

WEST END BLUES - LOUIS ARMSTRONG

Louis Armstrong and his 'hot five' would have performed this piece in the late 1920s. Ko-ko was actually composed by Joe "KING" Oliver, when Louis Armstrong was a member of King Oliver's band before it split up in 1924. Joe Oliver, cornetist, bandleader and composer, was one of the earliest influential Blues pioneers. His work was typical of the New Orleans' style, which had developed from the Black African slave chants of the cotton fields, influencing the "folk" or local popular music of the era and area.

The set up of the ensemble would have been:

Brass – trumpet and trombone

Reed – clarinet

Rhythm – piano, banjo, drums

This piece starts with a solo trumpet (Armstrong) playing six bars of syncopated, rubato arpeggios and broken chords in the key of Eb major using the blue notes of the key which are F# and Db.

The main 12 bar blues starts with a swung rhythm played by the trumpet and clarinet whilst the trombone plays a simple harmony. The piano provides the beat to the piece using a steady right hand harmony of blocked chords, with the tonic note in the left hand.

There is not much variation in the rhythm or chord structure throughout the piece. This produces the notes of the 12-bar structure. In bar 18, the percussion changes to a syncopated 'clip clop' sound (suggested to be milk bottles) This is played for 12 bars with the melody from the trombone whereas all other instruments provide additional harmonies. At bar 31, Louis Armstrong sings a vocal 'scat'; here he tries to imitate the sounds of the instruments. The accompaniment is then passed to the clarinet, giving a dark, mystical sound by playing in the Chalumeau register. In bar 42, a piano solo begins; this is played in a 'stride' style splitting the harmonies between high and low bass notes. The final 12 bars return to the piano accompaniment, whilst the trombone, clarinet and trumpet play an Eb chord for 4 bars. The



blues are concluded by the trumpet playing a 4 bar syncopated rhythm followed by a 3 bar solo piano break. The last 3 bars slow down with blue chords from the piano below the trumpet.