

THE RECORDINGS OF ESSIE WHITMAN

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

WHITMAN, Essie, singer

b: Lawrence, Kansas, prob. In 1880s, d: Chicago, c. 1962-64

One of the famous Whitman Sisters, daughters of Rev. Albery A. Whitman.

Mabel (oldest), singer/manager, d. 1942; Essie, singer, "*a real coon shouter*"; Alberta (Bert), dancer, male impersonator, d. pre 1964; Alice (Baby Alice), b. c.1900, marries 1919, dancer.

Started in Vaudeville in Kansas City c. 1904, active until c. 1943. (See Stearns and Stearns, Jazz Dance). Had own band and accompanying acts, kept up with latest developments, served as a strict training ground for many later talents.

Essie Whitman made one recording, with a probable FH group (2 titles, c. Oct/21), although Garvin Bushell seems to remember making records with her for (he thought) the red Gennett label. The Black Swan record shows an older woman with a powerful voice, in what must be a pre-blues vaudeville style – a unique document, and not a bad record, too! (Walter C. Allen, Hendersonia)

This personnel-discography is based on RUST, JAZZ AND RAGTIME RECORDS 1897 - 1942.

Personnel are taken from this source, but modified in the light of earlier or subsequent research or on the strength of my own listening, discussed with our listening group or other interested collectors.

- Documented, most certain and aurally absolutely obvious identifications are listed thus: **Essie Whitman**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Essie Whitman*
- Not attributable identifications – although the musician in question might be an otherwise well-known person – are listed thus: unknown
- If a possible identification for an otherwise unknown musician is suggested by the author without the possibility to prove the factual evidence, it is listed thus: (*Essie Whitman*)

When feeling certain without a musician's documented presence, I have not refrained from altering Rust's statements without using italics. In any case, my statements are open to discussion and I would appreciate any contribution - pro or contra!

As always in my discographies on this website I have written recording sessions with their headings, dates, titles and names of musicians in italics, whenever I am convinced that the eponymous musician of this discography is not part of the accompanying group of this session! Documented names of musicians if known – in recording ledgers or on record labels – are listed in bold letters.

This discography still is - and will certainly be - a work in progress for a long time, if not eternally. Yet, on the way to a definite discography of all jazz recordings before 1942 - which certainly will never be possible - it is intended to fill some gaps that have not been treated before.

ESSIE WHITMAN

001 **ESSIE WHITMAN** her Jazz Masters

New York,

c. Oct. 1921

Essie Whitman – voc;

Gus Aiken – tpt; *Bud Aiken* – tbn;

Garvin Bushell – clt; Joe Elder – ten; Charlie Jackson – vln;

Fletcher Henderson – pno; John Mitchell - bjo

P-155-1 Sweet Daddy, It's You I Love

BS 2036,

Document DOCD-5342

P-156-2 If You Don't Believe I Love You

BS 2036,

Document DOCD-5342

P-156-3 If You Don't Believe I Love You

BS 2036,

Document DOCD-5342

The recording date given in Rust*6 and BGR*4 is October 1921, but as the recording date of the Ethel Water's (sic) Jazz Masters 'Bugle Blues' session is c. November 1921 (Hendersonia) or c. September 1921 (BGR), this session should yet be seen in close temporal relation. This is the only known recording of singer Essie Whitman. As Walter C. Allen writes: "The Black Swan record shows an older woman with a powerful voice, in what must be a pre-blues vaudeville style – a unique document, and not a bad record, too!" W.C. Allen in 'Hendersonia': "*Garvin Bushell recalled recording behind Essie Whitman for, he thought, the 'red Gennett' label in New York, but no such date can be found in the Gennett matrix ledgers for New York at the period of the red-label 3000 series, so it is possible he may have meant this date. The band is 'hot', by Black Swan standards. The personnel is based on aural identification and comparison with the 'Bugle Blues' date (Ethel Water's Jazz Masters, New York, c. November 1921 – KBR). Essie Whitman (to John Steiner) said that she was accompanied here by a W.C. Handy band.*"

The trumpet player here in part is a Johnny Dunn disciple (see coda of last title), but his personal style is dominated by legato playing and he plays horizontal lines which may be proof of Gus Aiken's presence. Ad-lib trombone playing is musical and harmonic and might well be Bud Aiken. There is prominent Garvin Bushell in his - for this time - customary "Larry Shields" style. Joe Elder on tenor sax can only be suspected, while the violin plays above and parallel to the singer. Also, the banjo can only be recognized when its player stops strumming in the second (instrumental) chorus middle-break.

Notes:

- BGR*2, *3, *4: prob Gus Aiken, tpt; Bud Aiken, tbn; Garvin Bushell, clt; Joe Elder, clt, ten; Charlie Jackson, vln; Fletcher Henderson, pno; poss John Mitchell, bjo

- Rust*3: ?Gus Aiken -t; Bud Aiken -tb; Garvin Bushell -cl; Joe Elder -cl -ts; Charlie Jackson -vn; Fletcher Henderson -p; ?John Mitchell -bj

- Rust*4: probably: Gus Aiken -t; Bud Aiken -tb; Garvin Bushell -cl; Joe Elder -cl -ts; Charlie Jackson -vn; Fletcher Henderson -p; unknown, bj

- Rust*6: prob Gus Aiken, t; Bud Aiken, tb; Garvin Bushell, cl; Joe Elder, cl, ts; Charlie Jackson, vn; Fletcher Henderson, p; unknown, bj

- W.C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p.36: probably: Gus Aiken, cornet; Bud Aiken, trombone; Garvin Bushell, clarinet; poss Joe Elder, clarinet and tenor sax; Charlie Jackson, violin; Fletcher Henderson, piano; possibly a banjo also present.

- Bushell, Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*: (probable personnel): Gus Aiken, c; Bud Aiken, tb; Garvin Bushell, cl; Joe Elder, cl, ts; Charlie Jackson, vn; Fletcher Henderson, p (No further comment on this date, nor on Essie Whitman)

Discernible differences of takes:

P-156-2: Coda: tpt plays a sequence of 6 eighth notes and 3 triplets, then 2 eighth notes and 1 sustained final note; bars 15/16 of instrumental chorus (last chorus): E. Whitman shouts "Oh, little me!" on the beat

P-156-3: Coda: tpt plays a sequence 1 triplet, 1 quarter note and 3 triplets, then 3 eighth notes and 1 sustained final note; bars 15/16 of instrumental chorus (last chorus): E. Whitman shouts "Oh, little me!" retarded (off beat)