

TROMBONE SMEAR COMPOSER - N.C. DAVIS

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351

In the fifteen years before the “Roaring Twenties”, trombone ragtime smears appeared in the United States, and many were NOT composed by Henry Fillmore!

One such composer of smears was Nathaniel Cleophas Davis who came up with “Oh Slip It Man” (1916), “Mr. Trombonology” (1917), “Miss Trombonism” (1918), “Master Trombone” (1919), and “Trombone Française” (1921).

We first played “Mr. Trombonology” at the 1981 Convention. Our most recent playing of “Oh Slip It Man” was in 2015 and “Master Trombone” in 2019.



PROF. N. C. DAVIS.

Nathaniel Davis, generally known as “N.C.,” was born in Pulaski, Tennessee on August 14, 1888, of African American parents, Lula Mason Connor (1863-1931) and Otis Bland Davis (1863-1920).

By 1908, N.C. was in Nashville directing the band at the Tennessee School for the Blind. On April 10th that year the **Nashville Globe** reported N.C. Davis was a trombonist with Prof. Dock Liner’s six-piece ensemble playing for the Eureka Dancing Class.

N.C. also taught music for a time at Fisk University. One of his pupils at Fisk was trumpeter Adolphus Anthony “Doc” Cheatham (1905-1997.) Cheatham got his professional start playing soprano and tenor saxophone, in addition to trumpet, in Nashville’s African American Vaudeville Theater.

Along with his brothers, Otis Bland Davis, Jr. (1899-1944) and Clarence Matthew Davis (1883-1955), N.C. formed a music publishing business and a school of music. The business was the N.C. Davis Company, located at 510 1/2 Cedar Street, Nashville, Tennessee. The school was first known as the Traveling Conservatory of Music and then as the Davis Band & Orchestra School. Davis also had his own ensemble, the N.C. Davis Band.

The **Nashville Tennessean** printed the following in their April 5, 1914 Sunday edition: “Prof. N.C. Davis, the comet virtuoso, and his excellent band of musicians will appear in a free concert in the chapel of the negro state normal school. Professor Davis is a musician of rare ability and is also a composer of note. He is considered one of the most clever cometists of the race, and has had large experience as an organizer of bands throughout the south. The Davis brothers teach all wind instruments and have organized concert bands in many towns and cities.”

When Davis registered for military service on June 4, 1917, he described himself as a self-employed band organizer and schoolteacher. During World War I, he served as a musician with the U.S. Army’s 368th Infantry Regiment, part of the 92nd Infantry Division. His basic training was at Fort Meade, MD, where his role was listed as “conductor.”

N.C.’s regiment was shipped to France on June 15, 1918, for additional training under the French military. The regiment fought a battle near Binarville, France in September 1918 and suffered heavy casualties. After the November 11th Armistice, the regiment remained in France until February 1919 when it returned to the U.S. The regiment was then demobilized on March 7 in New York City.

Davis composed “Trombone Française” (1921) as a tribute to his wartime service in France. His various trombone smears were published by either C. G. Conn, Carl Fischer, or his own company. In 1920, Davis joined the Annex Band at Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, playing under the leadership of Perry George “P.G.” Lowery. His composition “Mr. Trombonology” was a featured work with the sideshow band’s performances. In the circus street parades, it was a crowd favorite.

Davis composed many other tunes, some with lyrics by his wife or brother Otis. A 1920 trade ad lists three songs available from N.C. Davis Music Publishing: “Somebody’s Got My Man” (lyric by Miss L.P. Stratton), “I Know Now Who’s Got My Man” (lyric by Miss E. Davis), and “The Man You’ve Got Is the Man You Stole from Me” (lyric by O.B. Davis.) Other tunes were “Early Mornin’ Blues” (lyric by Otis B. Davis), “Ah, Keep the Pearl,” “Our Lady of Liberty,” “You Make Me Dare to Never Care,” and “Guess Who.”

Davis married Edith Rose Bonner (1902-1983) on December 6, 1926. They had one son, Warren George Davis, born November 27, 1927. At the time, N.C. was an executive with the Tennessee Colored State Fair Association as well as continuing as a music teacher. The marriage was short-lived.

At the time of his WWII Draft Registration, the 53-year-old Nathaniel C. Davis was living in Los Angeles, self-employed as a Director of Music and with a Hollywood mailing address. He died December 19, 1972, at age 84 and is buried at South View Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia.

1st & 2d Trombones

Mr. Trombonology

A Characteristic Trombone Smear

N. C. DAVIS

Allegro

Pub. by N.C. Davis, Nashville, Tenn.

You will sure like this one

GUESS WHO?

SONG--A deep study in Love-ol-o-gy

On sale at all Music stores. Complete copy, words and Music 25c. By mail 30c. Send 2 cent stamp for sample sheet

N. C. DAVIS MUSIC CO., P. O. BOX 52, NASHVILLE, TENN.
MUSIC DEALERS v RITEFOR TERMS

March 1, 1918 Nashville Globe

GUESS WHO--Song. 10c will bring you this poem. Send your order or ask your dealer. N. C. DAVIS MUSIC COMPANY, Box 52, Nashville, Tenn.

March 22, 1918 Nashville Tennessean

GET 'Early Mornin' Blues.' Vocal style song roll 12808. Price \$1, mail \$1.07. C. O. D. \$1.14. N. C. DAVIS MUSIC. Phone M. 5755.

July 16, 1924 Nashville Tennessean

