



## Arvell Shaw

Location: N/A

Date: N/A

### **When did you first hear Jazz? What was it?**

Well you know I'm, I'm very very lucky man because I had a chance in my lifetime to play with a a man that I admired, who one of my heroes, and uh and that's Louis Armstrong, because when I was a young kid, the first time I saw him and he was he came to the, uh, Comet Theater in St. Louis, and of course in those days St. Louis was a completely segregated uh city this is before the second world war and uh they had this black theater out in the black neighborhood they called The Comet, where you used to bring all the big black bands and Louis brought his band to play and my father took me to hear him, I must have been about what 8 or 9 years old. And Louis then was big heavy then you know?

And I'd heard a few records of him but when he walked out on that stage and start playing, it just was like electric shock went up my spine, and uh my father said, "I never seen you react like that to anything." You know? So, it just, uh, I never forgot that as long as I live and to be able to have spent 25 years of my life later playing with this man, it was just more than I could hope. I'm a very fortunate man to be able to do that, in my lifetime, you know?

### **He was a natural, they said, as a musician. What does that mean to you as a musician?**

It was, uh, everything, what he did, what he played came from within, it came from, uh, uh, it came from his own heart from his mind, it where he wasn't anything contrived or or you or or it was him. It was Louis.

What he was the essence of his being that's what, that's, that's the difference. He, he was a completely honest man. Musically. And, and and in every way that I knew about.

**What else can you tell me about him, since you spent 25 years with him. Give me some stories, some experiences that captured, captures for us, his personality.**

Um, let me see, in 25 years there's so many things. So, many uh uh wonderful things that that happen you know uh...

**Talk about his generosity.**

Well he was a, he was a very, uh, uh, generous man. He believed in helping young people cause see, uh myself and Velma Middleton were the only two people he kept out of his big band when the All-Stars first started, you know and because uh for some reason he uh uh uh took a a liking to me you know you know, and I know for the story a funny that happened, you know, the second time I saw Louis, I was in the Navy and he came to sing to us again, to play an auda- uh concert, a dance in the auditorium, on one one afternoon and there was very few people there, because it was an afternoon concert and Louis had a big band you know, so I was in the Navy, I was in my uh uh a suit in my in uniform, and uh I stood in front of the bandstand for the fu- uh complete four hours of the you know, and I didn't think Louis been paid because there was like two or three hundred people there but for an auditorium that size, it was like uh no people at all you know? And I stood there during the whole four hours, even during the intermissions, you know? And, years la- later when uh I was with Louis, I, I said, 'Hey Pops, do you remember during the Second World War that you came to St. Louis and played one afternoon, and uh uh you played that afternoon uh dance at the auditorium in St. Louis and there were very few people there?' He say, 'Yeah I remember.' I said, 'Do do you remember a sailor that stood there for the whole four hours?' He said, 'I don't remem-' Then he stop he say, 'Was that you?' I said, 'Yeah that was me.' You know? He said, 'I remember that, just like it was yesterday.'

He remembered it you know, but that's he that you know, he the the type of man that, that re - that remembered to - a lot of other people were unimportant things but they were human things. He was a very human person, you know?

**Yeah and they also say that he had an anger too... do you remember any time that he got mad?**

Yes. But but uh if he got angry it was it was uh uh about something that was definitely wrong, but it didn't last. He would blow up and then that would be it, he held no grudge. You know, he would blow up, he held no grudge. And uh the anger would be uh something legitimate you know, like for instance, he hated for you to be late, because Louis Armstrong was always the first one on the bandstand, and he worked very hard and he paid you very well and he expected you to do to do that he expected you he was a very serious

man about his art you know. And, he expected you to be serious if he worked if you worked with him you know. And uh a couple of times when he really blew up, when somebody was just deliberately would be late or try to do something wrong, then he would blow up and and and after a while he, he you know, he never did hold a grudge you know?

**'Mack the Knife.' Tell me the story.**

OK OK. You know we were, we, we used to record for Columbia Records, and uh, Columbia at the time used a converted cathedral on 30th Street in Manhattan. Because the acoustics were magnificent, you know, the Philharmonic and and the Met used to record there and all the big bands. So, this one day we were in the studio getting ready to record, and in walk this very attractive lady, with this very soft German accent. So, she walked up to Louis and said, 'Mister Armstrong, it's been my life long ambition to make uh a record with you, a, a duet with you. And this is one of the few chances I think I'll ever have.' You know? And she said, 'And since you are just about to record, uh, one of my husband's tunes that I would like to make for my private collection, just make a duet with you and me doing this before you make the day.' The lady turned out to be Lotte Lenya, the widow of Curt Wild you know? And Louis, you know, we did the record, uh, she and Louis, she with her operatic voice and Louis with his voice. They did this duet together on 'Mack the Knife' and it was a hilarious you know?

And then we, uh, after it was over I never heard it you know, but I heard it was great you know because, uh, I think somebody has it from her own personal collection. So, then we made the record and that record became one of his biggest hits, 'Mack the ...Knife' but the, this was one of those rare incidents you know?

**Well, there was another rare incident of some caliber. Tell me about 'Hello Dolly.'**

Oh oh, well, 'Hello Dolly', we were playing this club in Chicago called Chez Paris, and um, got a call from Louis' agent Joe Glaser, to go into New York on our off day, Sunday. So, uh, Louis said, 'Well, you know we working so hard and we need some rest.' You know?

So Louis being the stone professional that he was he said, 'Well, we'll do it.' So we flew into New York on Sunday, we got to the studio and uh, they gave Louis the sheet music and Louis looked at it and heard it down, he said, 'You mean to tell me you called me out here to do this.' So, he hated it you know? But we did, we made the record and then we went back to Chicago and finished out the engagement. Three or four months later we were out on on the road doing one-nighters out in, uh, Nebraska and Iowa, out out way out you know? And every night we'd here from the audience, 'Hello Dolly, Hello Dolly.' So, the first couple of nights Louis ignored it, and it got louder, 'Hello Dolly'.

So look, Louis looked at me, he say, "What the hell is 'Hello Dolly'?" I say, "Well, you remember that date we did a few months ago in Chicago? One of the tunes was called 'Hello Dolly', it's from a Broadway show." We had to call and get the music and and put it, and learn it and put it in the concert and the first time we put it in the concert pandemonium broke out because we were so far out he didn't even realize he had a big hit, you know? But uh, things like that happen, you know? Especially with Louis, you know?

**Did he enjoy doing "Hello Dolly" from there on?**

**ARVELL SHAW:**

Well, really, uh, from then on because it, it, that was his biggest commercial hit of his whole life, he never had a hit like... in fact it did, uh, it, it pushed the Beatles out of first place, you know and for a a man who had been in show business for 57 years, that was unheard of you know? And uh especially playing our type of music... was what we called, what they called Dixieland, you know? That was unheard of, you know? He, he, things happen you know, just like the, the 'What a Wonderful World' became a big hit 20-something years after the man passed away, you know.

Armstrong All-Stars was a very international band, we traveled all over the world many many many times, in fact we we made a world tour at least some times twice a year you know? So, and no matter where we went no matter where we went when we thought someplace when we were the first one there, but every time we got there we always saw two signs of Americans who were there before us, you know? And one was the Harlem Globetrotters and the other one was Coca Cola, so we were the third Americans, you know? And that that was very interesting you know that uh, we introduces American Jazz to so many p- uh places that had never heard it live before.

**One of those places was Africa.**

In Africa yes.

**Tell me that story about how the people loved Louis so.**

Oh, I'll never forget that as long as I live, you know uh well the the first one we landed in uh, uh, the Congo, Leopoldville and uh, we're there, got there two, two or three days after Lumumba was killed and, uh, we were the guest of Morshumba(?) who was then the, the premièr, the prime minister, and uh, we stayed at his place, you know, and we got, we went, we left him and got uh, to the airport, we went to hi- the ground of his place, we go through the gate, we rode about 20 minutes before we got to his house and every, uh, 50 feet or so on this side was a tank, on this side was an armored car, and in fifty feet a tank armored car all the way up to his house, you know? And, then when we got to his house and getting ready to go in, we looked up in

the tree and here's a guy, a cat sitting up in the tree with a leopard skin on and a bow and arrow. So we said, "What is that?" You know? So, the guy said, "Well this tribe has been the uh, uh, protectors and guards for the kings of the Congo for 5,000 years." You know, this one tribe has always guarded the kings of the Congo, so you know that was strange to see all this armor and this guy with a bow and arrow, but it was a ceremonial thing you know? Beautiful costume, you know?

And that night they gave a reception, a dinner for us, you know, and this guy came up oh, he was in his uh, uh, white coat you know, the summer tuxedo thing you know? And with the British accent he said, "By Jove it was inspiring today to, to seeing you." Uh, you know? And we said, "Why thank you, but, uh, were you there?" He said, "I was there." He said, "I was the guy that was the guard up in the tree in the leopard skin." You know? And oh, we died and he turned out to be a a wonder- he was uh, had all kind of degrees from Oxford, but it was a ceremony like the Beefeaters in London, you know?

**Well now, take it to the concert and tell me how the audience, the people responded...**

Oh oh, well first we did a concert for the VIP's ... the diplomats and, uh, the press, and then we gave a concert that was paid for by the government, in a soccer stadium, which held over a hundred and fifty thousand people, one of the largest crowds I've ever seen, and we started playing and drum, the drum solo Barrett Deem was on, started playing his drum solo and the people got so carried away and they wanted to, just wanted to get close to Louis because they'd seen, they seen him on television and everything.

They wanted to get close to him and a hundred and fifty thousand people started moving forward and uh, the police tried to push them back and they just kept coming forward and they were getting so close and the poli- and the arm and the soldiers were there and they, there was backing soldiers up against the bandstand, the bandstand start shaking, so the guy said... So we had to stop playing that's the only thing that stopped it because it been a, could have been a catastrophe. You know but that that was the reception he got, you know? And uh just on another incident was when the welcoming ceremony, you know, the real welcoming ceremony the next day after this incident ...?... We were down on the banks of the Congo River, they had all these stands set up you know, this ceremony they did this for thousands of years, you know and we didn't know what to expect, you know, so all of a sudden, come and we could hear it off in the distance all these drums... (IMITATES DRUMS) And it kept getting louder and louder, and we looked up the Congo River, here was about four or five hundred barges with drummers and, and, and from, from every tribe in the Congo coming down this river, and they had Louis with sitting on the, on the stage, on the stand, on a, on a throne next to the VIP's, and that was with all these tribes coming down playing these drums, and the closer it get the louder it got until it got, that it was the most and these costumes they had on you know? From each tribe had their own costumes and that was, that welcoming and then when they

got there these drums are (IMITATES DRUMS) they start, oh, and that they said that they don't know when they gave a welcoming ceremony, been hundreds of years since anybody'd gotten a welcoming ceremony like that.

**I read that it gladdened Louis' heart.**

Oh, yes. You know Louis said, uh, Louis said, when he got on the, he had, he was looked very wistful he says, 'Gee I saw a lady just looked exactly like Momma Lucy.' You know and his sister and now and somebody like my mother, he said, 'This is truly where I'm from.' You know and uh it's something that uh, there's something that, that, that only can happen once in a lifetime, you know?

**You were going to tell me how Louis' singing made you feel. Tell me...**

Well, it was, you ... listen not - at least I did, I listen not so much to the... timbre of the voice but, but, but to the feeling, because it was something that went deep inside, you know it came from inside. See, Louis could do ... for instance when he would do a tune like, "That's My Home" Louis say, 'I'm always welcome back no matter where I roam, just an old sweet ...?... we call it home sweet home.'" But he could do that so much, and so help me, I'd have to fight back the tears. Now every night we do that and and it just, certain things he did that had such, uh, such ... artistic and emotion, emotion it was uh, it, it ... was much more than just a great singer... He didn't have a great voice, but his heart and his soul were, he was a giant, you know?

**Well, there was one song in particular that I want you to talk about because they said that he transformed..."Shine."**

Yes, you know "Shine" was, you know ... a lot of people said that was a uh, what they call "The Uncle Tom" he think, you know? And uh, but the way Louis did it, you know, he always says, that's why you know, he says, "Just because my teeth are pearly, just because my hair is curly, just because I always wear a smile," you know? And it would go like this, he says, "that's why they call me Shine." You know? And, and he did it in such a way and with such taste, there's nobody could be get offended, you know?

And another thing about, people don't realize, Louis, you know,... in the forties they came about the thing about, "Black Is Beautiful" you know. Louis in the years ago, in the twenties, he used to tell guys when when they would, you know, because in those days, if you call, if one man called another man "black" that that was fighting words, you know? But, Louis was, he was the first man I heard to say, "You're black, be proud of it, you're black, you're not white you're not yellow, you're black. Be proud of it." He was saying that when it was so very unpopular you know? That's how far ahead he was in, in you know?

And Louis, I never heard him say anything about any race, anything. He did not thought, think like that, in fact when Louis was the King of the Zulu's you know in New Orleans, uh, after the parade was over we uh, we were booked

to play a concert you know? You know the King of Zulu at Mardi Gras time you know? We were, we were booked to play ...to play a concert, that's why Louis' not buried in New Orleans right now, because the City of New Orleans would not let us play the concert because we had a white man in the band, which was Jack Teagarden, one of the world's greatest trombone, and that hurt Louis so he never, he never forgave, so they been trying to get his way he say, "I...no." He refused to to be buried in in New Orleans, that's why he's buried in Queens, you know? That hurt him so, you know?

**Tell me how he felt when the young Turk film, young Turk musicians attacked him for portraying the King of the Zulus. There are a lot of - there were a lot of people who took offense at that, not just musicians, but others, right?**

Well, that... that was so stupid, you know, because uh, this, this was an honor that they didn't ta- they didn't take uh, the the, what's his name, Rex? He had costumes on, so the King of the Zulu's he had ... uh, the make-up on, he had the black face on, you know? And that, that had been going on for a hundred years, you know? And nobody took offense to it until Louis did it, you know? And, and, and that also hurt him, you know? But, uh one of the things that happened I'll never forget that, we were on the float, we were riding on the float during the parade you know?

Oh yeah, when Louis was King of the Zulu's, we had the honor, you know, he, he bought us all of them put us, let us ride on the float with him you know? Oh, and what, what, what an experience that was, because then he, all of his fans had come from all over, in fact that year, they said for the Zulu, you know the Zulu parade, and that, the regular New Orleans would, Rex, that's two different things all together you know? And this, this one year they had more people for the Zulu because they had, Louis Armstrong was King of the Zulu's and people from all over the world came there and we're riding this float and we're such a such a great feeling to see the people you know? And, uh, how much they were cheering him, and they had designated stops where they would toast and champagne and Louis would throw out a coconut and throw out coconuts to the people everybody would uh, to get a coconut from the King of the Zulu, that was a great thing you know? So, and this went on until we got to the Congo Square.

I'd never seen anything this beautiful in my life you know they have some tribes, the black Indians of Louisiana, in Louisiana you know? And it's been the custom for two, maybe two hundred years that the King of the Zulu must meet the the chiefs of these tribes, and these tribes they get together for a like a year before each and make these unbelievable beautiful costumes with these full feathers and, and and it would be maybe a thousand of them in these costumes that all come down and then here come the King of the Zulu's with the band playing (IMITATES BAND) sing you know "Saints" in there and they would meet and drink champagne them and and it was a this a beautiful thing you know, uh and what a beautiful day, too bad it had such an unpleasant ending but uh, you know.

### **When you say unpleasant ending, what do you mean?**

Well, after after the parade the uh, we were supposed to play a concert that night and the City of New Orleans would not permit us to play because we had a white man in the band, Jack Teagarden, the great trombonist, you know. And it hurt him [Louis] so that he refused to be buried in Louisiana, every governor, everybody that comes that, since he died, senators - they want to try to get him, to have his body, laid where they named the park, but that he, that hurt him so deeply he say he never did want to be buried. But I suspect that one day they'll get his body back there. They will, you know.

### **Why did he keep on playing? You were with him for a whole bunch of years and he thrived on performance. Why did he keep going like that?**

Well, Louis, if he didn't play he would have died early, you know just like me. I can see now the way I, I'm sort of semi-retired ... I've got Glaucoma on, on - I'm what they call legally blind, you know?

But if I didn't get out and play, I would - I wouldn't survive, that's a thing I've been doing all my life and that's the way he was. And, he had so much music in him, till it's no way he could have lived and not played, you know, even when he could, you know, uh - one of the worst experiences I had with him, I did the last three weeks with him.

We were at the Empire Room at the Waldorf Astoria and the doctor - he [Louis] had been in intensive care - the doctor told him, say, "Louis, you don't do it, you can't do it." Louis said, "Well, I got a contract, I got to do it, my fans." And they had to help him, ...(?)... they had to help him on and off...

**OK.**

Let's go to something else.

### **His favorite music. It sounds kind of strange to learn to hear what it was, tell me about it...**

Well, what Louis loved Guy Lombardo, you know, because - and you know a lot of people don't know that - remember the Savoy Ballroom in New York, Guy Lombardo is got the record there as drawing the largest crowd in the history of the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. He drew the largest crowd that's ever been in that ballroom, s- something about Guy's music that that peop- that especially black people like because he played the melody, played, and what he did, Guy Lombardo played, he did it, it was sincere, it was not you know? And one of the biggest things, every year, General Electric, the president of General Electric would hire Guy Lombardo and Louis Armstrong to put a big convention, you know?

And, the only thing he wanted, he wanted to hear Guy Lombardo's Band and Louis play, "When the Saints Go Marching In", he would stay that and as soon as we play to the, the "When the Saints Go Marching In" ... and the band, to both bands together, he'd get up and split, but every year we did that you know? But Louis said he, you know, he, he liked, in fact, Louis recorded with Guy Lombardo, you know? But Louis, Louis liked all types of music, you know?

**Well, he used to listen to music a lot. In fact, he had to have music when he went to sleep right?**

Yeah, he had the first tape recorder, I think, that right after the, right after the war he had the first tape recorder I ever seen and he would ... we'd record some of the thing, some things, some - in fact, some of his tapes are in the Louis Armstrong Archives at Queens College. He recorded these things and listen to them in, he'd sleep with them, you know?

And I do the same thing, I sleep with the radio or the tape recorder on all night, you know I can't sleep without it, you know. I guess I got that from him, you know?

**What would happen if they if the music went off?**

He'd wake right up, wake up. He could be sound asleep, the music, as soon as he turned the music off he, he'd wake up you know? But ... and on the bus, ... you know you, you talking like this, you know, so, so many things happen in 27 years though, a lot of thing come back that I've forgotten, you know? You know. And uh...

**QUESTION:**

You were going to tell me something about the bus though? Or you want to tell that?

**ARVELL SHAW:**

...?... well that's that's a little...

**QUESTION:**

That's a little risky, OK well but

**There's one thing I have to talk to you about. He liked his herb, didn't he?**

Oh yes.

**You got to help me explain this to the audience uh because a number of people know, but a lot of people don't know, that he smoked Marijuana, why was that important to him?**

Well, Louis introduced Marijuana to New York City, Louis Marijuana was, uh... it's an herb you know? Now the only reason that Marijuana is illegal, because it grows wild and it is the government cannot tax anything that grows without being cultivated. But uh, the Marijuana, ... he smoked it all of his life. He didn't uh, do it to an ... uh, he didn't over do it and everything you know? **Don't fight for an answer to this, but also ... what did it do for him? Tell me how it made him feel, if you've ever heard him say, or if you have an opinion about it.**

He said it, it relaxed him and it made him slow down, you know, because of the pace that he had to keep with the, you know - I used to look at Louis and and I'd ask him, I'd say, "Louis how can you stand this pressure?" He say, "Well, I'm used to it." You know, because the press and everything was on this man especially after the the big hits you know? The pressure that he had to - you know? And I said, "How can you stand it?" He says, "Oh you know." He says pot helped him to relax and to bear this pressure, you know? **There was a lot of pressure in '57 now, right? After the - when the Littlerock schools were being integrated... you remember what happened? Tell the story.**

Yes, he wrote - he wrote a letter to to Eisenhower, to President Eisenhower, that's why Louis Armstrong has never been to the White House.

Every, you know, he's never been to the White House because he, he wrote to President Eisenhower - he says, "Mr. President," - he was very respectful - "Mr. President," he says, "I look at the pictures of these soldiers with these young black kids standing there, now are these soldiers, " he says, "Mr. President, if you will go there and take these kids by the hand and lead them into the school, I will join you, I will be by your side." ...And I never heard Louis go anywhere, I mean, political. He stayed away from politics, but this thing got to him, you know, it got to him, you know? **And the press wouldn't let him re- relent after that...**

No they wouldn't let him relent but then he didn't want to. So, the next day Joe Glaser, who called a press release, he said, "Louis, Lou Armstrong never said nothing like that." You know because he's thinking about those big fees you know? He said, "Louis Armstrong never said anything about that and he didn't say anything like that." Louis said, "Yes I did, I meant it, and I'll stand by until my dying day, all I ask is for to take those little kids into the school. Why can't they go to school? All they want to do is go to school. So, why, why it's all, they got soldiers to keep them out of school." And f - and from then on, he never was invited to the White House, you know? **First time you gigged with Louis Armstrong, how did it make you feel? Tell us the story.**

Well, you know the, the idea that I'd get a chance to play with the man you know, I was just out of the Navy, ,and I was in the Navy band in Washington, and then in, uh, out of Quonset Point and then I was stationed on an aircraft carrier, you know in the Pacific. But uh when I got back to St. Louis, I got the Louis Armstrong was playing at a club they called The Club Plantation, the bass player he had before was was uh uh had to go back to Philadelphia, his home town because his wife was expecting a child. So, they call he called the union to ask them whose the best bass player in town and and I was there and II uh and they sent me.

He didn't recognize me at first but then uh the first job was in Kansas City, and I was scared to death, you know the playing you know because they had guys in the band like Joe Garland, who wrote 'In the Mood' and 'Leap Frog' and they had uh Dexter Gordon and and uh uh uh Big Chief Russel Moore you know? And uh uh I opened the book and the bass player that was with the band for years and he had probably not opened the book in years and the all the arrangements are all in different places, it the book was a complete shambles and I'm scared to death you know and uh he called the, they they called the set for the first set of that you know and the auditorium was packed about three or four thousand people you know.

And I'm and they and I'm looking, looking trying to find the the arrangements and Joe Garland who who's the music director looked back and says, he didn't even remember my name he say, 'Hey bass player, is anything wrong?' I say, 'Yeah yeah the the book is all messed up.' And I looked around I look at Louis and Louis just looked back as if to say what have do we have here and then he looked away.

So, I finally got the music together, we played the first uh uh set and then after we finished and Joe Garland came back said, 'What are you playing?' I said, 'Well, I'm only playing the arrangements here', because the bass player they had before hadn't looked at the music and he was playing his own notes you know? And from then on after about three weeks then then the the Louis said uh, 'Would you like to do a few more weeks with us till he gets back?' I said, 'Of course.' So, and then they had and then after that he said, 'How about doing uh a you wanna s- you want the job?' And that was that was the beginning of my first job with Louis and uh it was a horrifying experience, you know. You know to work with this man but Louis then after the set then after I noticed that after the second set that everybody in the band started looking back and kind of smiling and I saw Louis Louis looked back and Louis looked at me and says... That's all he did, when that set my whole life, that one little gesture he made, you know.

**When he did that, you know, sort of a signal to you, I guess that you could swing.**

Yeah yeah ...he, then he realized you know. And then he lat- then later he says, he said, he say, "You know what are you sure you say from St. LGB(?) are you sure you're not from New Orleans, cause you have a New Orleans

beat." You know. That in other words that that it's the New Orleans beat that comes from the funeral bands, it's uh, if you heard the bands like the, the New Orleans funeral bands, you know they'll be... (IMITATES STYLE) You know? That and then you get yourself that, in fact that beat goes all the way off to New Orleans because the New Orleans mission musicians came up from New Orleans up to Memphis, up to uh, up to St. Louis and up to Davenport, in fact that's why Davenport, that's Davenport, that's where Bix Beiderbecke lives and that's why Louis first met Bix, you know?

**All right ... but when you were playing, and when you're feeling good, when you're swinging, are you anticipating the beat? Are you retarding the beat? What, how - what is swing? Come on, help us understand.**

Swing is getting the right note at the right time, not before or not after. But right on the, at the right time and keeping it there, don't speed up or don't slow down, keep it there, keep it keep it keep it keep it constant and at the right time and go along cause swing, the bass and the drums, yeah, you know, if, if the drummer and the bass player don't get together, if they can't play together that's nothing in Jazz is going to happen, because if you don't have a heart beat, the bass is the heart beat and the drum is the time, so in Jazz, which is a rhythmic music, if you've got to have the time and and you've got to have the pulse, the bass is the pulse. Because if you ever listen to music without bass it sounds empty you know, you understand what I'm saying? So, that's why, in other words you have to get, in other words you gonna play swing, you gonna, you gonna be playing you say, (IMITATES BASS) you can't say (IMITATES BASS) you gotta say (IMITATES BASS, CLICKING FINGERS) Just keep that going, don't move, that's the way and believe me, when I tell you that's like a heart beat and you look at the audience, they all get it and you see them first start pattin' their foot, and then you going to see they going to get up and they going to start swinging around. That's, that's what makes Jazz so unique, so unique and so great, that's what makes it different from any other music, you know.

**We've heard three or four people talk and they said Jazz is freedom, you've used that word too. Can you riff on that a little bit, tell me a little bit more...**

Now, freedom, yeah. But freedom is relative you know... freedom means like when you're playing your chord change, you have the freedom to invert and change those chords any way, but you don't have the freedom to change tempo to go back and forth, that has to remain constant or else you're playing some other kind of music, uh la- you know. You understand what I'm saying? See, there the freedom, the, the, there's no such thing as complete freedom because complete freedom is chaos, you know, in the, we are not - the human race is not yet ready for complete freedom, that's my own personal opinion. We have to have a guide line - we have to have something constant, you know.

**Bring this music of Jazz, down to America, ...You're an American, you've played this music, you've swung, you know - does this music say something about who we are?**

Yes it does.

**Tell me.**

You know why, because it has, uh, the cultures of, of so many different races, it has the culture, European culture it has the African culture, it has mix from the Indian culture, it's the true music of the world, of true music, of, of people, humanity. That's why it has traveled so far, and it keeps traveling so ... it's the most played music in the whole world today. And that, that is why, because it's, everybody can relate to Jazz, you know, and I, there's one thing I notice with Louis -playing with Louis Armstrong, you know, we played, uh, some of the the countries that are the most primitive countries and we played the most sophisticated countries, you know, but the people react to the same things that we play no matter what culture, no, not mind or what race.

They react at the same way to the same things that we used to do with Louis. You know it, it, so it goes, Jazz goes beyond, uh, race or culture, it, it, it goes to the human being, what we are as, as human beings.

**We asked somebody else a similar kind of a question, they said, 'What.' and we ask what gets expressed when you're improvising? What's get expressed when you're playing this music, and they said love, is that true?**

Love, and love...

**This music expresses...**

This music expressed life. That's the life that you've led, your experience, that's what you as an individual, uh, performer, that's what it expresses, that's what what you are if you are sincere in playing this music, it will come out playing Jazz. What you are inside, your heart, your, your, ... love, your mental capacities, whatever will come out because it requires all of that to play this music.

**Beautiful. (APPLAUSE)**

**Alright. Tell me about, uh, Lucille's relationship with her, with her boy Louis.**

Louis, uh, and Lucille was - uh, uh, completely devoted to Louis and Louis had worked four three or four--MORE NOT ON TRANSCRIPT--[Her only thoughts...so many marriages.]

**Benny Goodman. You were going to give me a story about him that sort of captures the man for me.**

Oh yeah, you know, uh, Benny has the reputation of being, uh, a eccentric and all that you know? But I worked with Benny, I made his South American tour and I went to Europe with him twice and I enjoyed myself thoroughly,

you know, because it was just great, except for one time, we went, in 1958, we went to the Brussels World's Fair - remember the World's Fair at Brussels - we made the pa- American theater so, so I told him I said, "Look, Benny, I, I'm going but my wife is pregnant and the child is due on June 3rd, and she and, and it's going to be born, you know, over here, you know?" And uh, he said, "Well, that's OK, Gate." - that's what he used to call me - he say, "OK Gate, good, we'll be finished on a week before," he said, you know. So, in the meantime Benny books the Newport Jazz Festival, so he comes up to me and he says, "Look, Gate, I booked a week when we get back at the Newport Jazz Festival, and, and can you make it?" I said, "Benny, I told you before I can't, I'm, I have to go, my wife expectin' ." He said, "Well, look, I'll pay your way over, I'll pay your way, I'll pay everything." I said, "I can't, you know, I don't have that much time", you know?

Up until then everything was great, you know, and then, uh, with the band we had five trumpets, four trombones, and then we'd, you know, I'm the bass player you know, and, uh, we'd get to the end of the, we'd be playing a tune like "One O'clock Jump" and these five trumpets and four horns, they'd be screaming loud and the band would be all rocking, you know, and Benny would walk to the mic, say, "Arvell, you're playing too loud." And I would break up. He couldn't get me mad, you know, and not really, but after a while, you know, he said, "I can't make you mad, can I?" I said, "No Benny, you can't make me mad, you know," I say, "I been working too much, you know?" But, uh, other than that man, to me Benny was a giant.

**What about the 'ray', now other people call talk about the ray.**

I don't know what they experience. I never experienced the ray, because, uh, Benny wouldn't give me the ray, he wouldn't dare. You know, because I'd give him the ray. But Benny, now, Benny was, Benny was a giant, he was a great, a great musi- he did so much for Jazz, in fact he integrated Jazz. So, to, to me Benny is a giant.

**Giant, so let's - I'm going to go back to Armstrong one more time and talk about him as a giant. Uh, professionalism, he was giant as a professional too, you had a line of, uh, you know, an insight that you wanted to give us about his professionalism, not just an opinion, an analysis about it, I want a story too, if you can fashion one about how professional he was.**

Gi- well Louis was, Louis came old show business, he was show business, it was show. He understood about show business, because he came up with people, with King Oliver and then he became friends with Bill Robertson, and all the old Hollywood stars, you know, so uh, uh, Bessie Smith, he recorded with Bessie Smith in, uh, and all these, you know? So, he was a stone professional, and he believed that if you working in a club, you were not there to be entertained, you were there to entertain.

He would not go into a club and sit with the audience. He never did that, never. 'Cause he said, 'Well, look, people are paying to come and see me. If

I'm out there sitting out drinking with the audience, it, it's not the same thing. But when when I play a club, when I walk out, I walk out fresh and I give a performance, like a professional.' And if you notice, none of the great stars ever went out and and sat in club, I mean the great stars, you know. And that's the way he was, he was a stone professional, and he realized that you, you were there to be entertained, and, no you're there to entertain, not to be entertained.

**He was a professional in another sense as well, he practiced his craft, didn't he? I mean he studied a lot, I mean he, he practiced a lot. Or did he?**

Yes, yes.

**Tell me about that.**

Yes, he, he every time he got a chance, you know, first thing you see him, he would take - he would do - use the mouthpiece you know (IMITATES SOUND) and blows the mouth piece you know, just without the horn, just the mouthpiece, and make you know it sound like a whistle.(IMITATES) That's the way he would do that all the time on the bus, you know (IMITATES). In other words, that kept, and that kept his lips supple, supple, and then he - when he - before he went on to play, he would train like a fighter.

He had things that he would do, he had, uh ,cotton and swabs that he would put on his lips and let the cotton stay there and to soften the corns(?) and then he calls - I don't know if you ever met Louis - but Louis was built like a tank. He - his chest was this wide, you know - he was a short man but he was this wide, so he was a very strong man and and he was like an athlete, and that's why he could play so strong and forceful, you know. Louis Armstrong and Trummy Young, those two guys would co- and Edmond Hall, that band, they could play louder than a nine man brass section of big band, you know? And it wasn't loud unpleasant, it was loud, it was just power, because those guys, they, they lived their, uh, their profession, and they trained for it. They did not do no excess, they didn't hang out, they they go out ..?.. They didn't hang out they didn't get stoned, they hadn't no drugs, nothing like that.

They had a little taste every now and then like we all do, you know? And the, they smoke a joint every now and then, you know, which I do too, for Glaucoma medical pur-, purposes. In fact, if you got a roach now, it'd be very much appreciated. You can cut that out.

**Cut. (LAUGHTER)**

**This is the Prague story ...**

OK, well, we, we were the first band after the war to go behind the Iron Curtain, and the first, the first engagement was a week at a theater in Prague, you know? So, the, the, the first night was reserved for the VIP's, the diplomatic corps and everything. So they had the, the, all the the dip- the VIP's, the diplomats from China, from Africa, from all over Europe

Eastern Europe, you know, Russia and everything was there, and they had three rows in front for the American Embassy staff and the American Ambassador, you know. But, first when we landed, we landed in Prague, they had Ale- Alexander Dupcheck was then the, uh, uh, première, and he was there to greet us, you know? That's how big he was then, you know? So this night, uh, we looked out there, and, and the place was packed with all these VIP's, every country in the world, and the first three rows were empty and Louis says, "What, what, what's that." He said, "Well, that's from the American pe- the American Embassy, they didn- no, nobody showed.' He [Louis] said, "Why?" He said, the promoter said, "You know, I don't know."

So we went out and played the concert, and the next day the newspaper, like, the newspaper, The New York Times' front page, 'Louis Armstrong and All-Stars One of the Greatest Things We've Ever Seen' and oh, so and so, and just raved, the newspaper, the TV you know. The next concert, the next night, we walked, we went out on the stage to play, the theater was packed and right in front was the place was filled by the Americans with flags waving, "That's our boy, Louis." Louis said, "Those jive turkeys, they thought I was going to bomb out, and they wouldn't go to support me." And - but we laughed it out, you know, you know, it wou- it was a diplomatic thing, you know.

And the, the, uh, second thing that was interesting that happened on that tour was, uh, when we got to East Berlin, the theater, the Frederick State Theater in East Berlin, and um, you know, in East Berlin, all the action was in West Berlin. But we were in East Berlin and we, you know, you get through with there - you get through theater and they rolled in the sidewalk. So one night we had a few wine, Louis, Louis said, "Man, let's, let's go to West Berlin." The promoter said, "You can't, you got to, go you got to get permission." Louis said, "Hell with it. You get in the bus."

We get in the bus and was going through, we went to Checkpoint Charlie and when we got to the, the, the side where the the Russ- the East German guards, the Russian guards were, they stopped, came on the bus with these loaded machine guns. They said, "Where are your passes? Where are your passes ...?...?" And one of them say, "'Louis Armstrong!" They say, "Oh Mr. Armstrong ...?...?" and all that, they said, "'Go right on through" and then we got to the American side where the American arm was and they say, "Where are your passes?" The guys came through. "Hey Pops!" One of the soldiers said Pops, go it and we went through. Every night we used to go from East Berlin to West Berlin and hang out all night, and we, you know, they would shoot you going through Checkpoint Charlie through there, we'd go through every night without a pass, stoned you know?

And, and by the time the whole week - man, we'd go through and some of the American, when we got to the Russian side, some of the American soldiers be on the bus and we got through and some of the Russians, and it was just thing and another thing that happened, we were going up to to

Leipzig, you know that's in East Germany, and, uh, all of a sudden we were in the bus riding and all of a sudden we look, we looked out, and we were in the middle of the East German Army and it looked just like Hitler's Army, these cats, the same uniforms and the tanks and everything, and Louis said, "How did we get here?" You know? So uh, ...?... somehow we got on this road and we were in the middle of this army, for miles ahead was army, and miles behind us, you know? So, they said, "What do we do?" He - Louis said, "Just keep going," he said.

We got going and we - they stopped a place where they used to sell all these big long frankfurters, you know, and Louis said, "Let's get out and have some frankfurters." You know, so we pulled off to the side and all the German, the army's going by, so we pulled off to the side and start eating these, we eating these hot dogs and then... All of a sudden the army's stopping and some of the East Germans say, "Louis Armstrong!" And they stopped the whole column, and they were all asking Louis for his autograph. And they're the whole column, you know, and they gives order, and, uh, what they did, they parted the column, and let us go through to get to the concert in time. This is the East you know?

**The End**