

THE RECORDINGS OF EDGAR DOWELL

An Annotated Tentative Personnel - Discography

DOWELL, Edgar, pianist

No personal details known

Composer/co-composer of popular jazz titles as 'That Da Da Strain', 'Of All The Wrongs You've Done To Me', 'Broken Busted Blues', 'Yes! Suh!'

See 'Sources' at the bottom for press items and book citations re Edgar Dowell.

STYLISTICS

Dowell's style might be characterised as modernised and moderated ragtime, blended with more modern harmonic and rhythmic devices. In the time-span observed here, Dowell recognisably develops from a ragtime-ruled pianist into a more modern and more Stride oriented player.

Unlike the Harlem Stride players, he uses a reticent left-hand rhythm interacting with his right-hand ragtime melodic material – quite in contrast to the heavy "oom -pah" of the New York Stride players. In 1925 sessions, his left-hand rhythm is more a modest 'Stride' than in 1924.

He plays with a soft left-hand rhythm and frequently uses double-time passages to achieve cross-rhythms.

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: **Edgar Dowell**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Edgar Dowell*
- 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: (*Edgar Dowell*)

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.

The following statements and the resulting list of recordings only reflect the opinion of this writer/listener and are open to discussion. More so, discussion is eagerly invited. Corrections, amendments and controversial opinions are much appreciated.

EDGAR DOWELL

001 **EVA TAYLOR**

Eva Taylor – voc;
unknown – tpt; unknown – clt; *Willie Lewis* – alt;
Edgar Dowell or (*Clarence Williams*) – pno

New Moon

Composer credit is: (*Williams*)

New York,

c. Sep. 1922

BS 2103,

Doc DOCD-5408

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

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 doubt Gus Aiken's presence! This very trumpet player is not a follower of Dunn's style, not at all. I hear traces of people like Natty Dominique. JK thinks this trumpet player to be the same as on sessions 002 and 003 below.

The clarinetist does not sound like Bushell of 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 the South.

The alto saxophonist only plays a straight rendering of the melody and might thus very well be Willie Lewis (later with Sam Wooding), of whose improvisational abilities and style I 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 concern 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;

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 trumpet player plays straight melody only throughout and might be anyone. He may even be early Miley, not Morris. (JK hears the same trumpet player as on 'New Moon' of session 001 above.)

Certainly, Irvis 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 melody behind Eva Taylor.

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 or (Clarence Williams?) – 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)

The trumpet player shows J. Dunn influence, but he plays rather insecure 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 a lead part like a trumpet player, obviously derived from his practice of earlier years (Detroit 1919), where he played lead in Hank Duncan's Kentucky Serenaders. This clarinet player here plays a clarinet part, in his solo passages going back into second harmony part when joining the ensemble again at the appropriate places. This is not Elliott's style.

Therefore, very probably not Elliott. I do not hear an alto saxophone.

Clarence Williams' presence on piano is doubted because the style heard is not his. Piano playing is close to that on session 001 above (Eva Taylor, New Moon), and might therefore well be Edgar Dowell, whose composition is played here!

The banjo is strong and could well be Christian.

Very interesting is the presence of a drummer on woodblocks – just as on the session before – because Clarence hired a drummer only later in his recording career. Might this be an indication that not Clarence was 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.”

001	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, a ragtime pianist of Baltimore origin (see “Sources” below), 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)

002	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

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. Unfortunately, we do not have a chance to hear Miss McCoy on her kazoo!

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).

003	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 noted on the label, therefore no reason to assume anybody else. This is a convincing performance of a well-known pianist of the early Baltimore scene, but little busy 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

004	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 noted on the label as accompanist, therefore no reason to assume anybody else. Again, expert accompaniment in ragtime/early stride style by a musician, whose recording career seems to have been limited from 1924 to 1926. He, yet, was a respected pianist in his hometown Baltimore (see Sources below).

Notes:

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

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Edgar Dowell -p

005 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 chorus.

Notes:

- RR 86-6: not listed

- Rust*3,*4,*6: Edgar Dowell, pno

- BGR*2,*3,*4: Edgar Dowell, pno

006 KITTY BROWN	New York,	c. Sep. 29, 1924
Kitty Brown – voc; Billy Higgins – voc (3,4);		
Rex Stewart – cnt (2,3,4); (Cecil Benjamin?) – clt;		
(John Montague?) – pno		
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 part 2 of my article 'A Case of a Misunderstood Novice' (see elsewhere on this website) 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 either musician hitherto listed. Thus, no Edgar Dowell here.

I do not hear Thomas Morris, who is named by Louis Hooper in RR 77, but a young Rex Stewart. Earlier on, I have attributed these sides to a "somewhat disguised Bubber Miley", and my listening companions shared the same opinion. Yet, there are no growls and few Johnny Dunn elements pointing to Miley, but frequent jumping trills. This trumpet player is much more assured than Morris and might well be Rex Stewart considering my recognitions of before. As well, this trumpet player does not seem to be Harry Smith of the Rosa Henderson session of this same date.

'A Case of a Misunderstood Novice – Part 2': "This trumpet player is much more assured than Morris as listed in BGR and might well be Rex Stewart, considering my previous identification. I do not hear Thomas Morris, who is named by Louis Hooper in RR 77 and my listening companions share the same opinion. Yet, there are no growls and few Johnny Dunn elements pointing to Miley, but the frequent jumping trills lead me to Rex Stewart. In the light of the recordings discussed in part 2 of this article I dare to doubt Bob Fuller's presence here and would like to propose that of Cecil Benjamin, clarinetist of the John Montague band (see Part 1 of this article in N&N 84). Fuller's fast vibrato can not be detected here and this player uses a more Western style. Louis Hooper is doubtful. Rust*6 lists Edgar Dowell."

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"

007 HARLEM TRIO	New York,	Sep. 30, 1924
George McClennon – clt, bcl;		
(Edgar Dowell) – pno; unknown – bjo		
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' sides. These earlier sides may well enclose 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 below (see next session below). My assumptions re Edgar Dowell are based on the fact that Dowell is named as pianist for the following session in Record Research 66, and the deduction from being composer of the next session's both titles – 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.

The banjo player again plays very functional without being discernible.

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

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, Jazz Directory, Vol. 4: George McClennon (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

008 HARLEM TRIO	New York,	Oct. 18, 1924
George McClennon – clt, bcl;		
(Edgar Dowell) – pno; unknown – bjo		
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)

Storyville 152-80: “Perhaps not surprisingly and contrary to Rust, the featured instrument on the Harlem Trio’s ‘Bass Clarinet Blues’ is bass clarinet. But there’s also an odd sound quality on this side which I think I can explain.”

Storyville 153-120: “No response at all on this one (above - KBR), so let me tell you what I (Laurie Wright – KBR) think. The label names George McClennon as the clarinet soloist and, like most collectors, I have thought of him only as the leader of a small band on the OKeh label and occasionally with others. It was only when delving through my newspaper files that I came across a short piece about him with a photograph which revealed that he was a vaudeville artist who specialised in trick clarinet work and a feature of his act was playing three clarinets simultaneously. Armed with this information, I would suggest that on ‘Bass Clarinet Blues’ he is playing a clarinet and a bass clarinet together, which accounts for the odd sound quality. The tune and range are very simple, but on the reverse side he is all over his instrument and the odd sound quality is absent.” Against L. Wright’s stated opinion, I feel unable to follow him, here.

We hear a pianist different from the first ‘Harlem Trio’ session, again. But here, we find a pianist playing continued eighth rhythm in the right hand, almost continually 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!

The banjo player again plays very functional without being discernible.

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

Notes:

- Carey, McCarthy, Jazz Directory, Vol. 4: George McClennon (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

009 **JULIA MOODY**

New York,

Jul. 10, 1925

Julia Moody – voc;

Percy Glascoe – clt; **Edgar Dowell** – pno

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.

This is typically Percy Glascoe with his un-swinging and “freakish” trumpet styled clarinet. He uses his clarinet as a comic instrument, not being influenced by any classic jazz clarinet players like Johnny Dodds or other swinging jazz reed players.

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.

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.

010 **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)

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 owns potential to develop into one the real greats of jazz trumpet further 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.

We hear a surprisingly competent but obviously underrated pianist in Edgar Dowell, much more in Harlem Stride style here than in ragtime as before. 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 commends “Add unknown drums”, I would recommend not to because there definitely are none (see also 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.”

011 ROSA HENDERSON	<i>Three Hot Eskimos</i>	New York,	May 14, 1926
<i>Rosa Henderson – voc;</i>			
<i>Edwin Swayze – tpt; Bob Fuller or (Jack Butler?) – clt;</i>			
<i>Cliff Jackson – pno</i>			
E-3050	<i>Here Comes My Baby</i>	Voc 1021,	Document DOCD-5403
E-3052	<i>Chicago Policemen Blues</i>	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 Joerg 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 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 at 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).”

012 ROSA HENDERSON	<i>the Four Black Diamonds</i>	New York,	Jun. 05, 1926
<i>Rosa Henderson – voc;</i>			
<i>Edwin Swayze – tpt; Oscar Hammond – tbn; (Jack Butler) or (Bob Fuller) – clt;</i>			
<i>Cliff Jackson – pno</i>			
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 Swayze 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, on 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.

Sources:

- M. Osteen & F.J. Graziano, (ed.), 'Music at the Crossroads, Lives & Legacies of Baltimore Jazz' do not even mention Edgar Dowell!
- Storyville 6, John R. T. Davies, Eubie Blake – Life and Times: “According to Eubie, “Hop” Johns was a fine piano player as well as cornetist, and as a speciality would play one tune with one hand and a second with the other, blending them into a very pleasing whole. Just when everything was running along fine, 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, Blake having been thrown out of school somewhat prematurely as a result of a frame-up perpetrated by one Willie Pemberton, and in spite of representations made to a local politician, Charles Smith, by Blake senior.”
- Storyville 2002/03 shows two interesting newspaper clips re Edgar Dowell:
 “Now playing piano exclusively for record companies and declining orchestra work” (BAA 29/07/1921 4/2)
 “Directing orchestra for the revue at Club Maurice, New York for which he wrote some of the music.” (BAA 2/06/1922 11/4)
 I suspect that with an attitude like the one listed first above it is no wonder that Mr. Dowell did not get greater recognition than that expressed by the few recording sessions listed below!
- G. Bushell, M. Tucker, 'Jazz from the Beginning', p. 21: “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.”
- Ibid. p. 34: “Baltimore had a great variety of jazz and many excellent performers. The 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.”
- Ibid. p. 181: “Dowell, Edgar. Pianist and composer from Baltimore (according to Bushell). He played with Bushell at the Lybia Café in Harlem (West 139th Street), behind the Garden of Joy. He recorded with singers Viola McCoy, Julia Moody, Rosa Henderson, and possibly Kitty Brown.”
- S. B. Charters, L. Kunstadt, 'Jazz - A History of the New York Scene', p.254: “One of Chick’s (Webb – KBR) close friends was a guitarist named John Trueheart and he and Chick went up to New York together in 1925. While they were still getting to know other musicians, Chick happened to be in a club during an audition by Edgar Dowell’s orchestra. The drummer didn’t arrive and Chick offered to help out. The manager offered the job to Dowell on the condition that he keep the new drummer. Chick stayed with Dowell for a few months, but he wanted to start his own band.”
- Willie The Lion Smith, George Hofer, 'Music on my Mind', p. 40: There were many others I heard for the first time in A.C. that summer: Edgar Dow (sic – KBR), another fine ragtime pianist from Baltimore, who played at the Boat House with the great Philadelphia violinist, Charlie Taylor.”
- Barry Singer, 'Black and Blue – the Life and Lyrics of Andy Razaf', p.132: “. . . and two songs composed with pianist Edgar Dowell, a first-rate ragtime player out of Baltimore, remembered particularly by Eubie Blake for his playing in an organ duel at a Baltimore party thrown by a girlfriend of Blake’s, when Blake was 15 years old. “He cut me so bad,” the veteran keyboardist (Blake – KBR) later recalled. “He played more notes in his left hand than I did. He had this great left hand, wiped me right off the place. Then he took my girl. She had her arms around him. . . . Dowell killed me. . . . I didn’t play the organ for two years after that.” . . . Razaf may have met Edgar Dowell through Hughie Woolford, a Baltimore native himself, who had grown up with both Dowell and Blake. A skilled, ragtime-influenced songwriter, Dowell’s greatest success had come the previous season, in 1922, with his rather eccentric ‘That Da Da Strain’, a roiling novelty number written with Mamie Medina that many early jazz musicians took to as a favorite improvisational theme. Dowell’s work with Razaf in 1923 was not quite so memorable. Their two songs together, ‘No One Can Toddle Like My Cousin Sue’ and ‘He Wasn’t Born In Araby (But He’s A Sheikin’ Fool)’ ultimately were purchased in October 1923 by Rainbow Music (a new firm recently established by Irving Berlin as a “Race” subsidiary to his own Irving Berlin Music publishing company at 1607 Broadway, under the direction of black songwriters Bob Ricketts and Porter Grainger) after ‘He Wasn’t Born In Araby’ was featured in the 1923 edition of Lew Leslie’s ‘Plantation Revue’, upstairs over the Winter Garden Theatre. . . . In July 1923, the Jack Mills Publishing Company, in a lengthy *Amsterdam News* feature story, confirmed that, in addition to having recently acquired the publishing rights for at least 60 “blues” numbers, it also had now signed to exclusive contracts a very impressive stable of black songwriters, including Will Vodery, Chris Smith, Shelton Brooks, James P. Johnson, and Edgar Dowell, among others.”
- Tom Lord, Clarence Williams, p. 98: “The LoC copyright card for the first composition (Without You, Dear - KBR) states that Joseph Medina is a pseudonym for Edgar Dowell.”
- Ibid, p. 189: “The November 13th (1926 – KBR) edition of ‘Billboard’ announced that Clarence Williams Music Publishing Company had added a salesman to cover the South, and another for New York State. The company added Edgar Doll (sic, Dowell?) and C. Rosenberg to the payroll.”
- Ibid, p. 455: List of officers and employees of the Clarence Williams Music Publishing Company as mentioned in periodicals: Edgar Dowell – salesman – BB 11/13/26.”
- Ibid, p. 486: Selected list of composers and compositions of the Clarence Williams Music Publishing Company: here: Edgar Dowell: All The Wrongs You’ve Done To Me, That Da Da Strain, West Indies Blues, (and 53 titles more!).
- Dickie Wells / Stanley Dance, The Night People: “There was another reason why I wanted to be on Wall Street. It’s the onliest place in the world where there are so many musicians – both ex- and active – working by day. . . . There must be t least a hundred cats down there, cats who are on and off the scene. Tommy Benford, Julian Dash, Bobby Johnson, Herbie Cowans, Les Carr, Bobby Williams, Johns Williams, Edgar Dowell, Joe Britton, Alphonse Steele and George Stevenson are some I see often.”

- W. C. Allen, *Hendersonia*, p. 61: „The latter article (in New York ‘Amsterdam News’ July 11, 1923 – KBR), a long one bylined by James A. Jackson, went on to list the established composers in Mills’ stable: Will Vodery, Henry Creamer, Tim Brymn, Spencer Williams, Chris Smith, Shelton Brooks, James P. Johnson, Porter Grainger, Donald Haywood, Edgar Dowell, and Bob Warfield; ...”

- Garvin Bushell / Mark Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning*, p. 21: “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.”

- *Ibid.*, p. 34: “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.”

- Clyde E. B. Bernhardt / Sheldon Harris, *I Remember*, p. 111, “I gigged around New York for a few months (in 1933 – KBR), taking some one-night pickup work with Cass Carr, Earl “Nappy” Howard, and Edgar Dowell. And I did my share of house-rent parties, too.”

K.-B. Rau
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