

The
ALTOSAX
and
BARITONESAX
of
EDGAR SAMPSON

Born: NYC. Aug. 31, 1907

Died: Englewood, New Jersey, Jan. 16, 1973

Introduction:

Edgar Sampson is primarily known for his fine altosax playing with Chick Webb & His Orchestra. He also appears occasionally with violin. However, his talents as a very competent arranger made him leave active altosax playing, and to our knowledge there are no examples after the end of the 1930s. He made great success as arranger, particularly for Benny Goodman & His Orchestra. We feel confident that he could have been one of the most important altosax players in swing and mainstream eras, if he had chosen to be an instrumentalist

Early History:

Began on violin at the age of six, doubled on altosax from early teens. Led own high school band, then began working with pianist Joe Coleman in New York (1924). Did a season with Duke Ellington at the Kentucky Club, then with Bingie Madison and Billy Fowler (1926) before playing at Savoy Ballroom with Arthur Gibbs. With Charlie Johnson's band from 1928 until 1930, with Alex Jackson (ca. 1930), then joined Fletcher Henderson (1931-1932). Briefly with Rex Stewart's bigband (1933). Joined Chick Webb in 1934, whilst with Chick composed many tunes that were to become jazz standards, such as "Blue Lou", "If Dreams Come True", "Stompin' At The Savoy" and "Don't Be That Way". Left the band in July 1936 and began a long stint as a busy free-lance arranger, scoring for Artie Shaw, Red Norvo, Teddy Hill, Benny Goodman, Teddy Wilson, etc. etc. Brief return to full-time: as musical director of Ella Fitzgerald band from July-November 1939 and on altosax/baritonesax with Al Sears (1943). (Source: John Chilton).

Message:

Since Edgar Sampson also played baritonesax with one important recording session, I found it sensible to include it here. I have not systematically studied his violin soli.

EDGAR SAMPSON SOLOGRAPHY

**DUKE ELLINGTON
& HIS KENTUCKY CLUB ORCHESTRA** Nov. 29, 1926 - April 30, 1927
Bigband personnels including Edgar Sampson (as).
Several recording sessions for Vocalion, but ES takes no altosax soli.

EVELYN PREER NYC. Jan. 10, 1927
Bubber Miley (cnt), probably Edgar Sampson (cl, as, vln), Duke Ellington (p),
Sonny Greer (dm).
Two titles were recorded for Victor, One issued: 37528-1&3 "If You Can't Hold
The Man You Love", violin solo but no altosax solo.

GEORGIA STRUTTERS NYC. May 23, 1927
Revised personnel (ref. K.-B. Rau): Tommy Ladnier (tp), Jimmy Harrison (tb),
possibly Herschel Brassfield (cl, ts), Edgar Sampson (cl, as, vln), unknown (p),
possibly Harry Hull (tu), unknown (dm), Perry Bradford (vo, dir).
Two titles were recorded for Harmony:

144202	Rock, Jenny, Rock	Solo with ens 12 bars. (M)
144203	It's Right Here For You	Solo 18 bars. (FM)

While "... Rock" is not that interesting, "... For You" has a good and noteworthy
solo! Note that on this title he also takes a violin solo, 18 bars!

CHARLIE JOHNSON'S PARADISE TEN NYC. Jan. 24, 1928
Bigband personnel including Edgar Sampson (vln, as?), Benny Carter, Ben
Whitted (cl, as).
Three titles were recorded for Victor, but no ES.

CHARLIE JOHNSON & HIS PARADISE BAND NYC. Sept. 19, 1928
Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris (tp), Jimmy Harrison (tb), Edgar Sampson, Ben
Whitted (cl, as), Ben Waters (cl, ts), Charlie Johnson (p), Bobby Johnson (bj),
Cyrus St. Clair (tu), George Stafford (dm).
Three titles were recorded for Victor, two issued, but no ES.

JACKSON & HIS SOUTHERN STOMPERS NYC. Sept. 1928
Personnel of this band indicates it is a clone of the Charlie Johnson band, with
high probability of Edgar Sampson, Ben Whitted (cl, as).
Two titles were recorded for Marathon:

31339-2	Dusky Stevedore	Straight. (FM)
31340-2	Take Your Tomorrow	Solo 8 bars. (FM)

This can very well be ES soloing (ref. K.-B. Rau)!

CHARLIE JOHNSON & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. May 8, 1929
Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris (tp), George Washington (tb), Edgar Sampson,
Ben Whitted (cl, as), Ben Waters (cl, ts), Charlie Johnson (p), Bobby Johnson
(bj), Billy Taylor (tu), George Stafford (dm).
Three titles, one has ES:

53600	Mo'lasses	Brief breaks. (FM)
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A recent discovery, excellent item, with ES most likely taking the altosax breaks.

CLARENCE WILLIAMS & HIS JAZZ KINGS NYC. Dec. 3, 1929
Personnel largely disputed, Clarence Williams (dir), Eva Taylor (vo). possibly
Edgar Sampson (as).
Two titles were recorded for Columbia:

149665-4	Zonky	Solo 8 bars. (M)
149666-3	You've Got to Be Modernistic	Solo 16 bars. (FM)

The identity of the altosax soloist is not known. Charlie Holmes has been
suggested but seems aurally unlikely. However, K.-B. Ray offers ES as an
alternate suggestion, good idea, what do you think?

**FLETCHER HENDERSON
& HIS CONNIE'S INN ORCHESTRA** NYC. July 17, 1931 - March 11, 1932
Bigband personnels including Edgar Sampson (as).
Several recording sessions for Victor, Crown, Columbia and Banner in this
period, but ES takes no altosax soli. Note however that on July 17, 1931 he
records a violin solo: E-36926 "The House Of David Blues", solo 16 bars. (SM).

**LOUIS ARMSTRONG WITH
CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA** **Camden, NJ. Dec. 8, 1932**

Bigband personnel including Edgar Sampson (as, vln).
Four titles were recorded for Victor, but no altosax soli.

FLETCHER HENDERSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Dec. 9, 1932**

Bigband personnel including Edgar Sampson (as).
Three titles were recorded for Columbia, but ES takes no altosax soli.

CHICK WEBB's SAVOY ORCHESTRA **NYC. Dec. 20, 1933**

Mario Bauza, Reunald Jones (tp), Taft Jordan (tp, vo), Sandy Williams (tb), Pete Clark (cl, as), Edgar Sampson (as, arr), Elmer "Skippy" Williams (cl, ts), Joe Steele (p), John Trueheart (bjo, g), John Kirby (b), Chick Webb (dm, ldr).
Two titles, "On The Sunny Side Of The Street" and "The Darktown Strutters' Ball" were recorded for Columbia but no ES.

NYC. Jan. 15, 1934

Same. Two titles:

152686-3 If Dreams Come True Solo 16+8 bars, (tp) on bridge. (M)

152687-2 Let's Get Together Solo 18+8 bars, (tb) on bridge. (FM)

NYC. May 9, 1934

Same. Two titles, but no ES.

NYC. May 18, 1934

Same. Two titles, one has ES:

152740-2 Stompin' At The Savoy Solo 8 bars. (FM)

NYC. July 6, 1934

Similar, Bobby Stark (tp) replaces Reunald Jones, Fernando Arbello (tb), Wayman Carver (fl, ts) added. Four titles were recorded for Okeh, two have ES:

152769-2 Blue Minor Soli 8 and 8 bars. (M)

152771-2 Lonesome Moments Solo 8 bars. (M)

With these early 1934 recording sessions with Chick Webb, we find the real reason for an Edgar Sampson solography! Finally he gets the chance to show his altosax capabilities on record, and we are amazed! A confident approach and an open, very attractive tone give nice results. The five items are all very nice, and for a particular favourite, try "... Come True"!

ETHEL WATERS **NYC. Sept. 5, 1934**

Personnel including Edgar Sampson (as, vln).
Four titles were recorded for Decca, but no ES.

CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Sept. 10, 1934**

Mario Bauza, Bobby Stark (tp), Taft Jordan (tp, vo), Sandy Williams, Claude Jones (tb), Pete Clark (cl, as), Edgar Sampson (as, arr), Elmer Williams (ts), Wayman Carver (fl, ts), Don Kirkpatrick (p), John Trueheart (bjo, g), John Kirby (b, tu), Chick Webb (dm), Charles Linton (vo).
Four titles were recorded for Decca, three have ES:

38593-A That Rhythm Man Solo 8 bars. (F)

38595-A Lona Solo 32 bars. (FM)

38596-A Blue Minor Soli 8 and 8 bars. (FM)

NYC. Nov. 19, 1934

Same. Four titles, three have ES:

39140-A Don't Be That Way Solo 8 bars. (FM)

39141-A What A Shuffle Soli 18+8 bars (tb) on bridge. (FM)

39142-A Blue Lou Solo 8 bars. (M)

NYC. June 12, 1935

Similar, Nat Story (tb) replaces Claude Jones, Ella Fitzgerald (vo) added.
Four titles, one has ES:

39617-A Love And Kisses Coda. (SM)

NYC. Oct. 12, 1935

Similar, Dell Thomas (b) replaces John Kirby. Five titles, two have ES:

- 60054-A Rhythm And Romance Solo 4 bars. (M)
 60058-A Facts And Figures Solo 16+10 bars, (cl) on bridge. (F)

Also on the next batch of Chick Webb recording sessions we find several nice altosax contributions. Listen to the elegant bridge he takes on "Blue Lou", or on "... Rhythm Man"! And on "... Minor" there are even two of them!

BUNNY BERIGAN & HIS BLUE BOYS NYC. Dec. 13, 1935

Bunny Berigan (tp), Edgar Sampson (cl, as), Eddie Miller (cl, ts), Cliff Jackson (p), Grachan Moncur (b), Ray Bauduc (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Decca, two have altosax:

- 60229-A You Took Advantage Of Me Solo 16 bars. (M)
 60229-B You Took Advantage Of Me As above. (FM)
 60232-A Blues Solo 12 bars. (SM)

Three excellent altosax soli on this mixed racial session, the first session under Berigan's own name!

CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Feb. 19, 1936

Bigband personnel similar to above, Ted McRae (ts) replaces Elmer Williams.

Twelve titles were recorded for World Transcriptions, five have ES:

- Big John's Special Solo 8 bars. (M)
 Stompin' At The Savoy Solo 8 bars. (FM)
 Don't Be That Way Solo 8 bars. (FM)
 King Porter Stomp Solo 16 bars. (F)
 If Dreams Come True Solo 18 bars. (FM)

Already we have arrived at the actual and much too early end of ES' relation as a soloist with the gigantic Chick Webb swing organization. Although rather brief contributions, he seems to prefer bridges, nevertheless he always manages to create something very pleasant and of lasting interest. "... Come True" is a nice highlight here. Apart from altosax players like Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges and Freddy Gardner, not many achieved ES' level of competence in the 1930s!

CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. April 7, 1936

Personnel as above.

Four titles were recorded for Decca, three have ES:

- 61000-A Cryin' My Heart Out For You Break. (SM)
 61001-A Under The Spell Of The Blues Break. (SM)
 61002-A When I Get Low, I Get High Break. (FM)

NYC. June 2, 1936

Same. Five titles, one has ES:

- 61125-A A Little Bit Later On Break. (M)

Unfortunately not much attention is given to ES during his last recording sessions with Chick Webb. This hot organization is already steering towards oblivion as an important jazz orchestra.

STUFF SMITH & HIS LUCIDIN ORCHESTRA NYC. Jan. 1937

Jonah Jones, Mario Bauza, Bobby Stark, Taft Jordan (tp), Sandy Williams, Nat Story (tb), Garvin Bushell, Andrew Brown (cl, as), Edgar Sampson (as, arr), Walter Thomas, Ben Webster (ts), Stuff Smith (vln), Clyde Hart (p), Bobby Bennett (g), John Kirby (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Ella Fitzgerald (vo).

WMCA broadcasts from Hotel Biltmore, "Let's Listen To Lucidin" seven eye lotion commercials. ES' altosax is heard on the following three titles:

- Jan. 6 Stompin' At The Savoy Solo 8 bars. (FM)
 Jan. 8 Copper Colored Gal Solo 4 bars. (FM)
 Jan. 15 Put On Your Old Grey Bonnet Solo 16 bars. (F)

These incredible programs have appeared lately, and ES offers very nice altosax soli in the same style as we know from the successful Chick Webb recording sessions.

BILLIE HOLIDAY & HER ORCHESTRA **NYC. Jan. 12, 1937**

Personnel including Edgar Sampson (cl, as).
Four titles were recorded for Vocalion, but clarinet soli only.

DICK PORTER **NC. Feb. 16, 1937**

Jonah Jones (tp), Edgar Sampson (as), Clyde Hart (p), Bobby Bennett (g), John Kirby (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Dick Porter (vo).
Four titles were recorded for Vocalion, two have altosax:

20682-1	Swing, Boy, Swing	Solo 16+8 bars, (tp) on bridge. (M)
20682-2	Swing, Boy, Swing	As above. (M)
20685-1	Poor Robinson Crusoe	Solo 8 bars. (F)
20685-2	Poor Robinson Crusoe	As above. (F)

This is, with one single exception below, the last chance to hear ES' nice altosax playing. These items are so good that we can only regret he chose arranging as his main occupation in the years to come. Note also that there exist two takes of these items, showing that ES certainly was an improviser, the necessary differences are certainly different!

LIONEL HAMPTON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Jan. 18, 1938**

Cootie Williams (tp), Johnny Hodges (as), Edgar Sampson (bar, arr), Jesse Stacy (p), Allan Reuss (g), Billy Taylor (dm), Sonny Greer (dm).
Four titles were recorded for Victor, no (bar)-soli on 18336-1&2 "The Sun Will Shine Tonight" but:

18335-1	You're My Ideal	Intro 3 bars. Solo 3 bars. (SM)
18337-1	Ring Dem Bells	Solo 16 bars. (F)
18338-1	Don't Be That Way	Solo 8 bars. (M)

ES's only recording session on baritone sax shows that he is equally competent on this instrument! A lovely and confident intro on "... Ideal", and excellent soloing, even in the high tempo of "... Bells", also known as one of the most famous swing classics recordings.

TEDDY WILSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Oct. 31 & Nov. 9, 1938**

Personnel including Edgar Sampson, Benny Carter (as), Billie Holiday (vo).
Six titles were recorded for Brunswick, but no ES.

EDGAR SAMPSON & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. May 25, 1939**

Unknown two (tp), (tb), Edgar Sampson (as), unknown (p), (b), (dm), The Three Swingsters (vo-group).
Three titles were recorded for Vocalion, two issued, no altosax on 1024-A "Pick Your Own Lick" but:

1023-A	Don't Try Your Jive On Me	With orch 16+8 bars, solo 8 bars on bridge. Solo 4 bars. (M)
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When ES at last gets the chance to record under his own name, the opportunity is almost wasted, "Pick ..." is vocalgroup with no jazz value. There are however some nice details on "... On Me".

No further recording sessions.

Late history:

Resumed regular playing in late 1940s, led own band in New York (1941-1951) – mostly on tenorsax. Then arranging for and playing with several Latin-American bands including Marcellino Guerra, Tito Puente and Tito Rodriguez. Led own small band through the late 1950s and early 1960s, also gigged regularly with Harry Dials' Bluesicians. Inactive in the late 1960s through severe illness.