



ESSENTIAL *Jazz* EDITIONS  
SET #1: NEW ORLEANS JAZZ, 1918-1927

# Potato Head Blues

COMPOSED BY LOUIS ARMSTRONG

AS RECORDED BY

LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND HIS HOT SEVEN, 1927

**FULL SCORE**

CO-PRODUCED BY

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER,

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION'S NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY, AND  
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Smithsonian  
*National Museum of American History*



These editions are made possible by the generous support of the New Orleans Jazz Commission and the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.

# Potato Head Blues

(Louis Armstrong)

AS RECORDED BY LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND  
HIS HOT SEVEN, 1927

## Instrumentation

B♭ Clarinet  
B♭ Cornet (B♭ Trumpet)  
Trombone  
Piano  
Banjo  
Tuba (String Bass)  
Drums

## Original Recording

Recorded by Louis Armstrong and His Hot Seven:  
Johnny Dodds (clarinet), Louis Armstrong (cornet  
and leader), Johnny Thomas (trombone), Lil  
Armstrong (piano), Johnny St. Cyr (banjo), Pete  
Briggs (tuba), Baby Dodds (drums).

Recorded May 10, 1927. Matrix number W 8055-C.  
First issued as OKeh 8503. Compact disc reissues:  
*The Hot Fives and Hot Sevens, Vol. 2; This Is Jazz,*  
*No. 1* (both Columbia); *A Portrait of the Artist as a*  
*Young Man* (Smithsonian/Columbia); *Great Original*  
*Performances, 1923–1932* (Louisiana Red Hot);  
and *The 25 Greatest Hot Fives & Hot Sevens*  
(ASV Living Era). Also included in the anthology:  
*The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* (Smithsonian).

## Credits

Transcription and music preparation: Don Vappie  
Music editor: Chuck Israels  
Text editor: John Edward Hasse

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## Smithsonian Institution

### National Museum of American History

Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra  
David N. Baker, Artistic and Musical Director  
James Zimmerman, Executive Director  
Kenneth Kimery, Producer  
14th & Constitution Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20560-0616  
202/633-9164

The Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, comprises 16 museums, the National Zoo, and research facilities, and hosts 30 million visitors a year. In 1971, the Smithsonian established a presence in jazz that has grown to become one of the world's most comprehensive

jazz programs. The National Museum of American History holds major collections of jazz memorabilia, artifacts, and oral histories, including famous icons such as Dizzy Gillespie's trumpet and the 200,000-page Duke Ellington archive. The museum's resident jazz band, the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, under Musical and Artistic Director David N. Baker, tours nationally and internationally, conducts educational programs, and is heard on the *Jazz Smithsonian* public radio series. The Smithsonian mounts exhibitions and traveling exhibitions on jazz and produces historical recordings, video programs, books, music editions, websites, and educational projects on jazz. The Smithsonian also undertakes research projects in jazz and offers fellowships for research in its holdings.

## Library of Congress

Music Division  
Jon Newsom, Chief  
1st and Independence Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20540-4710  
202/707-5503

In its historic role as depository for all copyrighted works, the Library of Congress is arguably the oldest collector of jazz documents. In addition to its collections of manuscripts and printed music registered for copyright, the Library of Congress has sound recordings in all formats including the famous oral history of Jelly Roll Morton made at the Library. Since then, it has acquired an extensive archive of commercial disks as well as unique broadcast and studio recordings, which have been augmented by recordings of performances sponsored by the Library. Its jazz archives include manuscripts, photographs, correspondence, film, video tapes, oral history, and related documents of many leading jazz composers, arrangers, and performers.

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# Classic New Orleans Jazz

BY JOHN EDWARD HASSE

In the story of American music, New Orleans has long had a fabled reputation as the birthplace of jazz. Although New Orleans was not the only place where proto-jazz was performed, the city's unique set of geographical, historical, cultural, and musical circumstances combined to give rise to this new style of music. In contrast to most American cities, New Orleans had no racial or ethnic ghettos back then, and African-Americans, French-Americans, Italian-Americans, et al, often lived side by side, creating countless opportunities for musical interchange.

From the beginning, jazz was a style of music intended for dancing, and New Orleans boasted dozens of dance halls—Economy Hall, Masonic Hall, the Tin Roof Café—where young people flocked to dance to the emerging style. New Orleans jazz musicians developed a style of playing that wove separate melodic lines into a counterpoint—a sound of group embellishment and improvisation. The musicians played blues, rags, marches, pop tunes, and original jazz compositions.

Musicians were more lucratively rewarded in the North and West, and by 1907, some players had taken the nascent New Orleans jazz sound on the road. By the late 1910s, a stream of musicians was leaving the city, many of them part of the great African-American migration from the South to the North. Greater opportunity beckoned the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB), Jelly Roll Morton, and Louis Armstrong, among others, to Chicago and then to New York City, where the opportunities for performing and recording were more numerous than in New Orleans. In the 1920s, jazz emerged into full flower, as dancing to jazz music became hugely popular among young people nationwide, record companies recorded the music in considerable quanti-

ty, and the music penetrated nightspots and homes across the nation. Although the style of the ODJB, Morton, and Armstrong would be influenced by developments emerging from Chicago and New York, the formative influence of New Orleans would remain a part of their music always.

In recognition of the importance of jazz to American culture, and the centrality of New Orleans to the development of jazz, in 1994 the United States Congress authorized the National Park Service to establish the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park. The Park, and its associated New Orleans Jazz Commission, are developing tours, exhibitions, educational programs, and visitors facilities that, when completed, will operate in the municipal Louis Armstrong Park. The inaugural set of Essential Jazz Editions, honoring three New Orleans pioneers of jazz, is an encouraging sign that the music is finding a greater place of value in American culture.

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JOHN EDWARD HASSE is Curator of American Music at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, a member of the New Orleans Jazz Commission, author of *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington*, and editor of *Jazz: The First Century*.

## Performance Notes

BY CHUCK ISRAELS

N.B. In order to simplify the notation and reduce the number of symbols on the page, the convention in these publications is as follows: all quarter notes are to be played short unless they are under a slur, or marked with a long articulation. Eighth notes are played most often with a triplet feel.

## Performing Early Jazz

This music represents a body of work that provides the foundation for all jazz. Any serious jazz musician needs experience playing music from this formative

period in American music. It is logical for young musicians to begin playing jazz using repertoire from later, less complex styles. Most student musicians start with Count Basie material from the Kansas City tradition, where everyone plays more or less the same thing at the same time. But eventually the difficulties and subtleties of independent playing that lead, on the one hand, to Ellington's contrapuntal style and, on the other hand, to the development of rhythm section independence exemplified by the Bill Evans Trio, must be addressed. This piece provides a good starting point.

These transcriptions have been made from recordings, from the 78 rpm era, that lack the dynamic range to which our ears have become accustomed with more recent technology. Listen to the recordings for indications of useful musical characteristics and then add whatever dynamic nuances might enliven the performances. (Louis Armstrong's playing on *Potato Head Blues* is a fine example of how some notes can be effectively de-emphasized in order that others be heard as strongly accented and prominent.)

In music in this style, the improvised ensembles exhibit certain characteristics that need to be maintained, and others that can be changed in order to give spontaneity to the performance. In general, the trumpet parts carry the melody of the composition and must be played nearly as they are. The clarinet part, with its eighth-note "sawtooth" pattern, must maintain its rhythmic and harmonic texture. In some cases, however, the exact choice of notes, patterns, dynamics, entrances, and exits is subject to change according to the taste and technical accomplishments of the individual player. The trombone parts, which are largely embellished bass/tenor lines, must maintain their "response" relationship to the "call" of the trumpet part, keeping the timings of entrances and rests and the resolutions on chord roots and main harmonic notes largely in place. But again, there can be some flexibility about how this role is realized according to the inclinations of the player.



All notes longer than a short quarter require nuance and color. Pitch bending, vibrato, and dynamic shaping all serve to give humanity and speech-like inflections to the music. For example, there are numerous occurrences of dotted quarter- and eighth-note figures in which the beginning of the dotted quarter note is strongly accented for about the duration of an eighth note, and the rest of the note is played much more softly, while still maintaining air flow and breath, until the arrival of the next eighth note, which is again played with a strong accent. Pay close attention to the various pitch bends and glissandi that are inexactly notated but are an inseparable part of the style of some of the ensemble passages as well as the solos.

Jazz compositions from this period are full of breaks and other stop-time devices that enliven their rhythmic texture. These must be performed with metric integrity so that the vitality of the music is maintained through the moments when the rhythm section stops and a solo instrument carries the momentum. It is equally essential that the re-entry of the band or rhythm section happens exactly in time with no rushing or dragging of tempo. This is less a matter of counting than of internalizing the pulse and having that pulse inform and control every musical impulse and melodic choice. Successful jazz improvisation is not superimposed on the pulse of the music; it grows out of it.

In this style, the rhythm section, with its three-“horn” improvised ensemble, must be kept simple to avoid clutter. There is often enough harmonic information in the other parts that the piano part can be kept minimal during the ensembles; that way its entrance accompanying other soloists or its own solo passages provides an interesting change in orchestration and texture. Modern practices of high chord voicings (above G above middle C) and highly syncopated rhythmic placement will be out of place in this style. On the other hand, relentless plodding on the beat can also become more tiring than useful, so some

middle ground must be found that takes advantage of the piano's ability to express dynamic nuances beyond what is heard in these technically primitive recordings. Using simple whole-note and half-note lines based on the voice leading tendencies of the sevenths and thirds is a good idea. Just because the piano part has chord notation does not mean that the piano must play whenever there are chord symbols, or that all of the chord tones need to be included. Amplification should be unnecessary to achieve a good balance in this music. Many of the notated solos are included to serve as starting models for the process of developing a personal solo style on the part of the new performer of this music, but Louis Armstrong's stop-time solo in *Potato Head Blues* is one example of a perfect “instant composition” and deserves to be re-created and experienced in all performances of this piece.

### Performing *Potato Head Blues*

*Potato Head Blues* has some sublime examples of why Louis Armstrong's playing has remained the model for the essence of jazz feeling and invention: his performance here is full of intuitive nuance and uncontrived expression, everything for which future generations of jazz improvisers continue to strive. It is possible to conceive of more attractive accompaniment possibilities to the clarinet solo than the repetitive quarter-note chords on the recording; the single-line technique favored by Jelly Roll Morton is one possible example of another accompaniment choice. If chords are played, some tasteful syncopation and spacing would be welcome. The tuba part can be performed by a string bass playing an octave higher than notated.

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CHUCK ISRAELS is a bassist and composer who formerly worked with Cecil Taylor, Stan Getz, Herbie Hancock, and Bill Evans. From 1973–78, he directed the National Jazz Ensemble, a pioneering repertory company. He is Associate Professor of Music at Western Washington University in Bellingham.

## Louis Armstrong

BY JAMES DAPOGNY

Born in 1901 in New Orleans, Armstrong grew up terribly disadvantaged, poor, and fatherless. Sent to a home for delinquents as a young teenager, he took up the cornet and played in the institution's band. After his stay there, he returned home and began to make his way into the New Orleans jazz world. Musically and socially he was helped by becoming a protégé of, and eventually a replacement for, cornetist King Oliver.

He worked on riverboats and in clubs, and by 1922, when summoned to Chicago to play second cornet in Oliver's band, was a seasoned enough musician to more than hold his own in this fine group. In 1924, he left Oliver to join Fletcher Henderson's big band in New York City, becoming the group's featured jazz soloist, before returning to Chicago in late 1925.

Back in Chicago, with his reputation already growing among fellow musicians, Armstrong inaugurated his series of numerous Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings, working (before pianist Earl Hines started recording with him) basically within a New Orleans format. These widely distributed records introduced Armstrong to the world, taking the first steps that would culminate in his eventual worldwide fame. They show that apart from his highly developed swing and improvising inventiveness, he continued to push his working range upward. He changed from the traditional cornet to trumpet to aid in this quest. His unprecedentedly inventive and technically masterful playing clearly made him the star on this series and showed that the New Orleans style did not best suit his gifts as an improviser.

So, in 1929 he began fronting a big band, working as basically a featured soloist carrying whole performances himself with the band merely a backdrop. With this new format, which he maintained for nearly twenty years, he attracted the kind of attention no jazz

musician ever had before, and which few could have borne. He toured Europe. Working with popular songs as repertoire, featuring his singing and playing, he achieved wide renown outside the jazz world and became a major star not only through live appearances and recordings, but also through films and radio.

In 1947 Armstrong formed the six-piece All Stars and returned to a small band and to a repertoire more centered on jazz itself. This band was his usual live performing medium for the rest of his life, though he continued to record more popular material with a variety of other groups. After a heart attack in 1959, he played the trumpet less and less in performance and sang more. When he died in 1971 he was mourned worldwide, but many of his mourners didn't realize that he had single-handedly changed the course of jazz history.

Armstrong's career is unique in jazz and in popular music. He moved from being the most forward-looking and influential jazz musician worldwide in the late 1920s and early 1930s to being a pop musician known worldwide, well beyond the jazz community, in the last two decades of his life. Although his most influential and inventive conceptions were formed and disseminated before the middle 1930s, he remained ever-capable of expressive and inventive jazz performance and always had something to show the jazz world.

## Potato Head Blues

BY JAMES DAPOGNY

The New Orleans jazz tradition featured ensemble improvisation prominently, sometimes to the exclusion of any solo playing at all. But as it developed and spread beyond New Orleans—still preserving its distinctive swing and rhythmic drive—the New Orleans style quite easily accommodated the development of solo playing in the 1920s. It retained ensemble

portions too, but now most often just at the beginning and end, framing the performance.

Within the New Orleans style, instruments had quite well-defined roles, ones that prescribed types of playing and their registers, the high and low boundaries a player was to occupy.

But *Potato Head Blues*, as performed by Louis Armstrong's Hot Seven, shows the beginning of a further step in the development of jazz: that of improvisation by an individual so melodically inventive, so technically able to move through a large range, creating music so demanding of attention, that the New Orleans style's presumption of more or less equal contributions by all of the players could not accommodate it.

Here the player whose conceptions go beyond New Orleans style is Louis Armstrong himself, perhaps the greatest jazz improviser and most widely influential jazz musician ever.

Armstrong's group is composed of musicians who don't match his ability or forward-looking rhythmic sense—but then nobody did. Armstrong himself, nominally still working within the New Orleans style he grew up in, strains beyond it because of his musical power and swing. This is power he had as an artist—he is inventive and poised well beyond the abilities of his colleagues here—and the power he had as a technician—his strength, flexibility, range, and harmonically and linearly sophisticated ear were already, in 1927, setting new standards for jazz.

*Potato Head Blues* was copyrighted with a lead sheet written by Armstrong's wife at the time, Lil Hardin Armstrong. She had been his colleague in the King Oliver band and they had married in 1924. Though not an original or distinctive pianist herself, she had secured a formal education in music at Fisk University and had great influence on the course of jazz history by encouraging and helping Armstrong to develop technically and as a soloist who could command a musical situation.

Despite its title, *Potato Head Blues* is not a blues in form; rather it resembles a verse-and-chorus popular song. The form, as presented in this performance is as follows:

*First chorus*, beginning in m. 1 - Ensemble in which Armstrong refers to the composed melody very little. It's clear, in m. 9 and 10, and in a few places elsewhere, that Armstrong's front-line colleagues do not have a clear fix on the tune's harmonic progression.

*Verse*, beginning at m. 33 - trumpet and rhythm section

*Chorus*, beginning at m. 49 - clarinet solo

*Break by the banjo* (four measures), beginning at m. 81

*Chorus*, beginning m. 85 - Armstrong's solo, with the entire band accompanying in stop time. Here Armstrong's great rhythmic poise is perfectly in evidence, as are his expanded range, which reaches to the trumpet's high D, his ability to move throughout his range with agility and a good sound, and his stamina.

*Half chorus* (the second half) - Ensemble, beginning in m. 117. Here Armstrong plays the melody more clearly than before.

Characteristic of Armstrong is that he places his solo just before the concluding ensemble so that the momentum of his solo carries through the performance's two concluding choruses. Other trumpet players often separated these just to rest after a solo and before playing the lead at the end.

It is interesting to note that the chorus of *Potato Head Blues* strongly resembles, harmonically and even in some of its melodic aspects, the third strain of Jelly Roll Morton's *Frog-I-More Rag*. In 1923, Armstrong and Hardin had recorded Morton's piece (as *Froggie Moore*) with Oliver's band—featuring an early Armstrong solo. And Armstrong had recorded a solo on the tune, under its alternate title *Sweetheart O' Mine*, for notation and printing in a 1926 solo folio devoted to him. Did Armstrong borrow part of *Frog-I-More* when creating his own *Potato Head Blues*? Probably. But then that wasn't unusual: the history of jazz is full of borrowings and adaptations from the very earliest days of the music.

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JAMES DAPOGNY is pianist/leader of his Chicago Jazz Band, which has toured the United States since 1976, specializing in jazz of its first half century. Professor of Music at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, he is editor of *The Collected Piano Music of Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton*.

CONDUCTOR  
EJE9905C

Essential Jazz Editions Set #1:  
New Orleans Jazz, 1918 - 1927

As recorded by Louis Armstrong and His Hot Seven  
**POTATO HEAD BLUES**

By LOUIS ARMSTRONG  
Transcribed by DON VAPPIE  
Edited by CHUCK ISRAELS

**♩ = 180**

**9**

B♭ Clarinet

B♭ Cornet (B♭ Trumpet)

Trombone

Piano

Banjo

Tuba

Drums

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

**17**

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

\* Dynamic markings do not appear in the score and parts as the limitations of early technology made it impossible for the transcriber to discern dynamic variety from the recording. Use your own discretion to create dynamic variety throughout the piece.

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Conductor - 2

Potato Head Blues

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27

Chord progression for measures 19-27:

- Measures 19-20: Gmi7, C7
- Measures 21-22: F7, Bb
- Measures 23-24: D7, Gmi7
- Measures 25-26: Bb, Db7
- Measure 27: F

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37

Chord progression for measures 28-37:

- Measures 28-29: D7, G7
- Measures 30-31: C7, F
- Measures 32-33: F, Fdim7
- Measures 34-35: F, Gmi
- Measures 36-37: D7

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47

49

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57

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Conductor - 4

Potato Head Blues

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66

D7 G7 C7 F E7

D7 G7 C7 F E

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76

Gmi7 C7 F7 Bb D7 Gmi7 Bb F

Gmi7 C7 F7 Bb D7 Gmi7 Bb F

Conductor - 5

Potato Head Blues

81

84

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

G7 C7 F F

Bjo.

G7 C7 F F

Tuba

Drums

choke cym.

77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bb6 F Bb6 D7

Bjo.

Bb6 F Bb6 D7

Tuba

Drums

simile

alternate fingering

simile

86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95

101

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104

Chord symbols: G7, C7, F, Bb6

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114

Chord symbols: F7, Bb6, F, G7



117

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123

Chords: F, F, E7, Gmi7, C7, F7, Bb, D7

Cl.

Cnt.

Tbn.

Pno.

Bjo.

Tuba

Drums

124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132

Chords: Gmi7, F, D7, G7, C7, F, C+7, F

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# Potato Head Blues

COMPOSED BY LOUIS ARMSTRONG

AS RECORDED BY

LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND HIS HOT SEVEN, 1927

## Instrumentation

B♭ Clarinet  
B♭ Cornet (B♭ Trumpet)  
Trombone  
Piano  
Banjo  
Tuba  
Drums