

The
TRUMPET
of
EDWARD TOMPKINS
“EDDIE”

Born: Kansas City, Missouri, 1908
 Died: Camp Richenback, Tennessee, April 17, 1943

Introduction:

Oslo Jazz Circle was not very fond of the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra back in the day; we thought that the band lacked important soloists. This view still lingers among surviving members, but nevertheless it is a pleasure to present Eddie Tompkins, and he certainly has qualities.

History:

Trumpet from an early age. Played with Terrence Holder, Eli Rice, Jesse Stone, and Grant Moore before entering Iowa University in 1926. Played with Cecil Bruton and his Blue Six whilst at university, also worked with George E. Lee during last year of his studies. Left university and briefly rejoined Grant Moore, then worked with Terrence Holder, Bennie Moten, and Tommy Douglas (1931), trombonist Shuffle Abernathy (1932), before joining Jimmie Lunceford. Remained with Lunceford until December 1939. Whilst serving as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army he was accidentally shot dead during manoeuvres in Tennessee (ref. John Chilton: Who's Who of Jazz).

Note that his name is often spelt with an h: "Thompkins". We think this is incorrect, and have chosen to spell it like the contemporary label of the 78 rpm record "Put On Your Old Grey Bonnet", where he is featured as vocalist.

Message:

We have studied carefully the important work: Bertil Lyttkens: The Jimmie Lunceford Legacy (1996), having solo identifications. This has been very useful, but we have permitted ourselves to deviate from this in certain cases. The lack of reference material makes identification of Lunceford soloists sometimes quite difficult. We would appreciate our readers to give us critical feedback!

| | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 39169-A | Rain | Solo 18 bars. (M) |
| 39170-A | Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down | Solo 16 bars. (M) |
| 38916-C | Shake Your Head | Solo 8 bars. (FM) |

Good soli here; the highlights being "Since My Best Gal Turned Me Down" and his "Shake Your Head" (there are three trumpet soli and we think Sy Oliver solos first; then Tompkins and finally Stevenson).

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. May 29, 1935**

Eddie Tompkins, Paul Webster, Sy Oliver (tp), Russell Bowles, Elmer Crumbley, (tb), Eddie Durham (tb, g), Laforet Dent, Willie Smith (cl, as), Joe Thomas (cl, ts), Earl Carruthers (cl, as, bar), Eddie Wilcox (p), Al Norris (g), Moses Allen (b), Jimmy Crawford (dm, vib, tymp), Jimmie Lunceford (dir).

Six titles were recorded for Decca, three have ET:

| | | |
|---------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| 39553-A | Rhapsody Junior | Straight with orchestra (M) |
| 39556-A | Four or Five Times | Solo 14 bars (mute). (M) |
| 39556-B | Four Or Five Times | As above. (M) |

A new opportunity to compare two takes. The two soli have slight differences, with the B take to be preferred. On "Runnin' Wild", Stevenson's replacement Paul Webster hits the high notes. (Tompkins' few bars with the orchestra right after the tenor solo are hardly worth mentioning).

NYC. Sept. 23&24, 1935

Same. Six titles, five issued, one has ET:

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|---------|------|----------------------------|
| 39996-A | Babs | Solo with orch 8 bars. (M) |
|---------|------|----------------------------|

A rather straight solo of no interest.

NYC. Sept. 30, 1935

Same. Four titles, one has ET:

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|---------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 60013-A | I'll Take The South | Obbligato parts. Solo 6 bars. (F) |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|

Barely audible obligato, and a staccato solo ending corny.

NYC. Dec. 23, 1935

Same. Four titles, at least one has ET:

| | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 60275-B | I'm Nuts About Screw Music | Unlikely solo 8 bars. (FM) |
| 60276-A | The Best Things In Life Are Free | Solo 14 bars. (M) |
| 60277-A | The Melody Man | Unlikely 4, 4, 4 and 4 bars. (FM) |
| 60277-B | The Melody Man | As above. (FM) |

Tompkins starts nicely on "The Best Things In Life Are Free", but lapses into a corny phrase before barely hitting the limit of his high register. The rest of the solo is good enough, and another take is sorely missed. That is what we get on "The Melody Man", where we get no less than four brief solo spots (three before the vocal), however we find it more likely that these, as well as "I'm Nuts About Screw Music", are played by Paul Webster.

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Summer 1936**

Personnel same/similar.

Vitaphone Film Short, five titles, one has ET:

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|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Moonlight On The Ganges | With orch (mute). (FM) |
|-------------------------|------------------------|

Although this this film contains more soloing by Tompkins than any records, it is of interest only because we get some glimpses of him playing in the background, while "The Three Brown Jacks" do their stepping in front.

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Aug. 31, 1936**

Personnel as above except Ed Brown (cl, as, ts) replaces Dent.

One title was recorded for Decca:

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|---------|-----------------------|--|
| 61246-A | Organ Grinder's Swing | Straight (mute) with (as-WS). Probably solo 8 bars. (M) |
|---------|-----------------------|--|

An open horn solo contrasting very effectively with Oliver's growling. We believe it is played by Tompkins, although Lyttkens goes for Paul Webster here.

NYC. Sept. 1, 1936

Same. Four titles were recorded for Decca, three have ET:

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|---------|---------------------------|--|
| 61247-A | On The Beach At Bali Bali | Solo 8 bars. (M) |
| 61248-A | Me And The Moon | Straight 8 bars. Solo with orch 8 bars. (M) |
| 61249-A | Living From Day To Day | Solo with orch 8 bars. (SM) |

Gems are some times to be found where you least expect them. As here, in the corny song "On The Beach At Bali Bali". His allotted 8 bars start wonderfully in the best vintage trumpet tradition. Alas, the last half of the solo could have been better. On "Me And The Moon" he start his solo very effectively, quoting the preceding bar played by the trumpet section, before venturing into the high register and ending in a quote from the spiritual "Old Man River". On "Living From Day To Day" he paraphrases the melody in a masterly fashion. His best session so far!

NYC. Oct. 14, 1936

Same. Three titles, one has ET:

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|---------|-------------|------------------------------|
| 61323-A | Muddy Water | Solo with orch 32 bars. (FM) |
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Here Eddie Tompkins for the first, and sadly, the last time in his recording career, gets a 32 bars solo. Although heavily arranged, he manages to stand out from the orchestral accompaniment to make an impressive statement. To quote Eddy Determeyer's liner notes for Mosaic: "Tompkins is his usual self, full of swagger, Sturm und Drang".

NYC. Oct. 26, 1936

Same. Two titles, one has ET:

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|---------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 61346-A | Running A Temperature | Solo 8 bars. (M) |
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A rather ordinary solo here.

NYC. Jan. 18&20&26, 1937

Personnel as above except Dan Grissom (cl, as) added.
Seven titles; all three from the 26th have ET:

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|---------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 61551-A | Linger Awhile | Straight 16 bars. (FM) |
| 61552-A | Honest And Truly | Soli 8, 8 and 4 bars. (M) |
| 61553-A | Slumming On Park Avenue | Soli 10 and 10 bars. (M) |

Good soloing here, although rather straight.

BILLIE HOLIDAY & HER ORCHESTRA **NYC. April 1, 1937**

Eddie Tompkins (tp), Buster Bailey (cl), Joe Thomas (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Carmen Mastren (g), John Kirby (b), Alphonse Steel (dm), Billie Holiday (vo).
Four titles were recorded for Vocalion, two have ET:

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|---------|--------------------------|---|
| 20918-1 | Where Is The Sun? | Solo 10 bars (open). (S) |
| 20920-1 | They Can't Take That AFM | Straight intro 3 bars. Brief obbligato parts (mute). (S) |
| 20920-2 | They Can't Take That AFM | As above. (SM) |

It is a shame that this is the only time this great trumpeter is ever to be heard on record with a small band. Like most musicians who got a chance to accompany Billie Holiday in the late thirties, he does his very best. "Where Is The Sun?" is the recording that prompted this solography. I (Ronnie) have been fascinated by these 9 1/2 bars ever since I first heard them more than sixty years ago, and I repeat them in my mind every time I need a boost. Tompkins builds his solo with such authority, so logically, so melodically, that I can not imagine one note that might have been different on another take. (Although I believe that like all great jazz musicians, he would hardly have been able to repeat himself.) My buddy, the excellent trumpeter (in the late twenties Armstrong tradition) Torstein Kubban, wrote this to me: "A very well nuanced and tasteful solo. The tempo is exactly right". However, I am (RJ) not so fond of his intro on "They Can't ... " with its abrupt ending. The obbligato parts after the clarinet solo are beautiful, with little variations between the takes though.

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD & HIS ORCHESTRA**NYC. June 15, 1937**

Personnel similar to above.

Five titles were recorded for Decca, one has ET:

62261-A Raggin' The Scale Solo/straight 14 bars. (M)
 62261-B Raggin' The Scale As above. (M)

Corny soloing on a corny tune, but what else can one expect?

NYC. July 8, 1937

Same. Four titles, one has ET:

62344-A Posin' Soli 8 and 8 bars. (FM)

Tompkins' first solo on "Posin'" is quite ordinary, but then he seems to be inspired by Joe Thomas to provide a colourful bridge during the Chu-like tenor solo. Conversely, Thomas is inspired to reach new heights completing his own solo. Later in the session, Tompkins makes his vocal debut, and got his name on the label of the 78 rpm record's A side: "Put On Your Old Grey Bonnet", even if Willie Smith and Thomas are heard making some vocal comments. (Tompkins was a regular member of the band's famed vocal trio).

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD & HIS ORCHESTRA**LA. Nov. 5, 1937**

Eddie Tompkins, Paul Webster, Sy Oliver (tp), Russell Bowles, Elmer Crumbley, Trummy Young (tb), Willie Smith (cl, as), Ted Buckner, Dan Grissom (as), Joe Thomas (ts), Earl Carruthers (bar), Eddie Wilcox (p), Al Norris (g), Moses Allen (b), Jimmy Crawford (dm, vib, tymp), Jimmie Lunceford (dir).

Five titles were recorded for Decca, one has ET:

1010-A Pigeon Walk Straight 2 and 2 bars (mute). (FM)
 1010-C Pigeon Walk As above. (FM)

NYC. Jan. 6, 1938

Same. Three titles, one has ET:

63135-A I'm Laughing Up My Sleeve With orch. Obligato parts. (M)

NYC. April 12, 1938

Same. Four titles, one has ET:

63585-A Down By The Old Mill Stream Obligato parts. (M)

Nothing of much interest here.

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD & HIS ORCHESTRA**NYC. Jan. 3, 1939**

Personnel as above.

Five titles were recorded for Vocalion, but no ET.

NYC. Jan. 28, 1939

Same. Broadcast "Saturday Night Swing Club", two titles, but no ET.

NYC. Jan. 31, 1939

Same. Five titles, two have ET:

24052-2 You're Just A Dream Solo 8 bars. (SM)
 24055-1 I've Only Myself To Blame Straight 2 and 4, soli 2 and 2 bars (M)

Rather straight soloing.

NYC. Feb. 7, 1939

Same. Four titles, three have ET:

24084-1 Mixup Unlikely soli 6 + 16 bars. (F)
 24085-1 Shoemaker's Holiday Straight 6 bars. (M)
 24086-1 Blue Blazes Unlikely soli 8 and 4 bars. (F)

We think Paul Webster is the trumpet soloist on "Mixup" and "Blue Blazes", although some sources think otherwise.

NYC. April 7, 1939

Same. Four titles, but no ET.

NYC. May 17, 1939

Same. Four titles, two have ET:

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|---------|----------------|---|
| 24643-B | Oh Why, Oh Why | Intro 4 bars to soli 8 and 2 bars. (SM) |
| 24646-A | I Love You | As below? () |
| 24646-B | I Love You | Solo 15 bars. (M) |

“Oh Why, Oh Why” has a rather straight, but very nice 8 bars solo, while “I Love You” has got one of Tomkins’ very best soli on record. Just therefore the missing -A take is urgently wanted!!

NYC. June 11, 1939

Broadcast, one title but no ET.

NYC. Aug. 2, 1939

Same, except Gerald Wilson (tp) replaces Sy Oliver.
Five titles, one has ET:

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|---------|-------------------|------------------|
| 24968-A | I Want The Waiter | Solo 6 bars. (M) |
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NYC. Sept. 14, 1939

Same. Four titles, two have ET:

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|---------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 26067-A | You Can Fool Some Of The People | Straight 12 bars. (M) |
| 26069-A | Liza | Straight 3 bars. Solo 8 bars. (FM) |

His nice 8 bars solo on “Liza” is, sadly, the very last to be heard from this neglected trumpeter. He should not be forgotten!

On the next recording session, Dec. 14, 1939, ET is replaced by Snooky Young.

No further recording sessions.

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