

The
TROMBONE
of
GEORGE WASHINGTON

Born: Brunswick, Georgia, Oct. 18, 1907
Died: No info

Introduction:

George Washington was one of the better Afroamerican trombone players of the 1930s, but I cannot recall if Oslo Jazz Circle realized this back then. The main reason must have been that Mills Blue Rhythm Band records were hard to find in post-war Norway.

History:

Raised in Jacksonville, Florida. Trombone from the age of 10, studied at the Edward Waters College in 1922. Worked locally with Eagle Eye Shields, then sailed up to Philadelphia in 1925. Played briefly with J. W. Pepper's band, then did day work before moving to New York. Studied with Ernest Clarke and Walter Damrosch at the New York Conservatory. In 1925 worked in New York (and Florida) with Broadway Jones and his band, then worked with Luckey Roberts. With Dave Alford (early 1927), Arthur Gibbs' orchestra for a year from June 1927, then with Charlie Johnson and Vernon Andrade during the late 1920s. With Don Redman in 1931, Bennie Carter (1933), played with (and arranged for) the Mills Blue Rhythm Band on and off from summer 1932 until 1936, also staff arranger for impresario Irving Mills. With Fletcher Henderson early in 1937, then with Louis Armstrong's bigband from spring 1937 until 1943. Moved to West Coast, with Horace Henderson (summer 1945) and several stints with Benny Carter. Recorded with Count Basie (December 1947). Led own band in California and Las Vegas before working for many years in band led by drummer Johnny Otis. Worked with Joe Darensbourg in 1960, then free-lance session work and arranging. (ref. John Chilton).

GEORGE WASHINGTON SOLOGRAPHY

FOWLER'S FAVORITES

NYC. July 5, 1927

Personnel taken from Brian Rust: Unknown (tp), (tb), possibly Ernest Elliott (cl, sop), possibly Charlie Holmes (as), unknown (ts), Lemuel Fowler (p, vo—"... Blues"), unknown (bjo), (tu), (dm). However, distinguished jazz scholar K.-B. Rau argues for a different personnel: Leonard Davis (cnt), George Washington (tb), Eugene Mikell (cl, as), Happy Caldwell (sop, ts), Lemuel Fowler (p, vo—"... Blues"), Paul Burnett (bjo), Billy Taylor (tu), Sammy Hodges (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Columbia, both have trombone:

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|--|
| 144627-1 | Percolatin' Blues | In ens. Solo 18 bars (mute). (FM) |
| 144628-3 | Hot Strut | In ens. Solo 16+8 bars, (cl) on bridge. (FM) |

Since five years will pass until any definite GW solo will appear, it is difficult to find aural evidence, but particularly the last 8 bars of "... Strut" can give support.

CHARLIE JOHNSON & HIS ORCHESTRA

NYC. May 8, 1929

Suggested personnel (K.-B. Rau): Leonard Davis, Sidney de Paris (tp), George Washington (tb), Ben Whitted, Edgar Sampson (cl, as), Ben Waters (cl, ts), Charlie Johnson (p), Bobby Johnson (bjo), Billy Taylor (b), George Stafford (dm). Another suggestion (Brian Rust) has been George Stevenson/Stephenson but he did not join the band until three years later (ref. John Chilton).

Three titles were recorded for Victor:

- | | | |
|---------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 51298-1 | Harlem Drag | Solo 2 bars. (SM) |
| 51298-2 | Harlem Drag | As above. (SM) |
| 51299-1 | Hot Bones And Rice | Solo 16 bars (mute). (SM) |
| 51299-2 | Hot Bones And Rice | As above. (SM) |
| 53600 | Mo'lasses | Solo 8 bars. () |

"Hot Bones ..." is interesting, and the trombonist may very well be GW.

CLARENCE WILLIAMS' JAZZ KINGS

NYC. Sept. 26, 1929

Suggested personnel (K.-B. Rau): Charlie Gaines (tp), George Washington (tb), Ben Whitted (cl, as), Benny Waters (cl, ts), Clarence Williams (p), Leroy Harris (bjo), Cyrus St. Clair (tu). Another suggestion (Tom Lord) has been Julius "Geechie" Fields.

Two titles were recorded for Columbia:

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 149056-3 | Nervous Breakdown | Solo 12 bars (mute). (M) |
| 149057-2 | Railroad Rhythm | Straight 8 bars. (FM) |

We feel it is difficult to give reliable identification, since reference material is several years into the future.

CLARENCE WILLIAMS & HIS JAZZ KINGS

NYC. Dec. 3, 1929

Suggested personnel (K.-B. Rau): Ed Anderson (tp), George Washington (tb), Edgar Sampson (cl, as), Arville Harris (cl, ts), James P. Johnson (p), Leroy Harris (bjo), Harry Hull or Richard Fullbright (b), Eva Taylor (vo). Many others have been suggested: Charlie Green, Wilbur de Paris and Julius Fields

Two titles were recorded for Columbia:

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| 149665-4 | Zonky | Solo 16 bars. (M) |
| 149666-3 | You've Got To Be Modernistic | Solo 16 bars. (FM) |

The same goes for this session, and also we are not confident that it is the same trombone player on these two Clarence Williams sessions.

ELMER SNOWDEN & HIS ORCHESTRA / SMALL'S PARADISE ENTERTAINERS

NYC. 1932/1933

Leonard Davis, Roy Eldridge (tp), Dicky Wells, George Washington (tb), Otto Hardwick, Al Sears, Wayman Carver (reeds), Don Kirkpatrick (p), Elmer Snowden (bjo), Richard Fullbright (b), Sid Catlett (dm), unknown female (vo). Warner Brothers' movie short "Smash Your Baggage", four titles, but no GW.

MILLS BLUE RHYTHM BAND

NYC. Aug. 17&26, 1932

Personnel may include George Washington (tb) as given in Rust.

Four titles were recorded for Banner, but all trombone soli are listed in the Henry Hicks solography, not sounding like GW, though some may be Harry White.

MILLS BLUE RHYTHM BAND **NYC. Sept. 23, 1932**

Wardell Jones, Shelton Hemphill, Ed Anderson (tp), Henry Hicks, George Washington (tb), Gene Mikell (cl, as), Crawford Wethington (as, bar), Joe Garland (cl, ts, bar), Edgar Hayes (p), Benny James (bjo, g), Hayes Alvis (b, tu), O'Neil Spencer (dm), Baron Lee (dir).

Three titles were recorded for Banner, two issued, one has GW:

12357-1 Jazz Cocktail Solo 16 bars. (F)

George Washington appears as a strong and confident voice, with some minor fluffs, on a fast and brilliant record side with the vastly underrated MBRB.

MILLS BLUE RHYTHM BAND **NYC. March 1, 1933**

Personnel as above with Eddie Mallory (tp) possibly added.

Three titles were recorded for Columbia but no GW.

BENNY CARTER & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. March 14, 1933**

Shad Collins, Leonard Davis, Bill Dillard (tp), George Washington, Wilbur DeParis (tb), Benny Carter (tp, cl, as, dir, arr), Howard Johnson (as), Chu Berry (ts), Nicholas "Rod" Rodriguez (p), Lawrence "Larry" Lucie (g), Ernest Hill (b), Sidney Catlett (dm, vib).

Four titles were recorded for Columbia:

265090-2 Swing It Solo with ens 16 bars. (FM)

265091-3 Synthetic Love Solo 16 bars (mute). (M)

265092-2 Six Bells Stampede Solo 16 bars. (FM)

265093-2 Love, You're Not The OFM Straight 16+8 bars, orch on bridge. Straight 6 bars to coda. (SM)

To be chosen for a recording session with Benny Carter shows that GW now is a recognized trombone player, and he is believed to be heard on all four items. There are slight fluffs as in "... Stampede", but in general he plays competent trombone in a quite personal style.

SPIKE HUGHES & HIS NEGRO ORCHESTRA **NYC. April – May, 1933**

Personnel including George Washington, Dicky Wells (tb).

Recording sessions for English Decca, but all trombone soli are by Dicky Wells.

MILLS BLUE RHYTHM BAND **NYC. Aug. 31, 1933**

Personnel as March 1, 1933.

Four titles were recorded for Melotone, three issued, all have trombone soli. 'Storyville' assumes Hicks on two but this is doubtful. We think the relaxed and swinging solo on "... Martini" sounds like Hicks, while the other two seem to be by GW. Note the typical Washington-phrase in bar 5 of "Feelin' Gay":

13929-1 Harlem After Midnight Solo 8 bars. (FM)

19931-1 Feelin' Gay Break 2 bars. Solo 8 and 16 bars. (FM)

NYC. Oct. 5, 1933

Same. Four titles were recorded for Victor, all have trombone soli, but the guys in 'Storyville' must be in error here on "Kokey Joe"; GW's favourite phrase crops up again in bar 9 and at the beginning of the last 8 bars:

78093-1 Break It Down Solo 8 bars. (F)

70094-1 Kokey Joe Solo 16+6 bars, (p) on bridge. (FM)

78096-1 Harlem After Midnight Solo 8 bars. (FM)

NYC. Dec. 4, 1933

Same, except Lucky Millinder (dir) replaces Lee.

Three titles were recorded for Victor, two issued but no GW.

Chi. Feb. 20, 1934

Similar. Two titles were recorded for Bluebird:

80278-1 The Stuff Is Here Solo 8 bars. (FM)

80279-1 The Growl Solo 12 bars. (FM)

GW is a rough unsophisticated player, whose style fits perfectly into the hard swinging style of the early MBRB. Strong soloing on these sessions, with "... Gay" and "Kokey ..." as typical examples, although his problems with attacking the notes cleanly can be quite annoying. The two quite similar and somewhat comely versions of "Harlem ..." shows also that there is not much improvisation.

Note that 'Storyville' has Henry Hicks on "The Growl", but we disagree; GW is recognizable by his use of the same phrase again in bar 9, and also by his problems with attacking the notes clearly, so characteristic of nearly all his soli.

CHICK BULLOCK & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. April 19, 1934**

Wardell Jones, Shelton Hemphill, Ed Anderson (tp) or Eddie Mallory (tp), George Washington, unknown (tb), Crawford Wethington (as, bar), Gene Mikell (cl, as), Joe Garland (cl, ts, bar), Edgar Hayes (p, arr), Benny James (bjo, g), Hayes Alvis (tu, b), O'Neil Spencer (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Banner:

15084-1 Frankie And Johnnie Solo 12 bars. (M)
15085-1 I Can't Dance Solo 16+8 bars, ens on bridge. (FM)

same date

Same, as **TODD ROLLINS & HIS ORCHESTRA**, two titles, not available.

This is of course the Mills Blue Rhythm Band again, and GW's style is easily recognizable with two good trombone soli.

MILLS BLUE RHYTHM BAND **NYC. Oct. 4, 1934**

Wardell Jones, Shelton Hemphill, Henry "Red" Allen (tp), George Washington (tb, arr), probably Henry Hicks (tb), Gene Mikell (cl, sop, as, bar), Crawford Wethington (cl, as, bar), Joe Garland (cl, ts, bar, arr), Edgar Hayes (p), Benny James or Lawrence "Larry" Lucie (g), Hayes Alvis (b), O'Neil Spencer (dm), Chuck Richards (vo), Alex Hill, Benny Carter (arr), Lucky Millinder (dir).

Three titles were recorded for Columbia, two have trombone, both GW:

16036-A Let's Have A Jubilee Solo 8 bars. (F)
16037-A Out Of A Dream Straight 32 bars (mute). (SM)

NYC. Dec. 5, 1934

Same/similar. Three titles, one has trombone, by GW:

16271-1 African Lullaby Solo 12 bars (mute).
Duet with (as) (mute). (SM)

NYC. Dec. 11, 1934

Same/similar. Three titles but no trombone.

A fast "... Jubilee" confirms GW's strong and hot style in fast tempi. With mute his style is much softer, as evident in the nice "... Lullaby".

HENRY ALLEN & HIS ORCHESTRA **NYC. Jan. 23, 1935**

Henry Allen (tp, vo), Pee Wee Erwin (tp), George Washington (tb), Buster Bailey (cl), Luis Russell (p), Danny Barker (g), Pops Foster (b), Paul Barbarin (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Melotone, no GW on 16672 "It's Written All Over Your Face" but:

16671-1 Believe It, Beloved (vo) Solo 12 bars (mute). (M)
16671-2 Believe It, Beloved (non-vo) As above. (M)
16681-1 Smooth Sailing Solo 32 bars. (F)
16682-1 Whose Honey Are You? Solo 30 bars (mute). (F)

The two trombone soli on "... Beloved" are quite similar, and we may deduce that GW possibly was no great improviser. However his fast and hot soli on "... Sailing" and "... Honey ...?" show that he was one of the better black trombone players of his time.

MILLS BLUE RHYTHM BAND **NYC. Jan. 25, 1935**

Henry Allen, Wardell Jones, Shelton Hemphill (tp), J. C. Higginbotham, George Washington (tb), Gene Mikell (cl, as), Crawford Wethington, Joe Garland (reeds), Edgar Hayes (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), Elmer James (b), O'Neil Spencer (dm), Lucky Millinder (dir), Chuck Richards (vo).

Three titles were recorded for Columbia, two have trombone, at least one has GW:

16700-1 Back Beats Solo 8 bars. (FM)

NYC. July 2, 1935

Same. Three titles, two have trombone, certainly by GW:

17760-1 Harlem Heat Solo 32 bars (mute). (F)
17761-1 Once To Every Heart Solo 12 bars (mute). (S)

- NYC. July 9, 1935
 Same. Three titles, two have trombone, one by GW:
 17797-1 There's Rhythm In Harlem Solo 16 bars (mute). (FM)
- NYC. Aug. 1, 1935
 Same. Four titles but trombone soli by JCH.
- NYC. Dec. 20, 1935
 Same except Tab Smith (as) replaces Mikell.
 Four titles but trombone solo by JCH.
- NYC. Jan. 21, 1936
 Same. Two titles, one has GW:
 18548-2 Midnight Ramble Solo 24 bars. (M)
- NYC. May 20, 1936
 Same. Four titles, two have GW:
 19297-1 Everything Is Still Okay Solo/straight to long coda. (SM)
 19298-1 Jes' Natch'ully Lazy Solo 6 bars. (M)
- NYC. Aug. 11, 1936
 Same. Four titles but trombone soli by JCH.
- NYC. Oct. 15, 1936
 Same except Billy Kyle (p) and Hayes Alvis (b) replace Hayes and James.
 Four titles but trombone solo by JCH.
- NYC. Nov. 20, 1936
 Same. Four titles, one has GW:
 20297-1 Algiers Stomp Solo 32 bars (mute). (FM)

With the appearance of J.C., the trombone competition is much more heavy, but GW still manages pretty well. It seems that he uses the mute more now, and quite long soli like "... Heat" and "... Stomp" are executed nicely. He takes the bridge on Red's trumpet solo on "... Beats". With the closing of MBRB, the main scene for GW's solid and traditional trombone seems to weaken, and he is rarely heard as a soloist any more.

**FLETCHER HENDERSON
& HIS ORCHESTRA**

NYC. March 2 & 22, 1937

Personnels including George Washington, Ed Cuffee, J. C. Higginbotham (tb).
 Two recording sessions for Vocalion, but no trombone soli.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG & HIS ORCHESTRA July 2, 1937 – March 14, 1940

Personnels including George Washington, J. C. Higginbotham, George Matthews, Wilbur De Paris (tb).

Numerous recording sessions for Decca, but trombone soli believed to be by J. C. Higginbotham.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG & HIS ORCHESTRA NYC. March 10, 1941

Louis Armstrong (tp, vo), George Washington (tb), Prince Robinson (cl, ts), Luis Russell (p), Lawrence Lucie (g), John Williams (b), Sid Catlett (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Decca:

- 68796-A Everything's Been Done Before Weak obbligato parts. (SM)
 68797-A I Cover The Waterfront In ens 16+8 bars, solo 4 bars on bridge. Weak obbligato parts. (SM)
 68798-A In The Gloaming Weak obbligato parts. In ens. (SM)
 68798-B In The Gloaming As above? ()
 68799-A Long, Long, Ago Break. Solo 8 bars. Weak obbligato parts. In ens. (FM)

NYC. April 11, 1941

Same. Four titles, three have GW:

- 68997-A Hey Lawdy Mama Weak obbligato parts.
 Solo 10 bars. (M)

- 68998-A I'll Get Mine Bye And Bye In ens. Straight 16 bars.
Solo 18 bars. In ens. (F)
- 69000-A Yes Suh! Solo 14 bars. In ens. (FM)

These smallband sessions give GW some opportunity to play, but the stage belongs of course mostly to Louis. There are some good trombone soli particularly on "... Lawdy Mama" and "Yes Suh".

LOUIS ARMSTRONG & HIS ORCHESTRA Chi. Nov. 16, 1941

Bigband personnel including George Washington, Norman Greene, Henderson Chambers (tb).

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

L.A. April 17, 1942

Personnel including George Washington, James Whitney, Henderson Chambers (tb).

Four titles, one has trombone solo, possibly GW:

- 2974-A Cash For Your Trash Solo 8 bars. (M)

Sounds like GW, what do you think?

George Washington continues to play with Louis Armstrong, then with Fletcher Henderson, Benny Carter, Count Basie, Johnny Otis and numerous smaller groups, last recording session in 1958. We have not done research on this later period, but GW's music belongs to the thirties, and the probability of finding any trombone soli is considered quite low, of exciting quality even lower. His solography must therefore stop here for the time being, but any findings would be very much welcomed.

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