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## Who Was Einar Swan? The Story Behind "When Your Lover Has Gone"

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# The Mississippi Rag®

THE VOICE OF TRADITIONAL JAZZ AND RAGTIME

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## An Old Tradition.



## A New Beginning ...

Welcome to new readers and old friends: In this, our first electronic issue, *The Mississippi Rag* begins the new year with a new identity, melding the music of yesterday with the technology of today, expanding our musical reach via the exciting possibilities of the Internet. This month, we look back at multi-talented **Einar Swan**, at left, above, then jet ahead to a **British Festival** where Aurelie Tropez and Stephane Gillot, right, made sweet music. And there's more: **Kenny Davern, Jay McShann, West Coast Ragtime, Reviews.**





Child prodigy: Einar Swan with violin, c. 1910. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)

# Who Was Einar Swan?

## *The Story Behind 'When Your Lover Has Gone'*

by Sven Bjerstedt  
Senior lecturer, Lund University, Sweden

The composer and lyricist behind the wonderful, sad evergreen "When Your Lover Has Gone" (1931) was Einar Swan (1903-40), a Finnish-American multi-instrumentalist from Massachusetts.

Who?

I asked everyone I could think of for information on Einar Swan. The results were meager in the extreme. Nobody seemed to know anything at all about him. That made me

really curious. After all, several decades ago, this exceptionally versatile lyricist, composer, arranger and multi-instrumentalist was working successfully at the world's center of popular music. But, for several reasons, his life and work fell into nearly complete oblivion.

### A Finnish-American

Einar Swan was the son of Finnish immigrants to the United States. His father, a carpenter named Matti Aleksinpoika Joutsen from Evijärvi, Finland, was one of the many men who chose to leave Finland in 1899. Matti was 22 when he emigrated.

When elderly villagers in Alaveteli (Nedervetil), Finland, were interviewed by genealogist Jan-Erik Nygren in 2005, they remembered the Joutsen family and told stories about



At left, Einar William Swan, violin; John Matthew Swan, saxophone; Ellen Victoria Swan, organ; Walter Eero Swan, clarinet. c. 1913. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)



Young Einar Swan with cornet, c. 1915. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)



**During the 1920s, Ellen and Anne Swan played with a female orchestra that was sometimes called the Gypsy Sweethearts. On the back of the picture, Anne Swan Meligs wrote, "Sugar Hill, New Hampshire 1929-1932. Hotel Lookoff Ensemble. Anne, Marion, Ellen, Elena, Florence." (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)**

how mean the parents were and how badly they treated their children, four of whom died young. The four other children emigrated.

Villagers recalled that Einar Swan's grandfather, Aleksi Joutsen, had a nickname – "Alex-with-a-limp." The reason was dramatic. Aleksi had been severely punished by his youngest son, Oskari. The story was told thus: "Aleksi, the father, was also called 'Alex-with-a-limp'. It is said that one day when Oskari was chopping wood, Aleksi came into the shed and started harassing and teasing him. He used to put his foot on the chopping block and then draw it away before the axe fell. Then Oskari told him, 'If you put your foot on the block once more, I'll chop it off!' Aleksi put his foot on the block, Oskari struck at once, the axe went through his [Aleksi's] boot and cut off half of his foot. Aleksi went with a limp the rest of his life."

### Matti Becomes John Swan

When Aleksi's son, Matti, came to America, he changed his name to John Matthew Swan. The surname was a direct translation of the Finnish word Joutsen. He was a self-taught musician but soon established himself as an important musical leader in the Worcester, Mass., area. He gave music lessons in Finnish-American communities and organized and led orchestras and choirs. He performed on all reed instruments and appeared as a composer and arranger.

John married Edla Maria Aaltonen in 1900. They had nine children and eventually John established an extraordinary family orchestra.

### The Swan Family Orchestra

The Swan family orchestra was, in fact, a couple of different orchestras, because most of the family members were multi-instrumentalists. There was also a Swan vocal quartet. One constellation featured violin, flute, clarinet, saxophone, and piano or organ. Another one consisted of reed instruments exclusively. They gave concerts and played for lodges, clubs, dances and other entertainments.

When interviewed in the *Worcester Telegram* in 1915, John Swan drew attention mainly to the talents of his son, Einar, stating, "Einar W. Swan, my oldest boy and the musical genius of the family, was born at Fitchburg 12 years ago and showed musical talent when he was 2 years old. He first played the organ, and, later on, I found that he loved to play violin. It was at the age of 4 when he started to play his little violin. [...] After this he rapidly picked up a knowledge of various instruments. He studied in order, piano, clarinet, flute, saxophone, trap drumming, all of which he plays better than many persons who confine their ability to one instrument."

John Swan was an expert carpenter and manufactured a number of musical instruments, among them a bassoon and Einar's first (3/4 size) violin.

The other siblings were also presented in some detail in the newspaper article: Ellen (1901-75) played piano, organ, and reed instruments; little Anne (1909-97) played flute and clarinet; Walter (1904-64) played reeds.

Music permeated this family. In a 2004 *Mountain Times* interview, Einar's younger sister, Aina, recalled that their

mother, Edla, sang a lot. It sounded like Finnish folk songs, but she made them up herself.

Walter worked as a musician all his life. Ellen and Anne continued playing together in the '20s and early '30s. They were part of a five-girl band called the Gypsy Sweethearts.

### The Child Prodigy Grows Up

As a teenager Einar developed his multi-instrumental skills. According to the *Worcester Telegram*, April 24, 1927, "As one of the best musicians Commercial High School ever turned out, he learned to play all the instruments in the school band – explaining it to the authorities by saying that he would be a good lad to have around in case anyone was sick. [...] he introduced novel rhythms, and unknown notes into the compositions he played. He was making jazz, though he didn't know it." The list of musicians in the 1921 Worcester High School of Commerce yearbook does not entirely correspond with this photograph. Einar is listed on clarinet but is holding a trombone in the picture!

At 24, Einar Swan was featured in a panegyric article in his hometown newspaper, titled "High Up Among World's Jazz Artists" and starting with the exclamation "once of Worcester, now of the world!"

A lot had happened. Einar had grown up. The child prodigy was becoming his own man. He had discovered his own music, and he had, not less important, discovered his love. The music was jazz. The girl was Jewish. The clash with his father was disastrous.

John Swan had worked hard for many years, hoping that Einar and the other children would be successful musicians. However, music outside the legitimate classical genres was incommensurate with his vision.

The religion of Einar's sweetheart "Billie" (Ann Kaufmann of Southbridge, Mass.) only made the father-son conflict worse. The argument on music was serious enough and is said to have come to blows. But when Einar married Ann, he performed the ultimate act to manifest his independence of his father and indeed his Finnish heritage: he converted to the Jewish faith and switched his middle name from William to Aaron.

That was it. With one blow, the harmony of the Swan family orchestra had vanished completely. The discord that replaced it lasted for decades. Einar totally lost contact with his family for the rest of his life.

"He went to New York to pursue his career. He had a terrible fight with his father because his father wanted him to be a classical musician, but Einar had

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other plans." According to Einar's niece, Cynthia Meigs, "John Swan smashed Einar's violin during the argument."

**Swanie's Serenaders 1922-24**

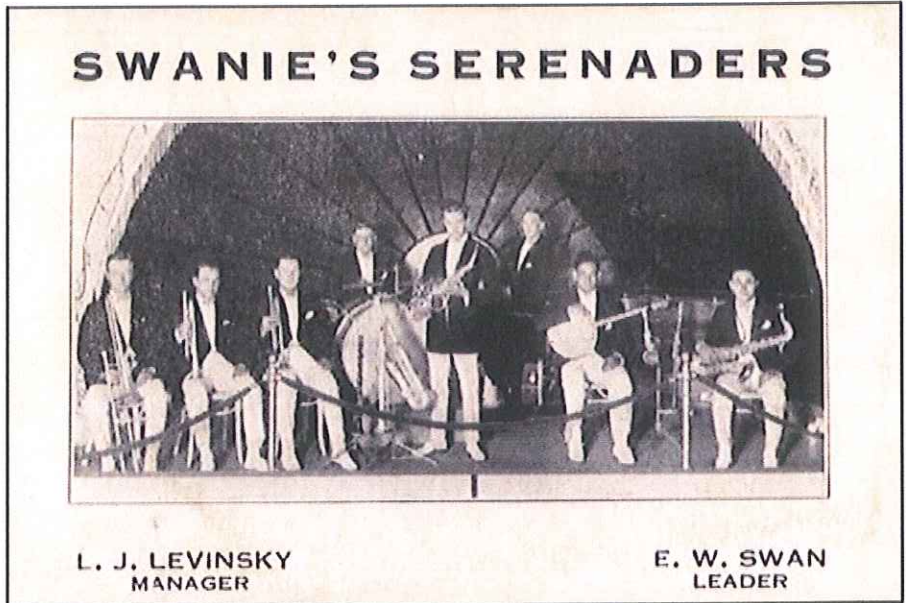
Einar Swan's choice of musical style was no whim. In the 1927 *Worcester Telegram* article, he elaborated on the subject in an interview, stating, "Jazz is now firmly established, the music of the future, and already has become classic in a certain way; the only difference being that it is more alive than the older type of music."

In a 1957 interview in the *Worcester Sunday Telegram*, Worcester shoe salesman Joseph Fagan speaks of a trio that he thinks was the first orchestra with which Swanie ever played.

Their initial job was during the summers of 1918 and 1919 at Lake Wopawog, a resort outside East Hampton, Conn. Swan played saxophone, Fagan violin and Henry Berman, piano. They were paid \$10 a week. Later, Swan joined Benny Conn's band, at that time popular at dances in Worcester.

"After that, he led his own band, the well-remembered Swanie's Serenaders. Many a matron still sighs at thoughts of dances where he supplied the music."

Dick Hill, in his biography of Finnish-American trumpeter Sylvester Ahola (*The Gloucester Gabriel*, Scarecrow Press), quotes Ahola, who remembered Swanie's Serenaders as "a good, modern group, similar to Frank Ward's" (the



*Swanie's Serenaders, 1924, were (from left) probably Oscar Werme, trombone; two unidentified musicians, trumpets; Ernest Paul, drums; Einar Swan, saxophone; probably Sammy Swenson, piano; Joe Toscano, banjo; unknown, saxophone. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)*

New England territory band that Ahola himself played with).

In 1924 Einar Swan received an offer to play in New York. It meant leaving his family as well as Swanie's Serenaders. Unknowingly, by moving to New York Einar also escaped the Swan family's final disintegration.

**The Swan Family Disaster**

About 1930, Einar's father, John M. Swan, deserted his wife and children and moved to California, leaving them in poverty. Many years later, Einar's younger sister, Aina, collaborated as a lyricist for three decades with the Finnish composer Heikki Sarmanto. He

*Personnel for Swanie's Serenaders in this 1924 photo included, from left, an unidentified musician; Ernest Paul; unidentified musician; Oscar Werme; probably Sammy Swenson; Einar Swan; Joe Toscano; unidentified musician. The inscription reads: "To 'Billie,' Best Wishes, Swanie." According to Donald Swan, "Billie" was the nickname of Ann Kaufmann Swan. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)*



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**Vincent Lopez musicians:** "The one hundred thousand dollar saxophone section" is written on the back of this photo, probably taken in 1926. Stephen J. Hester gives a tentative identification of the reedmen as George Napoleon, Larry Abbott, Einar Swan, and Billy Hamilton. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)



**Einar Swan and Vincent Lopez, 1926.** (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)

retold her story from these difficult years: "When the breadwinner let them down, they had to beg in order to survive."

It is difficult to ascertain what really happened. It was not talked about much. In her 80s, Einar's sister, Anne Swan Meigs, mentioned that their mother, Edla, attempted suicide and was taken to an institution for a while. Edla died in 1935.

John Swan did not attend his wife's funeral and seems to have had no further contact at all with his family. He later owned the Eureka Organ Factory in Eureka, California. He built and installed the organ in the Fort Bragg Trinity Lutheran Church in 1942. This organ is still in use occasionally. John Swan remarried in California. He died in Petaluma, Calif., in 1956. His obituary mentions nothing of his earlier life and family.

**Sam Lanin's Roseland Ballroom Orchestra, 1924**

Einar Swan's first New York gig was with Sam Lanin (1891-1977) and his Orchestra, playing at the Roseland Ballroom on Broadway.

Suddenly the 21-year old Worcester boy, Einar Swan, was at the center of popular music, making new, important musical acquaintances. One of them was tubaist Joe Tarto (1902-1986), soon to co-compose "White Ghost Shivers" with Swan. According to jazz historians Tim Gracyk and Stephen J. Hester, Einar Swan also arranged for Lanin's orches-

tra. He and Joe Tarto may have written all the arrangements for the first recordings of Lanin's Red Heads. According to jazz historian Frank Driggs, Swan and Tarto even wrote arrangements for the black band which was featured at the Roseland Ballroom at the same time: Fletcher Henderson's orchestra.

Brian Rust's discography lists a number of recordings by Sam Lanin's Roseland Ballroom orchestra where Einar Swan may have participated. However, for lack of further evidence the exact dates are difficult to ascertain.

**Vincent Lopez 1925-1930(?)**

After five months with Sam Lanin, Einar Swan was engaged by orchestra leader Vincent Lopez (1894-1975). According to the *Worcester Sunday Telegram*, December 22, 1957, the gig was a dance date in Springfield.

Soon after Einar Swan started with the Lopez orchestra, a major event took place – a tour to England. This tour has been thoroughly researched and reported in an article by Joe Moore ([www.mgthomas.co.uk/dancebands](http://www.mgthomas.co.uk/dancebands)).

Vincent Lopez and His Orchestra were booked to play at the opening of the Kit-Cat Club and at the Capitol Cinema Theatre in London in May 1925. Booking agent William Morris had offered Lopez £1200 a week for a two-month engagement. The orchestra sailed on the Leviathan from New York on May 1 and arrived at Southampton on May 8. The members of the band are

**The entire Vincent Lopez Orchestra, c. 1926, is shown here: Vincent Lopez, leader; Joe Tarto, tuba; probably George Napoleon, trumpet and reeds; probably Charlie Butterfield, trombone; Joe Gold, piano; Bob Effros, trumpet; probably Larry Abbott, reeds; unknown, banjo; unknown, trumpet; Einar Swan, reeds; probably William Kessler, drums; probably Billy Hamilton, reeds; Xavier Cugat and Pinky Herman (aka Jacob Pincus Perelmuth, aka Jan Pearce), violins.** (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)



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on the passenger list.

This is the run-down given by Joe Moore: Vincent Lopez (29) (piano/leader); Robert Effros (23) (trumpet), Norman Weiner (24) (trumpet), Michael Mosiello (28) (trumpet), Eino Swan (22) (reeds); Bernard Daley (24) (reeds), Biagio Napoli (28) (reeds); Xavier Cugat (25) (violin); Joseph Goldstein (31) (piano); William Kessler (31) (drums); Vincent Tortoriello (23); William Chestock (29), Francisco Giella (30), Frederick Greene (30), Joseph Griffith (31), Morris Kellner (25), Harry Lowenberg (28) (unspecified instruments). Vincent Tortoriello is tubaist Joe Tarto.

As shown by the photographs, Einar Swan played mainly reeds with the orchestra. According to Sylvester Ahola, Swan played first alto sax.

In his article, Moore vividly describes the band's engagements in London. A special performance before Queen Mary was arranged at Oxford. Among the sources of knowledge concerning this tour are a Pathé film clip (available at <http://www.britishpathe.com>) and numerous reports in *Variety*, according to Moore. On July 8, the Vincent Lopez Orchestra sailed on the S/S Paris back to New York.

According to the *Worcester Telegram*, April 24, 1927, 22-year old Einar was offered a contract to stay in London to conduct the Savoy Hotel Orchestra, one of the greatest in all Europe. "He turned down the offer. 'My baby was back in the United States and not very well,' he says, 'and I wanted to get back to her. Besides, I'm an American.'"

However, photographic evidence shows that his wife was, in fact, traveling with him. Einar's youngest child, Donald, reports, "My mother said that after a wonderful London tour in 1925, she returned and gave birth to my sister." Unfortunately, it would be difficult if not impossible today to verify the story about this offer.

It is equally hard to determine the reliability of the same article's account that Einar Swan, after returning to New York, "got an offer from Paul Whiteman, who with Lopez rules the empire of jazz as a twin king. He turned that down also."

When Lopez returned from England in July 1925, some musicians were replaced. Einar Swan is not listed as a member on Lopez's recordings, according to discographer Brian Rust (*The American Dance Band Discography 1917-1942*), but the rundowns of recording orchestras are more often than not subject to some doubt. Rust lists a number of recordings from this period. There is reason to believe that Einar Swan has been overlooked on some Lopez titles in

Rust's discography. According to Rust, Swan's instrument in the orchestra was trumpet, while all other available information indicates that he was a member of the reed section. Photographs of the orchestra show that one reed player did indeed double on trumpet. It is not Swan, but rather George Napoleon.


Einar Swan seems to have been well paid for his arrangement contributions to the Lopez orchestra, according to a sketch by violinist Xavier Cugat.

This successful and multi-talented

musician soon did the most unexpected thing. He quit playing.

## Einar Swan, The Arranger

After he left Vincent Lopez, Einar Swan worked mainly as an arranger for several orchestras, among them those of pianist-conductor Gustave Haenschen (1889-1980), Russian-American violinist Dave Rubinoff (1897-1986), the Paramount Theatre, New York, and Raymond Paige and the Westinghouse Symphony Orchestra.



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**Ann and Einar Swan on a cruise to Europe, 1925. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)**

It is difficult to understand how such an accomplished and successful multi-instrumentalist could give up playing. In a 1939 letter to his brother, Walter, Swan wrote, "Am very glad to hear that you're doing so well on the oboe. It used to be my favorite instrument. I haven't played anything except piano and organ for eight years."

Donald Swan explains his father's choice to quit playing for a living and become an arranger. He says, "Einar's daughter, Pearl (now Leslie von Roeder), was born in 1926, so he became a family man and probably found it better to live in one place and work as an arranger. He had played every instrument in an orchestra around the house. Can you imagine writing the arrangements for Raymond Paige who had a 100-man orchestra (plus one singer, Hildegard)? Einar Swan arranged for many orchestras when they performed on radio in the 1930s."

A December 1934 concert program from Cincinnati, Ohio, provides some additional information. Swan studied harmony and orchestration in New York under Michael Feveisky, a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov. After being chief arranger for Vincent Lopez for five years, Swan had been "associated the last four years exclusively with Rubinnoff."

Finnish-American trumpet player Sylvester Ahola told his biographer Dick Hill that Einar Swan, the arranger, was well paid, saying, "He ended up doing arrangements for violinist Dave Rubinnoff, and the agency gave him a \$1,500 bonus for a fancy arrangement that he did of 'Stormy Weather.'"

In a 1939 letter to his brother, Walter, Einar wrote, "Am not working at the

moment as the Raymond Paige program folded up. Hope something like it (a large orch.) comes soon as there is no money or prestige in dance arrangements."

Lyricist Al Stillman (1906-79) was married to Ann Kaufmann Swan's sister, Pauline. Donald Swan recalls, "When he and Einar got together with the family, they just had fun entertaining and playing."

On September 9, 1933, the multi-talented Einar Swan penned his "Impressions of Hollywood Orchestra After First Rehearsal For Chase And Sanborn Hour," probably to entertain the Rubinnoffs.

**Family Life**

Einar's wife, Ann (Anna) Kaufmann, (1904-93) was from Southbridge, Mass. According to their daughter, Leslie, the Swans were probably married in Connecticut in 1923. Ann was born in Kiev, Russia. She went to the Boston Conservatory of Music but never pursued a musical career. The school may be where she met Einar Swan. He converted to his wife's Jewish religion, probably in immediate connection with the marriage, and changed his middle name, William, to Aaron. His son, Donald, says that after this "his family wanted nothing to do with him. John didn't communicate with Einar after he converted," Donald Swan said.

ing to do with him. John didn't communicate with Einar after he converted," Donald Swan said.

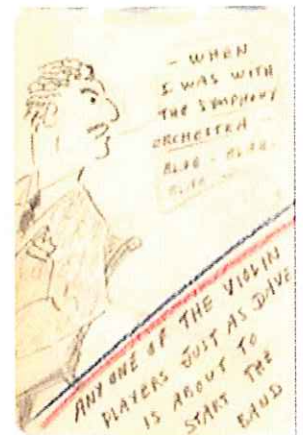
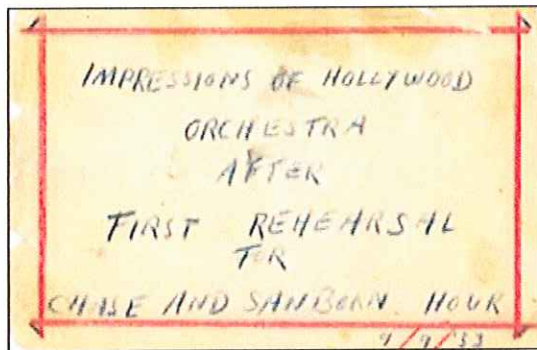
Later sources, such as ASCAP records on compositions, invariably give his name as Einar Aaron Swan. The sheet music of his 1931 hit "When Your Lover Has Gone" gives his name as E. A. Swan.

Einar Swan died August 8, 1940, while vacationing in Greenwood Lake, N.Y. He was only 37 years old. The cause of death was cerebral hemorrhage.

In a 1939 letter to his brother Walter, Einar had written, "Four years ago, a doctor told me that I had very high blood pressure. I didn't do anything about it and about two years ago I had a hemorrhage and stayed in a hospital for four weeks. In the doctors' opinion, there is nothing organically wrong, but they think I have inherited the condition from Mother."

Einar's daughter, Pearl, is now Leslie von Roeder, married to Robert von Roeder and living in Pennsylvania. Donald Swan (born in 1930) lives in California and is married to Liny. He writes, "I have six children - son Donald, Jr., daughters Danielle, Leslie, Gigi and Beatrice, and my son, Manny, who is a gifted and talented player and writer of rock songs."

**Cartoons by Einar Swan, 1933. (Illustration: Courtesy Donald Swan)**





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Swan's Serenades

Being a composer was never the main thing for Einar Swan. Royalties for musical compositions were a less reliable income source than being a musician and arranger. However, in a 1939 letter to his brother, Walter, Einar wrote, "I'm trying to write songs, that is enough of them to get into A.S.C.A.P., so that

maybe soon I can give up arranging which is very strenuous when you have to keep at it constantly."

I have detected only a dozen titles by his hand (including the march he wrote in 1914). Half of them are still merely titles to me.

These are the Einar Swan compositions given by ASCAP online: "In The Middle Of A Dream," "A Room With A View," "The Tip Off Cues," "Trail Of Dreams," "What Good Is Scheming," and "When Your Lover Has Gone."

The ASCAP Biographical Dictionary also mentions "Swan's Serenade" and "The Spirit Of St. Louis."

The April 24, 1927 article in the Worcester Telegram further mentions "White Ghost Shivers," "Closet Strut," and "Orient."

This oeuvre contains hit songs, less well-known material, and downright obscure titles. A few of them remain mysteries.

The waltz "Trail Of Dreams" (1926) has lyrics by Raymond W. Klages and melody [!] by Einar Swan, © Robbins-Engel Inc. It has been recorded by The Yellow Jackets on Okeh 1926, and by Ben Bernie, Fred Rich, Harold Oxley, Johnny Kamp, Paul Specht, and Vincent Lopez.

"White Ghost Shivers : (A Spooky Foxtrot)" (1926), an instrumental number, was written by Einar Swan and Joe Tarto, © Triangle Music Publishing Co., Inc. It has been recorded by the New Orleans Owls on Columbia 1926 and for Ken Burns' film *Unforgivable Blackness 2004* by The New Black Eagle Jazz Band.

"When Your Lover Has Gone" (1931)

has music and lyrics by E. A. Swan, ©Warner Bros. Inc. It was featured with considerable dramatic effect in the 1931 motion picture film *Blonde Crazy*, with James Cagney and Joan Blondell. It has been recorded by hundreds of artists and to this day remains the single "best-known" song by Einar Swan.

"A Room With A View" (1938) has lyric by Al Stillman and music by Einar Swan, © Bregman, Vocco & Conn Inc. It has been recorded by Artie Shaw, H. Forest, G. Auld, B. Eckstine, H. Geller, B. Hackett, and others.

"In The Middle Of A Dream" (1939) has lyrics by Al Stillman and music by Einar Swan and Tommy Dorsey, © Larry Spier Inc.

"What Good Is Scheming" was written by Einar Swan, Lee Christopher Hamblin and Simon Alban Law, according to ASCAP. (The two collaborators are unknown names to me. The song is also a mystery.

Its title is almost identical with the first line of the "When Your Lover Has Gone" lyrics.)

"The Tip Off Cues," "Swan's Serenade" (possibly a theme song for Swanie's Serenaders?), "The Spirit of St. Louis," "Closet Strut," and "Orient" are also mysteries.

Of these songs, "When Your Lover Has Gone" is undoubtedly Einar Swan's lucky strike. His lyrics are amazingly well-written, well wrought in the genre of the popular melancholy jazz ballad. There is no reason to over-interpret them as also being a personal, let alone biographical statement by the lyricist. All the same, one cannot help thinking of the extremely difficult situation that prevailed in the Swan family at the time when the song was composed.



"A Room With A View" sheet music.



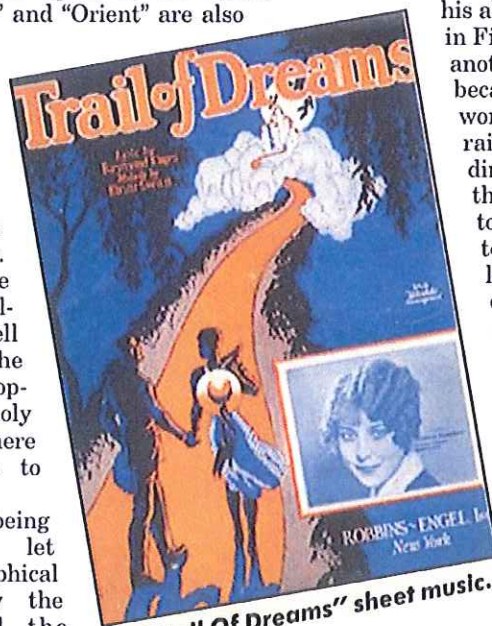
Einar Swan with family at summer home in Rye, NY, 1935: Pearl (later Leslie Von Roeder), Ann Kaufmann Swan, Einar Aaron Swan, Donald Swan. (Photo: Courtesy Donald Swan)

The following thoughts are mere speculation, but one wonders....

When Swan signed "E. A. Swan" on the sheet music, this was, as far as we know, the first time he used his Jewish middle name officially. At the same time, not signing with his full first name makes this composition stand out as slightly more incognito. This may be for personal reasons.

At the turn of the century, Einar's father, Matti Joutsen, left his allegedly "mean" parents in Finland and emigrated to another continent. He became John Swan. He worked hard, and he raised a family of extraordinary talents, a family that was meant to play together and stay together. A few years later, there was grave disagreement between him and his son, Einar, on music and religion. The falling-out resulted in mutual permanent alienation. Shortly afterwards, John Swan deserted his wife and the other children.

I would very much like to think that when Einar Swan penned his solemn and sad masterpiece, "When Your Lover Has Gone," he had his mother's misfortune and maybe also the memory of her melodic voice in mind. ♪



"Trail Of Dreams" sheet music.