

## act 6

## Ambassador Satch, Superb Entertainer: 1950–1971



**Music on accompanying CD:** “Mack the Knife,” “I Got Plenty O’ Nuttin’,” “Duke’s Place,” “Hello, Dolly,” and “What a Wonderful World.”

**Louis Armstrong and dancers in Africa**

Courtesy Louis Armstrong House and Archives at Queens College

#### PROCEDURE

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

By 1950 Louis Armstrong had become one of the world’s favorite entertainers. People across the globe recognized his voice instantly. He was so popular abroad that in 1960 the State Department asked him to make a series of tours to help improve international relations. These tours created huge amounts of publicity on television and in newspapers and magazines at home. As the sixties wore on, Armstrong developed health problems and began to sing more and play the trumpet less. Even with these challenges, he performed and recorded to the end of his life.

#### OBJECTIVE

To highlight Armstrong’s versatility as a great entertainer and ambassador of goodwill in the twilight of his career.

The National Standards for Arts Education are addressed in consideration of: the various roles that musicians perform; citing Armstrong as a representative individual who functioned in each role; and describing his activities and achievements.

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

Louis Armstrong was the first great soloist to incorporate jazz into popular music. He not only revolutionized the entertainment industry, he was also a great lover of classical music. His versatility included operas, such as the classic 1957 recording with jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald of George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, and the blockbuster “Mack the Knife” from *The Three-Penny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, in 1955. Armstrong recorded with many top stars, appeared in major movies, and became a favorite guest on variety and talk shows on television.

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



### 3. Guided Listening Lesson

**“Mack the Knife,” by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, English translation by Marc Blitzstein**

#### Lyrics:

1. Oh, the shark has pretty teeth, dear—and he shows them pearly white.  
Just a jackknife has Macheath, dear—and he keeps it out of sight.  
When the shark bites with his teeth, dear, scarlet billows start to spread.  
Fancy gloves, though—wears Macheath, dear, so there’s not a trace of red.
2. On the sidewalk Sunday morning, lies a body oozing life;  
Someone’s sneaking ’round the corner; is the someone MACK THE KNIFE?  
From a tugboat by the river a cement bag’s drooping down;  
The cement’s just for the weight, dear; bet you Mackie’s back in town.
3. Louie Miller disappeared, dear, after drawing out his cash;  
And Macheath spends like a sailor; did our boy do something rash?  
Sukey Tawdry, Jenny Diver, Lotte Lenya, Lucy Brown  
Oh, the line forms on the right, dear, now that Mackie’s back in town

#### Music: “Mack the Knife” (Time: 3:21)

- 0:00 Louis says: “Dig man, there goes Mack the Knife!”  
Trumpet solo plays melody
- 0:49 Louis sings: “O the shark has,” etc.; trombone accompanies
- 1:10 “When the shark bites with his teeth,” etc; clarinet accompanies
- 1:30 “On the sidewalk,” etc;
- 1:52 “From a tugboat,” etc; clarinet and trombone accompany
- 2:15 “Louie Miller”, etc. piano accompanies
- 2:35 “Sukey Tawdry,” etc. piano accompanies
- 2:55 Voice: “Take it, Satch!” Louis solos, ascending to end on high note.

#### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Note:** *The Three-Penny Opera* opened in Berlin in 1928. It is a free adaptation of British composer John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* of 1728, a satire of contemporary politics and Italian opera. Armstrong said he recorded the song because it reminded him of some of the unsavory characters and deeds he observed in his youth in New Orleans.

1. “Mack the Knife” is an excellent example of how Armstrong could take a ballad from a totally unexpected source and turn it into a huge hit. As students listen to the recording, have them underline words or phrases they find interesting in his interpretation. Discuss their choices; have the class sing along with the recording.
2. Have students research *Beggar’s Opera* and *The Three-Penny Opera* and compare. Also, research jazz-inspired operas, both originals and revisions of standards.



#### 4. Guided Listening Lesson

“I Got Plenty O’ Nuttin’” by George Gershwin, Dubose and Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin

##### Lyrics:

Louis Armstrong: Yes, I got plenty o’ nothing, and nothing’s plenty for me  
I got no gal, got no mule, got no misery  
The folks with plenty o’ something, got a lock on the door  
Afraid somebody’s going to rob them while they’re out making more, what for?  
I got no lock on the door, that’s no way to be; they can steal the rug from the floor,  
That’s O.K. with me, cause the things that I prize like the stars in the skies are all free  
I got plenty o’ nothing, and nothing’s plenty for me  
I got my gal, got my song, got heaven the whole day long  
Got my gal, got my Lord, got my song!

Ella Fitzgerald: Oh, I got plenty o’ nothing, and nothing’s plenty for me  
I got the sun, got the moon, got the deep blue sea  
The folks with plenty o’ plenty, got to pray all the day  
Seems with plenty, you sure got to worry how to keep the devil away—away  
I ain’t afraid about hell, till the time arrives, never worry as long as I’m well  
Never want to strive to be good, to be bad, what the hell, I’m glad I’m alive!  
I got plenty o’ nothing, and nothing’s plenty for me  
Got my man, got my song, got heaven the whole day long  
Got my man, got my Lord, got my song!

**Music: “I Got Plenty O’ Nuttin’” (Time: 3:50)**

Intro	0:00	Band begins
	0:07	Trumpet solo; Armstrong plays first verse of song
	1:10	Band plays bridge
A	1:17	Louis sings first verse of song
B	2:29	Ella sings second verse of song

##### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Note:** *Porgy and Bess* is an opera written by George Gershwin for an all-black cast and first produced in 1935. It is the best-known and most critically acclaimed opera by an American composer. Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong give satisfying interpretations of the songs due to the unique quality and contrast of their voices.

1. Students like the swinging rhythms of this song; have them sing along with the recording.
2. Play recordings of “I Got Plenty O’ Nuttin’” by other performers and have class discuss the differences they hear.
3. Assign research into the life and music of George Gershwin, one of America’s great composers and the first to introduce the jazz idiom in his compositions for the concert stage.
4. Assign research into the life and music of Ella Fitzgerald, one of America’s greatest jazz and popular vocalists.



**"Duke's Place" by Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington (recorded 1961)**

**Lyrics:**

Baby! take me down to Duke's Place, wildest box in town is Duke's Place  
Love that piano sound in Duke's Place.  
Saxes do their tricks in Duke's Place, fellas swing their chicks in Duke's Place  
Come on! Get your kicks in Duke's Place!  
You find yourself a seat, and when you want to eat, you look around and yell, "Waiter!"  
You fill your cup chock full of dreams and drink it up  
You're jetting along with your girlie  
It's after three o'clock, but baby, it's still early!  
If you've never been to Duke's Place, take your tootsies into Duke's Place  
Life is in a spin in Duke's Place.

**Music: “Duke’s Place” (Time: 5:00)**

**Intro 0:00** Duke plays piano introduction

A 0:15 Louis sings: “Baby! take me down to Duke’s Place,” etc.

**B**     **0:48**   Ellington solo

A 1:17 Louis sings: "If you've never," etc.; piano, double bass and drum accompany

C 1:33 Barney Bigard solos on clarinet

**D**    **2:03**    Louis solos on trumpet in high register

E 2:32 Trummy Young solos on trombone

F 3:02 Ellington and Bigard duet

A 3:17 Ellington solos accompanied by clarinet and trombone

**3:34** Ellington continues solo with double bass accompanying; music gets softer

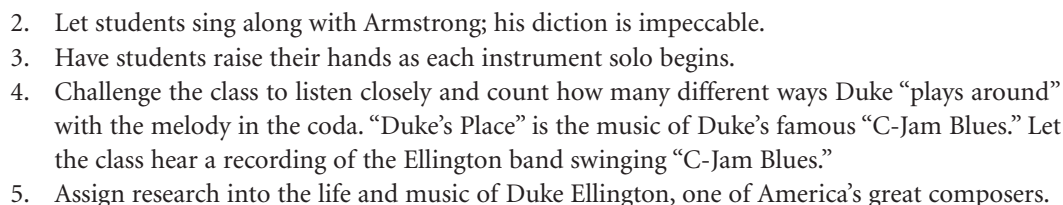
**Coda 3:49** Ellington ends song, improvising with double bass accompaniment

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Note:** “Duke’s Place” is from the album titled *Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington: The Great Summit/The Master Takes*. It is a superb recording featuring two of the most influential men in the history of jazz. With the exception of Ellington, the five musicians were members of Louis Armstrong’s All Stars, the band with whom he performed in 1961. The recording was a unique event. All of the compositions were by Ellington and highlighted the talent of both men to make memorable music.

1. Play the theme of “Duke’s Place” (Example 10) below, for class before listening to the recording.

### EXAMPLE 10





## 6. Guided Listening Lesson

“Hello, Dolly!” by Jerry Herman (recorded 1963) (Time: 2:23)

- Intro 0:00** Banjo
- 0:12** Armstrong sings:  
“Hello, Dolly, this is Louis, Dolly  
It’s so nice to have you back where you belong  
You’re looking swell, Dolly, I can tell, Dolly  
You’re still glowing, you’re still crowing  
You’re still going strong
- 0:38** I feel the room swaying, for the band’s playing  
One of our old favorite songs from way back when  
So—take her wrap, fellas, find her an empty lap, fellas  
Dolly’ll never go away again!”
- 1:01** Trumpet plays melody with band accompanying
- 1:25** Trumpet continues solo in high register
- 1:50** “I feel the room swaying, for the band’s playing  
One of your old favorite songs from way back when  
So—golly gee, fellas, have a little faith in me, fellas
- Coda 2:10** Dolly’ll never go away, promise you’ll never go away,  
Dolly’ll never go away again!

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Note:** “Hello, Dolly” was one of the biggest hits of Armstrong’s career. Recorded in 1963, it introduced him to millions of new fans who were unaware of his early successes and influence on jazz. The song was played constantly on radio stations, night and day, and even knocked the Beatles out of the number one spot on the charts at the height of their popularity. In 1968 Louis appeared in the film *Hello, Dolly* with Barbra Streisand and sang the song that helped make the movie a hit.

1. Have students listen and sing along with Armstrong on the recording.
2. Instruct the class to place an X on the lines of the song when the trombonist, Trummy Young and clarinet player Joe Dorensbourg are heard. They were members of Louis Armstrong’s All Stars, the ensemble on the recording.
3. The sound of the acoustic guitar was a novelty in popular music in 1963 and added to the success of the recording. Have students indicate on their papers when the guitar is heard prominently.



## 7. Guided Listening Lesson

**“What a Wonderful World” by George Douglas, George Weiss, and Bob Thiele (recorded 1967) (Time 2:18)**

### Lyrics:

I see trees of green, red roses too, I see them bloom for me and you  
And I think to myself what a wonderful world.  
I see skies of blue and clouds of white,  
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night  
And I think to myself what a wonderful world.  
The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky  
Are also on the faces of people going by  
I see friends shaking hands, saying “How do you do!”  
They’re really saying, “I love you”  
I hear babies cry, I watch them grow  
They’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know  
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world  
Yes, I think to myself, what a wonderful world!

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

**Note:** Armstrong loved “What A Wonderful World.” It is one of the few songs he recorded without playing his trumpet—stringed instruments provide the background music. The song was a huge hit in England and became popular in the United States twenty years later when it was featured in the movie *Good Morning, Vietnam*—sixteen years after his death.

1. Have students listen and sing along with the recording.
2. Challenge students to:
  - Listen for examples of Armstrong’s singing style. Sometimes he’s right on the beat, just before the beat, or just behind the beat. Indicate how he attacks the beat beside the verses of the song.
  - Write a poem describing your own view of “a wonderful world.”