

**The**  
**TROMBONE**  
**of**  
**GEORGE MATTHEWS**

Solographers: Jan Evensmo & Ola Rønnow  
Last update: Oct. 10, 2019, July 3, Nov. 2, 2023

Born: Dominica, West Indies, Sept. 23, 1912  
Died: NYC. June 28, 1982

*Introduction:*

We hate to say it, but Oslo Jazz Circle was not so well educated about trombones and particularly not those of the thirties. Thus George Matthews was not a name for us. Shame.

*History:*

Father was a guitarist. Raised in New York, studied for four years at the Martin Smith School of Music (1927-31). Played with various bands in and around New York, then joined Tiny Bradshaw in 1934. With Willie Bryant (1935-37), then with Louis Armstrong before joining Chick Webb's band, later worked under Ella Fitzgerald's leadership. With Count Basie from early 1946 until late 1949. With Erskine Hawkins during the early 1950s. Featured with Lucille Dixon's band (1960), continued to play regularly in New York (ref. John Chilton).

## GEORGE MATTHEWS SOLOGRAPHY

### **EDDIE DEAS & HIS BOSTON BROWNIES** **NYC. Oct. 22, 1931**

Personnel including George Matthews, Chester Burrill (tb), Eddie Deas (vo, dir).  
Four titles were recorded for Victor, 70297-1 "Signs Of The Highway" (Victor 22841) has not been available but:

70294-2	Jes' Shufflin'	Straight 4 bars. (M)
70295-1	All I Care About Is You	Straight breaks. (M)
70296-2	Little Mary Brown	Straight with orch. (M)

Solid swing orchestra well worth giving a listening, but nothing personal by the trombones.

### **TINY BRADSHAW & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Sept. 19, 1934**

Lincoln Mills, Shad Collins, Max Maddox (tp), George Matthews, Eugene Green ? (tb), Russell Procope, Bobby Holmes (as), Edgar Courance (cl, ts) Clarence Johnson (p), Bob Lessey (g), Ernest Williamson (b), Harold Bolden (dm), Tiny Bradshaw (ldr, vo).

Four titles were recorded for Decca:

38693-A	Shout, Sister, Shout	Solo 16+8 bars, (ts) on bridge. (F)
38694-A	Mister, Will You Serenade?	Solo 8 bars. (FM)
38695-A	The Darktown Strutters' Ball	Solo 18 bars. (F)
38696-A	The Sheik Of Araby	Solo 16 bars. (F)

### **NYC. Oct. 3, 1934**

Same. Four titles, no trombone solo on 38788 "She'll Be Coming", while 38787-A "I'm A Ding Dong Daddy" Solo 16 bars. (FM) has somebody else, but:

38785-A	Ol' Man River	Solo 8 bars. (FM)
38786-A	I Ain't Got Nobody	Solo 16+8 bars (cl) on bridge. (F)

Another excellent vintage band! That Bradshaw sings on all items just adds to the red hot swing atmosphere, and we can just lament that these sessions are all there are (no consolation to know that Bradshaw became a great entertainer after the war). All items also have trombone solo, and keen listening indicates that all soli are played by the same man (false!!). The strong but slightly primitive style, when compared to later sessions, also leads to George Matthews as the performer. If so, there is no doubt that this is his most important session, full of energy!! Postscript of Nov. 2, 2023: Further listening by K.-B. Rau, Ola and myself have concluded that the above is not quite correct! "... Ding Dong ..." is not played by GM (possibly Eugene Simon), but, as before, the remaining six are all GM.

### **WILLIE BRYANT & HIS ORCHESTRA** **NYC. Jan. 4, 1935**

Robert Cheek, Richard Clarke (tp), Edgar Battle (tp, vtb), John "Shorty" Haughton, Bob Horton, George Matthews (tb), Glyn Paque, Stanley Payne (cl, as), Johnny Russell (ts), Teddy Wilson (p), Arnold Adams (g), Louis Thompson (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Willie Bryant (ldr, vo).

Four titles were recorded for Victor, no (tb)-soli on 87265 -1 "Throwin' Stones At The Sun" and 87266-1 "It's Over Because We're Through". The remaining two, 87267-1 "A Viper's Moan" and 87268-1 "Chimes At The Meeting" have (tb)-soli but not sounding like GM, most likely Haughton.

### **NYC. May 8, 1935**

Personnel according to Rust including John Haughton, Bob Horton, Eddie Durham (tb), while GM is supposed to be omitted.

Four titles were recorded for Victor, no (tb)-soli on "Long About Midnight" and "Jerry The Junker". The remaining two, 89817-1 "Rigamarole" and 89819-2 "The Sheik" have (tb)-soli but not sounding like GM, most likely Haughton.

### **NYC. Aug. 1, 1935**

Personnel as above with Otis Johnson (tp), George Matthews (tb), Ram Ramirez (p), Ernest Hill (b), replacing Robert Cheek, Bob Horton or Eddie Durham, Teddy Wilson, Louis Thompson.

Four titles, no (tb) on 92910-1 "Long Gone", the remaining three have (tb)-soli, all seem to be by GM:

92908-1	The Voice Of Old Man River	Straight 16 bars. (F)
92909-1	Steak And Potatoes	Obbligato 16 and 8 bars. Solo 14 bars. (FM)

92911-1 Liza Solo 16 bars. (FM)

The strong trombone voice here sounds much like what we heard with Bradshaw and all soli must be played by the same man, by GM that is, most interesting is "... Potatoes".

**WILLIE BRYANT & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. April 9, 1936**

Richard Clarke, Jack Butler (tp), Taft Jordan (tp, vo), John "Shorty" Haughton, George Matthews (tb), Glyn Paque, Stanley Payne (as), Charlie Frazier (ts, fl), Johnny Russell (ts), Ram Ramirez (p), Arnold Adams (g), Ernest Hill (b), Cozy Cole (dm), Willie Bryant (ldr, vo).

Six titles were recorded for Bluebird, two have trombone soli, both by GM:

99973-1 All My Life Soli/straight 4, 4 and 4 bars. (M)

99975-1 The Glory Of Love Solo 16+8 bars, (cl) on bridge. (M)

**NYC. June 3, 1936**

Same. Four titles, one has trombone, seems to be by GM:

102006-1 I'm Grateful To You Intro 4 bars (mute). (SM)

Nice cooperation with trumpet on "... Life". GM also goes for it on "... Love", note the part after the bridge, but could in general be more concentrated here.

**CHU BERRY & HIS STOMPY STEVEDORES NYC. March 23, 1937**

Hot Lips Page (tp, vo-293,295), George Matthews (tb), Buster Bailey (cl), Chu Berry (ts), Horace Henderson (p, arr), Lawrence Lucie (g), Israel Crosby (b), Cozy Cole (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Variety:

M293-1 Now You're Talking My Language As below. (FM)

M293-2 Now You're Talking My Language Solo 6 bars. (FM)

M294-1 Back Home In Indiana Solo/straight 16 bars. (FM)

M294-2 Back Home In Indiana As above. (FM)

M295-1 Too Marvelous For Words Solo 8 bars. (FM)

M295-2 Too Marvelous For Words As above. (FM)

M296-1 Limehouse Blues Soli 8 and 6 bars. (F)

M296-2 Limehouse Blues As above. (F)

We became familiar with GM through this session, playing it again and again. It was not much space for trombone soli though, and most of his contributions are rather straight, not much improvisation. Nevertheless, to take part in a date like this, why not relax and have fun?

**NOBLE SISSLE NYC. April 14, 1937**

Bigband personnel including possibly George Matthews, Chester Burrill (tb).

Four titles were recorded for Variety, three issued, but no trombone soli.

**LOUIS ARMSTRONG & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. July 2&7, 1937**

Bigband personnel including George Matthews, George Washington, J. C. Higginbotham (tb).

Eight titles were recorded for Decca, but no trombone soli.

**CHICK WEBB & HIS ORCHESTRA May 2, 1938 – May 4, 1939**

Bigband personnels including George Matthews, Nat Story, Sandy Williams (tb).

Numerous recording sessions for Decca, but trombone soli are mostly believed to be by SW, however with the following exceptions:

**NYC. Aug. 17, 1938**

64461-A I Can't Stop Loving You Straight 8 bars. (M)

**NYC. Oct. 6, 1938**

64574-A I Love Each Move You Make Solo 8 bars. (M)

**NYC. Jan. 9, 1939**

How Am I To Know? Solo/straight 8 bars. (FM)

**NYC. Feb. 10, 1939**

Broadcast from the Cocoanut Grove at the Hotel Park Central, six titles, four have trombone, two by GM:

Deep In A Dream	Solo/straight 8 bars. (SM)
That Was My Heart	Solo/straight 8 bars. (SM)

**NYC. April 21, 1939**

65448-A That Was My Heart	Solo 8 bars. (SM)
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As you can see, trombones were not much featured with the Webb/Fitzgerald orchestra, and Sandy Williams was chosen ahead of GM. There is really nothing much to comment upon.

**ELLA FITZGERALD  
& HER ORCHESTRA**

**June 29, 1939 – July 31, 1942**

Bigband personnels including George Matthews, Sandy Williams and others (tb). Numerous recording sessions for Decca, but the few trombone soli are probably taken by SW.

**ELLA FITZGERALD & HER ORCHESTRA**

**1939 – 1942**

Bigband personnels including George Matthews, Sandy Williams and others (tb). Numerous broadcasts, but the few trombone soli are probably taken by SW, with at least two exceptions:

**NYC. Jan. 22, 1940**

NBC broadcast from Savoy Ballroom:

Confessin'

**NYC. early 1940**

Broadcast from Roseland Ballroom:

Peg O' My Heart	Solo with orch 14 bars. (SM)
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Rather straight solo on "Peg ..." but nice execution.

**COUNT BASIE & HIS ORCHESTRA**

**1946-49**

Personnels including Ted Donnelly, Bill Johnson, J. J. Johnson, Melba Liston, George Matthews, Eli Robinson, Dicky Wells (tb).

According to Sheridan's Count Basie Bio-discography, GM appears on the following:

**NYC. March 13, 1947**

Recording session for Victor:

655-1 Futile Frustration	Solo/straight 36 bars. (M)
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**COUNT BASIE,  
HIS INSTRUMENTALISTS & RHYTHM**

**NYC. May 20, 1947**

Emmett Berry (tp), George Matthews (tb), Charles Price (as), Paul Gonsalves (ts), Jack Washington (bar), Count Basie (p), Freddie Green (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Victor, no trombone soli on 887-1 "St. Louis Boogie" but:

888-1 Basie's Basement	Solo 8 bars. (S)
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889-1 Backstage At Stuff's	Solo 12 bars. Coda. (FM)
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890-1 My Buddy	Solo 16 bars. (M)
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Ten years since the last smallband session, and although GM plays rather simply, he fits nicely into the Basie atmosphere here.

**HELEN HUMES ACC. BY**

**BUCK CLAYTON's ORCHESTRA**

**NYC. June 24, 1947**

Buck Clayton (tp), George Matthews (tb), John Hardee (ts), Ram Ramirez (p), Mundell Lowe (g), Walter Page (b), Jo Jones (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Mercury, one has GM:

861-3 I Just Refuse To Sing The Blues	Intro 4 bars. (S)
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861-5 I Just Refuse To Sing The Blues	As above. (S)
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**LA. April 11, 1949**

Recording session (COUNT BASIE) for Victor:

601-1 Cheek To Cheek Straight 8 bars. (M)  
 603-1 Katy Straight 4 and 4 bars. (S)

**ERSKINE HAWKINS & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Dec. 6, 1950**

Bigband personnel including George Matthews, Andrew Penn (tb).

Four titles were recorded for Coral, one has trombone, probably GM:

80625 Bear Mash Blues Solo with orch 12 bars (mute). (S)

**NYC. Feb. 18, 1951**

Bigband personnel including George Matthews, Ted Donnelly, Bob Range (tb).

Four titles, one has trombone, probably GM:

80409 Love Never Comes Around Solo/straight 12 bars. (S)

The George Matthews solography has to take a stop now, but looking at the discography there is little chance we miss something. The following however needs to be included:

**DICKIE WELLS & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. Feb. 3, 1958**

Dickie Wells, Vic Dickenson, Benny Morton, George Matthews (tb), Skip Hall (p, org), Major Holley (b), Jo Jones (dm).

Three titles were recorded for Felsted, issued as "Bones For The King", no GM-solo on "Sweet Daddy" and "You Took My Heart" but:

Bones For The King Solo 12 bars (1<sup>st</sup> (tb)-solo). (S)

Great performance bringing all the good old guys together!!

**DICKIE WELLS & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. April 21/22, 1959**

Collective personnel: Dickie Wells, Vic Dickenson, Benny Morton, George Matthews (tb), Skip Hall (p, org), Kenny Burrell (g), Everett Barksdale (g, b), Major Holley (b), Herbie Lovelle (dm).

Seven titles were recorded for Felsted, issued as "Trombone Four In Hand", one has GM:

Air Lift Solo 32 bars (1<sup>st</sup> (tb)-solo). (M)

And one more, for the last time!

Last session in 1973.

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