

EDWARD KENNEDY “DUKE” ELLINGTON



VITAL STATISTICS

Born: April 29, 1899 in Washington, D.C.

Died: May 24, 1974 in New York City of lung cancer and pneumonia.

Nationality: U.S.

Genre: Jazz

Performed as: pianist and bandleader of the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

During the composer's lifetime: The Harlem Renaissance enlists the arts in a celebration and investigation of the African-American experience. The Civil Rights movements of the 1950s-70s causes a dramatic change in American society and politics.

BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

Beginnings, 1899-1919: Both mother, Daisy, and father, James Edward Ellington, were amateur pianists. Edward's friends notice his elegant manners and sharp appearance and nickname him "Duke." Edward begins studying piano at age 7 and makes his professional debut at 17. He forms his first ensemble, "The Duke's Serenaders" (or the "Colored Syncopators") in 1917. A year later, Ellington marries Edna Thompson, and in 1919 their son, Mercer, is born.

New York City, 1923-27: After initial disappointments, Ellington takes pianist Fats Waller's advice and stays in New York to work with Elmer Snowden's band, The Washingtonians. He performs in various venues around New York City with the band, which expands to a 10-piece outfit. The members later provide the nucleus for Ellington's own band.

Cotton Club, 1927-30: Ellington forms the Duke Ellington Orchestra, which shares top billing with the likes of Louis Armstrong at Harlem's exclusive Cotton Club cabaret. Under the shrewd management of Irving Mills, the band goes on to make about 200 recordings and is featured in a 1929 Hollywood short film, *Black and Tan*, and a number of films thereafter.

Expansion and experimentation, 1932-42: Ellington's expanded band makes successful American and European tours of major cities. Ellington writes and records some of his signature pieces, such as *It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* (1932), *Sophisticated Lady* (1933), *Caravan* (1937, by trombonist Juan Tizol), *Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me* (1940), and *I Got It Bad (and That Ain't Good)* (1940). He also experiments with longer, more involved pieces for the full band, such as *Creole Rhapsody* (1931), the first jazz number to occupy both sides of a 78-rpm record, *Reminiscing in Tempo* (1935, four sides, a tribute to his recently deceased mother), *Concerto for Cootie* (1940), and *Ko-Ko* (1940). In 1940, Billy Strayhorn arrives as second pianist and Ellington's kindred compositional collaborator and contributor. Strayhorn writes *Take the A-Train* that year.

Holding things together, 1943-56: Ellington further expands the size of his ensemble, and brings it to Carnegie Hall. With Strayhorn's advice and aid, the Duke writes larger, multi-movement works, most significantly the suite *Black, Brown, and Beige* (1943). However, these works are less well-received. The decline of big-band jazz, and the rise of bebop, rhythm and blues, and rock, causes a dip in the band's fortunes. Ellington's doggedness and his status keep the ensemble going through the lean decade. A fiery performance at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival puts the band back on track and leads to another long-term recording contract.

Later years, 1957-74: Ellington composes liturgical music (the *Sacred Concerts*), and incidental music, as well as film scores. He receives numerous awards, honors, and accolades from around the world. A documentary film about him and his orchestra's life on tour is completed in the final year of his life.

JOHN BIRKS “DIZZY” GILLESPIE

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: October 21, 1917 in Washington, D.C.

Died: January 06, 1993 in Englewood, New Jersey.

Nationality: U.S.

Genre: Jazz

Performed as: Songwriter, Singer, Trumpet Player

During the composer's lifetime: Performed with the United Nations Orchestra and best know for being one of the founders of Be-Bop.



BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

Early Life

Famed jazz trumpeter and composer Dizzy Gillespie was born John Birks Gillespie on October 21, 1917, in Cheraw, South Carolina. He would go on to become one of the most recognizable faces of jazz music, with his "swollen" cheeks and signature (uniquely angled) trumpet's bell, as well as one of the most influential figures of jazz and bebop. When he was 18 years old, Gillespie moved with his family to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He joined the Frankie Fairfax Orchestra not long after, and then relocated to New York City, where he performed with Teddy Hill and Edgar Hayes in the late 1930s. Gillespie went on to join Cab Calloway's band in 1939, with whom he recorded "Pickin' the Cabbage"—one of Gillespie's first compositions, and regarded by some in the jazz world as his first attempt to bring a Latin influence into his work.

Commercial Success

From 1937 to '44, Gillespie performed with prominent swing bands, including those of Benny Carter and Charlie Barnet. He also began working with musical greats such as Ella Fitzgerald, Earl Hines, Jimmy Dorsey and Charlie Parker around this time. Working as a bandleader, often with Parker on saxophone, Gillespie developed the musical genre known as "bebop"—a reaction to swing, distinct for dissonant harmonies and polyrhythms. "The music of Charlie Parker and me laid a foundation for all the music that is being played now," Gillespie said years later. "Our music is going to be the classical music of the future."

In addition to creating bebop, Gillespie is considered one of the first musicians to infuse Afro-Cuban, Caribbean and Brazilian rhythms with jazz. His work in the Latin-jazz genre includes "Manteca," "A Night in Tunisia" and "Guachi Guaro," among other recordings.

Gillespie's own big band, which performed from 1946 to '50, was his masterpiece, affording him scope as both soloist and showman. He became immediately recognizable from the unusual shape of his trumpet, with the bell tilted upward at a 45-degree angle—the result of someone accidentally sitting on it in 1953, but to good effect, for when he played it afterward, he discovered that its new shape improved the instrument's sound quality, and he had it incorporated into all his trumpets thereafter. Gillespie's best-known works from this period include the songs "Oop Bob Sh' Bam," "Groovin' High," "Leap Frog," "Salt Peanuts" and "My Melancholy Baby."

In the late 1950s, Gillespie performed with Duke Ellington, Paul Gonsalves and Johnny Hodges on Ellington's *Jazz Party* (1959). The following year, Gillespie released *A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (1960), an album dedicated to Ellington also featuring the work of Juan Tizol, Billy Strayhorn and Mercer Ellington, son of the legendary musician. Gillespie composed most of the album's recordings, including "Serenade to Sweden," "Sophisticated Lady" and "Johnny Come Lately."

Final Years

Gillespie's memoirs, entitled *To BE or Not to BOP: Memoirs of Dizzy Gillespie* (with Al Fraser), were published in 1979. More than a decade later, in 1990, he received the Kennedy Center Honors Award. Dizzy Gillespie died on January 6, 1993, at age 75, in Englewood, New Jersey.

DAVID WARREN “DAVE” BRUBECK

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: December 06, 1920 in Concord, California
Died: December 05, 2012 in Norwalk, Connecticut
Nationality: U.S.
Genre: Jazz

Performed as: pianist and bandleader of the Dave Brubeck Quartet and US Jazz Ambassador

During the composer's lifetime: Dave Brubeck was an American jazz pianist and composer known for his unconventional meters, as well as songs like "In Your Own Sweet Way" and "The Duke."



Early Life

Born in Concord, California, on December 6, 1920, David Warren Brubeck began playing piano when he was 4 years old, and began performing with jazz bands in California in the early 1930s. After graduating from high school, in 1938, Brubeck enrolled at the College of the Pacific in California. Not long after, he formed a 12-piece jazz ensemble. During World War II, Brubeck conducted a service band in General George Patton's army. Following the war, he attended Mills College to study music composition.

The Dave Brubeck Octet

In 1946, Brubeck and seven of fellow students at Mills College—including saxophonist Paul Desmond, trumpeter Dick Collins and clarinetist Bill Smith—formed the Dave Brubeck Octet. Based in San Francisco, the band performed together until 1949 and released several recordings, including "The Way You Look Tonight," "Love Walked In," "September in the Rain," "Fugue on Bop Themes," "Let's Fall in Love," "I Hear a Rhapsody," "Laura" and "What Is This Thing Called Love." Though they garnered little attention in the 1940s and '50s, the octet has earned acclaim in recent years; their recordings have been deemed innovative and ahead of their time, even by contemporary jazz standards.

The Dave Brubeck Trio and Quartet

After the Dave Brubeck Octet disbanded in 1949, Brubeck founded the Dave Brubeck Trio. The group quickly earned popularity in the San Francisco area, and later reformed and then expanded into a quartet—Paul Desmond became the fourth member of the group, spurring the Dave Brubeck Quartet. Playing together for more than a decade, the quartet included a range of members over the years; Desmond and Brubeck were the only members to perform on all of the group's albums, which include *Dave Brubeck Quartet*, *Jazz at the Black Hawk*, *Jazz at Oberlin*, *Jazz at the College of the Pacific* and *Jazz Goes to College*.

By the mid-1950s, Brubeck had finally gained international fame. Some of his most popular compositions include "Blue Rondo a la Turk," "In Your Own Sweet Way" and "The Duke." His use of unconventional meters contributed to his wide appeal. A testament to his popularity, Brubeck was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in November 1954. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Brubeck discussed his feelings on his fame in '50s, noting that his longtime partner, Paul Desmond, didn't gain recognition until several years later. "Seven in the morning, there's a knock at the door and there's Duke [Ellington] handing me the magazine and saying, 'Dave, you're on the cover,'" he said. "He was happy for me, but I was just so disappointed because it should have been him. They got around to him finally a couple of years later. But ... it just bothered me."

In 1959, Desmond's "Take Five" became the first jazz instrumental to sell more than a million copies. The song, included on the Dave Brubeck Quartet's album *Time Out*, attracted many new listeners to jazz, particularly on college campuses, during the 1950s and '60s.

Later Career

The Dave Brubeck Quartet disbanded in 1967. Desmond died a decade later, in 1977. Brubeck went on to form another group, a quartet with his sons, keyboardist Darius Brubeck, bassist and trombonist Chris Brubeck, and drummer Danny Brubeck. In 1973, the group released *Two Generations of Brubeck*. Brubeck continued to release music throughout the 1980s and '90s, including the albums *Blue Rondo* (1986), *Moscow Nights* (1987), *In Their Own Sweet Way* (1994) and *A Dave Brubeck Christmas* (1996).

Death and Legacy

On December 5, 2012, one day before his 92nd birthday, Brubeck died of cardiac arrest in Norwalk, Connecticut. Today, Brubeck is remembered for his musical experimentation and unconventional meters. While he's best known for his compositions, his talent on the piano has also been praised. Of his passion for the piano, Brubeck once said, "It's like a whole orchestra, the piano for me."

LOUIS "SATCHMO" ARMSTRONG



VITAL STATISTICS

Born: August 04, 1901 in New Orleans, Louisiana

Died: July 06, 1971 in Corona, Queens, New York

Nationality: U.S.

Genre: Jazz

Nickname: "Pops"

Nickname: "Satchmo"

Nickname: "Ambassador Satch"

Full Name: Louis Armstrong

Occupation: Singer, Trumpet Player

Did You Know?: In 1936, Louis Armstrong became the first African-American jazz musician to write an autobiography, *Swing That Music*.

Did You Know?: Also in 1936, Louis Armstrong became the first African American to get featured billing in a major Hollywood movie with his turn in *Pennies from Heaven*.

Did You Know?: In 1937, Louis Armstrong became the first African-American entertainer to host a nationally sponsored radio show.

Education: Fisk School for Boys, Colored Waif's Home for Boys

Best Known For: trumpeter, bandleader, singer, soloist, film star and comedian. Considered one of the most influential artists in jazz history, he is known for songs like "Star Dust," "La Via En Rose" and "What a Wonderful World."

BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

YOUNGER YEARS

Louis Armstrong was born on August 4, 1901, in New Orleans, Louisiana, in a section so poor that it was nicknamed "The Battlefield." Armstrong had a difficult childhood. His father was a factory worker and abandoned the family soon after Louis's birth; his mother, who often turned to prostitution, frequently left him with his maternal grandmother. Armstrong was obligated to leave school in the fifth grade to begin working. A Jewish family, the Karnofskys, gave young Armstrong a job collecting junk and delivering coal. They also encouraged him to sing and often invited him into their home for meals.

On New Year's Eve in 1912, Armstrong fired his stepfather's gun in the air during a New Year's Eve celebration and was arrested on the spot. He was then sent to the Colored Waif's Home for Boys. There, he received musical instruction on the cornet and fell in love with music. In 1914, the home released him, and he immediately began dreaming of a life making music. While he still had to work odd jobs selling newspapers and hauling coal to the city's famed red-light district, Armstrong began earning a reputation as a fine blues player. One of the greatest cornet players in town, Joe "King" Oliver, began acting as a mentor to the young Armstrong, showing him pointers on the horn and occasionally using him as a sub.

By the end of his teens, Armstrong had grown up fast. In 1918, he married Daisy Parker, a prostitute, commencing a stormy union marked by many arguments and acts of violence. During this time, Armstrong adopted a three-year-old boy named Clarence. The boy's mother, Armstrong's cousin, had died in childbirth. Clarence, who had become mentally disabled from a head injury he had suffered at an early age, was taken care of by Armstrong his entire life. Meanwhile, Armstrong's reputation as a musician continued to grow: In 1918, he replaced Oliver in Kid Ory's band, then the most popular band in New Orleans. He was soon able to stop working manual labor jobs and began concentrating full-time on his cornet, playing parties, dances, funeral marches and at local "honky-tonks"—a name for small bars that typically host musical acts. Beginning in 1919, Armstrong spent his summers playing on riverboats with a band led by Fate Marable. It was on the riverboat that Armstrong honed his music reading skills and eventually had his first encounters with other jazz legends,

EARLY CAREER: JAZZ MUSICIAN

Though Armstrong was content to remain in New Orleans, in the summer of 1922, he received a call from King Oliver to come to Chicago and join his Creole Jazz Band on second cornet. Armstrong accepted, and he was soon taking Chicago by storm with both his remarkably fiery playing and the dazzling two-cornet breaks that he shared with Oliver. He made his first recordings with Oliver on April 5, 1923; that day, he earned his first recorded solo on "Chimes Blues." Armstrong soon began dating the female pianist in the band, Lillian Hardin. After they married in 1924, Hardin made it clear that she felt Oliver was holding Armstrong back. She pushed her husband to cut ties with his mentor and join Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra, the top African-American dance band in New York City at the time. Armstrong joined Henderson in the fall of 1924, and immediately made his presence felt with a series of solos that introduced the concept of swing music to the band. Armstrong had a great influence on Henderson and his arranger, Don Redman, both of whom began integrating Armstrong's swinging vocabulary into their arrangements—transforming Henderson's band into what is generally regarded as the first jazz big band. However, Armstrong's southern background didn't mesh well with the more urban, Northern mentality of Henderson's other musicians, who sometimes gave Armstrong a hard time over his wardrobe and the way he talked. Henderson also forbade Armstrong from singing, fearing that his rough way of vocalizing would be too coarse for the sophisticated audiences at the Roseland Ballroom. Unhappy, Armstrong left Henderson in 1925 to return to Chicago, where he began playing with his wife Lil's band at the Dreamland Café.

MID-CAREER: ACCLAIMED ARTIST

While in New York, Armstrong cut dozens of records as a sideman, creating inspirational jazz with other greats such as Sidney Bechet, and backing numerous blues singers, namely Bessie Smith. Back in Chicago, OKeh Records decided to let Armstrong make his first records with a band under his own name: Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five. From 1925 to 1928, Armstrong made more than 60 records with the Hot Five and, later, the Hot Seven. Today, these are generally regarded as the most important and influential recordings in jazz history; on these records, Armstrong's virtuoso brilliance helped transform jazz from an ensemble music to a soloist's art. His stop-time solos on numbers like "Cornet Chop Suey" and "Potato Head Blues" changed jazz history, featuring daring rhythmic choices, swinging phrasing and incredible high notes. He also began singing on these recordings, popularizing wordless "scat singing" with his hugely popular vocal on 1926's "Heebie Jeebies." The Hot Five and Hot Seven were strictly recording groups; Armstrong performed nightly during this period with Erskine Tate's orchestra at the Vendome Theater, often playing music for silent movies. While performing with Tate in 1926, Armstrong finally switched from the cornet to the trumpet. Armstrong's popularity continued to grow in Chicago throughout the decade, as he began playing other venues, including the Sunset Café and the Savoy Ballroom. A young pianist from Pittsburgh, Earl "Fatha" Hines, assimilated Armstrong's ideas into his piano playing. Together, the two formed a potent team and made some of the greatest recordings in jazz history in 1928, including their virtuoso duet, "Weather Bird," and "West End Blues." The latter performance is one of Armstrong's best known works, opening with a stunning cadenza that features equal helpings of opera and the blues; with its release, "West End Blues" proved to the world that the musical genre of fun, dance jazz was also capable of producing high art. In the summer of 1929, Armstrong headed to New York, where he had a role in a Broadway production of *Connie's Hot Chocolates*, featuring the music of Fats Waller and Andy Razaf. Armstrong was featured nightly on *Ain't Misbehavin'*, breaking up the crowds of white theatergoers nightly. That same year, he recorded with small New Orleans-influenced groups, including the Hot Five, and began recording larger ensembles. Instead of doing strictly jazz numbers, OKeh began allowing Armstrong to record popular songs of the day, including "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," "Star Dust" and "Body and Soul." Armstrong's daring vocal transformations of these songs completely changed the concept of popular singing in American popular music, and had lasting effects on all singers who came after him, including Bing Crosby, Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald.

'AMBASSADOR SATCH'

During the mid-'50s, Armstrong's popularity overseas skyrocketed which led him to be known as "Ambassador Satch." He performed all over the world in the 1950s and '60s, including throughout Europe, Africa and Asia. Legendary CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow followed Armstrong with a camera crew on some of his worldwide excursions, turning the resulting footage into a theatrical documentary, *Satchmo the Great*, released in 1957.

LATER CAREER

Armstrong continued a grueling touring schedule into the late '50s, and it caught up with him in 1959, when he had a heart attack while traveling in Spoleto, Italy. The musician didn't let the incident stop him, however, and after taking a few weeks off to recover, he was back on the road, performing 300 nights a year into the 1960s. Armstrong was still a popular attraction around the world in 1963, but hadn't made a record in two years. In December of that year, he was called into the studio to record the title number for a Broadway show that hadn't opened yet: *Hello, Dolly!* The record was released in 1964 and quickly climbed to the top of the pop music charts, hitting the No. 1 slot in May 1964, and knocking the Beatles off the top at the height of Beatle-mania. This newfound popularity introduced Armstrong to a new, younger audience, and he continued making both successful records and concert appearances for the rest of the decade, even cracking the "Iron Curtain" with a tour of Communist countries such as East Berlin and Czechoslovakia in 1965. In 1967, Armstrong recorded a new ballad, "What a Wonderful World." Different from most of his recordings of the era, the song features no trumpet and places Armstrong's gravelly voice in the middle of a bed of strings and angelic voices. Armstrong sang his heart out on the number, thinking of his home in Queens as he did so, but "What a Wonderful World" received little promotion in the United States. The tune did, however, become a No. 1 hit around the world, including in England and South Africa, and eventually became Armstrong's most lasting song after it was used in the 1966 film *Good Morning, Vietnam*.

FINAL YEARS

By 1968, Armstrong's grueling lifestyle had finally caught up with him. Heart and kidney problems forced him to stop performing in 1969. That same year, his longtime manager, Joe Glaser, passed away. Armstrong spent much of that year at home, but managed to continue practicing the trumpet daily. By the summer of 1970, Armstrong was allowed to perform publicly again and play the trumpet. After a successful engagement in Las Vegas, Armstrong began taking engagements around the world, including in London and Washington, D.C. and New York (he performed for two weeks at New York's Waldorf-Astoria). However, a heart attack two days after the Waldorf gig sidelined him for two months. Armstrong returned home in May 1971, and though he soon resumed playing again and promised to perform in public once more, he died in his sleep on July 6, 1971, at his home in Queens, New York.