



## AMICA International Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association Honor Roll

Emse Dawson (13 May 1901 –  
20 October 1976)

Biography and photo from Steve Rattle

Little is known of Ampico roll artist and editor, the Australian Emse Dawson. Recent new information has surfaced about her time in Australia and New York that starts to piece together the 'jigsaw puzzle' of her life. Emma Sears Dawson was born in rural Queensland to Andrew Dawson, a clerk, and Elizabeth Barrie. The name Emse appears to have been created by taking the first two letters of each Christian name; perhaps a childhood nickname? The family with older sister Margaret (born 1898) moved to Mackay in 1903. Another daughter, Mary Ethel, followed and the family relocated to Randwick N.S.W. in 1930. Young Emse studied piano in Mackay and travelled to Brisbane to complete her music examinations.

The *Brisbane Courier* (later renamed the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*) of Thursday 25 July, 1918 reported upon her pre-exam performance:



'Miss Emse Dawson gave a piano recital yesterday afternoon at the piano salon of G. J. Grice. A native of Mackay, Miss Dawson is a perfect little artist and although still in her teens, shall be sitting her diploma later this week. Her manner at the Rogers grand piano is quiet and absorbed; she lives the music as she plays'.

Success seemed assured as two days later (Saturday 27 July 1918) her photograph appears in the same paper with the following comment:

#### GIFTED PIANOFORTE STUDENT

Miss Emse Dawson, a native of Mackay who has secured the Diploma of L.T.C.L. with maximum marks, and to whose extraordinary musical ability reference was made in the 'Courier' of Thursday last.

The Diploma of L.T.C.L. (Licentiate Trinity College London) is an intermediate piano performance degree between that of Bachelor and Doctor. Emse's whereabouts are next reported in the newspapers but not in Brisbane, this time in Sydney. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reports on her performance at the Sydney Conservatorium from Monday 18 December, 1922:

#### DIPLOMA CANDIDATE PLAYS AT CONSERVATORIUM HALL LAST SATURDAY AFTERNOON

'Miss Emse Dawson played the Liszt Concerto in E flat. Her interpretation of this work was marked by vigour and technical brilliance of a high order, though she was lacking in the sheer physical strength necessary for the ponderous climaxes. Loud and prolonged applause showed that her work was generally appreciated. The orchestra was under the baton of Alfred Hill'.

One final newspaper comment has surfaced, once again in *The Brisbane Courier* on Saturday 2 February, 1924:

'Miss Emse Dawson has returned from the south and will resume tuition next Monday at room number 8, Longreach Buildings, North Quay'.

American researchers have long advised that her departure from Australia was to seek treatment for a chronic back problem. A reported advocate of Christian Scientology, Emse appears to have gone to live with an Aunt in New York. By 1925, Emse (at this stage known as Margaret; after her elder sister?) had commenced work as an editor for the American Piano Company, editing and recording AMPICO piano rolls. Romance blossomed in the editing room as 'Margaret' soon married fellow editor and recording artist Angelico Valerio in 1926. The couple remained with AMPICO and departed soon after their merger with The Aeolian Company to become Aeolian-American. The childless marriage appears to be finished by 1940.

'Stiff joints' and severe arthritis have been cited as the reasons why Emse gave up her career on the concert platform. She taught piano at the Henry Street Settlement School of Music in New York from 1940 until 1965. A resident of Manhattan (West 78<sup>th</sup> Street) until 1971, Emse made a short term retirement to Florida before finally returning to Australia to be closer to younger sister Mary. She did not return to live with Mary in the Randwick family home, but preferred to settle in Lane Cove, Sydney. Emse Dawson died at the Lynvale Nursing Home in Lane Cove and her cremation took

place on 22 October 1976. Her ashes were placed in the rose garden K1 at Eastern Suburbs Crematorium, Botany / Matraville on 17 November 1976.

Finally I can document the life of Australia's only Ampico recording artist. Next time you play her superb roll of '*Stardust*', please take a moment to remember the young Queensland lass who travelled to *The Big Apple* all those years ago.

My thanks to Pat Griffith, USA, Graeme Haigh, NSW and Robert Perry, New Zealand for their assistance with this biography.

## - STEVE RATTLE

Four (4) rolls were recorded by **Emse Dawson** as detailed:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Composer</u>	<u>Comments</u>
100805	Chimes	Various	Ampico Model B jumbo roll to be used with Ampichron
2931	Hold Your Man	Brown	Ampico
104905	Hold Your Man	Brown	Duo-Art : Released November 1933
213701	Stardust	Carmichael	Ampico
7251	Pense Sentimentale		
	(Sentimental Mood)	Unknown /Dawson?	Ampico : Originally unissued

Five (5) rolls were recorded by **Angelico Valerio** as detailed:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Composer</u>	<u>Comments</u>
213821	I Apologize	Nelson	Ampico : Released under the pseudonym Harry Shipman
213961	I Found You	Connelly	Ampico
213891	River, Stay 'Way from my Door	Woods	Ampico
2513	Sing Me to Sleep	Greene	Ampico
214081	Strange Interlude	Baker	Ampico

Pat Griffith, a piano student from Emse's Henry Street Settlement School teaching days, kindly shared her reminiscences of her old teacher:

*"I'm sorry I don't have any pictures to share with you. We never were much in the way of camera buffs. The words that most describe Emse Dawson are kind, courteous, gentle, quiet, cheerful, and consistent. She was pretty and dainty in the girl next door kind of way. We didn't know she was ever married. She had several beaux in the years we knew her but she never seemed serious about anyone. She seemed to be in excellent health the last time I saw her. One summer in about 1969 I took piano lessons from her again. When I had been her student from 1946 one of my assignments was Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. She was so particular about how it should be played. I never stopped playing the pieces she had taught me. In 1969 I was having trouble with the 3rd movement of the Moonlight Sonata so I dragged my kids to her apartment several times for help with the piece. I left the oldest child at home in Parsippany taking care of the baby while I and the other three kids went into New York for my piano lessons. She was a tremendous help to me. As you can see she really was like a member of the family.*

*Emse Dawson was strictly classical. She wouldn't even tolerate Rachmaninoff, much to my dislike. She was definitely old school, and they don't come like her any more. Back in my student days I was required to practice 3, 1/2 hours a day that last year, and when the time was upped to 4 hours I quit. I was a 14 year old girl who wanted to play other things beside the piano. She was grooming me to be a concert pianist and I didn't have the emotional cool for the job. It was too much stress and not enough reward in accomplishment to suit me. But it was all a valuable experience knowing her and being taught by her.*

*Emse Dawson was my piano teacher from 1944 to 1948. I was her protégé for those 4 years. I was very foolish to quit, and broke my mother's heart and disappointed Miss Dawson immensely. We had moved to New York from Baltimore where I began my piano studies at the Peabody School of Music in 1943 where Miss Dawson and the Henry St Settlement School of Music had been highly recommended. She had been a concert pianist in Australia until arthritis in her hands forced her to turn to teaching.*

*She was a tiny lady with sparkling eyes and red hair. She was vivacious, patient, enthusiastic, and encouraging. She was a superb and unsurpassed piano teacher. I never saw her moody, angry nor heard her raise her voice. I took lessons through the summers at her apartment on West 78th Street and always took her flowers that I picked walking to the NYC commuter train on the way to the lesson. She was like a good friend to both my mother and me.*

*She came to my home in New Jersey for a visit several times after I was married and had children. We went wading in the brook in the woods nearby my home in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. The last time I saw her was in 1971 when I invited her to attend a production of The Messiah at Carnegie Hall. I sang with David Randolph's Masterwork Chorus and I always took my kids in for one concert every December. We all went to a little French restaurant nearby and then they all sat in a prime box for the concert. Emse said she never realized I could sing. Although we exchanged Christmas cards every year we lost touch after I moved in 1972.*

*I think of her every day and wish I could have her help again with my piano efforts. I have resumed work on the 3rd Movement of the Moonlight Sonata, and have reviewed all the music she taught me. Kids are grown and there is plenty of time now to practice. I wish she could know how much her teaching means to me now".*

I should at this time, mention Emse Dawson - an Ampico roll artist and editor.

Emmasears Dawson was born in Queensland. After gaining a degree in music she went to the United States, where she lived with her aunt.

One of the main reasons for her coming to the U.S. was to seek treatment for a chronic back problem. She sought help from the Christian Science people, and it worked.

Emse Dawson worked as an editor for Ampico from 1925, to the early 1930's. She is responsible for two lovely popular arrangements for Ampico and also the "Chimes" roll for the Model B Ampico. A Duo-Art roll of "Hold Your Man", played by Emse Dawson, was released in 1933, but try as I might, I could not locate a copy.

A fascinating interview with Emse Dawson, occurs in the book, "The Ampico Reproducing Piano". It's well worth reading.

From The AMICA, April 1977

Word has just been received that Amica honorary member EMSE DAWSON, died a short time go. Ms. Dawson was married (married name: Valerio) and resided in Manhattan. She was a recording artist for both the Ampico and Duo-Art. Ms. Dawson and her husband were both editors at the Ampico Recording Studio until it went out of business. There were five editors in all. The dynamics of a recording artist's performance were electrically recorded on a separate sheet from the roll containing the note holes. This information was transferred mechanically to the music roll and an editor then molded them into a finished performance. We are told that this required great artistry and that Ms. Dawson was considered an outstanding editor because she was such a gifted pianist herself.

Amicans will miss this fine honorary member but her memory will always be with us through her skillful editing of many Ampico recordings. AEW



# Reissues

## AMPICO

- † AMP 1015 (50602) MINUTE WALTZ in D Flat, Chopin (Op. 64, No. 1)  
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- † AMP 1016 (62621) REVOLUTIONARY ETUDE, Chopin (Op. 10, No. 12)  
Played by Mieczyslaw MUNZ
- \* AMP 1017 (213701) STARDUST (Carmichael)  
Played by Emse DAWSON
- † AMP 1018 (70301) FLIGHT OF THE BUMBLE BEE (Rimsky-Korsakoff)  
Played by Sergei RACHMANINOFF
- \* AMP 1019 (214861) CARIOCA (Vincent Youmans)  
Played by OHMAN & ARDEN

## DUO ART

- \* DA 1015 (104735) BODY AND SOUL (Green)  
Played by Robert ARMBRUSTER
- † DA 1016 (Pt. 1 of 7287-4) ETUDE in E Flat Minor, Chopin (Op. 10, No. 6)  
Played by Vladimir HOROWITZ
- † DA 1017 (Pt. 2 of 7287-4) ETUDE in C Minor, Chopin (Op. 25, No. 12)  
Played by Vladimir HOROWITZ
- † DA 1018 (6755-4) RITUAL FIRE DANCE, de Falla ("El Amor Brujo")  
Played by Artur RUBINSTEIN
- \* DA 1019 (0964) CARIOCA (Vincent Youmans)  
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