

THE RECORDINGS OF EMMETT MATHEWS

An Annotated Tentative Personnelo - Discography

MATHEWS, Emmett, singer, soprano sax, tenor sax

Born: St. Louis, Missouri, c. 1902

Worked with many bands in St. Louis during the early 1920s, toured with Wilson Robinson's Bostonians (1922-23). Moved to New York, worked with pianist Irvin Puggsley's Hot Six (1928) and with Edgar Hayes at the Alhambra Theatre (1929), led own band at that venue (1930), also worked with Bill Benford's Band (1930). Moved to Chicago in spring of 1931, led own band. Returned to New York, joined bassist Charlie Turner's Arcadians, remained with the band when they became accompanying unit for Fats Waller. Led own recording band in the mid-1930s – featured on vocals and soprano sax. Remained with Fats Waller until 1937, then re-formed own band which played many theatre dates including the Apollo, New York. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s regular member of Steve Gibson and his Red Caps – a very successful vocal and instrumental combo. Has now retired from full-time music.

(J. Chilton, Who's Who of Jazz)

STYLISTICS

STYLE

Emmett Mathews soprano performance is strongly blues oriented, but lacks a recognisable personal style.

tone

His tone is rather thin, but clear and tidy.

VIBRATO

Very short and minimal vibrato of very little altitude.

TIME

Exact and swinging.

PHRASING

Simple and little melodic phrasing, mainly in a sort of riff oriented phrasing.

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

Personnels 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: **Emmett Mathews**
- Probable, generally agreed, but not documented identifications are listed in italics, thus: *Emmett Mathews*
- 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: (*Emmett Mathews*)

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.

Emmett Mathews (also named Matthews) was one of the many shadowy figures of the Harlem Jazz scene. Although his main instrument he used to play in public was the soprano saxophone, he also is known to have performed on alto, tenor and baritone sax, this for a couple of years in the Fats Waller touring big band. But he mainly stood out for his erratic appearing on stage. And he obviously did not stand for real musical quality, but for creating mental rapture in the 'Fats Waller and his Rhythm' big band. He later became part of the Rock 'n Roll business.

EMMETT MATHEWS

001 GULF COAST SEVEN

New York,

Oct. 19, 1928

Louis Metcalf – tpt; Joe Nanton – tbn;
 unknown – alt; *Emmett Mathews* – sop, ten;
James P. Johnson – pno; unknown – dms;
 Perry Bradford – voc (2)

147151-1 Daylight Savin' Blues

Col 14373-D,

Frog DGF 56

147152-1 Georgia's Always On My Mind

Col 14373-D,

Frog DGF 56

Composer credits: 147151 (Perry Bradford); 147152 (Johnson – Bradford)

For many years this coupling has been seen as an offshoot of the Ellington band of the day under Perry Bradford's superintendence. The undeniable presence of Louis Metcalf, a seemingly familiar trombonist out of the Ellington circle and a fluent and secure soprano player: this must have been a unit comprised of Ellington men. But it is not that easy!

First: Louis Metcalf's presence must be undisputed because of his very personal style of squeezed tone and individual phrasing. But second, the trombonist seems not to be as obvious as Metcalf. Very probably the man is Nanton, but there also are traces of Charlie Irvis in his playing which should not be disregarded. And it should be kept in mind that Rex Stewart wrote in 'Jazz Masters of the 30s': "*Tricky's trumpet buddy was Louis Metcalf.*" But by re-listening, Joe Nanton seems to be certain.

The alto player has been listed as Johnny Hodges on the strength of the presence of prominent soprano playing. But here we have a real problem! The style is not Hodges' at all! Neither on soprano nor on alto. The soprano can only be heard together with the alto, never together with the tenor. And when we hear the tenor, the soprano is silent. This urges us to the recognition that the altoist cannot be the soprano player. Above all, the altoist can only be heard playing in harmony with the tenor and in free ensemble with the soprano. This means that the tenor player also plays the soprano! And the altoist is not Hodges nor the otherwise presumed Charlie Holmes because the altoist cannot be heard in solo, which would necessarily be the case if Hodges or Holmes would have been present – and because of stylistic unsuitability. Consequently – in lack of solo playing – it is impossible to identify the alto player. His ensemble playing certainly lacks the elegance and finesse of either Hodges or Holmes.

With Hodges out of the way and no clarinet at all on these sides there consequently is no need to identify Barney Bigard. And the tenor playing is much too crude to be by Bigard. This player obviously prefers soprano as his main-instrument, he plays tenor only in harmony with the alto. This then makes us search for a distinct soprano player at the time in question. He may be found in Emmett Mathews, a singer and reed player who came to New York with Wen Talbert and his Orchestra in 1927, where he was engaged as a tenor player. In his "You Don't Know Me, But .." p. 13 George Winfield recalls "*Emmett Matthews running across the stage playing his soprano*". Matthews owns a very extrovert style of music-making as a singer and soprano player, as shown in recordings under his own name in 1931 with singer Laura Rucker and in 1936 with a bunch of Fats Waller musicians. He also can be heard in Waller's 'I Got Rhythm' of December 1935, rising his soprano over the big band in the finale.

On piano we probably hear James P. Johnson, the master, who at that time can often be found in Bradford-directed recording groups.

The drummer does not show anything attributable to Sonny Greer who obviously was only named in conjunction with the assumed Ellington connection. It is sometimes possible to get a hint to a drummer's identity from the pitch of his drums or cymbals. But then you need a reference recording which in this case is not existent. Also, that Greer uses different cymbals.

But finally, Bradford and his awful and off-pitch singing can be listed as unequivocal. This then is a weak element of the recording, indeed, but absolutely certain!

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography*, 1948: personnel unknown

- Rust*2: *Bubber Miley* (cnt); unknown (tbn); unknown (sop, alt); unknown (alt); unknown (pno); unknown (dms); P. Bradford (voc).

- Rust*3,*4: *Louis Metcalf* -c; ?*Joe Nanton* -tb; *Johnny Hodges* -ss -as; ?*Barney Bigard* -cl -ts; *James P. Johnson* -p; unknown -d; *Perry Bradford* -v

- Rust*6: *Louis Metcalf*, c; ?*Joe Nanton*, tb; *Johnny Hodges*, ss, as; ?*Barney Bigard*, cl, ts; *James P. Johnson*, p; ?*Sonny Greer*, d; *Perry Bradford*, v.

Soloists ad-lib:

147151: LM o-tpt 10; LM m-tpt 10; JN m-tbn 10; LM m-tpt+JN m-tbn 4 + 4; EM sop 14; free ens 14

147152: LM m-tpt 32; PB voc 32; EM sop 32; free ens 16; PB voc 8; free ens 8

002 EMMET MATHEWS

Grafton, Wis.

c. May 1931

Emmet Mathews – voc, sop;

Cassino Simpson – pno;

Laura Rucker – voc (1)

L-903-3 Upside Down

Pm 13087,

Document DOCD-5354

L-905-2 St. James Infirmary

Pm 13087,

Document DOCD-5354

Composer credits: No indication on CD

This is the first recording session of three under Emmett Mathews' name, in which he demonstrates a well-founded blues feeling.

In 'Upside Down' the leader is featured in a short comic dialogue with singer Laura Rucker followed by a succession of five intense eight-bars stanzas in modified blues-form on Mathews' soprano sax.

The well-known title 'St. James Infirmary' is sung by Mr. Mathews himself – after two choruses on his soprano sax. He sings four choruses accompanied by the mysterious Chicago pianist Cassino Simpson, who performs irritatingly confused behind Mathews – or comic? The title is ended by three soprano sax choruses, Simpson's accompaniment being of a very strict chordal rhythm.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography*, 1948: *Laura Rucker* (vo); *Cassino Simpson* (p)

- Rust*2: not listed

- Rust*3,*4: ?*Cassino Simpson* -p; with *Laura Rucker* -v

- Rust*6: *Mathews*, v; *Cassino Simpson*, p; with *Laura Rucker*, v

- Document DOCD-5354, booklet: *Emmet Mathews*, vcl; unknown, ss; poss *Cassino Simpson*, pno; *Laura Rucker*, vcl added

003 FATS WALLER AND HIS RHYTHM

New York,

Dec. 04, 1935

Thomas Fats Waller – pno, voc;

C.E. Smith, Ed Anderson, Herman Autrey – tpt;

George Wilson or (Fred Robinson) – tbn;

Emmett Mathews – sop, ten; Rudy Powell, George James – alt, clt; Gene Sedric – ten, clt; Freddy Skerritt – bar;

Hank Duncan – pno; James Smith – gtr; Charles Turner – sbs; Yank Porter – dms;

Alex Hill – arr (3); Don Donaldson – arr (4,5)

98196-1 Fat And Greasy

unissued on 78, Chronological Classics 776

98196-2 Fat And Greasy

unissued on 78, JSP Records JSP946D

98197-1 Functionizin'

HMV HE-2902, Chronological Classics 776

98198-1 I Got Rhythm

HMV HE-2902, Chronological Classics 776

98198-2 I Got Rhythm

Vic unissued not on LP/CD

Composer credits: 98196 (Charles Johnson & Porter Grainger); 98197 is from Waller's 'Harlem Living Room Suite

L. Wright, Fats in Fact, p.109: "This was the first recording by Waller's touring band and the Victor clerical staff were clearly unsure as to how to show them as the recording sheet simply has FATS WALLER BAND typed in and 'his Rhythm' added later in manuscript, which is how the last two sides were issued when they appeared in Europe, despite previous reports to the contrary."

'Fat And Greasy' has an un-usual chorus of 16 bars in two identical A-parts of 8 bars each. The B-part and subsequent A-part lacking to build an AABA form. The trumpet soloist is Herman Autrey in my ears, playing a somewhat horizontal 'swing' style, while the trumpet soloist in 'Functionizin'' obviously is Ed Anderson in his vertical Oliver-inspired sharp-toned bluesy style. This same title features Gene Sedric, one of Waller's closest associates, on tenor sax.

'I Got Rhythm' was some sort of show-stopper in the Waller shows, described by Hank Duncan as follows: "Oh, we used that as the closing of the bill on our theatre tours. I'd be at the keyboard for the opening of the show, where we'd usually begin with two or three fast instrumentals, before settling in the groove for some of the 'standard items' from his repertoire. ... I think that it might have been at the Grand Theatre in Philadelphia where we first expanded the 'I Got Rhythm' arrangement to include the piano cutting contest ... the number just sort of grew into a freewheeling bit of improvisation, with a lot of solo spots for the guys in the band and the two-piano thing with Fats and I as the finale. It eventually ran for nine or ten minutes, and frequently inspired the audience to respond with a standing ovation ...".

Here we find a nice modern-sounding trombone solo of the three A-parts of the tune, using ascending lip-trills in the third A-part, what makes me decide on Mr. Wilson – Teddy's brother – as the younger player. Fred Robinson, a player of an earlier generation, very certainly would not have a style that contemporary. This title also has Rudy Powell on alto and Gene Sedric on clarinet. And: the amusing piano fight of Hank Duncan and Fats Waller!

And for the ride-outs of the first and third titles we have the eccentric soprano saxophonist Emmett Mathews, recalled by George Winfield as "Emmett Mathews running across the stage playing his soprano", flying over the ensembles. Mathews owns a very extrovert style of music making as a singer and soprano player, as shown in recordings under his own name in 1931.

The rhythm section delivers a very exact, driving and swinging beat without any extras.

Trumpeter C.E. Smith probably is the musician named Clarence Smith in Emmett Mathews's Orchestra in Rust*6, who, yet, does not appear on the listed recorded titles.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, New Hot Discography 1948: not listed

- B. Rust, Victor Master Book, Vol. 2: 2t/ 1tb/ 5s/ FW-p/ p/ g/ b/ d, vocalist: Fats Waller, with members of the orchestra

- Rust*2: Herman Autrey, Sidney de Paris (tpt); Benny Morton (tbn); Edward Inge (clt); Rudy Powell (clt, alt); Don Redman (alt); Gene Sedric, Bob Carroll (ten); Fats Waller (pno, vcl, cel); James Smith (gtr); Charles Turner (sbs); Yank Porter (dms). No other titles were made at this session, despite rumours to the contrary

- Rust*3,*4: Herman Autrey -t; Benny Morton -tb; Emmett Mathews -ss; Rudy Powell -cl -as; Gene Sedric -Bob Carroll -ts; Fats Waller -p -vib -v; Hank Duncan -p; James Smith -g; Charles Turner -sb; Yank Porter -d; Alex Hill -Don Donaldson -a

- Rust*6: Herman Autrey, ?C.E. Smith, ?Eddie Anderson, t; Fred Robinson or George Wilson, tb; Emmett Mathews, ss; Rudy Powell, George James, cl, as; Gene Sedric, ts; Freddie Skerritt, bar; Fats Waller, p, vib, v; Hank Duncan, 2nd p; James Smith, g; Charles Turner, sb; Yank Porter, d; Alex Hill, Don Donaldson, a

- L. Wright, Fats in Fact: Herman Autrey, ?C.E. Smith, ?Eddie Anderson, t; Fred Robinson or George Wilson, tb; Emmett Mathews, ss; Rudy Powell, George James, cl, as; Gene Sedric, ts; Freddie Skerritt, bar; Fats Waller, p, vib, v; Hank Duncan, 2nd p; James Smith, g; Charles Turner, sb; Yank Porter, d; Alex Hill, Don Donaldson, a

Soloists ad-lib:

98196: FW pno 4; HA m-tpt 16; HA m-tpt+JS gtr obl 16; HA m-tpt+JS gtr obl 16; FW pno 16; EM sop obl 16

98197: EA m-tpt 16; GS ten 16

98198: FW pno 4; ?GW o-tbn 16; RP alt 8; ?GW o-tbn 8; GS clt 32; HD pno 32+2; FW pno 32; EM sop 4+4+8+4

Discernible differences of takes:

98196-1: Second chorus: trumpet solo starts with a phrase of 2 eighth-notes ab and 1 quarter-note ab repeated three times, then 1 staccato quarter-note f, 1 bound quarter-note eb to 1 staccato quarter-note c.

Second chorus trumpet solo: bar 9 starts with 1 quarter-note f, then 3 eighth-notes c – eb – bb and 1 quarter-note ab.

First line of vocal: "He's got big fat liver lips."

98196-2: Second chorus: trumpet solo starts with a phrase of 2 eighth-notes ab and 1 quarter-note ab repeated three times, then 3 staccato quarter-notes f – eb – c.

Second chorus trumpet solo: bar 9 starts with a phrase of 4 eighth-notes b-b-bb-ab repeated three times.

First line of vocal: "Ah, he's got a big pair of liver lips."

98198: As only take -1 was reissued, a comparison with take -2 was impossible

004 EMMETT MATTHEWS AND HIS ORCHESTRA

New York,

Apr. 10, 1936

Emmett Mathews – voc, ldr;

Herman Autrey – tpt; Fred Robinson – tbn; Rudy Powell – clt, alt;
 Hank Duncan – pno; Gene Fields – gtr; Charles Turner – sbs; Slick Jones – dms, vib
 18995-1 You Can't Pull The Wool Over My Eyes Voc 3228, Collectors Items 007 (LP)
 18996-1 I'll Stand By Voc 3226, Collectors Items 007 (LP)
 18997-1 There's Always A Happy Ending Voc 3226, Collectors Items 007 (LP)
 18998-1 Take A Good Look At Mine Voc 3228, Collectors Items 007 (LP)
Composer credits: No indication on LP

This extract from the contemporaneous Fats Waller big band under Emmett Mathews name plays a fine number of straight-ahead swing titles that were very seldom recorded in the thirties. There is very little arrangement in the tunes, and we hear solos of musicians that are recorded soloing sparsely, only. Herman Autrey and Rudy Powell are well-known for their many Fats Waller and his Rhythm sides, but where do hear Fred Robinson's trombone? And Hank Duncan is difficult to hear soloing.

But I would have expected to hear Mathews to shine all over on his soprano sax. But no, nothing! Mathews only sings, with a nice voice and swinging, but was this worth all the efforts for the Vocalion company?

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography*, 1948: not listed

- Rust*2: not listed

- Rust*3: Herman Autrey -t; Fred Robinson -tb; Rudy Powell -cl -as; Gene Sedric -ts; Hank Duncan -p; Gene Fields -g; Charles Turner -sb; Slick Jones -d; Emmett Mathews -v

- Rust*4: Emmett Mathews -as, v -dir; Herman Autrey -t; Fred Robinson -tb; Rudy Powell -cl -as; Hank Duncan -p; Gene Fields -g; Charles Turner -sb; Slick Jones -d

- Rust*6: Emmett Mathews, ss, as, v, dir; Herman Autrey, Clarence Smith, Andy Anderson, t; Fred Robinson, George Wilson, tb; Rudy Powell, George James, cl, as; Al Washington -cl -ts; Hank Duncan, p; Gene Fields, g; Charles Turner, sb; Slick Jones, d

Soloists ad-lib:

18995: HD pno 4; EM voc+RP clt obl 32; RP clt 16; HA o-tpt 1+16; free ens 24; EM voc 8; EM voc+free ens obl 12

18996: SJ vib 2; HD pno 2; EM voc+ens obl 32; FR m-tbn 16; HD pno 8; RP clt 8; EM voc+ens obl 16

18997: EM voc+HW m-tpt 32; HA m-tpt 16; RP clt 8; FR o-tbn 8; HA o-tpt+ens call-response 16; HD pno 8; HA o-tpt+ens call-response 8; EM voc+ens obl 16

18998: HD pno 4; EM voc 32; HD pno 16; FR m-tbn 16; RP clt 16; HA o-tpt 16; EM voc+ens 32

005 EMMETT MATTHEWS AND HIS ORCHESTRA

New York,

Sep. 08, 1936

Emmett Mathews – voc, sop, ldr;

Herman Autrey – tpt;

Rudy Powell – clt, alt; Gene Sedric – ten, clt;

Hank Duncan – pno; Gene Fields – gtr; Charles Turner – sbs; Slick Jones – dms

19826 You Came To My Rescue Voc 3332, Collectors Items 007 (LP)

19827 Bojangles Of Harlem Voc 3317, Collectors Items 007 (LP)

19828 The Way You Look Tonight Voc 3317, Collectors Items 007 (LP)

19829 Night In Manhattan Voc 3332, Collectors Items 007 (LP)

Composer credits: No indication on LP

Half a year after the above recording session the Vocalion People again have Emmett Mathews in their studio. This time there is no trombonist, instead Waller's long-time tenor sax man Gene Sedric has taken Robinson's place. The clarinetist/altoist lacks Rudy Powell's typical sand-paper tone, and I am a bit un-willing to keep his name in the personnel. But I do not find another name for the clarinetist. Also, Hank Duncan, one of Waller's closest pianist-friends, is not recognisable here, in that the pianist plays so much Latin rhythm.

The music – as above – is kind of Swing music with very little arrangement, but nice to hear. But I – KBR – am not surprised that these sides are so little known among collectors.

Notes:

- Ch. Delaunay, *New Hot Discography*, 1948: not listed

- Rust*2: not listed

- Rust*3: Herman Autrey -t; Fred Robinson -tb; Rudy Powell -cl -as -bar; Gene Sedric -ts -ss; Hank Duncan -p; Gene Fields -g; Charles Turner -sb; Slick Jones -d; Emmett Mathews -v

- Rust*4: Emmett Mathews -as, v -dir; Herman Autrey -t; Rudy Powell -cl -as -bar; Gene Sedric -cl -ts; Hank Duncan -p; Gene Fields -g; Charles Turner -sb; Slick Jones -d; Emmett Mathews -v

- Rust*6: Emmett Mathews, ss, as, v, dir; Herman Autrey, Clarence Smith, Andy Anderson, t; Fred Robinson, George Wilson, tb; Rudy Powell, George James, cl, as; Gene Sedric, Al Washington -cl -ts; Hank Duncan, p; Gene Fields, g; Charles Turner, sb; Slick Jones, d

Soloists ad-lib:

19826: EM sop 4; EM sop 16; GS ten 14; HA m-tpt 2; EM voc+ens obl 30; HD pno 2; EM sop 16; HW o-tpt 8; EM voc+ens 8

19827: SJ dms 4; EM voc 16 + 16 + 12; RP clt 2+16; HD pno 8; GS ten 20; SJ dms 16; HA o-tpt 8+20; GS ten 2; EM voc+ens 20

19828: HD pno 4; EM voc+ens 32 + 32; GS ten 32; HA o-tpt 16; EM voc+free ens 16+2

19829: EM voc+ens obl 8 + 24 + 24; GS ten 16; HD pno 8; RP alt 24; EM sop+HA o-tpt 24 + 16; EM voc+ens obl 8