Louis ?Stachmo? Armstrong Essay, Research Paper

Known as the King of Jazz, Louis “Stachmo” Armstrong

was one of the most important figures in early jazz. He

was said to have defined jazz music. Only Charlie Parker

comes close to having as much influence on jazz as Louis

Armstrong.

Armstrong was born on July 4, 1900 in New Orleans. He

grew up singing on the streets of New Orleans at a young

age and had a troubled childhood. At the age of twelve he

was placed in the Waif’s Home For Boys for firing a gun

into the air. However, at this home for boys is where

Louis’s thirst for music took off. Armstrong learned to

play the bugle, drums and the trumpet at the home.

After Louis left the center he began going to

different kinds of night clubs in order to listen and

learn new kinds of music. At these clubs is where he met

Joe “King” Oliver. “King” Oliver was one of Armstrong’s

favorite musicians and the man acted as father to Louis.

Oliver began to teach Louis how to play the cornet and the

trumpet. Upon learning the cornet Louis started filling

in for local bands at the clubs and eventually started his

own band.

In 1917 King Oliver left New Orleans and Louis took

his spot in a band called King Ory’s Orchestra which was

one of the most well known bands in town. Louis spent

time on a riverboat where he improved his cornet skills

and also learned to read music. In 1922 King Oliver

called Louis to Chicago, so he quit playing on the

riverboats and left to go play in the Creole Jazz band.

This was a dream come true for Louis. The band’s New

Orleans style of music took the town by storm and soon

many other bands from down south make their way north to

Chicago. In Chicago Louis switched from playing the cornet

to the trumpet, which was to be the instrument that would

make him the famous musician that he was. Louis brought

his New Orleans jazz style north and changed the way jazz

music was played. While playing in Oliver’s Creole Jazz

band Louis met Lillian Hardin who was a piano player for

the band. In February 1924 they got married. Lillian

felt that Louis was too talented and was wasting himself

by playing in King Oliver’s band. She eventually

pressured him to leave the band. Reluctantly he did.

In 1924 Louis left Chicago to go to Harlem and play

in Fletcher Henderson’s band. Fletcher and Oliver’s bands

styles of music were a lot different from each other.

Henderson’s band played more Latin rhythms and waltzes

while Oliver’s band played rags and stomps. While in

Harlem Louis started writing and recording his own music.

During this time Louis did many recording sessions with

numerous blues singers like Bessie Smith, and Clarence

Williams. His music began to influence musicians all over

the country. In 1920 Louis invented “scat” which is a

type of singing without words. He adapted his idea of

“scat” from listening to other singers like Ella

Fitzgerald.

In the 30’s he mostly toured the United States

playing and singing until 1932 when he went to England.

He stayed in Europe for 2 years where he became more

famous in Europe than he was in the U.S. The reason for

this was that racism in the U.S. was a lot stronger than

in England and was hurting his popularity. In 1935 Louis

returned to the U.S. and took 6 months off from his

trumpet playing because of lip problems. After this he

hooked up with manager Joe Glaser. He had known Glaser

when he was the manager of the Sunset Caf? in Chicago in

the 1920’s. Glaser remained Louis’s manager until his

death in 1969. Glaser took care of the business part of

the deal and left all the musical freedom to Louis. He

hired the Luis Russell Orchestra as Louis’s backup band.

The band was made up mostly of New Orleans musicians, who

had played with King Oliver. The

band was renamed the Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra.

Louis became the most famous men in America at this time.

Louis and his wife got divorce in 1938. He then married

Alpha his third wife. However they divorced for years

later.

For the next nine years the Louis’s band kept touring

and making records. But as the 50’s began to approach the

people’s liking for jazz shifted away from the sounds of

the Swing Era. The Louis Armsrong Orchestra began to look

tired and record and concert sales were on the decline.

In 1947, Glaser fired the orchestra and formed the Louis

Armstrong Allstars. The band was very popular worldwide.

In a 1955-56 tour through Europe he got the title of

“The Ambassador of Jazz” when he played for royalty. A

song most recognizable that Louis played to people who do

not know his music very well is “What a Wonderful World”.

Not only did Louis have a Musical career but he also had a

star role in the movie Hello, Dolly. Many people loved to

watch Louis play because he such great showmanship. He

was a great performer and he attracted all different sorts

of people to his shows. Louis’s health began to fail him,

and he had to be hospitalized many times in the remaining

three

years of his life. On July 6, 1971 Louis Armstrong died

in his sleep in his home in Queens, New York.