

act 2

On to Chicago: 1922–1924



Music on accompanying CD: “Dippermouth Blues” and “Chimes Blues”

PROCEDURE

1. Give the class the following information:

When Louis Armstrong was a teenager, New Orleans’s greatest jazz cornet player was Joseph “King” Oliver. Oliver was given the title King following the death of Buddy Bolden, an earlier player whose tone and power were legendary in the city. Impressed with Armstrong’s talent, Oliver became his mentor. When Oliver moved to Chicago, young Louis was good enough to replace him in a local band led by Kid Ory. His reputation as an excellent cornet player was beginning to spread.

Chicago had become a leading city for the new music called “jazz,” and King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band was the most successful ensemble in town. During this time, nearly all black bands were identified as Creole. Oliver sent for twenty-one-year old Louis Armstrong to play with him in Chicago, and with much trepidation the young man left New Orleans and joined the band in August 1922. Not surprisingly, and in spite of his fears, he fit in perfectly with the ensemble and was successful immediately.

The band consisted of the following musicians: King Oliver, first cornet; Louis Armstrong, second cornet; Honore Dutry, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Lil Hardin, piano; Bill Johnson, banjo; Baby Dodds and Johnny St. Cyr, drums; and Stump Evans, C-melody saxophone. All of the band members were from New Orleans except Lil Hardin, a college-trained pianist from Memphis, Tennessee. These artists exemplified the best of New Orleans jazz with sounds and style that were new to music “up north,” meaning outside of New Orleans.

They were a swinging band, with everybody improvising at once, making up their own music while playing together. Although they were “doing their own thing,” the band was carefully controlled and its members showed great discipline by staying close to the melody which they decorated and embellished. King Oliver conceived his band as *one* instrument—a group of musicians playing *collectively*. The New Orleans style was actually close to ragtime: it maintained a steady, swinging rhythm that produced a warm, happy feeling. Combined with an exciting, amazing energy, this new sound was described as “wild!”

OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce students to the sounds of King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band, the exemplars of the New Orleans style of early jazz.
2. To have students begin to recognize the sound of Louis Armstrong’s trumpet playing and the early innovations he brought to jazz.

The objectives incorporate the following National Standards in Music:

- Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
- Evaluating music and music performances.
- Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

The objectives incorporate the following National Standard in U.S. History:

- Integrating history, the social sciences, and the humanities.

2. Significance of the music selections

The recordings of King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band are noteworthy even today. Although Armstrong was second cornet to King Oliver, his performances are outstanding. Armstrong’s tone was so powerful that when recording, he was moved farthest from the pick-up horn of the recording device, to the very back of the room.

“Dippermouth Blues”: Joe Oliver has three fine solos on this recording that show why he earned the title “King.” He and Armstrong also play a duet demonstrating brilliant techniques that have seldom been equaled, much less surpassed.

“Chimes Blues”: Armstrong’s first recorded solo is on this recording. Here, his prominent part does not stay close to the melody, but is an imaginative solo that he delivers confidently with powerful, brilliant tones. Both numbers were recorded in April 1923 at Gennett Studios in Richmond, Indiana, a small town near Indianapolis, Indiana. Though not yet the soloist he was destined to become, the recordings prove that Armstrong was King Oliver’s equal, and more.

Prior knowledge and experience: Students have been taught the elements of music: melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and timbre, and can identify instruments of the band and orchestra by sight and sound.

You will need: The accompanying CD to the Guided Listening Lessons



3. Guided Listening Lessons

“Dippermouth Blues” by Joe “King” Oliver (Time: 2:25)
King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band

- Intro 0:00** Oliver and Armstrong play duet.
- A 0:06** Band begins with New Orleans sound: everybody improvising at once.
0:21 Clarinet, played by Johnny Dodds, weaves in and around band playing melody.
- A1 0:37** Clarinet solo with band in stop-time patterns: 1-2-3 accents.
0:53 Clarinet solo continues.
- A2 1:10** Armstrong heard in background leading in to Oliver’s solos.
- A3 1:26** First Oliver solo uses plunger mute for “wah-wah” sound effect.
1:42 Second Oliver solo has “leaping” patterns.
1:58 Third Oliver solo begins in high register.
2:12 Voice says, “Play that thing!”
- A4 2:14** Ensemble swings in steady rhythm; Oliver and Armstrong duet to the end.

EXAMPLE 3 DIPPERMOUTH BLUES, INTRODUCTION



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Play the introduction of “Dippermouth Blues” (Example 3), the duet melody Oliver and Armstrong play; have students raise their hands when they hear it on the recording.
2. Have students do the following on a sheet of paper while listening to the recording:
 - Write the number 1 when they hear Oliver and Armstrong play a duet.
 - Write the number 2 when they hear the band playing together, all improvising.
 - Write the number 3 each time they hear clarinet solo begin with band giving a “1-2-3” beat accent.
 - Write the number 3 each time Oliver begins a cornet solo.
 - Write the number 4 when a voice says, “Let’s play that thing!”
3. Assign class to research the lives of Joe “King” Oliver, Honore Dutrey, Johnny Dodds, Baby Dodds and Lil Hardin, all outstanding musicians in the history of jazz.



4. Guided Listening Lesson

“Chimes Blues” by Louis Armstrong (Time: 2:52)

King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---|---------|
| Intro | 0:00 | Band gives 4 bar introduction | |
| A | 0:06 | Melody begins in easy, New Orleans swing style; clarinet heard | 12 bars |
| | 0:24 | Melody repeated; wood block is heard | 12 bars |
| B | 0:41 | Reeds play in harmony; piano plays chords | 12 bars |
| | 0:59 | Phrase is repeated | 12 bars |
| C | 1:17 | Piano plays chords to imitate <i>chimes</i> ; cornet heard at end | 12 bars |
| | 1:35 | Phrase is repeated | 12 bars |
| D | 1:52 | Armstrong solos; piano and wood block accompany him | 12 bars |
| | 2:10 | Solo continues; Armstrong adds trills, varies rhythm | 12 bars |
| B2 | 2:28 | Band enters with earlier B theme | 12 bars |
| Coda | 2:47 | Ending begins with trombone dominant | 4 bars |

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. The rhythm of “Chimes Blues” is basically that of even eighth notes, typical of the New Orleans style. Have students tap the rhythms on their desks with pencils as they listen to the recording. Have them listen closely to how Armstrong adds to the steady rhythmic background of the band; all future jazz soloists would use his new technique.
2. The recording methods of the period required drummers to use wood blocks; have students raise their hands when they hear drummer Baby Dodds.
3. The clarinet weaves in and around the melody; have students raise their hands when they hear clarinetist Johnny Dodds.
4. Armstrong’s cornet sound was so brilliantly dominant that he was made to stand twelve to fifteen feet away from the rest of the band while recording. Ask the class for comments on this decision.