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# Louis Armstrong

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**Armstrong, Louis [Dippermouth; Papa Dip; Pops; Satchelmouth; Satchmo]** (*b* New Orleans, LA, 4 Aug 1901; *d* New York, NY, 6 July 1971). Trumpeter, singer, and entertainer.

1. LIFE. 2. RECORDINGS. 3. COMPOSITIONS. 4. FILMS AND SHOWS. 5. LEGACY.

## **1. Life.**

Despite his lifelong claim of 4 July 1900 as his birthday, Armstrong was actually born on 4 August 1901 as recorded on a baptismal certificate discovered after his death. Although calling himself “Louis Daniel Armstrong” in his 1954 autobiography, he denied knowledge of his middle name or its origin. Nevertheless, evidence of “Daniel” being a family name is strong: Armstrong's paternal great-great-grandfather, a third generation slave brought from Tidewater Virginia for sale in New Orleans in 1818, was named Daniel Walker, as was his son, Armstrong's great-grandfather. The latter's wife, Catherine Walker, sponsored her great-grandson's baptism at the family's home parish, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church on Canal Street.

Armstrong's mother, Mary (“Mayann”) Albert (1885–1927), a recent arrival in New Orleans from rural Boutte, Louisiana, was living with relatives “back o’ town” on Jane Alley when she met Catherine and Daniel Walker's grandson, William Armstrong (1880–1933), residing just around the corner on South Dupree. William abandoned the family soon after his son's birth but a short-lived reconciliation with Mayann produced a second child, Beatrice (“Mama Lucy”) two years later.

Initially, Louis stayed with his paternal grandmother, Josephine, while his mother, working as a domestic and part-time prostitute, came and went. Around age five, he joined his mother, sister, and a parade of “step-fathers” at a dilapidated tenement on Perdido Street in the colored red-light district. From here he attended Fisk School nearby, “wailed” enthusiastically at the sanctified Baptist church across the street, “second-lined” marching brass bands, and absorbed

the proto-jazz mixture of ragtime and blues pouring from surrounding honky-tonks, brothels, and saloons.

Before age ten Armstrong began contributing to the family income by selling newspapers, delivering coal, or collecting junk by day and singing with a quartet on the street by night. On New Year's Eve 1912, he was arrested for firing his "step-father's" pistol in public and, as a "repeat offender," remanded to the Colored Waif's Home on the edge of the city. The Home, a military reform school for boys run by ex-cavalry officer Joseph Jones, provided Armstrong with a daily routine, regular meals, and his instruction on the cornet from band director Peter Davis. Soon appointed leader of the school band, which often paraded and performed in and around the city, he was unhappy to leave the Home when released to his father's custody after 18 months.

William Armstrong, a "charcoal man" at a turpentine company whose wife was expecting her third child, had petitioned the court to release Louis to cook for his family and mind his young boys. When his extra mouth



Louis  
Armstrong  
, c1930.

(Private  
Collection/  
Peter  
Newark  
American  
Pictures/T  
he  
Bridgema  
n Art  
Library)

proved too expensive for his father's household after a few months, Louis rejoined Mayann and Mama Lucy, resumed delivering coal or selling newspapers, and obtained his first job as a professional musician, playing the blues for pimps and prostitutes at a local tavern. Upon his cousin Flora's death, 14-year-old Armstrong "adopted" her illegitimate son, Clarence (1915–1998). This child, who later suffered brain damage from a fall, remained in Armstrong's care for the rest of his life, putting a strain on more than one of the trumpeter's four marriages.

Armstrong idolized KING OLIVER, reputedly the best cornetist in the city, who reciprocated by giving the boy lessons and recommending him for gigs. Oliver left New Orleans for Chicago in early 1919, ceding his place in the highly regarded Kid Ory Band to his protégé. That summer, Armstrong, newly but unhappily married to prostitute Daisy Parker (c1897–1950), joined Fate Marable's riverboat band in which he played through 1921, taking odd jobs in New Orleans during the off-season. Since bands on the river played for dancing from stock arrangements, Armstrong, tutored by Marable and fellow bandsman David Jones, learned to read music for the first time. Armstrong claimed to have met and subsequently to have been influenced by Bix Beiderbecke. On a trip upriver to Davenport, Iowa from St. Louis, the riverboats' summer hub.

In late summer 1922 Oliver summoned Armstrong to join his Creole Jazz Band at the Royal Gardens cabaret in Chicago. Here the cornetist played second to Oliver's lead, intriguing audience and musicians alike by his faultless harmony on "improvised" duet breaks. While with Oliver, Armstrong met, wooed and (after a quickie divorce) married Lillian (Lil) Hardin (1898–1971), the Creole Band's pianist, in 1924. Lil encouraged her husband to leave Oliver and establish his own career with Fletcher Henderson in New York City. Armstrong spent a little over a year with Henderson as the band's "hot" soloist before being lured back to Chicago in late 1925 by his wife, who negotiated an "unheard-of salary" for him as the "World's Greatest Jazz Cornetist" in her new band at the Dreamland cabaret on the South Side. Simultaneously Armstrong began recording a now historic series of small-group sides, collectively known as the Hot Fives and Hot Sevens, which extended through 1928. One of these recordings, "Heebie Jeebies," forever identified Armstrong with scat singing.

Shortly after his return to Chicago, Armstrong began doubling with Erskine Tate's Orchestra, playing for silent films at the Vendome Theater a few blocks from the Dreamland. Having alternated between trumpet with Henderson and cornet on small-group recordings in New York, he now switched permanently from the latter instrument to the former. His high-register playing and dramatic solos on operatic numbers with Tate attracted crowds as well as the attention of Alpha Smith (1907–43), who would become his third wife. When the Dreamland closed for liquor violations in 1926, Armstrong doubled from the Vendome to the Sunset Café four blocks away, whose band included pianist Earl Hines. At the Sunset, a black-and-tan dance hall that also staged elaborate floor shows, Louis honed his entertainment skills by adding mugging, dancing, and singing to his act, all of which he had been discouraged from doing with Oliver and Henderson.

The year 1927 was one of professional and personal instability for Armstrong. Early that year the leader of the Sunset Café Band, Carroll Dickerson, was fired and the group reborn as Armstrong's Stompers. The publication of Armstrong's transcribed "hot choruses" and jazz breaks in the middle of the year testified to the trumpeter's growing popularity but was marred by the death of his mother, which, notwithstanding her apparent shortcomings as a parent, left her son disconsolate. By year's end the Sunset had closed, Armstrong's attempts to operate his own dance hall with Hines and drummer Zutty Singleton had failed, and, having earlier left the Vendome, he returned to being the "feature man" in a movie theater orchestra.

Armstrong spent most of his final two years in Chicago fronting the reunited Sunset Café Band under Dickerson (but minus Hines) at the new Savoy Ballroom. Financial difficulties at the Savoy in 1929 prompted him to take the band to New York City, where his record-producer manager, Tommy Rockwell, eventually found them work in Harlem substituting for the house band at Connie's Inn. Connie's band was then on Broadway accompanying Fats Waller and Andy Razaf's *Hot Chocolates*, in which Armstrong's cameo appearance on "Ain't Misbehavin'" caused a sensation and introduced him to a sizable white audience.

Fired from Connie's Inn in early 1930 after the close of "Hot Chocolates," Armstrong broke up his band, briefly reconciled with Lil and traveled with her to Los Angeles where he had been hired to front the Sebastian's New Cotton Club Orchestra, which included Lionel Hampton. A recording with country singer Jimmie Rodgers earned Louis and Lil early crossover credit, and an appearance in *Ex-Flame* (of which no trace survives) inaugurated Armstrong's movie career. Regarding the West Coast as his new home, Armstrong canceled his contract with Rockwell, who wanted him back at Connie's Inn. But a tip to the police by a rival club owner got Armstrong arrested for smoking marijuana, a drug which he used with apparent impunity for the rest of his life. After serving minimal jail time in March 1931, he fled to the Midwest where his new manager, Johnny Collins, booked him into a Chicago club. When a feud with Rockwell over his client's services appeared to threaten the trumpeter's safety, Collins found Armstrong a summer residency at the white Suburban Gardens dance hall in New Orleans.

On his first trip home since leaving nine years earlier, the black community greeted "Little Louie" with a hot jazz band and carried him on their shoulders down Canal Street. Before the large crowd gathered at the Suburban Gardens for the band's first performance, the white radio announcer could not bring himself to "announce that nigger" (Jones and Chilton, 148). Unfazed, Armstrong took the microphone and introduced himself—something unprecedented in Jim Crow New Orleans. With dancers thronging the Gardens nightly, Louis enjoyed his three-month stay in the Crescent City. He organized a baseball team (the Armstrong Nine), which played conservatively to avoid soiling their new uniforms, and paid well publicized visits to relatives, old haunts, and the Colored Waif's Home. Racism, though, probably instigated the precipitous cancellation of a farewell concert for his black fans and unquestionably caused the band's arrest and temporary imprisonment in Memphis during their subsequent tour of southern states.

In mid-1932 before settling out of court with Rockwell, Collins sent Armstrong on a four-month tour of England, where the performer's exuberant onstage demeanor and altissimo playing both shocked and fascinated skeptical British audiences. A year later Armstrong was greeted tumultuously by crowds on an 18-month tour of Europe, although he had to curtail his playing for a large portion of the trip because of lip problems. Recuperating in Paris, he jammed with gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt, who, inspired by these sessions, founded (with Stephane Grappelli) the first European jazz band of significance. Armstrong returned to New York in early 1935 with his finances in disarray. Having fired Collins in Europe, he decided to hire the tough, disreputable former manager of the Sunset Café, Joe Glaser, as his manager. Armstrong cared only to perform and wanted nothing to do with the business aspects of his career. Settled by a handshake, the agreement of a 50–50 split of the trumpeter's revenues with his manager lasted for life and made millionaires of them both.

Glaser put Armstrong back on the road fronting a big band at increasingly profitable venues and had him in the recording studio constantly. Glaser arranged for articles in *Vanity Fair*, and in 1936 negotiated Armstrong's appearance

in the film *Pennies From Heaven*, which initiated a long professional and personal relationship between the trumpeter and the film's star, Bing Crosby. In 1937 Armstrong became the first African American to host a national radio program, the *Fleischman's Yeast Hour*, and in 1938 Lil finally agreed to a divorce, freeing him to marry Alpha Smith. During WWII he performed on military bases, cut V-discs during the 1942–4 American Federation of Musicians' recording ban, continued making films, and won the first *Esquire* jazz poll.

The decline of the big-band era in the mid-forties combined with Armstrong's appearance in the film *New Orleans*, in which he led a small band of Crescent City jazz legends, radically altered his career. Leonard Feather, producer of the film's recording sessions, arranged for Armstrong to appear with Edmond Hall's New Orleans revivalist band at Carnegie Hall in early 1947, which, in turn, led to the now-famous Town Hall concert in May with a select group of performers impulsively billed as the All Stars. From then until shortly before his death Armstrong was typically on the road with this band, now officially known as Louis Armstrong's All Stars, for ten months of the year. Time off was spent at home in Queens, NY, with fourth wife, Lucille Wilson (1914–83), whom he married in 1942.

An outspoken opponent of bebop with a stage persona regarded in the 1940s and 50s as vaudevillian or, worse, smacking of "Uncle Tom," Armstrong was dismissed by many younger musicians of his race (e.g., Dizzy Gillespie) as old-fashioned, out-of-touch, or a sell-out. Others (e.g., Miles Davis) respected his playing but hated his "clowning," while still others (e.g., Sammy Davis Jr.) condemned him for his silence on civil rights and his performances for segregated audiences. Armstrong responded to the criticism by making clear that his audience came first: "... coming out all chesty, making faces, the jive with the audience clapping, aw, it's all in fun. People expect it of me; they know I'm there in the cause of happiness. What you're there for is to please the people. I mean the best way you can. Those few moments belong to them." (Meryman, 97).

Even so, Armstrong could not contain his outrage during the 1957 "Little Rock Nine" incident, which provoked him to write President Eisenhower a heated letter denouncing the treatment of "his people" and to cancel a scheduled government-sponsored tour of the Soviet Union. Before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, his anger extended as well to his home state, where he refused to perform with his All Stars because Louisiana prohibited integrated bands. Dizzy Gillespie, for one, would later recant his judgment of Armstrong and even became his neighbor in Queens, New York.

Such musical and political issues failed to resonate with the general public, for Armstrong, by adding TV spots to his movie and recording work, had already become a cultural icon. In 1956, for example, he was featured by the prestigious Newport Jazz Festival, the Royal Philharmonic in London, Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic, and CBS as the subject of an autobiographical documentary, *Satchmo the Great*. The US State Department continued to offer him tours abroad, enabling "Ambassador Satch" to spread the gospel of jazz worldwide.

Notable accomplishments besides those mentioned above include being the first jazz musician to publish an autobiography (*Swing That Music*, New York, 1936/R), the first jazz musician to appear on the cover of *Time* (1949), and the first honoree in *Down Beat's* Jazz Hall of Fame (1952). In 1964 Armstrong's recording of "Hello Dolly" displaced the Beatles as number one on the pop charts, where it remained for six weeks. At age 63 he was the oldest musician to attain this milestone.

After several bouts of heart disease, Armstrong died at his home, one of the most widely-known and best-loved personalities in the world. The Armstrong Archive opened on the campus of Queens College, Queens, New York in 1994, and the Armstrong House in Corona, Queens, a designated New York City landmark, opened as a museum in 2003. Posthumous recognition includes a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1972, a statue unveiled in New Orleans' Louis Armstrong Park in 1980, the issuance of a commemorative stamp in 1995, and the identification as one of *Variety's* Top 100 Entertainers of the Twentieth Century in 1999.

## 2. Recordings.

Armstrong recorded almost 1500 tracks (excluding alternate takes) in studios or at live concerts, and at least an equal number of tracks on air checks, film soundtracks, and television performances. His earliest recordings were with King Oliver, whose 35 sides in 1923 represent the first significant body of black recorded jazz. The two choruses of “Chimes Blues,” Armstrong’s first recorded solo, display a full, rich tone and contain the stylistic trademarks of a rip to a high note on a weak beat, the neighboring function of the raised second scale degree (*d* #) and an ascending triplet followed by a descending arpeggio (ex.1). Consisting of repeated arpeggios that suggest clarinet passage work (Harker, 2003, 143), the solo’s melodic redundancy is relieved harmonically and rhythmically by the passing diminished chord (*f* #–*a*–*c*) and metric displacement (quarter-note triplets across the bar line).

Although Armstrong’s solos on the Creole Jazz Band’s recordings of “Riverside Blues” are even more formulaic than that of “Chimes Blues,” his series of breaks on “Tears” foreshadow the brilliant stop-time solos of “Cornet Chop Suey” with the Hot Five in 1926 and “Potato Head Blues” with the Hot Seven (the Hot Five plus tuba and drums) in 1927. In “Tears” (ex.2) each pair of breaks forms a “call-and-response” pattern in which the second “answers” the first with motivic correspondences. The series concludes with an accelerated group of breaks that sums up the whole, while the eighth-note triplet figure unifies the sequence. This kind of coherent structure, dubbed the “correlated chorus” by the Bix Beiderbecke circle, typifies many of Armstrong’s solos in the 1920s and distinguishes his improvisations from those of his contemporaries.

Virtually inaudible on most of his acoustically recorded sides with Oliver, Armstrong’s second cornet work, when clearly heard (e.g., the duet on the OKeh version of “Mabel’s Dream” [1923]), demonstrates a flair



**Ex.1**  
Armstrong’s  
Solo in “Chimes  
Blues”

for counterpoint, a sensitivity to harmony, and a sure sense of swing. The latter quality—a combination of uneven eighth notes, pervasive syncopation, irregular phrasing and playing around rather than on top of the beat—conveys a sense of forward motion that characterizes Armstrong’s approach to rhythm and that would become the prototype for music of the Swing Era.

In 1924–5 Armstrong recorded over one hundred sides with Fletcher Henderson, Clarence Williams’s Blue Five, the Red Onion Jazz Babies, and various blues singers, including Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. Capable of improvising equally inventive but entirely different solos on alternate takes of the same piece (e.g., “Stomp Off, Let’s Go” [1926] with Erskine Tate), multiple takes of Armstrong’s recordings show that he tended, rather, to refine his ideas from one take to the next than totally rethink each one. His overall approach to improvisation consists of melodic paraphrase varying from the literal (a virtual duplication of the melody) to the abstract (a virtually new melody based on salient features of the old). As Armstrong put it, “The first chorus I plays the melody. The second chorus I plays the melody round the melody, and the third chorus I routines” (Sudhalter-Evans, 192).

Liberated from the constraints of the eight- or sixteen-bar solos with Henderson, Armstrong’s New York small-group sides disclose a more relaxed, expansive and virtuosic style on “Cold in Hand Blues” [1925] with Bessie Smith, “Railroad Blues” [1925] with Trixie Smith, “I Ain’t Gonna Play No Second Fiddle” [1925] with Perry Bradford’s Jazz Phools, and “Cake Walking Babies From Home” [1925] with Sidney Bechet in Clarence Williams’ Blue Five. His 1925 accompaniment of Bessie Smith on “St Louis Blues” is considered a classic interpretation of W.C. Handy’s best-known composition.

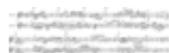
Epitomizing the change from an emphasis on the ensemble represented by Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band to an emphasis on the soloist, Armstrong’s early Hot Fives have long been regarded a watershed of jazz history. The stylistic shift transpires during the course of the band’s 33 recordings from November 1925 through December 1927 in which Armstrong dominates the proceedings with a solo-like lead and a steadily increasing number of instrumental and/or vocal solos. Although the band’s members (except for Lil) and its repertoire hailed from New Orleans, the innovative harmony, melody, and form of “Savoy Blues,” [1927] the final number recorded by the group, leaves Crescent City blues far behind.

The relaxed tempo of “Savoy Blues” (ex.3) enables Armstrong to stretch out melodically. Swooping and gliding in undulating streams of fluid eighth notes, he blurs phrase beginnings and endings with expanded pick-ups or lengthy extensions and enriches his harmonic vocabulary with 7ths, 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths in almost every bar. Particularly striking is the C major seventh (C–E–G–B) he plays against the accompanying D seventh (D–F #–A–C) harmony in bars 57–58 and 69–70. By means of skillful voice-leading from above



**Ex. 2**  
Armstrong's  
Breaks in  
“Tears”

and below, Armstrong employs the resulting dissonance to converge convincingly on the G major tonic harmony in bars 59 and 71 (Anderson, 2007, 186–87).



**Ex. 3**  
Armstrong's  
Solo in “Savoy  
Blues”

Armstrong's dilemma as a soloist at this point in his career was to integrate break-like passages and melodic paraphrase into a “unified solo style” (Harker, 1999, 58). He achieved this synthesis to varying degrees in several early Hot Fives, but most successfully in “Big Butter and Egg Man,” [1926] a structural masterpiece that seamlessly integrates melodic and rhythmic ideas. The golden proportions of “King of the Zulus” [1926]; correlated choruses of “Yes! I’m in the barrel” [1925], “Cornet Chop Suey” [1936], and “Once in a While” [1927]; motivic relationships of “Hotter Than That” [1927], “Skid-Dat-De-Dat” [1926], and “Put ‘Em Down Blues” [1927]; and the balance of melodic and harmonic improvisatory impulses in “Struttin’ with Some Barbecue” [1927] further exemplify Armstrong's intuitive preoccupation with form. The early Hot Fives confirm Armstrong's singular ability to internalize the harmonic and melodic possibilities of a tune, which, when coupled with imaginative phrasing, mastery of rhythm, avoidance of stock figures, and the capacity to conceive the work as a whole, encapsulates his genius.

Armstrong's last small-group recordings before the 1940s were made with members of Carroll Dickerson's Orchestra under the names Hot Five, Savoy Ballroom Five, and Louis Armstrong's Orchestra. Of the several noteworthy sides in this batch, “West End Blues” [1928] and “Weather Bird” [1928] stand far above the rest. The opening cadenza of the first became Armstrong's most heralded solo and the dazzling musical dialogue between the piano (Hines) and trumpet of the second became, in the view of many critics, “one of the all-time masterpieces of recorded jazz” (Miller, 107–8).

With few exceptions, Armstrong recorded exclusively with big bands from mid-1929 to mid-1947. Some of these groups preexisted, like Luis Russell's, Les Hite's, and Chick Webb's, while others, like Zilner Randolph's, formed only to back up the soloist. Armstrong seemed unaffected by their uneven quality of support and recorded some of the best sides of his career during these years, e.g., “I can't give you anything but love” (1929), “Sweethearts on Parade” (1930), “Stardust” (1931), “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea” (1932), “Basin Street Blues” (1933), “I've got my fingers crossed” (1935), and “Jubilee” (1938).

Stylistically, Armstrong refined the synthesis of melodic paraphrase with elements of rhythm and harmony achieved on some of the early Hot Fives. Now he more often forsook the original tune and extended coherence over multiple choruses by means of recurring rhythmic and melodic motives combined with a systematic heightening of register from one chorus to the next. Unfailingly announced by a rip or glissando, the climax on the final or “shout” chorus frequently highlighted a lengthy held note, as on “Mahogany Hall Stomp” (1929 and 1933) or rhythmically varied repeated pitches, as on “Swing That Music” (1936). His further adoption of a “leaner,” less florid, and more rhythmically dependent style might have been stimulated by the AABA form of his pop song repertoire, in which the need for contrast between sections could have encouraged an economy of note selection and greater reliance on rhythmic manipulation.

The primacy of rhythm especially characterizes his vocals, which are usually minimalistic, speech-like distillations of the melody with melodic interpolations between phrases. For Armstrong, a lyric's meaning ranked second to the timbral possibilities of its words, to which he applied bends, elisions, and smears or replaced entirely with scat. These techniques premiered on the early Hot Fives and persisted in 1931 on “All of Me” and “Lazy River” and on almost all other vocal solos thereafter. Upon returning from his second European trip in 1935, however, Armstrong occasionally modified the raspy texture of his voice to reveal “crooning” capabilities on songs like “Solitude” and “Ev'ntide.”

Armstrong's style of performance evolved little after 1932 and his repertoire progressively narrowed to popular hits. Concerts and recordings by the All Stars fell into a predictable routine: invariably opening with "Indiana," the program continued with a string of Dixieland, New Orleans, or pop favorites and closed with "When It's Sleepy Time Down South," Armstrong's theme song since 1931. In the final two decades of his career Armstrong's ravaged lip curtailed or precluded forays into the trumpet's high register, encouraging him, ever more extensively, to showcase his inimitable voice. Thus, thanks to his countless live and recorded renditions of "Blueberry Hill" (1949), "Mack the Knife" (1955), "Hello Dolly" (1964), and "What A Wonderful World." (1967), Armstrong's singing concluded his celebrity as it had begun in New Orleans a half-century earlier.

### 3. Compositions.

Armstrong began composing in New Orleans. When he replaced Oliver in Ory's band, the leader asked him to work up a number that featured him playing, singing, and dancing. One night when performing the bawdy tune he called "Get off Katie's head," Louis saw Clarence Williams writing it down. Afterwards Williams offered him \$50 for the song, which Armstrong said he never received. Copyrighted by Creole society bandleader, A.J. Piron, as "I wish I could shimmy like my sister Kate," the song became a hit for the Williams-Piron Publishing Company in 1919.

In Chicago with Oliver, Louis and Lil used to sit on her back steps and write "five or six songs a day" which they sold outright to the OKeh Record Company (*Louis Armstrong in His Own Words*, 132). Three of these ("Weather Bird Rag," "Where did you stay last night?" and "Tears") were recorded by the Creole Jazz Band, two ("Yes! I'm in the barrel" and "Cornet Chop Suey") were recorded by the early Hot Five and one ("Coal Cart Blues") was recorded by Armstrong with Clarence Williams' Blue Five.

Although not identified on the copyright deposit, Armstrong shared composer credit with Oliver on the record sleeves of the Creole Band's "Canal Street Blues" and "Dippermouth Blues." Other Hot Five or Hot Seven tunes assigned to him by copyright are "Gully Low Blues," "Gut Bucket Blues" and "Potato Head Blues." "Don't jive me," "I'm not rough," and "Jazz Lips," named Armstrong as composer on the record sleeve but credited Lil Hardin or Lil Armstrong on the copyright deposit. Record sleeves of "Put 'Em Down Blues" "S.O.L. Blues" and "Keyhole Blues," for which copyright deposits are no longer extant, also listed Armstrong as the composer (Chevan, 257–60). In addition, Louis claimed to have written the Hot Five's "Muskrat Ramble" (Williams, 211), copyrighted by Kid Ory, and "Struttin' With Some Barbecue," attributed solely to Lil after she filed suit in the 1930s.

In all, Armstrong applied for more than 80 copyrights registered at the Library of Congress (Berrett, 1992, 239). His most recorded compositions after the 1920s are "Back 'O Town Blues" (with Luis Russell); "Pretty Little Missy" (with Billy Kyle); "Velma's Blues" (with Velma Middleton); "Swing That Music" (with Horace Gerlach), which appeared in connection with his 1936 autobiography; and "Someday you'll be sorry," which came to him in a dream while touring frigid North Dakota in 1947. None of Armstrong's tunes have jazz standards.

### 4. Films and shows.

Armstrong's first Broadway opportunity fizzled but his second triumphed. In 1929 when he surprised his manager by showing up in New York with his band in tow rather than alone, Rockwell had already secured him the position of lead trumpet in the pit orchestra for Vincent Youman's *Great Day*. Demoted to second trumpet then fired for "not [being] adapted to show business" during previews in Philadelphia (*New York Age*, 8 June 1929), Armstrong returned to New York to appear in *Hot Chocolates*. The overwhelming response to his performance of "Ain't Misbehavin'" between acts quickly earned him a larger role on stage and sent him to the studio to record the show's hits. By the end of the musical's six-month run, Armstrong, already famous among blacks, had become a star among whites as well. Two later

theatrical ventures met with less acclaim, however. In 1939, *Swingin' the Dream*, a jazz *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Armstrong played Bottom, lasted only 13 performances on Broadway, and in 1961, Dave Brubeck's *The Real Ambassadors*, a jazz oratorio about race relations featuring Armstrong, yielded a recording and only one live performance.

Armstrong made 22 American feature films (not counting the lost *Ex-Flame*), six foreign feature films, eight documentaries or concerts, three movie shorts, two cartoons, and four soundies for coin-operated viewing machines. In features he played versions of himself in bit parts that seldom interacted with the main characters or had much to do with the plot. He usually managed to transcend racial or demeaning stereotypes common to movies of the day, such as being draped in a leopard skin surrounded by soap bubbles in *Rhapsody in Black and Blue* (1932) or serenading a racehorse in *Going Places* (1938). Armstrong's most memorable Hollywood moments occurred in *New Orleans* (1947) with Billie Holiday and in *High Society* (1956) with Bing Crosby. *A Man Called Adam* (1966) starring Sammy Davis Jr., in which Armstrong played a washed-up jazz musician, afforded him his largest scope as an actor and second-billing on the marquee.

## 5. Legacy.

According to assessments by Kenney, Hersch, and Brothers (2006), Armstrong had no desire to assimilate with white culture but was driven by forces of the marketplace. To please white audiences, he donned the “minstrel mask” in accordance with W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of “double consciousness.” Some critics argue that Armstrong's “tomming,” instead of denigrating his race, actually celebrated black vernacular culture by “signifying” upon racism. His stage behavior, moreover, was crucial to his success as a jazz ambassador. Armstrong, to a greater extent than any other early jazz musician, transformed a regional folk music into an international art form through the virtuosity of his playing as the first great jazz soloist and through the force of his charismatic personality, which disdained pretense, eschewed hypocrisy, honored life, and projected a genuine confidence in music's power to transcend cultural and racial differences.

## Recordings

(selective)

*(The following lists supplements the annotated list of Armstrong's recordings supplied in Meckna, 2004)*

Chronological Louis Armstrong (1989–2008, Classics Records); Complete Decca Master Takes 1935–39 (2001, Definitive Records); Complete Decca Master Takes 1940–49 (2001, Definitive Records); Complete Louis Armstrong and Fletcher Henderson (1993, Kings of Jazz) Fleischmann's Yeast Show and Louis' Home Recorded Tapes (2008, Jazz Heritage Society);

Intégrale Louis Armstrong, vols. 1–8 (2006–10, Frémeaux & Associés); King Oliver: The Complete 1923 Jazz Band Recordings (2006, Off the Record); Let's Do It, Best of the Verve Years (1995, Verve); Louis Armstrong, Columbia Jazz Masterpieces Series, vols. 1–7 (1988–93, Columbia Legacy); Louis Armstrong Complete Edition, Masters of Jazz Series, vols. 1–8 (1991–99, Media 7)

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