

Louis Armstrong, 1901-1971: 'The Ambassador of American Jazz'

"Satchmo" had a voice all his own. He recorded hit songs for fifty years. In 1964, his version of the song "Hello Dolly" was the top hit around the world. *Transcript of radio broadcast:*
27 September 2008

VOICE ONE:

This is Gwen Outen.

VOICE TWO:

And this is Steve Ember with People in America in VOA Special English. Today we tell about Louis Armstrong, one of the greatest jazz musicians. His voice, trumpet-playing skill and creativity continue to influence jazz artists today. One of Louis Armstrong's biggest hits was "Hello Dolly."

(MUSIC: "Hello Dolly")

VOICE ONE:



Louis Armstrong at Voice of America

Louis Armstrong played jazz, sang jazz and wrote jazz. He recorded hit songs for fifty years and his music is still heard today on television, radio and in movies.

Louis Armstrong was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on August fourth, nineteen-oh-one. New Orleans is a port city at the mouth of the Mississippi River. It is a city where the customs of many different people mixed together.

Louis Armstrong grew up in Storyville, one of the poorest areas of New Orleans.

His father left the family shortly after he was born. His mother worked to support him and his sister. But Armstrong spent most of his time with his grandmother.

VOICE TWO:

Jazz was just beginning to develop when Louis was a boy. It grew out of the blues songs and ragtime music that had been popular at the turn of the century.

Louis discovered music early in life. He was surrounded by it. The music of churches, bands, parades and drinking places were all a daily part of New Orleans culture. Louis sang with other boys on the streets for money. There he began to develop his musical skills.

VOICE ONE:

When he was eleven years old, Louis was sent to a reform school for firing a gun outside to celebrate New Year's Eve. At the school, he learned to play the trumpet in the school's brass band.

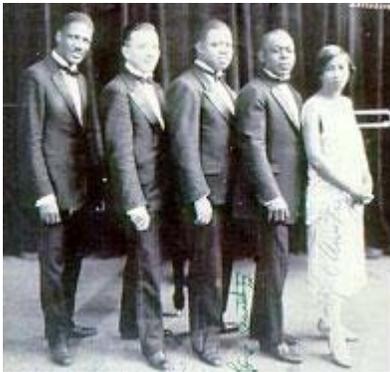
Louis spent eighteen months at the reform school. Then he went back to work. He sold newspapers, unloaded boats and sold coal from a horse and cart. He also listened to bands at popular clubs in Storyville. Joe "King" Oliver played with the Kid Ory Band. He soon became young Louis's teacher. As Louis's skills developed, he began to perform professionally.

VOICE TWO:

At the age of eighteen, Armstrong joined the Kid Ory Band, one of the finest bands in New Orleans. The experience helped him develop his music skills. Armstrong later replaced King Oliver in the band when Oliver moved to Chicago, Illinois. In nineteen-nineteen, Armstrong joined Fate Marable's band in Saint Louis, Missouri. Marable's band played on steamboats that traveled up and down the Mississippi River. Working with Marable helped prepare Armstrong to play for white audiences.

VOICE ONE:

In nineteen twenty-two, Armstrong left the Marable Band to play with King Oliver in Chicago. By then, Chicago had become the center of jazz music.



The Hot Five

A year later, Armstrong made his first recordings as a member of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. He later moved to New York City, where he influenced the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra with his creativity.

Armstrong returned to Chicago in nineteen twenty-six and formed his own group. They were called the Hot Five and later the Hot Seven. Their recordings are considered some of the most influential in jazz history.

Armstrong could make his voice sound like a musical instrument. He could make an instrument sound like a singer's voice. The song "Heebie Jeebies" is said to be the first recorded example of what became known as scat singing. He recorded it with the Hot Five.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

By nineteen twenty-nine, Armstrong was becoming very popular. He returned to New York to play in an all-black Broadway musical called "Hot Chocolates." The

show included the music of Fats Waller. Armstrong's version of Waller's song, "Ain't Misbehavin'", was a huge hit.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

By the end of the nineteen twenties, Armstrong had formed his own band. In nineteen thirty-two, he sailed to England, and had great success. A reporter there called him "Satchmo," and he kept that nickname for the rest of his life. For the next three years, Armstrong played in cities across the United States and Europe.



"Satchmo"

Louis Armstrong returned to the United States in nineteen thirty-five. He hired Joe Glaser to be his manager. Glaser proved to be a great manager and friend.

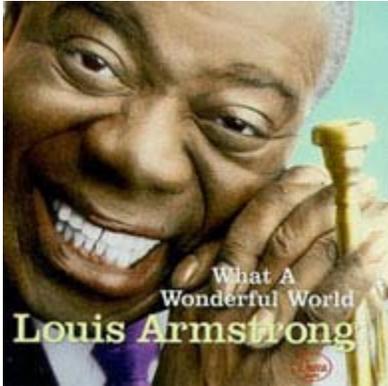
Glaser organized a big band called Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra. It was one of the most popular groups of the "swing" music period. Swing was a style of jazz played by big bands in the nineteen thirties.

VOICE TWO:

The group played together for the next ten years. During that time, Armstrong became one of the most famous men in America. He experienced racial unfairness during his life. But he rarely made public statements. One time, however, he criticized the way the government treated blacks in the American South in the nineteen fifties. Newspapers accused him of being a troublemaker for speaking out.

In the nineteen forties, Armstrong grew tired of leading a large group. For the remaining years of his life, he led a six-member group called the All Stars. The group included some of the best musicians in America. They performed extensively in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America.

VOICE ONE:



Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World"

Over the years, Armstrong recorded with many famous musicians. For example, he worked with singers Ella Fitzgerald and Bing Crosby and the great composer Duke Ellington. Armstrong was known as friendly and easy to work with.

Armstrong's biggest hits came later in his life. The song "Mack the Knife" was a big hit in nineteen fifty-five. In nineteen sixty-four, his version of the song "Hello Dolly" was the top hit around the world. It even replaced a top-selling hit by the hugely popular British rock group, the Beatles. Three years later, he appeared in the motion picture version of "Hello Dolly" with singer Barbra Streisand. The song "What a Wonderful World," recorded in nineteen sixty-eight, was his final big hit.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Louis Armstrong never finished the fifth grade in school. Yet he wrote two books about his life and many stories for magazines. He appeared in more than thirty movies. He composed many jazz pieces. He won several gold records and many other awards. Armstrong performed an average of three hundred concerts each year, traveling all over the world. He became known as the ambassador of American Jazz.

Louis Armstrong was married four times. Lucille Armstrong was his fourth wife. They married in nineteen forty-two and stayed together for the rest of his life. They had no children.

Louis Armstrong died in nineteen seventy-one. His death was front page news around the world. In nineteen seventy-seven, his home in Queens, New York, was declared a national historic place. It is now a museum. For more information about Louis Armstrong and his house, you can go to the museum's Internet Web site. The address is www.satchmo.net.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

This program was written and produced by Cynthia Kirk. This is Gwen Outen.

VOICE TWO:

And this is Steve Ember. Listen again next week for People in America in VOA Special English.