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## Louis Armstrong, the Star of Jazz

“If you have to ask what jazz is, you’ll never know.”- Louis Armstrong (Boujut, Michel) Louis Armstrong was a man who certainly knew what jazz is, without ever having to ask. For the greater part of the 20th century, Louis Armstrong was a central part of the American jazz/swing scene, and he influenced (directly or indirectly) all the musicians who have come after him (“Louis Armstrong”). This great man doesn’t receive the recognition he deserves for his incredible contributions to the canon of American music (Boujut, Michel).

Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong was born on August 4, 1901 in a very poor neighborhood of New Orleans, Louisiana (“Louis Armstrong”). His father worked in industry, performing manual labor, and his mother frequently turned to prostitution to support her children. When his parents separated, Louis was entrusted to the care of his grandmother (“Louis Armstrong”). A few years later, Louis’ parents attempted to get back together; although it didn’t work out, the couple had a daughter, Beatrice (Boujut, Michel). For the next five or six years, Louis split his time between school and church, as well as at the youth club where he learned to sing. He would also spend time hanging around the local honky-tonks, where he started to learn from the performers about playing the cornet (Boujut, Michel). He stayed in school until the fifth grade, when he started picking up odd jobs to support his family.

After a time, he grew close to a Jewish family, the Karnofskys. He would often eat dinner at their place, and they encouraged him to sing (“Louis Armstrong”). In 1913, Louis joined in the New Year’s Day festivities, and things didn’t go well. He fired a pistol into the air and was promptly taken to the Colored Waif’s Home for Boys, a detention home (“Louis Armstrong”). He joined the band at the home, and soon started to become very good at the cornet. Eventually, he became the band leader--a very proud moment for the young Armstrong (Boujut, Michel). When he was released from the home, he started earning a reputation as a blues player (“Louis Armstrong”). Joe “King” Oliver, one of the best cornet players in New Orleans, took Louis under his wing and acted as his mentor (Boujut, Michel).

Louis would occasionally play as a sub alongside King Oliver in Kid Ory’s band, one of the most popular swing bands in New Orleans. At first, he had to keep doing manual labor, such as carting coal, but soon he was able to support himself with music alone (“Louis Armstrong”). He would play at honky-tonks, at parties, and later, on riverboats during the summer.

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