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Definition: **Louis Armstrong (1901-71)** from *DK Eyewitness Books: Great Musicians*

The greatest of all jazz trumpeters, Armstrong was born in New Orleans, the home of jazz. He was nicknamed “Satchmo” because of his satchel-shaped mouth. Armstrong gave the solo trumpet an identity all of its own. He also became known as a singer through hits like “Hello, Dolly” and “What a Wonderful World.”



Image from: [The Jack Parnell band featuring \(L to R\) Sid... in Great Lives: A Century in Obituaries](#)

Summary Article: **Armstrong, Louis**

From *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

Louis Armstrong was one of the most beloved entertainers of all time.

Originally nicknamed “Dippermouth,” he became “Satchelmouth,” “Satchmo,” and finally “Satch,” while always known affectionately as “Pops.” His great good humor and impossibly broad grin, his shining trumpet, dabbing handkerchief and gravelly voice became known all over the world during his 50-year career.

Armstrong appeared in 50 films and numerous television shows, made dozens of recordings, wrote several autobiographies, and acted as a goodwill

ambassador for America over many years of constant touring. In 1964, his recording of “Hello Dolly” knocked the Beatles off the top spot on the music charts. But although most people recognize him as a pop star, his impact on jazz was as powerful as Beethoven's was on classical music.

Armstrong was born in New Orleans, a musical melting pot, at the turn of the century. His birthdate is usually given as July 4, 1900, despite evidence that it was actually in August of 1901. His musical training began in 1913, when he was arrested for firing a pistol in the air and sent to the Coloured Waif's Home, where he played cornet in the reformatory's band.

Released in 1914, he joined the popular Joe Oliver band, then worked locally, often on excursion boats, until Oliver (now nicknamed “King”) invited him to Chicago in 1922. Early on, Armstrong drew attention for the enthusiastic power of his tone and his musical ideas; by 1924, when he joined Fletcher Henderson's dance band in New York, switching to the trumpet, his ability to “swing” was becoming legendary. In November of 1925 he began his series of Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings, which are still cherished today as examples of jazz playing at its best.

“Swing” is a propulsive beat that makes listeners want to move in time to the music. Armstrong's distinctive use of rhythm relaxed the bands he played with and spurred them to greater freedom and drive. He's also credited with changing the strictly interactive nature of early jazz to highlight the solo artist, which opened the music to greater artistic expressiveness and became a crucial aspect of jazz performance ever since. Armstrong influenced many with his clean, clear tone, energy, and melodic inventiveness. But his impact went far beyond the instrumental: he set a new style of jazz singing, making the singer more important than the song, and probably invented the use of “scat”—those playful nonsense syllables that are sung in place of words. Every vocalist owes a large debt to Armstrong, and with his sunny, sincere personality, his singing always endeared him to audiences, even when his trumpet skills began to fail him.

Armstrong worked hard and steadily, sometimes performing every night of the year. From 1928 to

1947, he played at the head of large bands, then created the six-piece All Stars, with whom he toured the world for two decades. In 1955, after a live European album called “Ambassador Satch,” the State Department began sponsoring his trips. Armstrong made many albums with his All Stars, and recorded Disney songs and pop tunes as well; his famous collaboration with Ella Fitzgerald included an album devoted to George Gershwin's opera, “Porgy and Bess.”

At the same time that Armstrong influenced jazz, and helped shatter its decadent image, he also transcended it—on his last record, in 1970, he sang country songs with a Nashville rhythm section. But as Dizzy Gillespie said, “if it weren't for him, there wouldn't be any of us.” Armstrong died of heart failure on July 6, 1971, and his New York home is now a museum.



Louis Armstrong holding a trumpet. 1946. William P. Gottlieb, photographer. William P. Gottlieb Collection, Library of Congress.



Louis Armstrong playing the trumpet in profile. 1946. William P. Gottlieb, photographer. William P. Gottlieb Collection, Library of Congress.



Ella Fitzgerald. 1946. William P. Gottlieb, photographer. William P. Gottlieb Collection, Library of Congress.

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