

act 4

Innovative Trumpeter: 1925–1929



Music on accompanying CD: “Cornet Chop Suey,” “Struttin’ with Some Barbecue,” “Hotter Than That,” and “West End Blues.”

PROCEDURE

1. Give class the following information:

Louis Armstrong made the recordings that revolutionized jazz in Chicago between 1925 and 1928. He returned to Chicago from New York in 1925 and switched from the cornet to the trumpet. He was soon known as “The World’s Greatest Trumpet Player” and began to record as the leader of his own band, the Louis Armstrong Hot Five. The band was organized solely to record and, in fact, made only one public appearance. The Hot Five were Louis Armstrong, trumpet; Kid Ory, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Johnny St. Cyr, banjo; and Lil Hardin Armstrong, piano. All were outstanding musicians who had played with Armstrong in New Orleans, with the exception of Hardin, the pianist. On the group’s recordings, Armstrong had the room to expand and showcase his astonishing talents— incredible power, unmatched technique, and unlimited imagination and inventiveness.

The Hot Five and a later group, the Hot Seven, departed completely from the collective improvising style of King Oliver and other contemporary bands and focused on the “break,” which led to a solo player taking the lead. The sound was still swinging and still hot, but the soloist was the star. And what an incredible soloist Armstrong was!

OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the Louis Armstrong Hot Five and its importance in the history and development of jazz.

The objective incorporates 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 objective incorporates the following National Standard in U.S. History:

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

2. Significance of the music selections

As creator and master of the extended jazz solo, Armstrong solidified the concept of the solo as an integral part of jazz. As a trumpeter, he played in higher registers, longer and faster, with techniques that included vibrato and wide leaps, while improvising with more all-around virtuosity than anyone had done before. He was a powerful lead. His trumpet playing influenced the styles of all other players, including those on other instruments, and even the brass sections of American symphony orchestras. More than anyone else he is responsible for jazz becoming an improviser’s and soloist’s art rather than a collectively improvised form.

“When on June 28, 1928, Louis Armstrong unleashed the spectacular cascading phrases of the introduction to “West End Blues,” he established the general stylistic direction of jazz for several decades to come.”

—Gunther Schuller, composer, scholar, and conductor

Armstrong sang on many of the recordings, introducing a type of singing called “scat,” in which he used wordless phrases and sounds instead of the lyrics. He made one of the earliest recordings of scat singing in “Heebie Jeebies.”

In 1928 the classic recordings of the Hot Five and Hot Seven marked the end of Armstrong’s career solely as a jazz musician and as leader of a New Orleans style band. He would return to the band format in the forties. He had laid the foundation for a new era, during which his jazz innovations would be the bedrock of a musical expression that would sweep the world.

In the following Guided Listening Lessons, students are to listen for:

The break: a short, fast passage leading into an extended solo.

Cadenza: an improvised, unaccompanied passage for soloist.

Coda: the concluding unaccompanied passage at the end of the piece.

Stop-time: single, accented beats separated by silences.

Vibrato: a subtle, slight alternation of pitch; a “wavy” sound—the opposite of “straight.”



3. Guided Listening Lesson

“Cornet Chop Suey” by Louis Armstrong (Time: 3:00)

Intro	0:00	Opening cornet cadenza by Armstrong, 8 bars
A	0:05	Verse: Armstrong’s cornet solos over band in swinging New Orleans style
	0:15	Repeat of verse
B1	0:25	Chorus: cornet break; cascades up and down
	0:36	Seven stop-time patterns by band
	0:47	Cornet takes two high breaks at end of phrase
	0:58	Phrase ends with cornet vibrato (shake)
B2	1:08	Piano solo
	1:18	Piano improvises with rapidly alternating block chords
C	1:47	Cornet solo: departs from theme; displays wide range; stop-time breaks
	1:58	Cornet repeats solo with variations; stop-time breaks
B3	2:09	Cornet solo: returns to theme; break
	2:25	Cornet continues: seven stop-time passages with breaks
	2:35	Two cornet breaks
Coda:	2:52	Cornet plays rising pattern: two breaks with stop-time
	3:00	Cornet ends with descending cascade of notes

EXAMPLE 4 CORNET CHOP SUEY

INTRODUCTION



(A) VERSE



(B) SECOND THEME (CHORUS)



CODA (CONCLUDING PASSAGE)



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Note: The title “Cornet Chop Suey” reflects Armstrong’s love of Chinese food. The piece became famous as a test for trumpeters—aspiring players would memorize Armstrong’s solos note-for-note.

1. Play the introduction and themes on piano (Example 4, above) and have class sing them on neutral syllables; listen to recording again, and have students raise their hands when they hear the themes. The introduction is typical of the style that made Armstrong famous. If there is a trumpeter in the class, challenge him or her to play the introduction and themes on their instrument.
2. “Cornet Chop Suey” has many extended stop-time and break passages. Have students raise their hands when they recognize them and count how many they hear in this composition.



4. Guided Listening Lesson

“Struttin’ with Some Barbecue” by Louis Armstrong (Time: 2:59)

Intro	0:00	Trumpet plays improvised Introduction	16 bars
A	0:14	Trumpet solo: melody	16 bars
A1	0:35	Melody repeated	16 bars
	0:51	Banjo break	2 bars
B	0:54	Clarinet solo with piano accompaniment	16 bars
	1:11	Clarinet break	
B1	1:13	Trombone solo with piano accompaniment	16 bars
	1:31	Trombone break	
C	1:33	Trumpet solo in high register with piano accompaniment	30 bars
	1:50	Trumpet with *cascading triplets	
	2:01	Trumpet glissando with accents on and off the beat	
	2:11	Band plays stop-time break	
A2	2:16	Trumpet solo returns to melody; band improvising accompaniment	16 bars
	2:33	Banjo break	
A3	2:35	Trumpet solo with melody	8 bars
Coda	2:46	Band in stop-time ending	

EXAMPLE 5 STRUTTIN’ WITH SOME BARBECUE (CONCERT KEY)

INTRODUCTION



THEME A



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Note: The title “Struttin’ with Some Barbecue” refers to the delicious sandwiches Armstrong bought from a restaurant not far from the Savoy Ballroom in Chicago. By this time, he had switched permanently from playing cornet to trumpet.

1. Play the introduction and theme (Example 5, above) on piano. Have students raise their hands when they hear them on the recording and count number of times the theme is played.
2. Have students count number of breaks and stop-time passages they hear. Armstrong’s breaks contain lightning-fast triplets—listen for them.
3. Give research assignments to collect information about the Hot Five musicians: Kid Ory, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Johnny St. Cyr, banjo; and Lil Hardin, piano. Assign continuing research into Armstrong’s life and music.



5. Guided Listening Lesson

“Hotter Than That” by Lillian Hardin and Louis Armstrong (Time: 2:59)

Intro	0:00	Trumpet improvisation	8 bars
A	0:10	Trumpet solo with guitar accompaniment	14 bars
	0:25	Trumpet break	2 bars
		Solo continues	14 bars
A1	0:44	Clarinet solo by Johnny Dodds begins with 2-bar break; Solo continues for 14 bars with piano accompaniment	16 bars
B	1:19	Vocal scat solo by Armstrong with guitar accompaniment	14 bars
B1	1:37	Two-bar break starts new scat pattern	14 bars
B2	1:55	Vocal and guitar duet with Lonnie Johnson in call-and-response pattern; slower tempo.	
C	2:14	Piano interlude by Lil Hardin Armstrong	4 bars
A2	2:18	Trombone solo by Kid Ory	
A3	2:33	Trumpet solo break has short, high C’s leading into stop-time patterns!	14 bars
Coda	2:55	Trumpet and guitar in call-and-response	6 bars

EXAMPLE 6 HOTTER THAN THAT

(CONCERT KEY)



EXAMPLE 7

SOLO BREAK



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Note: Armstrong said he wrote “Hotter Than That” while sitting on the back steps of Lil Armstrong’s home in Chicago.

1. Play the beginning trumpet solo on piano (Example 6, above). These bars are very typical of Armstrong’s style and are still often copied note for note by trumpeters into whatever they are playing when they need an exciting passage. Have students raise their hands when they hear this in the recording.
2. Play the solo break (Example 7, above). This difficult passage is seldom copied, but universally admired. Have students raise their hands when they hear this break; count the number of high C’s Armstrong plays!



6. Guided Listening Lesson

“West End Blues” by Joe “King” Oliver (Time: 3:05)

Intro	0:00	Armstrong with the most famous solo trumpet cadenza in music history
	0:13	One chord played by band
A	0:16	Trumpet plays melody; clarinet and trombone accompaniment
	0:45	Trumpet ascends; ending strain with a high note
B	0:50	Trombone solo; clarinet and “clap”-sounding drum accompaniment
A1	1:25	Melody returns with duet by Armstrong and clarinet; Armstrong scat sings
C	2:00	Piano solo by Earl Hines
	2:10	Piano plays octave patterns; Hines’s famous “trumpet” style of playing
A2	2:32	Trumpet solo: Armstrong holds note for sixteen beats!
	2:45	Trumpet double-times in high register
Coda	2:55	Piano begins ending
	3:05	Armstrong plays six slowly descending notes to end with ensemble. Cymbals play final “clap” sound at end!

EXAMPLE 8 WEST END BLUES

(CONCERT KEY)



EXAMPLE 9



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Have students listen carefully for the following important features of Armstrong’s playing: the superb selection of notes and marvelous tone and his sense of swing and the shape and contour of his melodic lines. The way he played trumpet and cornet caused musicians to compose seriously for those instruments. Armstrong’s cadenza at the beginning of “West End Blues” was a startling innovation—a type of jazz improvisation that had never been heard before.
2. Play introductory cadenza for the class and let them hear it again. (Example 8, above). Discuss the elements of music in the cadenza: rhythm, melody, tone color, and texture. Only harmony is missing; how do we know this?
3. Review the elements of music with students: melody, rhythm, harmony, tone color, and texture.
4. Play the three notes that begin the melody in Sections A and A2. Discuss how Armstrong and the Hot Five develop each section and the differences in each. (Example 9, above).
5. As they listen to the recording again, have students list most dominant element in each of the sections: introduction, A, B, C, and the coda. What feature is obvious in each section? Answer: rhythm, the most instantly recognizable element in any and all music.
6. Let students use their hands, pencils, or small drums to keep the beat as the recording is played.
7. Earl Hines is considered the first true jazz pianist. Play several of the earlier recordings and contrast his piano-playing style with that of Lil Hardin Armstrong.
8. Assign research into the life and music of Earl Hines.
9. Discuss with the class the differences between the sounds of King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band and Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five; play examples of both again. They will discover that the element of texture is one of the differences, in addition to the solo passages and use of the break.