Webb, Chick (1902-1939) Encyclopedia Article

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The Chick Webb Band with Ella Fitzgerald on vocals.

With precise ensemble playing rather than standout soloists, drummer Chick Webb's orchestra regularly won big band jazz contests in the mid-1930s. Born in Baltimore, Webb moved to New York City, and in 1926 started a band that included star sax men Benny Carter and Johnny Hodges. Despite his diminutive stature, aggravated by a curved spine, Webb was a virtuoso drummer, anchoring his band's beat with impeccable taste. From 1933, Edgar Sampson arranged such landmark numbers as "Stompin' at the Savoy." When Webb discovered the teenaged Ella Fitzgerald in 1935, her singing led the band to new heights, with hit records for Decca and regular appearances at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem broadcast nationally. After Webb died of spinal tuberculosis in 1939, Fitzgerald led the band for two years.

Further Reading:

Atkins, Ronald, ed. *All That Jazz.* New York, Carlton Books, 1996.

Balliett, Whitney. *American Musicians.* New York, Oxford Press, 1986.

Simon, George T. *The Big Bands.* New York, MacMillan, 1974.