

Louis (Louie) Armstrong

Armstrong, Louis



Record Information

Source: *Movie Star News*.

Record Type: Photograph or Illustration

Date: b. 1901–d. 1971

Also Known As: Louie Armstrong;

Description:

Louis "Satchmo" (Louie) Armstrong was born in New Orleans in 1901. As a youth, he played the cornet in the band of the Waif's Home in New Orleans and in Kid Ory's orchestra. From 1918 to 1921 Armstrong traveled with a Mississippi riverboat band. In 1922 he went to Chicago to join King Oliver and his band and soon was widely recognized as a trumpeter and a vocalist. Armstrong established the importance of the solo performance in jazz.

Louis (Louie) Armstrong, also known as "Satchmo," was often called "the jazz ambassador." Besides having a successful jazz career in the United States, Armstrong played in several command performances before the king and queen of England, toured Europe often, and appeared in a number of motion pictures. His recording career goes back to the 1920s, and collectors value many of his rare recordings to this day. Armstrong came from a poor family. When he was 13 years old and living in New Orleans, he was sent to the Waif's Home for Boys for having fired a pistol in the streets. At that time, Armstrong could play only a homemade guitar, but the bandmaster of the Waif's Home soon taught him to read music and to play the cornet and the bugle. Clearly, Armstrong had a strong musical bent—by the time he was released from the home, 18 months later, he was leading the band.

In 1915, the teenaged Armstrong was probably ready to perform publicly as a musician, but he was too young for any band to hire him, so he supported himself by selling newspapers and working in a dairy. He also began to hang around the places where he could hear his idol, the musician Joe "King" Oliver, who was one of the pioneers of the "Dixieland" sound—the roots of a new type of music called jazz. King Oliver, a member of Kid Ory's band, took the young Armstrong under his wing and taught him the trumpet. When King Oliver went on to Chicago in 1917, he made sure that Louis Armstrong took his place with Kid Ory.

Armstrong played and toured with that band for the next five years. Then, in 1922, he joined King Oliver in Chicago. For two years, **Armstrong** played second cornet in Oliver's Original Creole Jazz Band.

In 1924, **Armstrong** worked with Fletcher Henderson's orchestra, which played at the famous Roseland Ballroom in New York. **Armstrong** had moved from the cornet to the trumpet and was also singing. The combination of his singing and trumpet playing would eventually become **Armstrong's** trademark.

In 1925, **Armstrong** returned to Chicago, where he began to establish a reputation for improvisation and newly invented rhythms. In 1926, he worked with famed jazz musicians Erskine Tate and Earl "Fatha" Hines.

Armstrong was such a success that his name was up in lights as the "World's Greatest Trumpeter." This inspired him to form his own band, **Louis Armstrong** and His Hot Five. Later, he had a group known as the Hot Seven. This was the beginning of his maturity as a musician, the "four golden years" of recordings he made with these two bands.

In 1930, after a headlining role in a Broadway revue, **Armstrong** moved from leading small bands to leading big ones. Instead of the old Dixieland sound, he began to use popular songs as his basic material, which distressed many jazz purists. Jazz lovers continued to worry about their beloved music as white musicians copied **Armstrong's** innovation, forming "big bands" and "swing bands" whose work was closely tied to popular and commercial tunes, rather than being based on the freer improvisation that had once shaped jazz.

In addition to his musical ability, **Armstrong** was a dynamic performer. He had a distinctive, rasping, half-growl of a voice and a flamboyant sense of theater, often telling jokes and performing as a comedian to accompany his musical work.

Armstrong's performing style was also effective on the stage. When he returned to New York in 1929, he starred in the musical *Hot Chocolates*, one of several popular revues that featured black people dancing, singing, and playing jazz. In 1939, he appeared on Broadway in a show called *Swingin' the Dream*, an adaptation for African Americans of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which **Armstrong** played the comic character Bottom.

Armstrong's open, friendly, energetic quality made him a favorite with audiences around the world. In 1932, he toured Europe, and in 1934, he appeared in his first command performance before Britain's King George V. After World War II, **Armstrong** continued to travel, frequently as a goodwill ambassador from the United States.

In 1936, **Armstrong** began his movie career with *Pennies from Heaven*, followed by *Every Day's a Holiday*, *Going Places*, *Cabin in the Sky*, and *The Glenn Miller Story*. By 1947, when **Armstrong** had gone from big bands back to small ones, his fame as a performer overshadowed his musical talents. The focus of his appearances was more on **Armstrong** himself than on his band as a whole.

In the 1950s, **Armstrong** was featured in the film *High Society*, where he played and sang with Bing Crosby. As late as 1969, he appeared in the film *Hello, Dolly*, with Barbra Streisand and Walter Matthau. He also appeared frequently on television.

References and Further Information

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