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Edited by Jim Torok and Dick Parker

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BOOK REVIEW

Louis Armstrong's New Orleans

by Thomas Brothers

Norton & Company 2006

Reviewed by Jim Torok

This is a new book, by an author who did us a great service with his previous book, "Louis Armstrong In His Own Words." I was amazed to find that his new book is largely nonsense. The previous book was a collection of Louis Armstrong letters and writing,



Armstrong, age 12 (top center), in the Colored Waif's Home Brass Band.

and as such is very interesting and highly recommended. The new book is written by Brothers, not Armstrong, and is a bunch of opinions and pontifications by a person who is not a jazz player and makes ridiculous statements and theories.

Brothers' thesis is that Armstrong was immersed in the vernacular (from the Latin meaning 'slave') music that surrounded him more than Armstrong's biographers have acknowledged. (page 5). In particular, the author thinks that he learned much more by

listening to street vendors and congregational singing in sanctified churches. He feels that jazz performers like King Oliver and Louis Armstrong learned collective improvisation by first playing the melody in unison, then by adding little inflections such as found in the sanctified church congregations, and finally branching out into polyphonic traditional jazz.

Three racial classes

Brothers correctly points out that there were three racial classes in New Orleans at the beginning of the 20th century: the whites, the blacks (whom he disrespectfully calls the “ratty” people) and the Creoles of color. This latter class spoke French, were well educated in music and the arts, their ancestors had been free before the Civil War, and some had even owned slaves themselves. The Creoles of color had been well trained in formal music, often played in symphony orchestras or the French Opera, and disdained musicians who could not read music and had not been trained in proper tone production. Surprisingly, New Orleans had integrated housing in the 19th century, and was very late to institute segregation. Blacks and whites lived next door to each other, and naturally learned from each other.

This was very important for the development of jazz. Jazz uses musical scales containing pitches that are in between the notes of the chromatic scale. This was known by song collectors who were collecting spirituals before the Civil War. These pitches are now called blue notes, but they came before the music we call blues was invented. People who are trained classically are drilled to play exactly on the pitches of the chromatic scale, and not in between. To play the blue notes goes against their training. They are also trained to play pure tones and not the buzzes and growls that jazz demands. Thus classically trained musicians have a lot to learn from untaught musicians.

Likewise, untaught musicians had much to learn from the trained musicians. The folk music had no harmony — that was a European invention. Proper tone production and instrumental technique, harmony and counterpoint all come from the trained musicians.

Brothers seems to feel that there was so much resentment between the Creoles and the blacks that they refused to teach each other the skills and knowledge that they needed. However, there are many cases where this was not true. Sidney Bechet, a Creole of color, gave clarinet lessons to Johnny Dodds, who was not a Creole. King Oliver, who was not a Creole, was taught by Creole musicians, in particular Manuel Perez of the Onward Brass Band. White musicians were not always given proper training either. Nick LaRocca, a white musician who made the first jazz recordings, played cornet left-handed.

Brothers seems mostly interested in the question of how jazz came to be, and how Louis Armstrong learned to play jazz.

Homophony, heterophony and polyphony

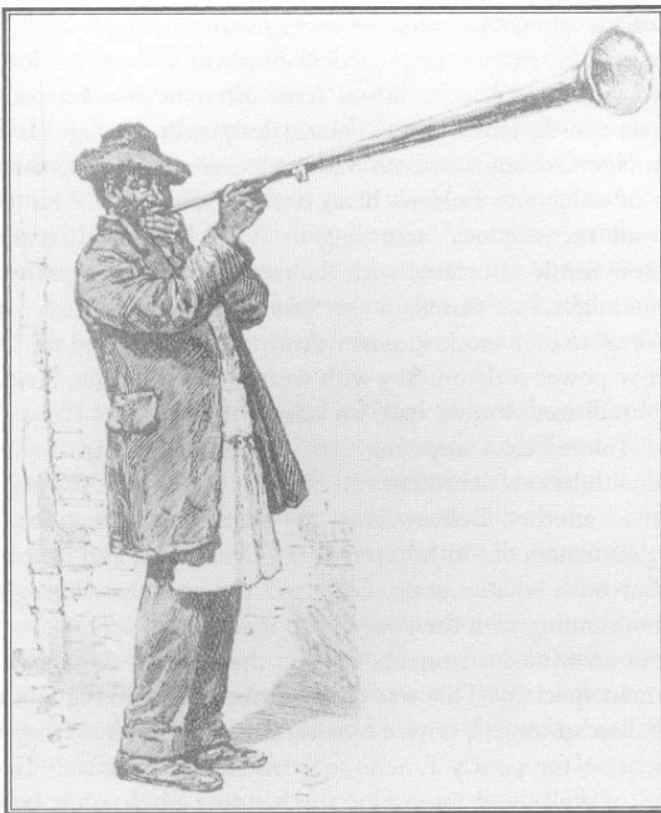
Brothers believes that jazz was invented by uneducated blacks from the plantations, who had no training in music and no concept of harmony. When they sang, they sang in unison or in octaves, and when they obtained wind instruments, played only the melody of the song either in unison or in octaves. This is homophony, and is like the first and last choruses that bop musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker would play in a much later age. Some instrumentalists would later add an ornament, or change a

phrase slightly, in the way congregations in the sanctified churches would sing. This is termed heterophony. It is not polyphony, which means different melodic lines played together as with Bach or Handel, or in traditional jazz with cornet, clarinet and trombone playing different melodic lines that fit together. This heterophony gradually evolved into polyphony.

This is an entirely new theory of the development of jazz. Normally people think that traditional jazz came before bop. Brothers seems to think it's the other way around. The Bop First theory!

Early influences on Armstrong's musical development

The earliest influence on Armstrong, according to Brothers, was the way the congregation of the sanctified church sang hymns, not quite together.



Harper's Weekly, 1886

The next influences according to Brothers on Armstrong were three bazaar street musicians or street peddlers, known as Lorenzo, Santiago and the Waffle Man. They didn't play proper valved instruments at all. Lorenzo played a long tin horn from a Kress department store. The horn cost ten cents. Santiago sold pies, a business he publicized with a bugle. Armstrong was perhaps 10 years old, and had no experience in blowing these instruments, but supposedly gained knowledge of rhythm from Lorenzo and Santiago.

According to Johnny Wiggs, the long horns were used by other people for celebrating Christmas, New Year's Eve and Mardi Gras. They had a soldered reed and a wooden mouthpiece on top of that. The wooden mouthpiece was

removed so the pitch of the reed could be manipulated directly, and get what Kid Ory called "untrue pitches."

Louis and his Vocal Quartet (page 91)

Before Louis played an instrument he sang in a childhood vocal quartet he formed with his buddies in order to hustle tip money on the streets. They used adult terminology to designate their respective vocal ranges: Louis sang tenor, Little Mack took the lead, Big Nose Sidney sang bass, and James "Big Happy" Bolton found his place on baritone. Their favorite song was *My Brazilian Beauty*. Sidney Bechet was so impressed that he invited 11-year-old Armstrong to dinner at his house.

Louis and the Blues (page 61)

Brothers says, “By age 14 or so he was gaining notice in a neighborhood honky tonk as a good little blues player. In fact, he couldn’t play anything else, and when older musicians used him as a substitute in their bands they had to work around his limited repertory.”

This is nonsense; the first tunes he learned to play were not blues at all. Louis said he took his first cornet, picked it up, tinkered with it, and “realized that I could play *Home Sweet Home* with it” (Page 73). Of course “Home Sweet Home” is not a blues! While most tunes have 16- or 32-bar structures, the blues (with very few exceptions) has a 12-bar structure. The basic blues harmonic structure is also different, with four bars of tonic, two bars of subdominant, two bars of tonic, two bars of dominant seventh and two bars of tonic.

Other tunes Brother says Armstrong played are *Maryland my Maryland*, *Sing On, Just a Closer Walk with Thee*, *Just a Little While to Stay Here*, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, and *When the Saints go Marching In*. None are blues, and many on that list are anachronisms.

Musicians know that even many tunes having “Blues” in the title are not blues at all. One example is Jelly Roll Morton’s *Wolverine Blues*, which contains three strains, none of them blues.

Louis and the Colored Waifs Home (page 98)

At age 12 Louis Armstrong was caught discharging a pistol, and sent to the Colored Waifs Home for Boys. There he was taught first to play a tambourine, then a snare drum, then an alto horn, then a bugle, and finally a cornet by music director Peter Davis. Davis even treated him to personal visits at the Davis household, where he was given extra lessons. Louis played duets in the Davis parlor, accompanied by Davis’ daughter Ida. This was very important in Louis’ training.

Louis and King Oliver (page 110)

The teacher that Louis regarded as most important and influential was King Oliver. There are some people that regard Oliver as the most important and best traditional jazz cornetist who ever lived, and his 1923 recordings as the best ever. King Oliver took Louis under his wing, gave him lessons, gave him a better cornet, gave him money for a



Armstrong (standing) and Joe Oliver, ca. 1923
(Historic New Orleans Collection, Acc. No. 92-48-L MSS 520 f. 1021)

doctor when Louis' first wife was sick, gave him musical jobs, and taught him musical good taste within the traditional jazz idiom. King Oliver sent for Louis to join his band in Chicago in 1922, thus launching Louis's national career.

The regard that Louis had for Oliver is revealed in an anecdote (page 47) that Louis told several times:

“Yea—I am just like the *Sister* in our Church in N.O., my home town. One Sunday our pastor whom we all loved happened to take a Sunday off and sent in another preacher who wasn't near as good. The whole congregation “frowned on him”—except one Sister. She seemed to enjoy the other pastor the same as she did *our* pastor. This aroused the Congregation's curiosity *so much*—until when the Church service was over they all rushed over to this *one* Sister and asked her why did she enjoy the substitute preacher the *same* as our regular one? She said, “Well, when *our pastor preach*, I can look right through him and see *Jesus*. And when I hear a preacher who's not as good as ours—I just look *over* his shoulder and see *Jesus just the same*.” That applies to me all through my life in music ever since I left New Orleans. I've been just like that Sister in our Church. I have played with quite a few musicians who weren't so good. But as long as they could hold their instruments correct, and display their *willingness* to play as best they could, I would look over their shoulders and see *Joe Oliver* and several other great masters from my home town.”

Brothers is disrespectful of Oliver's work, calling it “freak music” — “Beer buckets, toilet plungers, glasses, derby hats, coconuts, and kazoos combined with half valving, flutter tonguing, fake fingering, vibrato, growls, and subtle changes of tension in the lips to produce a creative array of vocalized effects.” This is unfair to a great man whose music is filled with great dignity and expression. Cornetist Mutt Carey said, “Joe could make his horn sound like a holy roller meeting; God, what that man could do with his horn.” That dignity and integrity shines through in his recordings.

Also disrespectful is Brothers' repeated use of the phrase “making monkeyshines” to refer to Oliver's second cornet playing to Perez's lead. One wouldn't refer to a Bach counterpoint part that way. Why use it for Oliver?

Buddy Bolden was the legendary first jazz cornet player. Brothers considered Buddy Bolden to be too crude to have been able to play softly for dancers in spite of his reported exhortation to his band to play “way down, way down low, so I can hear those whores drag their feet across the floor.” Brothers thinks instead that he was telling the dancers to crouch down in their dancing. He justifies this by saying that the musicians who heard Bolden say that he was very loud. However, those musicians were only five or six years old at the time and heard Bolden only in parades. As anyone who has marched in a jazz band in a parade knows, one has to play very loudly to be heard in such a situation.

A photo exists of the Bolden band. It shows a cornet, two clarinets, trombone, and a rhythm section of acoustic guitar and string bass. If the front line played loudly, the rhythm section would have been completely covered up.

Kid Ory was a great Creole tailgate trombone. He played with King Oliver in New Orleans, led Oliver's band when Oliver left for Chicago, made the first jazz records by New Orleans musicians of color, played trombone with Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Hot Seven, and had a most illustrious and influential career. Brothers, however, doesn't want to accept Ory as a Creole, even though he spoke French, because it doesn't fit his

theory. He feels that a Creole would have a more technical style and play fewer blue notes. He accepts Pop Foster's assertion that Ory used so many glissandos because he couldn't find the right note and slid into each note trying to find it. This is nonsense. Pops Foster also asserted that Jelly Roll Morton couldn't play both right and left hands of the piano at once, and hired someone else to play the left-hand part on his recordings.

Conclusions

There are too many misconceptions and mistakes in this book to be listed here. Brothers deserves credit for his editing job on his collection of Louis Armstrong's letters and writings, and for his original "bop first" theory, but the prospective reader should put off reading this book until after reading most of the other available books on traditional jazz.

Public Education Music Programs Help Define a Community's Tourism Economy: A New Strategy to Consider

by Vicci Johnson, Education Editor

There is ample statistical evidence to show politicians and public school administrators how music education enhances the learning of math and reading. Studies also demonstrate that artistic group performance in school is a forerunner to creating a cooperative adult workforce while cultivating a community with artistic taste. (See Richard Florida's three books on Economy and the Creative Class; "The Neglected Muse" by Peter Kalkavage; and Wynton Marsalis on America's Musical Classics, *American Educator*, Fall 2006). Nevertheless, Minnesota politicians continue to downsize arts funding, leaving public schools with inadequate means to implement full sequential music programs as part of the K-12 core curriculum that reflects the National Standards in Music Education.

Over the past two generations, arts organizations have relied on various strategies, including education partnerships, in an effort to develop and shape the next generation's audience base. Some businesses have graciously funded daytime performances, tickets, and transportation to arts venues so that busloads of urban students can experience the performances of superior musicians.

How effective is this? According to a Rand study of a 10-year arts partnership project in Los Angeles (ISBN: 08330-3650-5), the above strategy is not working. However, the Rand study also found that the most effective form of arts partnership transfers a useful skill from a master artist to a student. To experienced teachers that means "hands-on teaching and learning."

There is no doubt that students can acquire some form of appreciation as they attend an orchestra, ballet, or opera performance. But that's no substitute for participatory learning.

A New Strategy for the Community and the Tourism Economy

Perhaps Twin Cities businesses and arts organizations should join forces to hire a legal team of arts attorneys for the single purpose of lobbying for funds to hire more music teachers and to reinstate appropriate K-12 urban public school music programs in the St. Paul and Minneapolis Public Schools!

The JazzMN Educational Jazz Outreach Program

continues with a Joint Concert with the Mahtomedi High School Jazz Ensembles, directed by Dave Stevens, and the Mahtomedi Eight Grade Jazz Band, directed by Linda Niziolek. The Concert takes place on Thursday, November 16, at 7 PM, at Chautauqua Fine Arts Center (adjacent to Mahtomedi High School), 8000 75th St. N., Mahtomedi 55115.

The format for the JazzMN Educational Jazz Outreach programs is as follows: the first set is by the High School Jazz Ensemble, with two JazzMN musicians as guest soloists. The second set is by the JazzMN Big Band, directed by Doug Snapp, with three students and jazz educators from the school as guest soloists. The rousing grand finale is the High School Jazz Ensemble and the JazzMn Big Band playing together.

Please join us and help keep Big Band Jazz alive in the schools.

Dorothy Doring in New Orleans

Twin Cities jazz vocalist Dorothy Doring recorded her 2005 CD *Southern Exposure* in New Orleans, a project completed shortly before the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Her Minneapolis CD release party was held at the Dakota Jazz Club in November 2005. Dorothy's return to New Orleans recently included a CD release show in front of a packed house at the legendary Snug Harbor jazz club. The next day, Dorothy happened upon The National Anthem Project. The traveling event has been crossing the country, inviting all comers to perform *The Star-Spangled Banner* in an effort to raise money for school music programs. The project picks the best performance of the National Anthem in each state and awards \$1,000 to be donated to a school music program. Dorothy has now been notified that she was the winner of the contest for the State of Louisiana. She has designated Walker West Music Academy, a nonprofit music school in St. Paul,



to receive the \$1,000 donation. Doring will also travel to Washington, D.C. in June 2007, where the winner from each State is invited to participate in the program's Grand Finale ceremonies.

Maud Hixson gigs in November:

Wednesday, November 1st, 7-11pm Rossi's Blue Star Room "Jazz With A French Twist" with Steve Pikal, bass and Patrick Harison, accordion

Thursday, November 2nd, 8pm-12am Rossi's Blue Star Room "Jazz With A French Twist" with Jim Chenowith, bass and Patrick Harison, accordion

Friday, November 3rd, 6:30-10:30pm Dakota County Music Cafe 14201 Nicollet Ave. So. (in Holiday Inn Burnsville) with Arne Fogel, vocals

Friday, November 10th, 8pm-12am Matty B's Supper Club with Rick Carlson, piano Steve Pikal, bass Dick Bortolussi, drums Dave Karr, sax/flute

Christine Rosholt November Gigs

Saturday, November 4 — Wine and Jazz Festival. Come and taste over 80 different wines under \$20. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres and listen to Christine Rosholt with her three-piece band. All proceeds will benefit Second Harvest Heartland.

Maplewood Community Center, 2100 White Bear Avenue, Maplewood, MN 55109. \$30.00 Advance \$35.00 Day of Event 7:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m. Call 651-249-2100 ext. 0.

Christine Rosholt - vocals, Rick Carlson - piano, Keith Boyles - bass

Monday, November 3 — Dakota Jazz Club & Restaurant, 1010 Nicollet Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55403, 612-332-1010 \$5.00 cover 7 to 11 pm.

Christine Rosholt - vocals, Chris Lomheim - piano, Graydon Peterson - bass, Mac Santiago - drums, Russ Peterson - saxophone

Friday, November 10 — Brand new venue! Dakota County Music Café, 14201 Nicollet Ave South, Burnsville MN 55337, 952-435-2100. 6:30 to 10:30 pm.

Christine Rosholt - vocals, Chris Lomheim - piano, Graydon Peterson - bass, Mac Santiago - drums

Jazz from J to Z Series

Fat Kid Wednesdays, Nov. 2

The avant-garde group Fat Kid Wednesdays — Mike Lewis on sax, Adam Linz on bass and JT Bates on Drums — will be at the Artists' Quarter, 408 St. Peter Street, St. Paul (651-292-1359), at 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 2, for a CD release concert. Tickets are \$10 (\$7 for TCJS members).

Masters of the Banjo / Bill Evans & Friends, Nov. 18

It's a double-header for fans of traditional jazz: Schreyer Banjos, a four-piece family



Debbie, Ted and Lowell Schreyer, son-in-law Tom Owens on washboard. (Photo by John Diana)

group led by Lowell Schreyer of Mankato, an internationally respected musician and writer, will run through some of their repertoire of ragtime, razzmatazz and sweet banjo features. Harmonizing with Lowell are daughter Debbie, banjo, son Ted, tuba, and Tom Owens, Debbie's husband, washboard and vocals. Following will be a set led by Bill Evans, an original member of the Hall Brothers New Orleans Jazz Band and a trombonist/bassist as respected in the Crescent City as he is in the Twin Cities. They'll play a Saturday afternoon concert at 2:30 p.m. Nov. 18 at Club Underground, Spring Street Tavern, 355 NE. Monroe St. (Monroe and Spring Streets), Minneapolis (612-627-9123). Admission is \$10; \$7 for TCJS members.

Airmen of Note Flying in for Concerts Nov. 8 and 9

By Jerry Swanberg

The Airmen of Note, the premier jazz ensemble of the United States Air Force from Washington, D.C., and one of the best big bands in the world, is coming to town! They will be appearing at the Mall of America Rotunda on Wednesday, Nov. 8, at 6:30 pm and Burnsville High School on Thursday, Nov 9, at 6:45 pm.

The AON concert at the Megamall is free. The concert at the Burnsville High School Gym is also free, but tickets are required. To obtain tickets, send a self-addressed stamped envelope along with your name, address, telephone number, and the number of tickets desired (limit four), to:

Keith French -- Jazz Band Director AON Ticket Request
Burnsville High School
600 E. Highway 13
Burnsville, MN 55337

Ticket requests must be received at Burnsville High School by Nov. 6, so act soon. Ticket holders must be seated by 6:30 pm. Unclaimed seats at that time will be given to non-ticket-holders. The Burnsville Jazz Ensemble, directed by Keith French, a graduate of the University of Minnesota, will open the concert at 6:45 with a couple of tunes. The Airmen of Note will start their performance around 7 pm.