James Matthews, poet, writer and publisher, has produced seven books of poetry, a collection of short stories, a novel and an anthology of poetry which he edited. Most of his work was banned under the previous government and was translated and published overseas. For 23 years he was denied a passport and was placed in detention from September to December 1976. Solitary confinement was widely used during the apartheid years; its purpose being to disorient, to dehumanise, to undermine the detainee's sense of self-identity.
James Matthews waged a struggle against this agenda with the one weapon the jailers couldn't take away from him - his ability to turn words into poems. In 1980 Matthews participated in the Frankfurt BookFair, and in 1982 he participated in the Cultural and Resistance Conference in Gaberone. He was awarded a Fellowship at Iowa University, U.S.A. and was the Founding member of the Vakalisa Art Association and Founding member and Patron of the Congress of South African Writers.

James Matthews is the first Black person to have established an art gallery (Gallery Afrique) in South Africa, and is the first Black to have established a publishing house (BLAC Publishing House 1974 - 1991). The publishing house closed in 1991 due to constant harassment by the previous government. Matthews is the recipient of the Woza Afrika Award (1978), Kwaza Honours List - Black Arts Celebration, Chicago, U.S.A. (1979), and the Freeman of Lehrte and Nienburg, Germany (1982).

<b>Awards</b>
Woza Afrika Award (1978)
Freeman of Lehrte and Nienburg, Germany (1982).
Bartholemew

John Eric Morcambe died
and with him 29.8 million
of the nation, as was the ratings
that Christmas special
he was special, ratings don't lie
Heart attacks and heart bypasses
he was the epitome of success
and none of it grudged, not like today.
The nation still mourns because his
Christmas shows are still shown.
Good show, good Christmas
Bad show, bad Christmas
that's how the festive season was judged
that is a lot of pressure.
I suppose heart attacks were inevitable
there weren't many bad shows
he tried fly fishing to relax
too little too late, he was a performer
and fish don't clap.
I feel for the family, having to share,
I don't know what that could be like.
I couldn't do it, I couldn't begin to understand.

May 1984, I was Eleven.

02/04/02

James Matthews
The Midnight Hour

the midnight hour
has a special quality
a stillness of graveyards
after hours
am I the only one
alive to hear the dead
astir in their grave?
perhaps, I am dying
and now aware
only when the midnight hour
had passed
will my spirit depart
to take solitary walks
along the stars
and rest in the moon’s crescent
sipping moondew
from translucent goblet
seeking traces of others
who had wandered this way
ears strain to capture
echoes of conversations
of the past
refreshed, i continue passage
along heaven’s breadth
dawn finds me
blanket-wrapped entombed
on the cement floor
of my cell

James Matthews