

Nathaniel Cleophas Davis (1888-1972)

African American trombonist, composer, and band leader **Nathaniel Cleophas Davis** (also known as Nathan Davis) was born in Tennessee on August 14, 1888. By 1908, he had moved to Nashville where he directed the band at the Tennessee School for the Blind. Along with his brothers, Otis B. and Clarence M. Davis, he established a music publishing business and a music school, variously known as the Traveling Conservatory of Music and the Davis Band and Orchestra School. He described himself as a self-employed band organizer and school teacher on his military service registration card, completed on June 4, 1917. Among his musical compositions were five trombone features for band in ragtime style which included **Oh, Slip It Man** (1916), **Mr. Trombonology** (1917) and **Miss Trombonism** (1918). He served as a musician with the U. S. Army's 368th Infantry Regiment, part of the 92nd Infantry Division, during World War I. He began basic training at Fort Meade, Maryland and the Regiment was shipped to France on June 7, 1918 where it trained under French military leaders. Comprised of black enlisted men and junior officers, the 368th's regimental and divisional officers were all white. The 368th suffered heavy casualties in September, 1918, in a battle near Binarville, France, shortly before the Armistice on November 11, 1918. The Regiment was shipped back to the United States in February, 1919 where it was demobilized in New York City on March 7, 1919.

Upon returning from France, Nathaniel Davis continued writing ragtime trombone features including **Master Trombone** (1919) and a tribute to his wartime service in France, **Trombone Francais** (1921). His trombone features were published by his own company as well as C. G. Conn and Carl Fischer. In 1920, Nathaniel Davis began playing with P. G. Lowery's Band which was the first all-black band to play for the Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey's Circus sideshows. His composition, **Mr. Trombonology**, was a featured work in the band's performances. Davis married Edith Rose Bonner in December, 1926 and in 1949, he wrote music to a song, **Our Lady of Liberty**, with lyrics by Bernice Stokes; it was published by W. E. Goldsberry & Co., Los Angeles.

Nathaniel Davis died in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 19, 1972 at the age of 84 and is buried in South View Cemetery, Atlanta.

Douglas Yeo
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Oh Slip It Man

Score

1916

Trombone Novelty

Nathaniel C. Davis
Arranged by Aaron Hettinga

The score is for Trombone and Piano in 2/4 time, marked "Not too fast" with a tempo of quarter note = 92. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The piece consists of 18 measures. The Trombone part features a melodic line with triplets and slurs, starting with a *ff* dynamic and moving to *mf*. The Piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and moving bass lines, alternating between *f* and *mf* dynamics. Measure numbers 6, 12, and 18 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The score includes first and second endings for the final two measures.

Mr. Trombonology

1917

A Characteristic Trombone Smear
The Son of "Oh Slip It Man"

Nathaniel C. Davis
Arranged by Aaron Hettinga

Allegro

Trombone

Piano

ff

5

f

11

5

17

1. 2.

Master Trombone

1919

Another Characteristic Trombone Smear

Nathaniel C. Davis
Arranged by Aaron Hettinga

Tempo di Rag

Trombone

Piano

7

14

21

ff, *mf*, *f*

Score

Trombone Francais

1921
Trombone Novelty

Nathaniel C. Davis
Arranged by Aaron Hettinga

Tempo di Rag $\text{♩} = 88$

Trombone

Piano

6

12

ff *ff* *f* *mf* *mf* *f* *ff* *f* *f* *mf* *mf* *ff* *mf*

rit. *rit.*