

Louis armstrong: the jazzman

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Louis Armstrong: The Jazzman Choosing a recording definitive of Louis Sachmo Armstrong may be an impossible task. He is known as the most influential person on American Jazz, one of the truly American genres of music. He was also involved in blues, swing and ragtime, pop and other sub-genres. Armstrong invented “scatting”, singing nonsense syllables instead of the written words of songs, and a very difficult style. More than any of these, Louis Armstrong brought his music, and that of many other great artists, to every corner of America and around the globe (Riccardi,). Jazz was invented by African American slaves, and the term originally meant “sex”, but eventually included all kinds of fun, and then became the name of possibly the most American music style of all time (Harker, 2011). Jazz has its roots in the work songs of American slaves and their Gospel music from Christian churches (Ondaatje, 2011). As it became popular it was added to and modified by artist from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Because of its original improvisational style, it was easy for it to absorb contributions from other kinds of music and for master of other genres to contribute to its growth (Harker, 2011). Louis Armstrong actually played with many musicians, and they all influenced each other. However, many of the greats in were in Armstrong’s original groups or in groups started by people in them. We are lucky to have so much of his work, but it would have been really nice if somebody had put an automatic recorder in Louis Armstrong’s shirt pocket. In live performance he may never have played any song exactly the same way twice, Many of his recordings have different versions, such as his 1929 “After You’ve Gone” ([http://www. redhotjazz. com/lao. html](http://www.redhotjazz.com/lao.html)) for Okeh that includes one version rejected for distribution that I like better. Jazz

is cooperative and improvisational. It is like a conversation among the instruments, most evident in Dixieland style. Many musicians spent their lives searching for that “ perfect” performance, as in Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* (Ondaatje, 2011) the story of Buddy Bolden who, when he found it, he “ blew out his lip” and never played again. (Blowing out one’s lip means he cannot play again. It is like trying to pitch baseball with a badly healed broken elbow.) Jazz has many sub-genres and Armstrong played and influenced them all. It was very difficult to select one piece to represent this artist, but if we go back to his roots we can see the development of New Orleans Style jazz for which he was noted. There is a song that he and his second wife, Lillian Hardin Armstrong, wrote and recorded for Decca in 1940, I never heard it before: *Perdido Street Blues*, found here: [http://www. redhotjazz. com/lao. html](http://www.redhotjazz.com/lao.html). *Perdido Street* in New Orleans was where Armstrong was born and raised. It was a mean street filled with all kinds of poverty and vice. His father left his mother and she had to prostitute to buy food. Armstrong got in trouble at age 11 for firing his stepfathers pistol in the air on New Years Eve and was sent to Colored Waif’s Home for Boys where he was given the cornet lessons that changed his life (Ricardi 2013). *Perdido Street Blues* has many versions, but the original Decca recording on 10’ 78 rpm is the most representative of his style, which had matured by that time. There is no singing or scating on it, and Armstrong plays trumpet instead of cornet. The rest of the instrumentalists include: Bass – W. Brand Clarinet – S. Bechet Drums – Z. Singleton Guitar – B. Addison Piano – L. Russell Trombone – C. Jones (Louis Armstrong and his orchestra - *perdido street blues / 2. 19 blues (shellac)* at discogs Retrieved

12/2/2013) The music starts with a high four line (8 bars) solo on clarinet with the rest of the instruments punching in a 2 note counterpoint for the first three lines until the clarinet swings into the mellow backup theme to set off Armstrong's trumpet solo. There are four melody lines combining here with the trumpet taking lead in a very sophisticated Dixieland conversational style. Bechet (on clarinet) and Jones (on trombone) play off each other for 16 bars supporting Armstrong's trumpet solo. Then Bechet swings into his solo with a silky smooth rising note of the first variation. Two bars short of the phrase the clarinet becomes low and sensuous to lead into the piano solo on the third variation. Nobody plays behind the piano until the last two bars where the guitar and drums start to fill, then the guitar takes over for a solo and a fourth variation. The guitar trails into a rhythm transition and the trombone plays a solo variation five with a muted clarinet filling counterpoint. Then the trumpet jumps back in for the final solo and the other instruments drop into rhythm fill. The trumpet finishes a lively high note pattern and the clarinet finishes the phrase at the end. The players are playing musical tag almost like a real jam session. There are many other more famous pieces, but this piece really sounds like what that street must have been for Armstrong as he grew up. It shows his versatility on the trumpet. While they do not use the words, and Sachmo does not sing, it still seems to be a symbol of his feeling, life and character. References Harker, Brian (2011). Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings. Retrieved from <http://www.ebib.com> Louis armstrong and his orchestra - perdido street blues / 2. 19 blues (shellac) at discogs Retrieved 12/2/2013, 2013, from <http://www.discogs.com/Louis-Armstrong-And-His-Orchestra->

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