

## act 5

## Memorable Singer 1929–1949



Louis Armstrong at the microphone

Courtesy Louis Armstrong House and Archives at Queens College

**Music on accompanying CD:** “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” “Memories of You,” “Star Dust,” “I’ve Got the World On A String,” “When the Saints Go Marching In,” and “Blueberry Hill”

#### PROCEDURE

##### 1. Give class the following information:

By 1929 Louis Armstrong was one of the brightest stars in the music firmament, but he was not secure financially. At that time, jazz was still not accepted or appreciated by the mainstream public. Like ragtime, it was considered a somewhat corrupt form of legitimate music, whose popularity and acceptance was centered in the African American communities, where jazz was born and nurtured. The music industry produced records for separate consumers: “race” records were intended for blacks, a distinct commercial market. Race records could be bought by anyone, however, and Armstrong commanded a considerable following within the larger jazz community and among lovers of his music at home and abroad.

#### OBJECTIVES:

1. To trace how Armstrong’s fame as a singer began to spread out from the African American community to the world.
2. To recognize how his singing style influenced popular music singers in addition to jazz musicians.

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

Armstrong’s popularity was primarily in the African American community until he left Chicago and returned to New York in 1929. He took a job in the band at Connie’s Inn, a popular Harlem nightclub, and also sang the show’s featured number, “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” which became his first big recorded hit. His combination of singing and playing made him a sensation in New York; white musicians and audiences loved his style. He began concentrating on popular songs and leading his own big band, whose job would be to back up his playing and singing.

Armstrong’s singing style was unique: his voice was gravelly, but flexible and expressive. With crystal-clear diction, he could put almost any song across. He used his voice the same way he played his trumpet—with masterful inflection and phrasing. He recorded a variety of songs by Hoagy Carmichael, Harold Arlen, Eubie Blake, Andy Razaf, and other outstanding lyricists and composers. He had great influence on the singing styles of the best-known singers of the time, including the hugely popular Bing Crosby and Billie Holiday. Armstrong was on the way to becoming the first great, universally admired “crossover” artist, equally loved and respected by fans of all races.

**You will need:** Accompanying CD; words of song to give to class to follow as they listen.



### 3. Guided Listening Lesson

“Ain’t Misbehavin’” by Andy Razaf, Thomas “Fats” Waller, and H. Brooks

#### Lyrics:

“No one to talk with, all by myself  
No one to walk with, but I’m happy on the shelf  
Ain’t Misbehavin’, I’m saving my love for you.  
I know for certain, the one I love  
I’m through with flirtin’, it’s just you I’m thinking of  
Ain’t Misbehavin’, I’m saving my love for you.  
Like Jack Horner in the corner, don’t go nowhere  
What do I care, your kisses are worth waiting for believe me  
I don’t stay out late, don’t care to go  
I’m home about eight, just me and my radio,  
Ain’t Misbehavin’, I’m saving my love for you.

#### Music: “Ain’t Misbehavin’” (Time: 3:22)

- A 0:00 Trumpet solo; Armstrong plays melody  
0:29 Clarinet solo in high register  
0:44 Band continues melody; piano break
- A1 0:59 Armstrong sings “Ain’t Misbehavin’”  
1:57 Saxophone break
- A2 2:01 Trumpet solo; Armstrong improvises on what he sang  
2:13 Trumpet break  
2:17 Armstrong continues improvising melody  
2:29 Trumpet break
- A3 2:50 Band plays melody with Armstrong soaring over all
- Coda 3:03 Ending begins with Armstrong playing cadenzas, finishing on a high note.

#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Assign the class to research the life and music of the following outstanding African American musicians who wrote “Ain’t Misbehavin’”  
Thomas “Fats” Waller (1904–1943) is best known as one of the greatest of the Harlem stride piano players; he was also a prolific composer.  
Andy Razaf (1895–1973) was a very prolific and gifted lyricist born in Washington, DC; he was also descended from Madagascar royalty.
2. Let the class sing “Ain’t Misbehavin’” both with and without the recording.



## 4. Guided Listening Lesson

### “Memories of You” by Eubie Blake and Andy Razaf

#### Lyrics:

Waking skies at sunrise,  
Every sunset too,  
Seems to be bringing me  
Memories of You  
Here and there, everywhere,  
Scenes that we once knew,  
And they all just recall  
Memories of you.  
How I wish I could forget  
Those happy yesteryears  
That have left a rosary of tears.  
Your face beams in my dreams  
In spite of all I do,  
Everything seems to bring  
Memories of you.

#### Music: “Memories of You” (Time: 3:12)

- Intro 0:00** Vibraphone, played by Lionel Hampton  
**A 0:17** Trumpet solo by Armstrong  
0:35 Vibraphone  
**A 0:43** Armstrong sings  
1:53 Clarinet solo  
2:05 Trumpet breaks and solos  
2:46 Trumpet improvises in high register, ending on a high note  
3:05 Sounds of vibraphone heard at very end.

“Memories of You” was a great hit from a 1930s Broadway musical. This beautiful song became a standard of American popular music for many years. The music was composed by James Hubert “Eubie” Blake (1883–1993), a Baltimore-born ragtime pianist who performed regularly from his childhood to his nineties. Blake’s outstanding career had several successful facets: pianist, vaudeville performer, bandleader, and composer of Broadway musicals. He and his partner, Noble Sissle (1889–1975), revolutionized the New York stage when their historic musical *Shuffle Along* opened in 1921 with an all-black, star-studded cast. Blake’s music brought jazz dance to Broadway, laying the foundation for a distinctly American theatrical form that reached fruition with the musicals of George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, and others. Blake’s partnership with the great lyricist Andy Razaf resulted in many ballads that were exceptionally beautiful—the words and music were always a perfect fit. When Louis Armstrong recorded this song, his trumpet playing and vocal qualities added a new dimension to an already exquisite composition.

#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Have students follow the words of the song as Armstrong sings, raising their hands on trumpet entrances.
2. Eubie Blake based the melody of this song on “To A Wild Rose” by Edward MacDowell, the great American composer. Let students hear the original composition and compare it with Blake’s adaptation.
3. Assign research into the life and music of Eubie Blake.
4. Lionel Hampton, the great vibraphone player, is heard on the recording; assign research into his life and music.



## 5. Guided Listening Lesson

“Star Dust” by Hoagy Carmichael

### Lyrics:

Sometimes I wonder why I spend the lonely night dreaming of a song?  
The melody haunts my reverie, and I am once again with you  
When our love was new, and each kiss an inspiration,  
But that was long ago: now my consolation is in the stardust of a song.  
Beside a garden wall, when stars are bright, you are in the arms,  
The nightingale tells his fairy tale of paradise, where roses grew.  
Though I dream in vain, in my heart it will remain  
My stardust melody, the memory of love’s refrain.

**Music: “Star Dust” (Time: 3:33)**

**Intro 0:00** Band plays introduction.

**0:15** Trumpet solo; Armstrong improvises on melody.

**0:45** Solo continues.

**1:02** Band joins Armstrong at end of melody.

**1:15** Armstrong sings.

**2:22** Trumpet solo; Armstrong improvises.

**Coda 3:24** Trumpet ends song on a high note.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Note:** “Star Dust” is one of the best-known and beloved popular songs ever written—an enduring masterpiece. Armstrong’s recording of this classic has been called “inspired.” It is an excellent example of his mastery of phrasing and rhythm in both singing and playing. In 1931, when this record was made, his style of singing popular songs was very new.

1. Hoagy Carmichael was a great American songwriter; have the class research his life and music.
2. Have students beat a steady rhythm to the song with their right hands and raise their left hands when Armstrong inserts his improvisations.



## 6. Guided Listening Lesson

“I’ve Got the World on a String” by Harold Arlen

### Lyrics:

I’ve got the world on a string, sittin’ on a rainbow, Got the string around my finger  
What a world, what a life, I’m in love!  
I’ve got a song that I sing, I can make the rain go, any time I move my finger,  
Lucky me, can’t you see I’m in love!  
Life is a beautiful thing, as long as I hold the string  
I’d be a silly so-and-so, if I should ever let go  
I’ve got the world on a string, sittin’ on a rainbow, Got the string around my finger  
What a world, what a life, I’m in love!

**Music: “I’ve Got the World on a String” (Time: 3:11)**

Intro	0:00	Louis counts, “1,2” and piano begins	8 bars
A	0:10	Trumpet begins melody	16 bars
		Trumpet continues with improvisation	16 bars
B	0:36	Trumpet continues	16 bars
A	0:53	Trumpet returns to first melody	16 bars
	1:03	Piano bridge	8 bars
A	1:10	Louis begins: “I’ve got the world on a string,” etc.	16 bars
	1:23	“I’ve got a song that I sing,” etc.	16 bars
B	1:38	“Life is a beautiful thing,” etc.	16 bars
A	1:53	“I’ve got the world on a string,” etc.	8 bars
	2:00	Louis scat sings verse ending	8 bars
	2:08	Piano Bridge	4 bars
A	2:12	Band begins melody	8 bars
	2:18	Louis finishes phrase in high register.	8 bars
	2:25	Band continues melody	8 bars
	2:33	Louis completes phrase in high register	8 bars
	2:40	Band continues melody	16 bars
	2:54	Louis completes melody; rising to end on high note	16 bars

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

**Note:** Armstrong is accompanied by a new band on this recording, which included the excellent young piano player Teddy Wilson and other very fine soloists on trombone and tenor saxophone. Armstrong displays his talents as a showman. His unique singing style combined with his fine playing demonstrates that he is in complete charge.

1. Have students raise their hands when they hear Teddy Wilson.
2. Have the class tap the rhythms of the song, which moves along in sixteen-bar patterns. Challenge them to count the bars to see if they add up correctly!

**7. Guided Listening Lesson****“When the Saints Go Marching In” (Time: 2:43)**

Intro	0:00	Armstrong: “Sisters and Brothers, this is Reverend Satchmo, getting ready to beat out this mellow sermon for you. My text this evening is ‘When the Saints Go Marching In.’ Here comes Brother Higginbotham down the aisle with his trombone; blow it, boy!”
	0:18	J. C. Higginbotham plays melody on trombone
	0:36	Band plays interlude
	0:44	Armstrong sings: “When the saints go marching in, yes I want to be in that number, when the saints to marching in.”
	1:01	Charlie Holmes plays improvisation on alto saxophone
	1:20	Armstrong sings
	1:37	Trombone joins in with solo
	1:55	Band plays break
	2:02	Armstrong plays melody on trumpet
	2:18	Trumpet improvises and ends with rising, high note cadenza

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

**Note:** This was the first recorded jazz version of a Negro spiritual and a hit when it was released in 1938. Its immense popularity made the song the trademark of traditional, early jazz. Armstrong uses his nickname, Satchmo, derived from “Satchelmouth” in his introduction. Students love this song! Let them keep time on drums, clapping their hands and singing with and without the recording.



## 8. Guided Listening Lesson

“Blueberry Hill” by Al Lewis, Larry Stock, and Vincent Rose

Louis Armstrong sings with Gordon Jenkins, his orchestra, and choir

### Lyrics:

I found my thrill—on Blueberry Hill, on Blueberry Hill when I found you.  
The moon stood still—on Blueberry Hill, and lingered until—my dreams came true.  
The wind in the willow played—love’s sweet melody  
But all of those vows we made—were never to be.  
Though we’re apart—you’re part of me still  
For you were my thrill—on Blueberry Hill.

**Music: “Blueberry Hill” (Time: 2:51)**

**Intro** 0:00 Band begins

**A** 0:09 Armstrong sings: “I found my thrill on Blueberry Hill,” etc.

**B** 0:49 Choir sings: “The wind in the willow played,” etc.

**A** 1:08 Armstrong: “Though we’re apart, you’re part of me still,” etc.

**A1** 1:28 Choir begins repeat of song: “I found my thrill on Blueberry Hill,” etc.  
Armstrong ad libs: “Come climb the hill baby,” etc., and scat sings

1:50 Choir: “The moon stood still on Blueberry Hill,” etc.

**B1** 2:09 Armstrong: “The wind in the willow played,” etc.

Choir ad libs: “Do you really love me,?” etc.

**A1** 2:27 Armstrong scat sings

2:37 Armstrong: “For you were my thrill,” ad libs and scats to the end.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Note:** Louis Armstrong recorded with both white and black choirs, as well as many different singers. His distinctive voice made him a standout whether singing alone or with others. The secret? He sang like he played and vice versa.

1. Let class sing along with the recording.
2. Divide the class: one half sings with Louis, the other sings with the choir.