

THE RECORDINGS OF EDGAR DOWELL

A late appreciation of a little-known pianist and composer

By K.-B. Rau

In the early days of 'Storyville Magazine', author John R.T. Davies tells us about Baltimore pianist Eubie Blake: "*Just when everything was running along fine (for young Eubie – KBR), the scene was shattered by the appearance of Edgar Dowell from another part of Baltimore who pianistically wiped Eubie off the map, and stole his thunder with the girls. ... Blake and Dowell were soon playing in the local sporting houses.*" This 'shattering' incident must have had happened at the very end of the nineteenth century, and show that Mr. Dowell was a close contemporary of Eubie Blake and other early exponents of ragtime music and jazz.

Garvin Bushell in his 'Jazz from the Beginning' lets us know that: "*Baltimore had a great variety of jazz and many excellent performers. They came to New York in droves, and a large proportion of the significant figures in early New York jazz turn out to have come from Baltimore or nearby. Besides Eubie Blake and Edgar Dowell, whom I've mentioned earlier, there was Bobby Lee, piano; John Mitchell, banjo; Percy Glascoe, clarinet; and Pike Davis, trumpet. Later Chick Webb came out of Baltimore.*" And: "*An important piano influence came out of Baltimore. Players like Eubie Blake, Madison Reed, and Edgar Dowell were early exponents of ragtime who came to New York. They played modified ragtime – technically and musically more complex than what Joplin had done.*"

Very few personal details are known of Edgar Dowell or may be drawn from accessible sources. Only Garvin Bushell tells us something about Dowell's piano style. Luckily, Dowell's name seems to have been documented on a couple of Vocalion recordings, so that we have some reliable impression of the way he played. Also, he appears as bandleader on a very fine recording session by vaudeville singer Julia Moody in 1925 on the Columbia label. Yet, his most important appearance in the musical life of the 20s occurs in the field of composing. Clarence Williams employed him in his Clarence Williams Music Publishing Company as a 'salesman', or even as a 'professional director', in which occupation he had to handle a case on the rights of 'West Indies Blues' (Billboard, December 19, 1925, p. 8)). In any case, Dowell had more than 50 own compositions published by the Clarence Williams organisation, and an unknown number of tunes published elsewhere, among them such well-known popular jazz titles as 'That Da Da Strain', 'Of All The Wrongs You've Done To Me', 'Broken Busted Blues', and 'Yes! Suh!' From recollections of other musicians of the 1920s we may assume that Edgar Dowell was busy in the Harlem club life as a musician, also as a bandleader in lesser-known clubs, unfortunately too small and un-important to be a part of the celebrated Harlem night-life. This now is an attempt to find out about Mr. Edgar Dowell's recordings, his musician colleagues, and his pianistic style.

Dowell's style as recorded might be characterised as modernised and moderated ragtime, blended with contemporary harmonic and rhythmic devices. His ragtime playing is not as brawny as Willie Gant's (see N&N 101) and even less so than that of Scott Joplin and colleagues of early ragtime days. Instead, it is smooth and pleasant, well-structured, and shows a great deal of musical beauty. In the time-span observed here, Dowell recognisably develops from a ragtime-determined pianist into a more modern and more Stride oriented player. Unlike the Harlem Stride players, he used a reticent left-hand rhythm interacting dependently with his right-hand melodic material – quite in contrast to the heavy "oom-pah" of the New York Stride players. In his 1925 sessions, his left-hand rhythm could be called a modest 'Stride'. Here he plays with a soft left-hand rhythm, frequently using double-time passages to achieve cross-rhythms.

001 EVA TAYLOR

Eva Taylor – voc;
unknown – tpt; unknown – clt; Willie Lewis – alt;
Edgar Dowell – pno

New York, c. Sep. 1922

New Moon

BS 2103, Doc DOCD-5408

Composer credits are: (Williams)

The pianist's playing is strictly chordal and accompanying. Clarence Williams' well-known piano style cannot be heard here, and considering Willie Lewis' recollections (RR 65, Dec. 1964, below) it seems quite reasonable to suggest Edgar Dowell on piano. The pianistics heard are played with both hands dependently – as heard on Dowell's later recordings.

There certainly is nothing in the trumpeter's playing that reminds – if only fairly – of Johnny Dunn! This trumpet player comes from the Southern/Chicago kind of trumpet players. Because of this I would also deny Gus Aiken's presence as assumed below! I hear traces of people like Natty Dominique. Jörg Kuhfuss thinks this trumpet player to be the same as on sessions 002 and 003 below, but cannot attribute a name.

The clarinetist does not sound like Bushell at the time as we know him. This clarinetist plays a no-nonsense clarinet obligato, not the ubiquitous screeching and piping practiced in New York at the time, and might also come from Chicago or from the South.

The alto saxophonist most entirely plays a pre-set straight rendering of a harmonic second part to the melody and might thus well be the 17-years-old newcomer Willie Lewis (later of Sam Wooding fame), of whose improvisational abilities and style at this time we have no knowledge.

Notes:

- Record Research 65, 1964: Willie Lewis of Sam Wooding European fame, reported by Hal Flakser, Brooklyn, N.Y.: "*In a recent interview with veteran reedman Willie Lewis, Mr. Flakser has learned that Willie Lewis recalled recording with Clarence Williams, Eva Taylor and Edgar Dowell. He further mentioned Okeh and Black Swan as possible labels. Research!!*"

- Storyville 13: unknown (tpt); unknown (clt); unknown (alt); poss Clarence Williams (pno)

- Storyville 15-22: "*Eva Taylor: Johnny Dunn was on a lot of our records. Now I come to think of it I think he was the cornet man on that first record I did. (Brian Rust has since acquired a tape copy of the disc and confirms that Dunn is probable).*"

- Lord, Clarence Williams p23: "*Identified on the label as piano accompaniment, it actually includes trumpet, clarinet, alto and piano. Eva has suggested Johnny Dunn on trumpet. Len Kunstadt suggests Gus Aiken and Garvin Bushell (clt). The piano is possibly Clarence Williams. If this is true it is his first appearance as pianist on record. The pianist's role is primarily chordal accompaniment. Of possible significance is the fact that "Willie Lewis recalled recording with Clarence Williams, Eva Taylor and Edgar Dowell. He further mentioned Okeh and Black Swan as possible labels" (RR 65, Dec. 1964). The estimation of the date is from Rust.*"

- BGR*2,*3,*4: acc. poss Johnny Dunn, c; poss Garvin Bushell, cl; unknown, as; poss Clarence Williams, p.
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: acc by ?Johnny Dunn -c; ?Garvin Bushell -cl; unknown -as; ?Clarence Williams -p. "The label states merely "Piano Acc."

002 **IRENE GIBBONS AND JAZZ BAND** New York, Dec. 05, 1922
 Eva Taylor – voc;
 unknown – tpt; Charlie Irvis – tbn;
 (Ernest Elliott?) – clt; unknown – alt;
 (Edgar Dowell?) or (Clarence Williams?) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; unknown – dms
 80723-4 My Pillow And Me Col A-3922, Doc DOCD-5408
 80724-3 That Da Da Strain Col unissued not on LP/CD
 Composer credits are: 80723 (Brymn, Smith and Williams)

The pianist on this session plays a very restrained accompaniment playing a straight two-hand four-four beat without a left-hand bass. This is very different to Clarence Williams' assumed accompaniment to Eva Taylor's second Columbia recording session of November 25, 1922 – also under the 'Irene Gibbons' banner.

The trumpet player plays straight melody throughout and might be anyone. (J. Kuhfuss hears the same trumpet player as on 'New Moon' of session 001 above – and I agree.) Charlie Irvis is positively on trombone, and very beautiful. The clarinet player plays quarter and eighth notes only, shown as a characteristic of Elliott's style. In the middle break of the last chorus, we hear the first four notes played in pitch and then the next two (or four) notes played with slight downward slides, typical for Elliott's playing. But his smears and slurs are not there. Instead, the clarinet plays well pitched phrases unlike Elliott. So, the playing heard here is only slightly fitting and compatible with Elliott's documented style and his assumed presence. Alto sax is playing simple melody behind Eva Taylor and might be anyone.

Tom Lord, 'Clarence Williams', comments the two Irene Gibbons Columbia sessions thus: "Clarence and Eva try their luck with Columbia. In order to protect their standing with Okeh, Clarence appears anonymously with the Jazz Band (did he really? – KBR), and Eva uses her maiden name, Irene Gibbons."

Notes:

- Storyville 13: prob Thomas Morris (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo); unknown (woodblocks)

- BGR*2,*3,*4: prob Tom Morris, cnt; Charlie Irvis, tbn; Ernest Elliott, clt, alt; Clarence Williams, pno; Buddy Christian, bjo; unknown - dms . (BGR*4 lists both titles as unissued. The issued ones are dated early January 1924.)

- Rust*3,*4,*6: ? Tom Morris – c; Charlie Irvis – tb; Ernest Elliott – cl, as; Clarence Williams – p; Buddy Christian – bj; unknown - d - T. Lord, Clarence Williams p27: prob Thomas Morris – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; Ernest Elliott - clt; Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; unknown – woodblocks. "TKD lists: Elmer Chambers or Charlie Gaines – tpt; Irvis – tbn; Don Redman – clt; Williams, Christian and unknown – dms. Goldman lists Th. Morris, Irvis, and Sidney Bechet – clt."

003 **IRENE GIBBONS AND JAZZ BAND** New York, Jan. 06, 1923
 Eva Taylor – voc;
 unknown - tpt; (Charlie Irvis?) – tbn; (Julian Baugh?) – clt;
 (Edgar Dowell) – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; unknown – dms
 80724-6 That Da Da Strain Col A-3834, Doc DOCD-5408
 Composer credits are: 80724 (Edgar Dowell – Mamie Medina)

Piano playing is close to that on session 001 above (Eva Taylor, 'New Moon'), and might therefore well be Edgar Dowell again, whose composition is played here! (It should be noted that 'Mamie Medina' was a pseudonym for Edgar Dowell.) Clarence Williams' presence on piano is strongly doubted as the style heard is not his.

The trumpet player shows some J. Dunn influence, but he plays rather insecurely and his identity must remain unknown. On trombone Irvis' characteristics cannot be recognized, and this player plays very restricted, other than Irvis on the session before. He also has to remain unknown. Clarinet here is smoother than Elliott. (Elliott tended to play trumpet parts, obviously derived from his practice of earlier years (Detroit 1919), where he played lead with Hank Duncan's Kentucky Serenaders.) This clarinet player here plays a clarinet part, in his solo passages going back into second harmony when joining the ensemble again at the appropriate places. This is not Elliott's style. Therefore, very probably not Elliott. BGRs (Godrich, Dixon, Rye) list Clarence Robinson as a possibility, of whom we now know that he was not an instrumentalist but dancer. Thanks to Bo Lindström's research we also know now that the recordings formerly attributed to this Mr. Robinson may well be the work of clarinetist Julian Baugh, who is documented as part of Ethel Waters' accompaniment of this time. I do not hear an alto saxophone as listed. The banjo is strong and could well be Christian, again.

The presence of a drummer on woodblocks – just as on the session before – is astonishing because Clarence did not hire drummers until much later in his recording career. Might this be an indication that Clarence was not responsible for compiling the accompaniment?

Notes:

- Storyville 13: prob Thomas Morris (cnt); Charlie Irvis (tbn); Ernest Elliott (clt); Clarence Williams (pno); Buddy Christian (bjo); unknown (woodblocks)

- BGR*2,*3,*4: prob Tom Morris – c; Charlie Irvis – tb; poss Clarence Robinson - cl; Clarence Williams – p; Buddy Christian – bj; unknown - d . (BGR*4 lists this as a remake session for both titles of early December 1923. Accordingly, 80723-4 or -6 might also stem from this session.)

- Rust*3,*4,*6: ? Tom Morris – c; Charlie Irvis – tb; Ernest Elliott - cl, as; Clarence Williams – p; Buddy Christian – bj; unknown - d - T. Lord, Clarence Williams p27: prob Thomas Morris – cnt; Charlie Irvis – tbn; poss Clarence Robinson or Ernest Elliott - clt; Clarence Williams – pno; Buddy Christian – bjo; unknown – woodblocks. "Rust *3 says that Clarence Robinson may replace Elliott on clarinet. Rust's source for this is Walter C. Allen, who in his definitive 'Hendersonia' discusses the clarinet on Ethel Waters' 'That Da Da Strain' (Black Swan 14120-A) and states that the clarinetist plays the same ensemble part as on this record by Irene Gibbons."

004 **VIOLA McCOY** New York, Apr. 14, 1924
 Viola McCoy – voc;
 Edgar Dowell – pno; Robert Cooksey – har (1); Elmer Snowden – bjo (1)
 13007 West Indies Blues Voc 14801, Document DOCD-5417
 13012 It Makes No Difference Now Voc 14801, Document DOCD-5417

We hear pianist Edgar Dowell here as documented (?) on the record label, but close to the Harlem school here, a convincing musician. The harmonica player sounds very primitive in his playing. It certainly is Elmer Snowden on banjo regarding his style and the sound of the banjo, but he is not listed on the record label and thus not documented.

This – yet – probably is Elmer Snowden's first recalled record. (Les Muscutt, 'Discovering Elmer', Storyville 18: "As far as I can remember, before we started making records so fast, was the first one we made – or the first one that was put out, I'll put it that way, 'cause I'd made some before and they wasn't put out as far as I know. Now this first one was a test record, and they said if anything came of it we would get the chance to make some recordings for this company, which was Vocalion. So I thought OK, and we had a harmonica player, and this man was playing the piano and I was playing banjo, and we had a woman singer named Viola McCoy who had made many records. So we go into the studio and we cut two sides. Then when we were finished we don't get paid, he said, 'Now this is a test, if they like it you got a chance to make some recordings.' So about a month later I'm walking out one afternoon and looking at a record store and I see this record Brand new record that's just come out: Viola McCoy. So I looked at it and I saw my name on it, so I go inside to hear it, and that was it, they'd put it out, but we didn't get paid for it, that was supposed to have been the test record."

Notes:

- BGR*2: Edgar Dowell, pno; prob Robert Cooksey, hca; Elmer Snowden, bjo (1)
- BGR*3: Edgar Dowell, p; Robert Cooksey, h (1); Elmer Snowden, bj (1)
- BGR*4: unknown, h (1); Edgar Dowell, p; Elmer Snowden, bj (1)
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Edgar Dowell – pno; ? Robert Cooksey – har (1); Elmer Snowden – bjo (1)

005	VIOLA McCOY		New York,	May 02, 1924
	Viola McCoy – voc, kazoo;			
	Edgar Dowell – pno; Elmer Snowden – bjo (3)			
13147	I Don't Want Nobody That Don't Want Me	Voc 14818,	Document DOCD-5417	
13150	Mamma, Mamma (Don't Love Her Papa No More)	Voc 14818,	Document DOCD-5417	
	Stop It, Joe	Br unissued	not on LP/CD	

Very good and convincing piano here by Edgar Dowell again, although a bit "ragtime-ly" stiff. The first two titles are not listed in Rust. The third title is unissued and could thus not be checked. Thus, we only have a chance to hear Miss McCoy's virtuosity on her kazoo for a mere twenty bars!

Notes:

- BGR*2,*3,*4: own kazoo; Edgar Dowell, p; prob Elmer Snowden, bj.
- Rust*3: own kazoo(3); Edgar Dowell, p (3); Elmer Snowden, bj (3).
- Rust*4,*6: Vocalion 14818 not listed! Own kazoo (3); Edgar Dowell, p (3); Elmer Snowden, bj (3).

006	ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	May 20, 1924
	Rosa Henderson – voc;			
	Edgar Dowell – pno; unknown – tom tom (2); unknown – ship horn (1)			
13219	Black Star Line (A West Indies Chant)	Voc 14825,	Document DOCD-5402	
13223	Barbadoes Blues	Voc 14825,	Document DOCD-5402	

Edgar Dowell as accompanist is noted on the label, therefore no reason to assume anybody else. This is a convincing performance by Edgar Dowell, well-known pianist of the early Baltimore scene, but busy also in Harlem. In 'Barbados Blues' somebody hits a tom-tom in a distinct musical way, even using cross-rhythms, obviously referring to Caribbean music.

Notes:

- Delaunay: not listed
- Jazz Directory Vol.4: Fletcher Henderson –p
- BGR*2,*3,*4: Edgar Dowell –p; unknown effects (2)
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Edgar Dowell –p

007	ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	May 23, 1924
	Rosa Henderson – voc;			
	Edgar Dowell – pno			
13237	Chicago Monkey Man Blues	Voc 14832,	Document DOCD-5402	

Edgar Dowell documented as accompanist as before. Again, expert accompaniment in ragtime/early stride style by a musician, whose recording career was regrettably limited from 1924 to 1926.

Notes:

- Delaunay: not listed
- BGR*2,*3,*4: Edgar Dowell –p
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Edgar Dowell –p

008	ROSA HENDERSON		New York,	Jul. 1924
	Rosa Henderson – voc;			
	Edgar Dowell – pno			
5555-1	Barrel House Blues	Ban 1394,	Document DOCD-5402	

And again, a tasteful and very musically blues accompaniment in ragtime, and thus necessarily a bit stiff. There, yet, are some short blues/boogie-woogie sounds in the third to fifth choruses.

Notes:

- RR 86-6: not listed
- BGR*2,*3,*4: Edgar Dowell, pno
- Rust*3,*4,*6: Edgar Dowell, pno

009 **KITTY BROWN**

Kitty Brown – voc; Billy Higgins – voc (3,4);
Rex Stewart – cnt (2,3,4); (Cecil Benjamin?) – clt;
(John Montague?) – pno

New York, c. Sep. 29, 1924

5653-3	Family Skeleton Blues	Ban 1436,	Document DOCD-5507
5654-3	I Wanna Jazz Some More	Ban 1437,	Document DOCD-5507
5655-3	Keep On Going	Ban 1452,	Document DOCD-5507
5656-3	One Of These Days	Ban 1436,	Document DOCD-5507

In the light of my suggestions discussed in my article 'A Case of a Misunderstood Novice – Part 2' (see N&N 85) I doubt Thomas Morris', Bob Fuller's and Louis Hooper's presences here, and propose the possibility of members of John Montague's band: Rex Stewart - cnt, Cecil Benjamin – clt, and John Montague – pno. There is nothing heard on these sides of the styles of any musician hitherto listed. Thus, no Edgar Dowell here.

Notes:

- RR 77-9: Thomas Morris, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p
- BGR*2,*3,*4: Tom Morris, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Louis Hooper, p.
- Rust*3,*4: ?Edgar Dowell -p, with ?Bubber Miley -c; Bob Fuller -cl; Jazz Casper -v
- Rust*6: ? Bubber Miley, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Edgar Dowell, p; Jazz Casper, v.
- Scherman, Eriksson, Anderby, Wallen, Bubber Miley Discography: prob Bubber Miley (tp), Bob Fuller, (cl); Louis Hooper, (p). "Dixon-Godrich have Thomas Morris on trumpet, Rust has ?Miley. To us, it doesn't sound at all like Morris but more like Miley"

010 **HARLEM TRIO**

George McClennon – clt, bcl;
(Edgar Dowell) – pno; unknown – bjo

New York, Sep. 30, 1924

72863-B	Muddy Water Blues	OK 40220,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8022
72864-B	I Ain't Gonna Blame It On The Blues	OK 40220,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8022

Composer credits are: 72863 (Geo. McClennon); 72864 (Geo. McClennon)

We hear a pianist here different from the two fore-going 'Harlem Trio' sessions. These sides may well include Eddie Heywood in their personnel. But here, we find a pianist playing a moderate ragtime/stride style, very similar to the player on the subsequent session. Accordingly, he might be Edgar Dowell, as assumed in the next session, below. My assumptions re Edgar Dowell are based on the fact that Dowell is named as pianist for the subsequent session in Record Research 66, and the deduction from being composer of both titles of this session – and stylistically in contrast to Eddie Heywood on the first 'Harlem Trio' sides (c. July 16, 1924). As the composer credits on the labels of the next session's titles name Edgar Dowell, I am inclined to believe this pianist to be present here as well. And: pianistics might well be his!

The banjo player plays very functionally without being discernible.

Rust*6 lists Eddie Heywood for all Harlem Trio sides!

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, Jazz Directory, Vol. 4: George McClenman (clt; unknown (p); unknown (bj)
- Rust*2,*3: George McClennon (clt); Eddie Heywood ? (pno); unknown (bjo)
- Rust*4,*6: George McClennon -cl; Eddie Heywood -p; unknown -bj

011 **HARLEM TRIO**

George McClennon – clt, bcl;
(Edgar Dowell) – pno; unknown – bjo

New York, Oct. 18, 1924

72922-A	Bass Clarinet Blues	OK 8189,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8022
72923-B	Meddlin' With The Blues	OK 8189,	Jazz Oracle BDW 8022

Composer credits are: 72922 (Geo. McClennon – Edgar Dowell); 72923 (J. Edgar Dowell)

As before, we hear a pianist different from the first and second 'Harlem Trio' sessions (April 1923, July 16, 1924). Here, we find a player using continued eighth rhythm in the right hand, almost entirely during the first title, and probably by request of - and adjusted to - Mr. McClennon's special needs – and different from his usual style of performing. He uses this same device occasionally in the second title, but is more in his usual style here, which certainly is corresponding to Edgar Dowell's ragtime style.

As the composer credits on the labels name Edgar Dowell, I am inclined to believe this pianist to be present. Record Research 66, by the way, names Dowell for this session, but this seems not to have found its way into the discographies!

Quite contrary to Laurie Wright's observations as published in 'Storyville' 152-80 and 'Storyville' 153-120 re Mr. McClennon's sound on his bass-clarinet on the first title of this session, I have to state that I do hear the usual sound only of this special instrument, and not an additional clarinet played simultaneously with the bass-clarinet. Mr. McClennon might well have been able to play three clarinets simultaneously handling them with both hands in a horizontal position, but he would not be able to use this same manner to play a clarinet and a bass-clarinet together in this way, because of the very different lengths of these instruments and their difference of construction.

The banjo player again plays very functionally without being identifiable.

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, Jazz Directory, Vol. 4: George McClenman (clt; unknown (p); unknown (bj)
- Rust*2,*3: George McClennon (clt); Eddie Heywood ? (pno); unknown (bjo)
- Rust*4,*6: George McClennon -cl; Eddie Heywood -p; unknown -bj

012 **JULIA MOODY**

Julia Moody – voc;
Percy Glascoe – clt; Edgar Dowell – pno

New York, Jul. 10, 1925

140756-2	Strivin' Blues	Col 14087-D,	Document DOCD- 5418
140757-3	Last Night Blues	Col 14087-D,	Document DOCD- 5418

Composer credits are: 140756 (Edgar Dowell); 140757 (Edgar Dowell)

Miss Moody sings a remarkably beautiful style with full vocal power, fine vibrato and good feeling for jazz/blues.

Pianist Edgar Dowell accompanies in a modest pianistic style half-way between blues/boogie and Harlem stride. Very tasteful and elegant, yet un-obtrusive – and more in the Harlem Stride manner here than before. Here, again, we find this pianist’s manner of playing continued eighth rhythms, as before.

This is typical Percy Glascoe with his un-swinging and “freakish” trumpet-styled clarinet. He uses his clarinet as a comic instrument, very little only influenced by any classic jazz clarinet player, not even by Larry Shields of the ODJB.

Notes:

- *D. Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Percy Glascoe, clt; Edgar Dowell, p.*
- *BGR*2,*3,*4: Percy Glascoe, clt; Edgar Dowell, pno.*
- *Rust*3,*4,*6: Percy Glascoe –cl; Edgar Dowell -p.*

013 **JULIA MOODY** her Dixie Wobblers (1,4) / Edgar Dowell’s Chicago Waddlers (2,3) New York, Sep. 18, 1925
Julia Moody – voc;

Bobby Stark – tpt; Teddy Nixon – tbn;

Edgar Dowell – pno; James Thomas - bjo

140957-2 That Chicago Wiggle Col 14121-D, Document DOCD-5418

140958-1 Midnight Dan Col 14121-D, Document DOCD-5418

140959-1 Police Blues Col 14121-D, Document DOCD-5418

140960-2 He’ll Do You Wrong Col 14121-D, Document DOCD-5418

Composer credits are: 140957 (Dowell); 140958 (Edgar Dowell); 140959 (Mrs. Fannie Williams); 140960 (Dowell)

We hear the surprisingly competent but obviously much underrated pianist Edgar Dowell, much more in Harlem Stride style here than in ragtime as before.

There weren’t so many trumpet players in Harlem in 1925 with the brilliance, sheer instrumental power and exuberance as displayed on these sides. Only some six or seven names come to my mind. But here is a youngster unheard of before, un-correctly named as ‘Robert Starr’, and it seems he possesses potential to develop into one of the real greats of jazz trumpet later on. When listening to his instrumental technical fireworks, relations to the Dixie Stompers’ ‘Oh Baby’ of April 1928 become apparent, and it does not seem to be exaggerated to name this promising player Bobby Stark. Trombonist Ted Nixon as well as banjo player James Thomas are competent partners on these beautiful sides.

But although John Godrich in ‘Storyville’ 26-49 comments “Add unknown drums”, I would recommend not to because there definitely are none (see ‘Storyville’ 72-240/335)!

Notes:

- *D. Mahony, Columbia 13/14000-D Series: Edgar Dowell group: unknown tpt; unknown tbn; unknown p; unknown bj.*
- *BGR*2: acc by Her Dixie Wobblers (or Edgar Dowell’s Chicago Waddlers): poss Louis Metcalf, cnt; unknown - tbn; Edgar Dowell, pno; prob Elmer Snowden, bjo.*
- *BGR*3,*4: acc by Her Dixie Wobblers (1,4) / Edgar Dowell’s Chicago Waddlers(2,3): Robert Starr, c; Teddy Nixon, tb; Edgar Dowell, p; James Thomas, bj.*
- *Rust*3: acc by Her Dixie Wobblers (Col 14121-D) or Edgar Dowell’s Chicago Waddlers (Col 14103-D): ? Louis Metcalf - c; unknown - tb; Edgar Dowell - p; ?Elmer Snowden - bj.*
- *Rust*4,*6: acc by Her Dixie Wobblers (Col 14121-D) or Edgar Dowell’s Chicago Waddlers (Col 14103-D): Robert Starr, c; Teddy Nixon, tb; Edgar Dowell, p; James Thomas, bj.*
- *Storyville 2002-3, p.221: “Back in 1977, John Chilton and I were discussing Afterthought 335 in ‘Storyville’ 72 with particular reference to cornet player Robert Starr, named on the file cards for Julia Moody’s Columbia date of 18 September 1925. John had never heard of a musician of this name and wondered if it might be a misprint for Bobby Stark and mentioned that he had a copy of ‘The Needle’ from 1944 which had a short piece of Stark. Shortly afterwards he sent on a Xerox with a note saying “I think this makes him prime suspect for the session, I think.” His reason for saying so is that one paragraph notes that, “Bobby has recorded with Bessie and Clara Smith, with Monette Moore, Lucille Hegamin and other blues singers.” ‘Blues And Gospel Records’ now identifies him with Bessie Brown, but it might be worth having a close listen where there are other ‘unknown’ trumpet players, particularly with the artists mentioned.”*

014 **ROSA HENDERSON** Three Hot Eskimos New York, May 14, 1926

Rosa Henderson – voc;

Edwin Swayze – tpt; Bob Fuller or (Jack Butler?) – clt;

Cliff Jackson – pno

E-3050 Here Comes My Baby Voc 1021, Document DOCD-5403

E-3052 Chicago Policemen Blues Voc 1921, Document DOCD-5404

A couple of relevant Harlem trumpet players of the time have been named by the discos as you might see below. But in listening I recognized that not one of the listed players was present here. First, I suggested Louis Metcalf, following Rust. After comparing with earlier Metcalf sides, I missed his dropping the tone at the end of notes, and I opted for Rex Stewart. But further listening and Jörg Kuhfuss’ objections against the fore mentioned players made me search for other trumpet players who might have recorded for Vocalion in June 1926. As a pleasant surprise I found Edwin Swayze (sic) who was touring in the East with the show Bamville Dandies at this time. Comparison brought to light strong similarities stylistically, and I am convinced now that this trumpet player here is Edwin “King” Swayze. (Compare the Sammy Lewis OK 8285 and Sammy Lewis and his Bamville Syncopators Vocalions and The Levee Serenaders!) Swayze himself is remembered by colleagues as “a terrific trumpeter whose idol was King Oliver – not Louis as most of us were trying to sound like” (Arcadia 2008 cover text). For Swayze’s correct name see Storyville 78, p. 230.

Unfortunately, this result did not bear any hints as to the personality of the clarinet player with his very strong tone and rather hasty multi-toned phrasing. The way of playing made me think of a Caribbean musician as there were many of them living and playing in New York in these years, and I suggested Carmelo Jari as a possibility. Also, the erratic Arville Harris came to my mind. But to my next pleasant surprise it dawned on me that I heard the not-so-well esteemed Bob Fuller, who obviously had advanced and completed a remarkable development by this date. Comparison with the Three Jolly Miner sides verified my assumption. (But then, Fuller’s presence with the New Orleans Blue Five has to be sincerely doubted.) And still, we also have to consider Jack Butler’s reminiscences of playing clarinet before switching over to trumpet (see Storyville 78, p. 229, and my comment for session 012 below)

Cliff Jackson on piano with his steam-roller stride is absolutely certain! And there is no Edgar Dowell with his light ragtime/Stride style.

Notes:

- *Delaunay: possibly: Joe Smith (c), Buster Bailey (cl), Fletcher Henderson (p)*
- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown (cor); Jimmy O’Bryant (clt); unknown (pno).*

- RR 77-8: not listed.
 - BGR*2,*3: Tom Morris or Bubber Miley cnt; Bob Fuller, clt; prob Louis Hooper or poss Cliff Jackson, pno.
 - BGR*4: unknown, c; Bob Fuller, cl; prob Louis Hooper or poss Cliff Jackson, p.
 - Rust*3,*4,*6: Louis Metcalf, c; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson or Edgar Dowell, p.
 - VJM 177, Bob Hitchens, *The Choo Choo Jazzers*: "Rains hears Louis Metcalf. M. Berresford suggests Edgar Dowell and poss L. Metcalf. I considered Harry Tate as trumpet but this man is rather more prominent and confident. Sounds like L. Metcalf, Bob Fuller and Cliff Jackson to me. KBR (N&N77) notes that this tpt does not fall away in tone at the end of notes as Metcalf had done on earlier recordings. He suggests that Edwin Swayzee fits the bill. But we have not heard from L. Metcalf for 18 months during which time he has been active in Harlem. A young musician is bound to develop his style in these circumstances. In the absence of any reference to Swayzee's involvement from contemporary media or in personal reminiscences by those who were there, I see no reason revise this personnel. I do agree that the same trumpet is heard on Rosa's next two issued sessions and on that of c. January 1927 (by which time Swayzee was in the mid-west with Trent)."

015 ROSA HENDERSON	<i>the Four Black Diamonds</i>	New York,	Jun. 05, 1926
Rosa Henderson – voc;			
Edwin Swayze – tpt; Oscar Hammond – tbn; (Jack Butler) or (Bob Fuller) – clt;			
Cliff Jackson – pno			
E-3189 / 90	<i>Hock Shop Blues</i>	Voc unissued	not on LP/CD
E-3191	<i>I'm Savin' It All For You</i>	Voc unissued	not on LP/CD
E-3194	<i>Daddy, Come Back</i>	Voc 1025,	Document DOCD-5404
E-3196	<i>I've Got Somebody Now</i>	Voc 1025,	Document DOCD-5404

Here again, early Rusts and BGRs list Edgar Dowell as pianist, alternately to Cliff Jackson or Louis Hooper. There is no essential similarity of both these pianists! But neither is there any of Jackson and Dowell. Instead, we find a very beautiful, strong and distinct Cliff Jackson. Aurally, I recognize Swayzee again, as well as Bob Fuller on clarinet.

The rather unprofessional playing of the trombonist accords well with what can be heard from Oscar Hammond, trombonist of the Sammy Lewis Bamville Syncopators. And I think that he is the player. (The Bamville Syncopators' personnel of the time you might find in Storyville magazine Nos. 78, p. 229 and 162, p. 240, or in Franz Hoffmann's compilations of "Jazz Advertised".) Following Laurie Wright's article in Storyville 78, we might properly assume Jack Butler, second trumpeter of the Bamville Syncopators, on clarinet here, due to his own recollection that "he was first trained on clarinet and it seems possibly that he played it on the recordings, although he was not entirely certain ...".

Notes:

- *Jazz Directory Vol.4: unknown personnel*
 - RR 77-9: not listed.
 - BGR*2,*3: Louis Metcalf, cnt; Jake Frazier, tbn; Bob Fuller, clt; prob Louis Hooper or poss Cliff Jackson or Edgar Dowell, p.
 - BGR*4: unknown, c; unknown, cl; unknown, p.
 - Rust*3,*4: Louis Metcalf, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Bob Fuller, cl; Cliff Jackson, Louis Hooper or Edgar Dowell, p.
 - Rust*6: Louis Metcalf, c; Jake Frazier, tb; Cliff Jackson, p. Louis Hooper may be the pianist.

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