

## **The significance of Louis Armstrong's contribution to Jazz.**

By 1919 Marable's band had been joined by the young cornettist Louis Armstrong who was destined to become the most influential of all early Jazz performers. Armstrong's lowly background in New Orleans was typical of many first generation jazz musicians. Born in a slum, Louis gained his formative musical experiences in the bordellos of Storyville and by singing in street groups with friends. After Louis was released from being arrested he resolved to pursue a career as a musician and owed his initial success to the timely patronage of King Oliver.

Armstrong was faced with a new challenging task when he joined Oliver's band. In the New Orleans ensemble style it was difficult enough for the standard 3 instrument front line to create convincing polyphony; the addition of a fourth melodic strand, which Armstrong was asked to provide, caused further problems because his instrument was identical to Oliver's. This experience undoubtedly sharpened Armstrong's aural perception.

Armstrong's playing was characterized by a wide variety of original melodic and timbral devices and make his style instantly recognizable. Louis's idiosyncratic mannerisms, adumbrated in his recordings with Oliver and developed in the later 1920's, include descending arpeggio patterns in triplets, so called 'rips' in which a high note is approached by an aggressive glissando, and a rich terminal vibrato colouring sustained notes after the initial attack. His playing in these early years is distinguished by a powerful sense of swing, a characteristic that made him one of the 'hottest' performers of the time.

Retuning to Chicago after quitting Oliver's band and playing in Henderson's band, Armstrong formed with his wide the dynamics Hot Five and Hot seven ensembles. The hot five comprised cornet or trumpet, clarinet and trombone as its formidable front line with a rhythm section of piano and banjo. At this time Armstrong started to abandon the 'paraphrase' approach, in which a performer constructed a solo simply by embellishing the basic melody, while leaving the theme recognizable for the most part. Armstrong's technique of matching each of his two-or four bar melodic phrases to the immediately preceding phrase-known as the 'correlated chorus'.

Armstrong's improvisational skills were complemented by an impressive virtuosity on his instrument, which he changed in 1926 from cornet to trumpet in pursuit of a more brilliant sonority. Armstrong's talents were not restricted to trumpet playing: he also began to make a name for himself as an accomplished singer, especially in the 'scat' style. This technique, made famous by Louis Armstrong in the Hot five recording of Heebie Jeebies and Hotter than that, involved singing nonsense syllables to an improvised melody. He allegedly introduced this technique on the spur of the moment when he dropped his music during a rehearsal and was unable to remember the words.

Armstrong was by no means the only prominent jazz musician to secure for himself a lucrative career in the entertainment industry. As a result of his transatlantic tours of 1933 and 1934, Armstrong's fame spread to Europe. Back in New York in 1935m he hired the hard-hitting agent Joe Glaser, who placed him in Luis Russell's band alongside several former New Orleans colleagues. When the big-band craze evaporated after WW2, Armstrong returned to the traditional style of small-ensemble jazz then enjoying a revival, in a performance at Town hall New York.