

“ Can you imagine someone the age of a grandparent ranking number one in the top pop music charts? Jazz musician Louis Armstrong did it on two occasions with two different songs in his life. At the age of 63 he knocked the Beatles off the top of the charts with the song *Hello Dolly*, then once again at the age of 69, he reached the top of the charts in two countries with *What a Wonderful World*. ”

Louis Armstrong is one of the best known jazz musicians of all time. He was an exceptional trumpet player and vocalist who heavily influenced future generations of jazz artists and was the first jazz musician to popularize an improvised solo in the jazz band setting. He was the vocalist that popularized scat singing and throughout his long career he played and sang together with some of the most influential and important instrumentalists and vocalists of the time. He starred in more than thirty movies, played in Broadway musicals and toured the world. Many of his songs are featured in TV shows and movies even today.

As a child, Louis Armstrong lived in poverty with his mother and younger sister. He collected food that was thrown away then sold it to restaurants and delivered newspapers to earn money. He hauled and sold coal for the Karnofsky family who lent him money for him to buy his first cornet. While doing odd jobs for the family, he would often sneak into nightclubs and listen to jazz jams especially those where his future mentor “King” Oliver and other famous musicians would drop in and play.

When Louis was twelve years old, he was sent to a reform house for boys because of an incident where he fired a pistol in the air at a New Years Celebration. It was here that he met his teacher, Peter Davis who helped him focus on playing the cornet. Louis excelled and was made leader of the ‘house’ band.

After Armstrong left the reform school at the age of fourteen, his career began as he hauled coal by day and played cornet by night. He first played in bands around New Orleans and on river boats that crossed the Mississippi river. Then in the early 1920s, his mentor, “King” Oliver asked him to move to Chicago and join his Creole jazz band.

In the mid-twenties, Armstrong switched from playing the cornet to the trumpet so that he could blend in better with the other musicians he was playing with at the time. He formed his own bands called the **Hot Fives** and the **Hot Sevens**, some of the best examples of Armstrong’s instrumental abilities. He started to develop his own distinctive style and could play several octaves on his instrument. Louis was also a natural singer and had a distinctive voice that often imitated trumpet sounds. His expressive, wide open eyes and belly laughter, along with the stories he told on stage and improvisational techniques always made him a favorite among crowds.

FAST FACTS

NAME: Louis Armstrong

BORN: August 4, 1901 New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

DIED: July 6, 1971, New York City, USA

STYLE: Dixieland, jazz, swing, popular music

INSTRUMENTS: Trumpet and Vocals

IMPORTANT WORKS

Ain’t Misbehavin, *What a Wonderful World*,
Hello Dolly

FUN FACTS

Louis Armstrong puffed his cheeks out when he played, which earned him the nickname ‘Satchmo’ which was short for satchel mouth.

During the recording of *Heebie Jeebies*, Louis dropped his lyric sheet. He resorted to singing nonsense syllables because he didn’t have the words in front of him. This type of singing became known as scat.