

Louis Armstrong

Louis Daniel Armstrong (August 4, 1901 – July 6, 1971), nicknamed **Satchmo**,^[2] **Satch**, and **Pops**,^[3] was an American trumpeter, composer, vocalist and occasional actor who was one of the most influential figures in jazz. His career spanned five decades, from the 1920s to the 1960s, and different eras in the history of jazz.^[4] In 2017, he was inducted into the Rhythm & Blues Hall of Fame.

Armstrong was born and raised in New Orleans. Coming to prominence in the 1920s as an "inventive" trumpet and cornet player, Armstrong was a foundational influence in jazz, shifting the focus of the music from collective improvisation to solo performance.^[5] Around 1922, he followed his mentor, Joe "King" Oliver, to Chicago to play in the Creole Jazz Band. In Chicago, he spent time with other popular jazz musicians, reconnecting with his friend Bix Beiderbecke and spending time with Hoagy Carmichael and Lil Hardin. He earned a reputation at "cutting contests", and relocated to New York in order to join Fletcher Henderson's band.

With his instantly recognizable rich, gravelly voice, Armstrong was also an influential singer and skillful improviser, bending the lyrics and melody of a song. He was also skilled at scat singing. Armstrong is renowned for his charismatic stage presence and voice as well as his trumpet playing. By the end of Armstrong's career in the 1960s, his influence had spread to popular music in general. Armstrong was one of the first popular African-American entertainers to "cross over", meaning his music transcended his skin color in a racially divided America. He rarely publicly politicized his race, to the dismay of fellow African Americans, but took a well-publicized stand for desegregation in the Little Rock crisis. He was able to access the upper echelons of American society at a time when this was difficult for black men.

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Born	<div>Louis Daniel Armstrong^[1]</div> <div>August 4, 1901</div> <div>New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.</div>
Died	<div>July 6, 1971 (aged 69)</div> <div>Corona, Queens, New York City, U.S.</div>
Other names	"Satchmo" · "Satch" · "Pops" · "Louie"
Occupation	Musician · composer · singer
Spouse(s)	<div><div><div>Daisy Parker</div><div>​(m. 1918; div. 1923)</div></div><div><div>Lil Hardin Armstrong</div><div>​(m. 1924; div. 1938)</div></div><div><div>Alpha Smith</div><div>​(m. 1938; div. 1942)</div></div><div><div>Lucille Wilson</div><div>​(m. 1942)</div></div></div>
Musical career	
Genres	Dixieland · jazz · swing · traditional pop
Instruments	Vocals · trumpet
Years active	1919–1971
Associated acts	King Oliver · Ella Fitzgerald · Kid Ory · Jack Teagarden · Bobby Hackett · Oscar Peterson · Duke Ellington
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Early life

Armstrong often stated that he was born on July 4, 1900.^[6] Although he died in 1971, it was not until the mid-1980s that his true birth date, August 4, 1901, was discovered by Tad Jones by researching baptismal records.^[7] At least three other biographies treat the July 4th birth date as a myth.^{[8][9][10]}

Armstrong was born in New Orleans to Mary Albert and William Armstrong. Albert was from Boutte, Louisiana, and gave birth at home when she was about sixteen. William Armstrong abandoned the family shortly after.^[11] About two years later, he had a daughter, Beatrice "Mama Lucy" Armstrong, who was raised by Albert.^[12]

Louis Armstrong was raised by his grandmother until the age of five when he was returned to his mother.^[11] He spent his youth in poverty in a rough neighborhood known as The Battlefield.^[13] At six he attended the Fisk School for Boys,^[14] a school that accepted black children in the racially segregated system of New Orleans. He did odd jobs for the Karnoffskys, a family of Lithuanian Jews. While selling coal in Storyville, he heard spasm bands, groups that played music out of household objects. He heard the early sounds of jazz from bands that played in brothels and dance halls such as Pete Lala's, where King Oliver performed.^[15]

The Karnoffskys^[16] took him in and treated him like family. Knowing he lived without a father, they fed and nurtured him.^{[17][18]} In his memoir *Louis Armstrong + the Jewish Family in New Orleans, La., the Year of 1907*, he described his discovery that this family was also subject to discrimination by "other white folks" who felt that they were better than Jews: "I was only seven years old but I could easily see the ungodly treatment that the white folks were handing the poor Jewish family whom I worked for."^[19] He wore a Star of David pendant for the rest of his life and wrote about what he learned from them: "how to live—real life and determination."^[17] His first musical performance may have been at the side of the Karnoffsky's junk wagon. To distinguish them from other hawkers, he tried playing a tin horn to attract customers. Morris Karnoffsky gave Armstrong an advance toward the purchase of a cornet from a pawn shop.^[20]

When Armstrong was eleven, he dropped out of school.^[14] His mother moved into a one-room house on Perdido Street with him, Lucy, and her common-law husband, Tom Lee, next door to her brother Ike and his two sons.^[21] Armstrong joined a quartet of boys who sang in the streets for money. He also got into trouble. Cornetist Bunk Johnson said he taught the eleven-year-old to play by ear at Dago Tony's honky tonk.^[22] (In his later years Armstrong credited King Oliver.) He said about his youth, "Every time I close my eyes blowing that trumpet of mine—I look right in the heart of good old New Orleans ... It has given me something to live for."^[23]



Armstrong with his first trumpet instructor, Peter Davis, in 1965

Borrowing his stepfather's gun without permission, he fired a blank into the air and was arrested on December 31, 1912. He spent the night at New Orleans Juvenile Court, then was sentenced the next day to detention at the Colored Waif's Home.^[24] Life at the home was spartan. Mattresses were absent. Meals were often little more than bread and molasses. Captain Joseph Jones ran the home like a military camp and used corporal punishment.^[25]

Armstrong developed his cornet skills by playing in the band. Peter Davis, who frequently appeared at the home at the request of Captain Jones,^[26] became Armstrong's first teacher and chose him as bandleader. With this band, the thirteen year-old Armstrong attracted the attention of Kid Ory.^[27]

On June 14, 1914, Armstrong was released into the custody of his father and his new stepmother, Gertrude. He lived in this household with two stepbrothers for several months. After Gertrude gave birth to a daughter, Armstrong's father never welcomed him, so he returned to his mother, Mary Albert. In her small home, he had to share a bed with his mother and sister.^[28] His mother still lived in The Battlefield, leaving him open to old temptations, but he sought work as a musician. He found a job at a dance hall owned by Henry Ponce, who had connections to organized crime. He met the six-foot tall drummer Black Benny, who became his guide and bodyguard.^[29]



Louis Armstrong (2002),
hand-colored etching by Adi
Holzer

Career

Riverboat education

Armstrong played in brass bands and riverboats in New Orleans, first on an excursion boat in September 1918. He traveled with the band of Fate Marable, which toured on the steamboat *Sidney* with the Streckfus Steamers line up and down the Mississippi River.^[30] Marable was proud of his musical knowledge, and he insisted that Armstrong and other musicians in his band learn sight reading. Armstrong described his time with Marable as "going to the University", since it gave him a wider experience working with written arrangements. He did return to New Orleans periodically.^[31] In 1919, Oliver decided to go north and resigned his position in Kid Ory's band; Armstrong replaced him. He also became second trumpet for the Tuxedo Brass Band.^[32]



Armstrong was a member of Fate Marable's New Orleans Band in 1918, here on board the S.S. *Sidney*

Chicago and recording for Gennett

Throughout his riverboat experience, Armstrong's musicianship began to mature and expand. At twenty, he could read music. He became one of the first jazz musicians to be featured on extended trumpet solos, injecting his own personality and style. He started singing in his performances.^[33] In 1922, he moved to Chicago at the invitation of King Oliver. With Oliver's Creole Jazz Band he could make enough money to quit his day jobs. Although race relations were poor, Chicago was booming. The city had jobs for blacks making good wages at factories with some left over for entertainment.

Oliver's band was among the most influential jazz bands in Chicago in the early 1920s. Armstrong lived luxuriously in his own apartment with his first private bath. Excited as he was to be in Chicago, he began his career-long pastime of writing letters to friends in New Orleans. Armstrong could blow two hundred high Cs in a row. As his reputation grew, he was challenged to cutting contests by other musicians.^[34]

His first studio recordings were with Oliver for Gennett Records on April 5–6, 1923. They endured several hours on the train to remote Richmond, Indiana, and the band was paid little. The quality of the performances was affected by lack of rehearsal, crude recording equipment, bad acoustics, and a cramped studio. In addition, Richmond was associated with the Ku Klux Klan.^[35]

Lil Hardin Armstrong urged him to seek more prominent billing and develop his style apart from the influence of Oliver. She encouraged him to play classical music in church concerts to broaden his skills. She prodded him into wearing more stylish attire to offset his girth. Her influence eventually undermined Armstrong's relationship with his mentor, especially concerning his salary and additional money that Oliver held back from Armstrong and other band members.^[36]

In the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra

Armstrong and Oliver parted amicably in 1924. Shortly afterward, Armstrong received an invitation to go to New York City to play with the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, the top African-American band of the time. He switched to the trumpet to blend in better with the other musicians in his section. His influence on Henderson's tenor sax soloist, Coleman Hawkins, can be judged by listening to the records made by the band during this period.

Armstrong adapted to the tightly controlled style of Henderson, playing trumpet and experimenting with the trombone. The other members were affected by Armstrong's emotional style. His act included singing and telling tales of New Orleans characters, especially preachers.^[37] The Henderson Orchestra played in prominent venues for patrons only, including the Roseland Ballroom, with arrangements by Don Redman. Duke Ellington's orchestra went to Roseland to catch Armstrong's performances.

During this time, Armstrong recorded with Clarence Williams (a friend from New Orleans), the Williams Blue Five, Sidney Bechet, and blues singers Alberta Hunter, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith.

The Hot Five

In 1925, Armstrong returned to Chicago largely at the insistence of Lil, who wanted to expand his career and his income. In publicity, much to his chagrin, she billed him as "the World's Greatest Trumpet Player". For a time he was a member of the Lil Hardin Armstrong Band and working for his wife.^[38] He formed Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five and recorded the hits "Potato Head Blues" and "Muggles". The word "muggles" was a slang term for marijuana, something he used often during his life.^[39]

The Hot Five included Kid Ory (trombone), Johnny Dodds (clarinet), Johnny St. Cyr (banjo), Lil Armstrong on piano, and usually no drummer. Over a twelve-month period starting in November 1925, this quintet produced twenty-four records.^[40] Armstrong's band leading style was easygoing, as St. Cyr noted, "One felt so relaxed working with him, and he was very broad-minded ... always did his best to feature each individual."^[41] Among the most notable of the Hot Five and Seven records were "Cornet Chop Suey", "Struttin' With Some Barbecue", "Hotter Than that" and "Potato Head Blues", all featuring highly creative solos by Armstrong. His recordings soon after with pianist Earl "Fatha" Hines (most famously their 1928 "Weather Bird" duet) and Armstrong's trumpet introduction to and solo in "West End Blues" remain some of the most famous and influential improvisations in jazz history. Armstrong was now free to develop his personal style as he wished, which included a heavy dose of effervescent jive, such as "Whip That Thing, Miss Lil" and "Mr. Johnny Dodds, Aw, Do That Clarinet, Boy!"^[42]



"Heebie Jeebies" by Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five

Armstrong also played with Erskine Tate's Little Symphony, which played mostly at the Vendome Theatre. They furnished music for silent movies and live shows, including jazz versions of classical music, such as "Madame Butterfly", which gave Armstrong experience with longer forms of music and with hosting before a large audience. He began to scat sing (improvised vocal jazz using nonsensical words) and was among the first to record it, on the Hot Five recording "Heebie Jeebies" in 1926. The recording was so popular that the group became the most famous jazz band in the United States, even though they had not performed live to any great extent. Young musicians across the country, black or white, were turned on by Armstrong's new type of jazz.^[43]

After separating from Lil, Armstrong started to play at the Sunset Café for Al Capone's associate Joe Glaser in the Carroll Dickerson Orchestra, with Earl Hines on piano, which was renamed Louis Armstrong and his Stompers,^[44] though Hines was the music director and Glaser managed the orchestra. Hines and Armstrong became fast friends and successful collaborators. It was at the Sunset Café that Armstrong accompanied singer Adelaide Hall. It was during Hall's tenure at the venue that she experimented, developed and expanded her use and art of Scat singing with Armstrong's guidance and encouragement.^[45]

In the first half of 1927, Armstrong assembled his Hot Seven group, which added drummer Al "Baby" Dodds and tuba player, Pete Briggs, while preserving most of his original Hot Five lineup. John Thomas replaced Kid Ory on trombone. Later that year he organized a series of new Hot Five sessions which resulted in nine more records. In the last half of 1928, he started recording with a new group: Zutty Singleton (drums), Earl Hines (piano), Jimmy Strong (clarinet), Fred Robinson (trombone), and Mancy Carr (banjo).^[46]

Emerging as a vocalist

Armstrong returned to New York in 1929, where he played in the pit orchestra for the musical *Hot Chocolates*, an all-black revue written by Andy Razaf and pianist Fats Waller. He also made a cameo appearance as a vocalist, regularly stealing the show with his rendition of "Ain't Misbehavin'". His version of the song became his biggest selling record to date.^[47]

Armstrong started to work at Connie's Inn in Harlem, chief rival to the Cotton Club, a venue for elaborately staged floor shows,^[48] and a front for gangster Dutch Schultz. Armstrong also had considerable success with vocal recordings, including versions of famous songs composed by his old friend Hoagy Carmichael. His 1930s recordings took full advantage of the new RCA ribbon microphone, introduced in 1931, which imparted a characteristic warmth to vocals and immediately became an intrinsic part of the 'crooning' sound of artists like Bing Crosby. Armstrong's famous interpretation of Carmichael's "Stardust" became one of the most successful versions of this song ever recorded, showcasing Armstrong's unique vocal sound and style and his innovative approach to singing songs that had already become standards.

Armstrong's radical re-working of Sidney Arodin and Carmichael's "Lazy River" (recorded in 1931) encapsulated many features of his groundbreaking approach to melody and phrasing. The song begins with a brief trumpet solo, then the main melody is introduced by sobbing horns, memorably punctuated by Armstrong's growling interjections at the end of each bar: "Yeah! ..." "Uh-huh" ... "Sure" ... "Way down, way down." In the first verse, he ignores the notated melody entirely and sings as if playing a trumpet solo, pitching most of the first line on a single note and using strongly syncopated phrasing. In the second stanza he breaks into an almost fully improvised melody, which then evolves into a classic passage of Armstrong "scat singing".

As with his trumpet playing, Armstrong's vocal innovations served as a foundation stone for the art of jazz vocal interpretation. The uniquely gravelly coloration of his voice became a musical archetype that was much imitated and endlessly impersonated. His scat singing style was enriched by his matchless experience as a trumpet soloist. His resonant, velvety lower-register tone and bubbling cadences on sides such as "Lazy River" exerted a huge influence on younger white singers such as Bing Crosby.

Working during hard times

The Great Depression of the early 1930s was especially hard on the jazz scene. The Cotton Club closed in 1936 after a long downward spiral, and many musicians stopped playing altogether as club dates evaporated. Bix Beiderbecke died and Fletcher Henderson's band broke up. King Oliver made a few records but otherwise struggled. Sidney Bechet became a tailor, later moving to Paris and Kid Ory returned to New Orleans and raised chickens.^[49]

Armstrong moved to Los Angeles in 1930 to seek new opportunities. He played at the New Cotton Club in Los Angeles with Lionel Hampton on drums. The band drew the Hollywood crowd, which could still afford a lavish night life, while radio broadcasts from the club connected with younger audiences at home. Bing Crosby and many other celebrities were regulars at the club. In 1931, Armstrong appeared in his first movie, *Ex-Flame* and was also convicted of marijuana possession but received a suspended sentence.^[50] He returned to Chicago in late 1931 and played in bands more in the Guy Lombardo vein and he recorded more standards. When the mob insisted that he get out of town,^[51] Armstrong visited New Orleans, had a hero's welcome, and saw old friends. He sponsored a local baseball team known as Armstrong's Secret Nine and had a cigar named after him.^[52] But soon he was on the road again. After a tour across the country shadowed by the mob, he fled to Europe.

After returning to the United States, he undertook several exhausting tours. His agent Johnny Collins's erratic behavior and his own spending ways left Armstrong short of cash. Breach of contract violations plagued him. He hired Joe Glaser as his new manager, a tough mob-connected wheeler-dealer, who began to straighten out his legal mess, his mob troubles, and his debts. Armstrong also began to experience problems with his fingers and lips, which were aggravated by his unorthodox playing style. As a result, he branched out, developing his vocal style and making his first theatrical appearances. He appeared in movies again, including Crosby's 1936 hit *Pennies from Heaven*. In 1937, Armstrong substituted for Rudy Vallee on the CBS radio network and became the first African American to host a sponsored, national broadcast.^[53]

The Harlem Renaissance

During the 1920s, Louis Armstrong brought a huge impact during the Harlem Renaissance within the Jazz world. The music he created was an incredible part of his life during the Harlem Renaissance.^[54] His impact touched many, including a well known man during that time named Langston Hughes. The admiration he had for Armstrong and acknowledging him as one of the most

recognized musicians during the era.^[55] Within Hughes writings, he created many books which held the central idea of jazz and recognition to Armstrong as one of the most important person to be part of the new found love of their culture.^[56] The sound of jazz, along with many other musicians such as Armstrong, helped shape Hughes as a writer. Just as the musicians, Hughes wrote his words with jazz.^[57]

Armstrong changed the jazz during the Harlem Renaissance. Being known as "the world's greatest trumpet player" during this time he continued his legacy and decided to continue a focus on his own vocal career. The popularity he gained brought together many black and white audiences to watch him perform.^[58]

Reviving jazz with the All Stars

After spending many years on the road, Armstrong settled permanently in Queens, New York in 1943 in contentment with his fourth wife, Lucille. Although subject to the vicissitudes of Tin Pan Alley and the gangster-ridden music business, as well as anti-black prejudice, he continued to develop his playing. He recorded Hoagy Carmichael's "Rockin' Chair" for Okeh Records.

During the next 30 years, Armstrong played more than 300 performances a year. Bookings for big bands tapered off during the 1940s due to changes in public tastes: ballrooms closed, and there was competition from television and from other types of music becoming more popular than big band music. It became impossible under such circumstances to finance a 16-piece touring band.

During the 1940s, a widespread revival of interest in the traditional jazz of the 1920s made it possible for Armstrong to consider a return to the small-group musical style of his youth. Armstrong was featured as a guest artist with Lionel Hampton's band at the famed second Cavalcade of Jazz concert held at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles which was produced by Leon Hefflin Sr. on October 12, 1946.^[59] Following a highly successful small-group jazz concert at New York Town Hall on May 17, 1947, featuring Armstrong with trombonist/singer Jack Teagarden, Armstrong's manager, Joe Glaser dissolved the Armstrong big band on August 13, 1947, and established a six-piece traditional jazz group featuring Armstrong with (initially) Teagarden, Earl Hines and other top swing and Dixieland musicians, most of whom were previously leaders of big bands. The new group was announced at the opening of Billy Berg's Supper Club.

This group was called Louis Armstrong and His All Stars and included at various times Earl "Fatha" Hines, Barney Bigard, Edmond Hall, Jack Teagarden, Trummy Young, Arvell Shaw, Billy Kyle, Marty Napoleon, Big Sid Catlett, Cozy Cole, Tyree Glenn, Barrett Deems, Mort Herbert, Joe Darensbourg, Eddie Shu and percussionist Danny Barcelona. During this period, Armstrong made many recordings and appeared in over thirty films. He was the first jazz musician to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine, on February 21, 1949. Louis Armstrong and his All Stars were featured at the ninth Cavalcade of Jazz concert also at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles produced by Leon Hefflin Sr. held on June 7, 1953 along with Shorty Rogers, Roy Brown, Don Tosti and His Mexican Jazzmen, Earl Bostic, and Nat "King" Cole.^[60]

A jazz ambassador

By the 1950s, Armstrong was a widely beloved American icon and cultural ambassador who commanded an international fanbase. However, a growing generation gap became apparent between him and the young jazz musicians who emerged in the postwar era such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Sonny Rollins. The postwar generation regarded their music as abstract art and considered Armstrong's vaudevillian style, half-musician and half-stage entertainer, outmoded and Uncle Tomism, "... he seemed a link to minstrelsy that we were ashamed of."^[61] He called bebop "Chinese music".^[62] While touring Australia, 1954, he was asked if he could play bebop. "Bebop?" he husked. "I just play music. Guys who invent terms like that are walking the streets with their instruments under their arms."^[63]



Armstrong in 1953



Armstrong in 1955

In June 1950, Suzy Delair performed rehearsals of the song "C'est si bon" with Aimé Barelli and his orchestra at the Monte Carlo casino where Louis Armstrong was finishing the evening. Armstrong enjoyed the song and he recorded the American version in New York City on June 26, 1950. In the 1960s, he toured Ghana and Nigeria.^{[64][65]}



"Mack the Knife" was released in 1956.

After finishing his contract with Decca Records, he became a freelance artist and recorded for other labels.^{[66][67]} He continued an intense international touring schedule, but in 1959 he suffered a heart attack in Italy and had to rest.^[68]

In 1964, after over two years without setting foot in a studio, he recorded his biggest-selling record, "Hello, Dolly!", a song by Jerry Herman, originally sung by Carol Channing. Armstrong's version remained on the Hot 100 for 22 weeks, longer than any other record produced that year, and went to No. 1 making him, at 62 years, 9 months and 5 days, the oldest person ever to accomplish that feat. In the process, he dislodged the Beatles from the No. 1 position they had occupied for 14 consecutive weeks with three different songs.^[69]

Armstrong kept touring well into his 60s, even visiting part of the communist bloc in 1965. He also toured Africa, Europe, and Asia under the sponsorship of the US State Department with great success, earning the nickname "Ambassador Satch" and inspiring Dave Brubeck to compose his jazz musical *The Real Ambassadors*. By 1968, he was approaching 70 and his health began to give out. He suffered heart and kidney ailments that forced him to stop touring. He did not perform publicly at all in 1969 and spent most of the year recuperating at home. Meanwhile, his longtime manager Joe Glaser died. By the summer of 1970, his doctors pronounced him fit enough to resume live performances. He embarked on another world tour, but a heart attack forced him to take a break for two months.^[71]



Record of Armstrong's visit to Brazil, 1957.

External audio

 Louis Daniel Armstrong talks with Studs Terkel on WFMT; 1962/6/24 (https://soundcloud.com/studsterkel-radio-archive/louis-daniel-armstrong-talks-with-studs-terkel-on-wfmt-1962624), 33:43, Studs Terkel Radio Archive^[70]

Armstrong made his last recorded trumpet performances on his 1968 album *Disney Songs the Satchmo Way*.^[72]

Personal life

Pronunciation of name

The Louis Armstrong House Museum website states:

Judging from home recorded tapes now in our Museum Collections, Louis pronounced his own name as "Lewis". On his 1964 record "Hello, Dolly", he sings, "This is Lewis, Dolly" but in 1933 he made a record called "Laughin' Louie". Many broadcast announcers, fans, and acquaintances called him "Louie" and in a videotaped interview

from 1983 Lucille Armstrong calls her late husband "Louie" as well. Musicians and close friends usually called him "Pops".^[73]

In a memoir written for Robert Goffin between 1943 and 1944, Armstrong states, "All white folks call me Louie," perhaps suggesting that he himself did not or, on the other hand, that no whites addressed him by one of his nicknames such as Pops.^[74] That said, Armstrong was registered as "Lewie" for the 1920 U.S. Census. On various live records he's called "Louie" on stage, such as on the 1952 "Can Anyone Explain?" from the live album *In Scandinavia vol.1*. The same applies to his 1952 studio recording of the song "Chloe", where the choir in the background sings "Louie ... Louie", with Armstrong responding "What was that? Somebody called my name?" "Lewie" is the French pronunciation of "Louis" and is commonly used in Louisiana.

Family

Armstrong was performing at the Brick House in Gretna, Louisiana, when he met Daisy Parker, a local prostitute. He started the affair as a client. He returned to Gretna on several occasions to visit her. He found the courage to look for her home to see her away from work. It was on this occasion that he found out that she had a common-law husband. Not long after this fiasco, Parker traveled to Armstrong's home on Perdido Street.^[75] They checked into Kid Green's hotel that evening. On the next day, March 19, 1919, Armstrong and Parker married at City Hall.^{[75][76]} They adopted a three-year-old boy, Clarence, whose mother, Armstrong's cousin Flora, had died soon after giving birth. Clarence Armstrong was mentally disabled as the result of a head injury at an early age, and Armstrong spent the rest of his life taking care of him.^[77] His marriage to Parker ended when they separated in 1923.



Armstrong with Lucille Wilson (c. 1960s)

On February 4, 1924, he married Lil Hardin Armstrong, King Oliver's pianist. She had divorced her first husband a few years earlier. His second wife helped him develop his career, but they separated in 1931 and divorced in 1938. Armstrong then married Alpha Smith.^[78] His marriage to his third wife lasted four years, and they divorced in 1942. Louis then married Lucille Wilson in October 1942, a singer at the Cotton Club, to whom he was married until his death in 1971.^[79]

Armstrong's marriages never produced any offspring, though he loved children.^[80] However, in December 2012, 57-year-old Sharon Preston-Folta claimed to be his daughter from a 1950s affair between Armstrong and Lucille "Sweets" Preston, a dancer at the Cotton Club.^[81] In a 1955 letter to his manager, Joe Glaser, Armstrong affirmed his belief that Preston's newborn baby was his daughter, and ordered Glaser to pay a monthly allowance of \$400 (US\$4,676 in 2018 dollars^[82]) to mother and child.^[83]

Personality

Armstrong was noted for his colorful and charismatic personality. His autobiography vexed some biographers and historians, as he had a habit of telling tales, particularly of his early childhood when he was less scrutinized, and his embellishments of his history often lack consistency.^[84]

In addition to an entertainer, Armstrong was a leading personality of the day. He was beloved by an American public that gave even the greatest African American performers little access beyond their public celebrity, and he was able to live a private life of access and privilege afforded to few other African Americans during that era.^[84]

He generally remained politically neutral, which at times alienated him from members of the black community who looked to him to use his prominence with white America to become more of an outspoken figure during the civil rights movement. However, he did criticize President Eisenhower for not acting forcefully enough on civil rights.^[84]

Lip problems

The trumpet is a notoriously hard instrument on the lips, and Armstrong suffered from lip damage over much of his life due to his aggressive style of playing and preference for narrow mouthpieces that would stay in place easier, but which tended to dig into the soft flesh of his inner lip. During his 1930s European tour, he suffered an ulceration so severe that he had to stop playing entirely for a year. Eventually he took to using salves and creams on his lips and also cutting off scar tissue with a razor blade. By the 1950s, he was an official spokesman for Ansatz-Creme Lip Salve.^[85]

During a backstage meeting with trombonist Marshall Brown in 1959, Armstrong received the suggestion that he should go to a doctor and receive proper treatment for his lips instead of relying on home remedies, but he did not get around to doing it until the final years of his life, by which point his health was failing and doctors considered surgery too risky.^[86]

Nicknames

The nicknames "Satchmo" and "Satch" are short for "Satchelmouth". The nickname has many possible origins.^[84] The most common tale that biographers tell is the story of Armstrong as a young boy in New Orleans dancing for pennies. He scooped the coins off the street and stuck them into his mouth to prevent bigger children from stealing them. Someone dubbed him "satchel mouth" for his mouth acting as a satchel. Another tale is that because of his large mouth, he was nicknamed "satchel mouth" which was shortened to "Satchmo".^[84]



Autograph of Armstrong on the muretto of Alassio

Early on he was also known as "Dipper", short for "Dippermouth", a reference to the piece *Dippermouth Blues*.^[87] and something of a riff on his unusual embouchure.

The nickname "Pops" came from Armstrong's own tendency to forget people's names and simply call them "Pops" instead. The nickname was turned on Armstrong himself. It was used as the title of a 2010 biography of Armstrong by Terry Teachout.^[84]

Race

Armstrong was largely accepted into white society, both on stage and off, a rarity for a black person at the time. Some musicians criticized Armstrong for playing in front of segregated audiences, and for not taking a strong enough stand in the American civil rights movement.^[88] When he did speak out it made national news, such as his criticism of President Eisenhower, calling him "two-faced" and "gutless" because of his inaction during the conflict over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. As a protest, Armstrong canceled a planned tour of the Soviet Union on behalf of the State Department saying: "The way they're treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell" and that he could not represent his government abroad when it was in conflict with its own people.^[89] The FBI kept a file on Armstrong for his outspokenness about integration.^[90]

Religion

When asked about his religion, Armstrong answered that he was raised a Baptist, always wore a Star of David, and was friends with the pope.^[91] He wore the Star of David in honor of the Karnofsky family, who took him in as a child and lent him money to buy his first cornet. He was baptized a Catholic in the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in New Orleans,^[91] and he met Pope Pius XII and Pope Paul VI.^[84]

Personal habits

Armstrong was concerned with his health. He used laxatives to control his weight, a practice he advocated both to acquaintances and in the diet plans he published under the title *Lose Weight the Satchmo Way*.^[84] Armstrong's laxative of preference in his younger days was Pluto Water, but when he discovered the herbal remedy Swiss Kriss, he became an enthusiastic convert,^[84] extolling its virtues to anyone who would listen and passing out packets to everyone he encountered, including members of the British Royal Family. (Armstrong also appeared in humorous, albeit risqué, cards that he had printed to send out to friends; the cards bore a picture of him sitting on a toilet—as viewed through a keyhole—with the slogan "*Satch says, 'Leave it all behind ya!'"*)^[92] The cards have sometimes been incorrectly described as ads for Swiss Kriss.^[93] In a live recording of "Baby, It's Cold Outside" with Velma Middleton, he changes the lyric from "Put another record on while I pour" to "Take some Swiss Kriss while I pour."^[94]

Armstrong was a heavy marijuana smoker for much of his life and spent nine days in jail in 1930 after being arrested for drug possession outside a club. He described marijuana as "a thousand times better than whiskey".^[95]

The concern with his health and weight was balanced by his love of food, reflected in such songs as "Cheesecake", "Cornet Chop Suey",^[96] though "Struttin' with Some Barbecue" was written about a fine-looking companion, not about food.^[97] He kept a strong connection throughout his life to the cooking of New Orleans, always signing his letters, "Red beans and ricely yours ...".^[98]

A fan of Major League Baseball, he founded a team in New Orleans that was known as Raggedy Nine and transformed the team into his Armstrong's "Secret Nine Baseball".^[99]

Writings

Armstrong's gregariousness extended to writing. On the road, he wrote constantly, sharing favorite themes of his life with correspondents around the world. He avidly typed or wrote on whatever stationery was at hand, recording instant takes on music, sex, food, childhood memories, his heavy "medicinal" marijuana use—and even his bowel movements, which he gleefully described.^[100]

Social organizations

Louis Armstrong was not, as is often claimed, a Freemason. Although he is usually listed as being a member of Montgomery Lodge No. 18 (Prince Hall) in New York, no such lodge has ever existed. However, Armstrong stated in his autobiography that he was a member of the Knights of Pythias, which although real is not a Masonic group.^[101]

Music

Horn playing and early jazz

In his early years, Armstrong was best known for his virtuosity with the cornet and trumpet. Along with his "clarinet-like figurations and high notes in his cornet solos", he was also known for his "intense rhythmic 'swing', a complex conception involving ... accented upbeats, upbeat to downbeat slurring, and complementary relations among rhythmic patterns."^[102] The most lauded recordings on which Armstrong plays trumpet include the Hot Five and Hot Seven sessions, as well as those of the Red Onion Jazz Babies. Armstrong's improvisations, while unconventionally sophisticated for that era, were also subtle and highly melodic. The solo that Armstrong plays during the song Potato Head Blues has long been considered his best solo of that series.^{[84][103]}

Prior to Armstrong, most collective ensemble playing in jazz, along with its occasional solos, simply varied the melodies of the songs. Armstrong was virtually the first to create significant variations based on the chord harmonies of the songs instead of merely on the melodies. This opened a rich field for creation and improvisation, and significantly changed the music into a soloist's art form.^[84]



Selmer trumpet, given as a gift by King George V of the United Kingdom to Louis Armstrong in 1933

Often, Armstrong re-composed pop-tunes he played, simply with variations that made them more compelling to jazz listeners of the era. At the same time, however, his oeuvre includes many original melodies, creative leaps, and relaxed or driving rhythms. Armstrong's playing technique, honed by constant practice, extended the range, tone and capabilities of the trumpet. In his records, Armstrong almost single-handedly created the role of the jazz soloist, taking what had been essentially a collective folk music and turning it into an art form with tremendous possibilities for individual expression.^[84]

Armstrong was one of the first artists to use recordings of his performances to improve himself. Armstrong was an avid audiophile. He had a large collection of recordings, including reel-to-reel tapes, which he took on the road with him in a trunk during his later career. He enjoyed listening to his own recordings, and comparing his performances musically. In the den of his home, he had the latest audio equipment and would sometimes rehearse and record along with his older recordings or the radio.^[104]

Vocal popularity

As his music progressed and popularity grew, his singing also became very important. Armstrong was not the first to record scat singing, but he was masterful at it and helped popularize it with the first recording on which he scatted, "Heebie Jeebies". At a recording session for Okeh Records, when the sheet music supposedly fell on the floor and the music began before he could pick up the pages, Armstrong simply started singing nonsense syllables while Okeh president E.A. Fearn, who was at the session, kept telling him to continue. Armstrong did, thinking the track would be discarded, but that was the version that was pressed to disc, sold, and became an unexpected hit. Although the story was thought to be apocryphal, Armstrong himself confirmed it in at least one interview as well as in his memoirs.^[105] On a later recording, Armstrong also sang out "I done forgot the words" in the middle of recording "I'm A Ding Dong Daddy From Dumas".

Such records were hits and scat singing became a major part of his performances. Long before this, however, Armstrong was playing around with his vocals, shortening and lengthening phrases, interjecting improvisations, using his voice as creatively as his trumpet.^[84] Armstrong once told Cab Calloway that his scat style was derived "from the Jews *rockin*", an Orthodox Jewish style of chanting during prayer.^{[106][107]}

Composing

Armstrong was a gifted composer who wrote more than fifty songs, some of which have become jazz standards (e.g. "Gully Low Blues", "Potato Head Blues" and "Swing That Music").

Colleagues and followers

During his long career he played and sang with some of the most important instrumentalists and vocalists of the time; among them were Bing Crosby, Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Earl Hines, Jimmie Rodgers, Bessie Smith and perhaps most famously Ella Fitzgerald. His influence upon Crosby is particularly important with regard to the subsequent development of popular music: Crosby admired and copied Armstrong, as is evident on many of his early recordings, notably "Just One More

Chance" (1931).^[84] The *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* describes Crosby's debt to Armstrong in precise detail, although it does not acknowledge Armstrong by name:

Crosby ... was important in introducing into the mainstream of popular singing an Afro-American concept of song as a lyrical extension of speech ... His techniques—easing the weight of the breath on the vocal cords, passing into a head voice at a low register, using forward production to aid distinct enunciation, singing on consonants (a practice of black singers), and making discreet use of appoggiaturas, mordents, and slurs to emphasize the text—were emulated by nearly all later popular singers.



With Jack Teagarden (left) and Barney Bigard (right), Armstrong plays the trumpet in Helsinki, Finland, October 1949

Armstrong recorded two albums with Ella Fitzgerald: *Ella and Louis*, and *Ella and Louis Again* for Verve Records, with the sessions featuring the backing musicianship of the Oscar Peterson Trio and drummers Buddy Rich (on the first album), and Louie Bellson (on the second). Norman Granz then had the vision for Ella and Louis to record *Porgy and Bess*.

His recordings for Columbia Records, *Louis Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy* (1954) and *Satch Plays Fats* (all Fats Waller tunes) (1955) were both being considered masterpieces, as well as moderately well selling. In 1961 the All Stars participated in two albums—*The Great Summit* and *The Great Reunion* (now together as a single disc) with Duke Ellington. The albums feature many of Ellington's most famous compositions (as well as two exclusive cuts) with Duke sitting in on piano. His participation in Dave Brubeck's high-concept jazz musical *The Real Ambassadors* (1963) was critically acclaimed, and features "Summer Song", one of Armstrong's most popular vocal efforts.

In 1964, his recording of the song "Hello Dolly" went to number one. An album of the same title was quickly created around the song, and also shot to number one (knocking The Beatles off the top of the chart). The album sold very well for the rest of the year, quickly going "Gold" (500,000). His performance of "Hello Dolly" won for best male pop vocal performance at the 1964 Grammy Awards.

Hits and later career

Armstrong had nineteen "Top Ten" records^[108] including "Stardust", "What a Wonderful World", "When The Saints Go Marching In", "Dream a Little Dream of Me", "Ain't Misbehavin'", "You Rascal You", and "Stompin' at the Savoy". "We Have All the Time in the World" was featured on the soundtrack of the James Bond film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, and enjoyed renewed popularity in the UK in 1994 when it featured on a Guinness advertisement. It reached number 3 in the charts on being re-released.

In 1964, Armstrong knocked The Beatles off the top of the Billboard Hot 100 chart with "Hello, Dolly!", which gave the 63-year-old performer a U.S. record as the oldest artist to have a number one song. His 1964 song "Bout Time" was later featured in the film *Bewitched*.^[84]

Armstrong performed in Italy at the 1968 Sanremo Music Festival where he sang "Mi Va di Cantare"^[109] alongside his friend, the Eritrean-born Italian singer Lara Saint Paul.^[110] In February 1968, he also appeared with Lara Saint Paul on the Italian RAI television channel where he performed "Grassa e Bella", a track he sang in Italian for the Italian market and C.D.I. label.^[111]



Louis Armstrong in 1966

In 1968, Armstrong scored one last popular hit in the United Kingdom with "What a Wonderful World", which topped the British charts for a month. Armstrong appeared on the October 28, 1970, *Johnny Cash Show*, where he sang Nat King Cole's hit "Ramblin' Rose" and joined Cash to re-create his performance backing Jimmie Rodgers on "Blue Yodel No. 9".

Stylistic range

Armstrong enjoyed many types of music, from blues to the arrangements of Guy Lombardo, to Latin American folksongs, to classical symphonies and opera. He incorporated influences from all these sources into his performances, sometimes to the bewilderment of fans who wanted him to stay in convenient narrow categories. Armstrong was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as an *early influence*. Some of his solos from the 1950s, such as the hard rocking version of "St. Louis Blues" from the *WC Handy* album, show that the influence went in both directions.^[84]

Film, television, and radio

Armstrong appeared in more than a dozen Hollywood films, usually playing a bandleader or musician. His most familiar role was as the bandleader *cum* narrator in the 1956 musical *High Society* in which he sang the title song and performed a duet with Bing Crosby on "Now You Has Jazz". In 1947, he played himself in the movie *New Orleans* opposite Billie Holiday, which chronicled the demise of the Storyville district and the ensuing exodus of musicians from New Orleans to Chicago. In the 1959 film *The Five Pennies* he played himself, sang, and playing several classic numbers. With Danny Kaye he performed a duet of "When the Saints Go Marching In" during which Kaye impersonated Armstrong. He had a part in the film alongside James Stewart in *The Glenn Miller Story*.

Armstrong was the first African American to host a nationally broadcast radio show in the 1930s. In 1969, he had a cameo role in the film version of *Hello, Dolly!* as the bandleader Louis. He sang the title song with actress Barbra Streisand. His solo recording of "Hello, Dolly!" is one of his most recognizable performances.

^[84] He was heard on such radio programs as *The Story of Swing* (1937) and *This Is Jazz* (1947), and he also made television appearances, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, including appearances on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*.^[84]

Argentine writer Julio Cortázar, a self-described Armstrong admirer, asserted that a 1952 Louis Armstrong concert at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris played a significant role in inspiring him to create the fictional creatures called Cronopios that are the subject of a number of Cortázar's short stories. Cortázar once called Armstrong himself "Grandísimo Cronopio" (The Great Cronopio).^[84]

There is a pivotal scene in *Stardust Memories* (1980) in which Woody Allen is overwhelmed by a recording of Armstrong's "Stardust" and experiences a nostalgic epiphany.^[112]

Death

Against his doctor's advice, Armstrong played a two-week engagement in March 1971 at the Waldorf-Astoria's Empire Room. At the end of it, he was hospitalized for a heart attack.^[113] He was released from the hospital in May, and quickly resumed practicing his trumpet playing. Still hoping to get back on the road, Armstrong died of a heart attack in his sleep on July 6, 1971,



Armstrong played a bandleader in the television production "The Lord Don't Play Favorites" on *Producers' Showcase* in 1956.

a month before his 70th birthday.^[114] He was residing in Corona, Queens, New York City, at the time of his death.^[115] He was interred in Flushing Cemetery, Flushing, in Queens, New York City. His honorary pallbearers included Bing Crosby, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Pearl Bailey, Count Basie, Harry James, Frank Sinatra, Ed Sullivan, Earl Wilson, Alan King, Johnny Carson and David Frost.^[116] Peggy Lee sang The Lord's Prayer at the services while Al Hibbler sang "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" and Fred Robbins, a long-time friend, gave the eulogy.^[117]



Armstrong entertains Grace Kelly on the set of *High Society* in 1956.

Awards and honors

Grammy Awards

Armstrong was posthumously awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1972 by the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. This Special Merit Award is presented by vote of the Recording Academy's National Trustees to performers who, during their lifetimes, have made creative contributions of outstanding artistic significance to the field of recording.^[118]

Grammy Award					
Year	Category	Title	Genre	Label	Result
1964	Male Vocal Performance	" <u>Hello, Dolly!</u> "	Pop	Kapp	Winner

Grammy Hall of Fame

Recordings of Armstrong were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, which is a special Grammy award established in 1973 to honor recordings that are at least 25 years old, and that have "qualitative or historical significance".^{[119][120]}

Grammy Hall of Fame					
Year recorded	Title	Genre	Label	Year inducted	Notes
1925	" <u>St. Louis Blues</u> "	Jazz (Single)	Columbia	1993	<u>Bessie Smith</u> with <u>Louis Armstrong</u> , cornet
1926	" <u>Heebie Jeebies</u> "	Jazz (Single)	OKeh	1999	
1928	" <u>West End Blues</u> "	Jazz (Single)	OKeh	1974	
1928	"Weather Bird"	Jazz (Single)	OKeh	2008	with <u>Earl Hines</u>
1929	" <u>St. Louis Blues</u> "	Jazz (Single)	OKeh	2008	with Bessie Smith
1930	" <u>Blue Yodel No. 9 (Standing on the Corner)</u> "	Country (Single)	Victor	2007	Jimmie Rodgers (featuring Louis Armstrong)
1932	" <u>All of Me</u> "	Jazz (Single)	Columbia	2005	
1938	" <u>When the Saints Go Marching In</u> "	Blues (Single)	Decca	2016	
1955	" <u>Mack the Knife</u> "	Jazz (Single)	Columbia	1997	
1958	<u>Porgy and Bess</u>	Jazz (Album)	Verve	2001	with <u>Ella Fitzgerald</u>
1964	" <u>Hello, Dolly!</u> "	Pop (Single)	Kapp	2001	
1967	" <u>What a Wonderful World</u> "	Jazz (Single)	ABC	1999	

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame listed Armstrong's *West End Blues* on the list of 500 songs that shaped Rock and Roll.^[121]

Year recorded	Title	Label	Group
1928	<u>West End Blues</u>	<u>OKeh</u>	<u>Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five</u>

Inductions and honors

In 1995, the U.S. Post Office issued a Louis Armstrong 32 cents commemorative postage stamp.

Year inducted	Title	Results	Notes
1952	<u>Down Beat Jazz Hall of Fame</u>		
1960 ^[122]	<u>Hollywood Walk of Fame</u>	Star	at 7601 Hollywood Blvd.
1978	<u>Big Band and Jazz Hall of Fame</u>		
2004	<u>Nesuhi Ertegün Jazz Hall of Fame at Jazz at Lincoln Center</u>		
1990	<u>Rock and Roll Hall of Fame</u>		Early influence
2007	<u>Louisiana Music Hall of Fame</u>		
2007	<u>Gennett Records Walk of Fame, Richmond, Indiana</u>		
2007	<u>Long Island Music Hall of Fame</u>		

Film honors

In 1999 Armstrong was nominated for inclusion in the American Film Institute's 100 Years ... 100 Stars.^[123]

Legacy

The influence of Armstrong on the development of jazz is virtually immeasurable. His irrepressible personality both as a performer and as a public figure was so strong that to some it sometimes overshadowed his contributions as a musician and singer.

As a virtuoso trumpet player, Armstrong had a unique tone and an extraordinary talent for melodic improvisation. Through his playing, the trumpet emerged as a solo instrument in jazz and is used widely today. Additionally, jazz itself was transformed from a collectively improvised folk music to a soloist's serious art form largely through his influence. He was a masterful accompanist and ensemble player in addition to his extraordinary skills as a soloist. With his innovations, he raised the bar musically for all who came after him.

Though Armstrong is widely recognized as a pioneer of scat singing, Ethel Waters precedes his scatting on record in the 1930s according to Gary Giddins and others.^[124] Billie Holiday and Frank Sinatra are just two singers who were greatly indebted to him. Holiday said that she always wanted Bessie Smith's 'big' sound and Armstrong's feeling in her singing. Even special musicians like Duke Ellington have praised Armstrong through strong testimonials. Duke Ellington, DownBeat magazine in 1971, said, "If anybody was a master, it was Louis Armstrong. He was and will continue to be the embodiment of jazz."^[125] In 1950, Bing Crosby, the most successful vocalist of the first half of the 20th century, said, "He is the beginning and the end of music in America."^[126]

In the summer of 2001, in commemoration of the centennial of Armstrong's birth, New Orleans's main airport was renamed Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport.

In 2002, the Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings (1925–1928) were preserved in the United States National Recording Registry, a registry of recordings selected yearly by the National Recording Preservation Board for preservation in the National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress.^[127]

The US Open tennis tournament's former main stadium was named Louis Armstrong Stadium in honor of Armstrong who had lived a few blocks from the site.^[128]

Congo Square was a common gathering place for African-Americans in New Orleans for dancing and performing music. The park where Congo Square is located was later renamed Louis Armstrong Park.^[129] Dedicated in April 1980, the park includes a 12-foot statue of Armstrong, trumpet in hand.^[130]

The house where Armstrong lived for almost 28 years was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1977 and is now a museum. The Louis Armstrong House Museum, at 34-56 107th Street between 34th and 37th avenues in Corona, Queens, presents concerts and educational programs, operates as a historic house museum and makes materials in its archives of writings, books, recordings and memorabilia available to the public for research. The museum is operated by the Queens College, City University of New York, following the dictates of Lucille Armstrong's will. The museum opened to the public on October 15, 2003. A new visitors center is planned.^[131]

Armstrong appeared at many New York area venues, including several extended engagements at Freedomland U.S.A. in The Bronx. His performances there are featured in the book, *Freedomland U.S.A.: The Definitive History* (Theme Park Press, 2019).

According to literary critic Harold Bloom, "The two great American contributions to the world's art, in the end, are Walt Whitman and, after him, Armstrong and jazz ... If I had to choose between the two, ultimately, I wouldn't. I would say that the genius of this nation at its best is indeed Walt Whitman and Louis Armstrong."^[132]

On June 25, 2019, *The New York Times Magazine* listed Louis Armstrong among hundreds of artists whose material was reportedly destroyed in the 2008 Universal fire.^[133]

Discography

See also

- Louis Armstrong albums on Wikipedia
- Louis Armstrong songs on Wikipedia

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External links

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