer to his erstwhile piano teacher as both Robert/Bob Alexander and Alexander Robinson, as well as saying that he was Aletha Dickerson’s husband? There is a direct contradiction here which needs resolving, but unfortunately two letters to Little Brother Montgomery have gone unanswered. It is possible, I suppose, that there are two men involved: Alexander Robinson, otherwise known as ‘Bob’ Robinson, ‘Bob’ Alexander Robinson or ‘Bob’ Alexander; and Robert/Bob Alexander, otherwise known as Black Bob (because he was darker skinned?), to distinguish him from ‘Bob’ Alexander Robinson. However, this all seems highly speculative.

What does seem certain though is that Alexander Robinson, whether or not he was known as Robert/Bob Alexander, was not Black Bob. Aletha Robinson was definite on this point. She obviously knew Black Bob but did not know his surname and suggested that the person who might know it was Lester Melrose. Unfortunately I have learnt from Bob Koester that Melrose died in Florida in the early 1970s.

If Robert/Bob Alexander was not Alexander Robinson then this still leaves Robert/Bob Alexander as the prime candidate for Black Bob. Paul Oliver tells me that the name Robert Alexander for Black Bob was given to him in the 1950s by Big Bill Broonzy. Bill also told Oliver that he used to share an apartment with Bob and he conveyed the impression to Paul that he (Black Bob) may have come from Indianapolis or St. Louis. Ernest Virgo has written to me to say that he is in touch with a pianist in St. Louis who might have been Black Bob. We shall have to wait and see. *Melvyn Hirst*