

Louis Armstrong WAY DOWN YONDER IN NEW ORLEANS

Louis Armstrong, affectionately known as "Satchmo" for much of his life, brought a remarkable new range to swing style trumpet playing. He began studying at the age of thirteen, while interred in the New Orleans Colored Waifs Home. A year later he was performing on the street. In 1918 he was befriended by Joe "King" Oliver, who recommended Armstrong as his replacement in Kid Ory's band.

Earlier soloists had focused on simple ornamentation of a tune's melodic contour. Armstrong added a new level of virtuosity through sustained high notes, a loosened rhythmic sense, and improvisation on the chord progressions underlying the original tunes.

By today's standards, of course, his approach was extremely simple. Scales and arpeggiated triads make up the bulk of his tonal material.



Rhythmically, there is a "swinging," bouncy use of dotted eighths and syncopations, which keeps the music jumping.

Armstrong never strays far from the original melody:



He does, however, make use of chromatic (non-harmonic) tones within his solo lines. Such tones are used with great care: they appear in step-wise motion, and act to connect the chord tones in a straight line (the third of a chord moving down to the tonic, for example):



In the above example, E^b occurs as a "slide" or passing tone down to the D, just as the F[#] acts as a chromatic link from G to its dominant seventh tone, F natural. The leap which occurs from F to E is simply an octave displacement of the scalar motion.

Later artists made more sophisticated use of chromatics and non-scalar motion, but Louis Armstrong set the stage for their efforts. In his time, he was unmatched for lyricism and drive.