

LIVE FROM LINCOLN CENTER

December 13, 2000 8-10 PM on PBS

Jazz at Lincoln Center:

Armstrong-When the Saints Go Marching In

Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis

Jazz at Lincoln Center is the newest constituent member of New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. For the past few months the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra has been celebrating the centennial of the birth of one of the icons of jazz, Louis Armstrong. On Wednesday evening, December 13, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra will bring its celebration of Armstrong to the nationwide television audience as the next attraction on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series, Live From Lincoln Center. "Armstrong--When the Saints Go Marching In" is an exploration of Louis Armstrong's roots in New Orleans and its music.

Just who was this extraordinary man and musician? Armstrong himself, perhaps out of gratitude to the land that made his career possible, claimed July 4, 1900 as his birthdate. Later investigation seemed to indicate that his true birthdate was August 4, 1901. But that indefatigable musical sleuth, the late Nicolas Slonimsky, maintained that 1898 was probably the year of Armstrong's birth, the exact date remaining unknown. There is no question, however, that he was born in New Orleans and grew up in the fabled Storyville section of the city.

When he was 13, Louis Armstrong was arrested for firing his stepfather's pistol at a New Year's Eve celebration. As punishment he was placed in the Colored Waif's Home--a providential move as it turned out, for it was there that Armstrong learned to read music and to play several instruments. Upon his release from the Home, where the cornet had been his principal instrument, he played in various blues bands in Storyville. He came to the attention of one of the pioneers of New Orleans jazz, King Oliver, and in 1918- 1919 he played in the band of another New Orleans jazz great, "Kid" Ory.

In 1922 Louis Armstrong went to Chicago to play cornet in King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band; it was with that group that in 1923 he made his first recordings. He spent 1924-25 in New York as a member of Fletcher Henderson's band, but he returned to Chicago in 1925 and organized his own band, the Hot Five. With the Hot Five and its successor the Hot Seven he made a series of now legendary recordings. Having settled on the trumpet as his principal instrument, he at one point set an endurance record by playing high C on the trumpet 280 times in succession! His prowess as an improviser was so profound that some critics dubbed him "The Einstein of Jazz."

Louis Armstrong returned to New York in 1929 and became one of the world's most celebrated musicians from then until his death in July, 1971. He led his own big band from 1935 to 1947, and founded an All Star jazz unit in 1947. He toured

extensively throughout the United States and in many foreign countries, and became a regular guest on the most popular television variety shows of the 1950s and 60s. He also appeared in several movies, and his late-in-life recordings (as both trumpet player and singer) of "Hello Dolly" and "Mack the Knife" made his name and voice known the world over.

Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra will welcome several special guests on stage with them on the evening of December 13: clarinetist Bob Wilbur; trombonist Lucien Barbarin; and guitarist and banjo player Don Vappie. In addition, three teen-age musicians will join the ensemble: New Orleansite Troy Andrews, whose growth and development has been followed for several years by Wynton Marsalis; and trumpet players Brandon Lee of Houston and Dominick Farinacci of Cleveland, both of whom were discovered in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition and Festival.

The music to be heard will consist of Armstrong originals, songs popularized by him and other classics from 1920s New Orleans—among them St. James Infirmary, Potato Head Blues, Muskrat Ramble, 12th Street Rag, Up the Lazy River, and St. Louis Blues.

So a very special treat awaits us all on the next Live From Lincoln Center telecast on Wednesday evening, December 13. My usual stipulation: Be sure to check your local PBS station for the exact date and time in your locale.

See you then!