

Background information and performance circumstances

The song *West End Blues* was written by the jazz cornet player Joe 'King' Oliver, who first recorded it with a singer in 1928. Later in the same year it was recorded in an instrumental version by *Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five* and that is the version you have in the Anthology and the accompanying recording. The music wasn't written down at the time. It was mostly **improvised**; even the first statement of the tune - from the upbeat to bar 7 - departs considerably from King Oliver's original. The music printed in the anthology is a modern **transcription** taken from the recording.

King Oliver was a famous musician from the city of New Orleans in the southern United States. This song is his tribute to the *West End* area of his home city. In 1917 some of the entertainment areas of New Orleans were closed down, accused of introducing too much immorality to troops stationed nearby. Soon afterwards Oliver and other jazz musicians moved north to Chicago. In 1922 he invited the talented young New Orleans musician Louis Armstrong to join his Chicago band as second cornet player.

By 1925 Armstrong had helped to introduce a new style of **solo** performance in which the **group improvisations** of the New Orleans style were replaced by a performing method in which soloists took turns to improvise over accompaniment. In the earlier collective improvising style the players all tended to perform simultaneously for most of the piece. Armstrong is also credited with developing the *swing* style (see notes on rhythm and metre).

Blues had always been an important ingredient of jazz. The typical **twelve bar blues** used in this piece was and is the basis of innumerable jazz performances.

Performing Instruments and their handling

- Jazz in the first three decades of the twentieth century tended to involve **small groups**.
- The New Orleans style typically featured **seven instruments**: a cornet playing the tune, a clarinet and trombone playing additional contrapuntal parts, a double bass or tuba on the bass line and a piano and banjo playing chords, together with drums.
- **Recording technology** was still quite **primitive** in 1928 and double basses and tubas did not tend to come over well.
- There were similar problems with drums.
- The famous **recordings** by Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five often **omitted a bass instrument** altogether (including this piece, despite what it says in bar 7 of the anthology transcription).
- Instead of a regular drum kit, the percussionist had to use something that would work in the recording. The 'Milk Bottle Sound' mentioned in bars 18-19, was produced by an instrument called a *bock-a-da-bock*. This simple percussion instrument consisted of two small metal disks, which were slightly dome shaped. They were attached to a metal grip held by the musician. The player used his other hand to hit the instrument with a stick. The sound was supposed to resemble that of a milk bottle being hit.

- By this time Armstrong had moved from **cornet** to the brighter sounding **trumpet**.
 - The instrument covers a wide range from **top C** in bar 3 (which would need to be played as a **top D** on a typical **B flat** instrument) down to a bottom **A** in bar 6 (a **range of two octaves and a third**).
 - Unusually for a blues, the piece begins with a trumpet **cadenza** of the kind used in lighter classical styles of the era. A cadenza is a **virtuoso display passage**, usually unaccompanied, as here.
 - Armstrong uses **vibrato** occasionally, especially on long notes, for instance the top C in bar 3.
 - He uses a **lip trill** on the high B flat in bar 18. As the technique's name suggests, this is achieved by using the lips rather than the valves.
- The **clarinet** has a **subsidiary role** in this recording. It doesn't have its own solo and plays in a **low pitched range** throughout.
 - This low range on a clarinet is sometimes known as the **chalumeau register**, after an old low pitched type of clarinet.
 - The **range of the part here is only a tenth**.
- The pianist on the recording was Earl Hines, one of the leading jazz keyboard players of the age.
 - For much of the track Hines and the banjo player play in simple **comping style** - **simple improvised chords** with a steady rhythm, as an accompaniment.
 - The solo from bar 43 is much more elaborate. The pianist uses a technique called **stride bass** in which the **left hand leaps from low bass notes to high chords**.
 - Many of the left hand bass notes involve **wide stretches** of a 10th as in bar 43.
 - The improvised solo in the right hand is **virtuosic** and often in a **high register** (bars 43-7).
 - Later Hines plays the right hand in **octaves** (bars 47-50).
- In the third 'chorus' Armstrong sings in **scat style**. This involves improvised singing with **nonsense syllables**.
- The **trombone** has a solo in the second 'chorus'.
 - Its range is a tenth
 - Its part involves slides in performance which are not notated in the transcription.
 - Elsewhere, when playing with all the other instruments, the trombone plays the role of a 'tenor' instrument, though very occasionally it doubles the bass, e.g. bar 67.

Texture

- The music begins **monophonically** with a trumpet solo cadenza.
- There is a **homophonic chord** for **all instruments** at bar 6.
- The main tune section from bar 7 has a type of **three part texture over accompaniment**.
 - The three top parts are **unequal**.
 - **The top part has the tune** (already containing improvisation).
 - The second part (clarinet) starts by playing mainly in 3^{rds} with the trumpet, then has a simpler part, occasionally in **counterpoint** with the trumpet (e.g. bar 14).
 - The third part (trombone) is simpler still with long accompanying notes.
 - The piano and banjo play simple **comping chords**.

- From the second 'chorus' (upbeat to 19) there is **melody dominated homophony**, with a trombone solo over homophonic chords.
- The third chorus features **call and response** between clarinet and scat vocal.
 - The voice follows the clarinet, but is very free in its echoing, so that already by bar 33 the 'response' is very dissimilar to the clarinet's 'call'.
 - From bar 35 the voice starts to **overlap** with the clarinet.
 - At the end of the chorus the two top parts play in **compound tritones** (diminished 5ths and augmented 4ths).
- The piano solo is in melody dominated homophony with a rapid improvisation in the right hand over a **stride bass accompaniment** in the left hand which often plays the strong beats of the bar in 10^{ths}. Chordal notes in close position are often played on weak beats.
- The texture of the fourth chorus is similar to that of the first, with all instruments playing. It begins though with a long held homophonic chord for the upper instruments over continued comping below.
- A brief piano solo passage from bar 63 features a long held dominant **pedal** in the left hand.

Structure

The piece has a simple form of **introduction** and **5 choruses** using **12 bar blues** structure, followed by a **coda**:

<i>Bar</i>	<i>Section</i>
1-6	Solo trumpet cadenza
7-18	1 st Chorus - main theme on trumpet
19-30	2 nd Chorus - trombone solo improvisation
31-42	3 rd Chorus - clarinet and scat vocal
43-54	4 th Chorus - piano solo
55-56	5 th Chorus - trumpet improvisation with tutti instruments
66-68	Coda

- Note that many sections begin on the upbeat preceding the bar mentioned in the list above.
- The 12 bar blues structure is conventional, except that there is **no subdominant chord in the tenth bar**. Instead the dominant chord is repeated.
- Note that the 4th chorus **merges** into the coda by extending the dominant chord for an extra bar (65) and delaying the final tonic chord of the chorus until the last bar. **The coda is thus effectively an extension of the 4th Chorus.**

Melody

- The opening bar starts with a **broken chord** followed by a **leap** of a **diminished 5th**.
- There is **chromatic** movement in bar 2 (F-F#-G).
- There are some **large leaps** occasionally, e.g. the **descending minor 9th** from C to B natural in the trumpet part, bar 15.
- **Conjunct** melodic lines are rarer, though there are some short passages of stepwise melody, e.g. trumpet at the end of bar 14.
- **Blue notes** are common, e.g. the raised 2nd (F#) bar6.

- The F# could have been notated as a G flat, i.e. a **flattened 3rd**, as found in bar 11, trumpet part.
- An interesting use of the flat 3rd occurs at the beginning of the trombone solo (upbeat to bar 19), where the **flat minor 3rd alternates with the raised major 3rd**.
- The **flat 7th** in bar 10 and elsewhere is an important means of moving to the subdominant chord (see harmony notes).
- The **phrase lengths** are essentially **four bars long** but with links between the phrases, e.g. bar 10, which create a smooth flow from one phrase to the next.

Tonality

- The opening solo is **tonally ambiguous**. The first three notes and the broken chord from bar 2 to 3 suggest **C minor**. The second half of bar 1, leading to the E flat at the beginning of bar 2 suggests **E flat major**.
- The **blue notes** (e.g. G flat in bar 4) and chromatic notes, like the A flat in bar 5, also destabilise the tonality.
- The outline of the **Dominant 7th** in the trumpet part at the beginning of bar 6 leads to the first **unambiguous** statement of the **tonic chord of E flat** in bar 7.
- From bar 7 we have a straightforward **blues in E flat**.
- In Classical music, **secondary dominant chords** reinforce a harmonic progression by sounding almost like a **modulation** to a new key. Jazz has similar devices. The **flat 7th** chord in bar 10 suggests a modulation to A flat, but is really a secondary dominant chord reinforcing the progression to the subdominant chord - it sounds like V7-I in Ab (a strong, perfect cadence like progression) but is really I7-IV in the tonic key.
- There is **no real modulation**.
- **Perfect cadences** in the **tonic key** are found between the 10th and 11th bars of the 12 bar progression, e.g. bars 16-17.

Harmony

- A standard 12 bar blues like this uses **three main chords, all primary chords: tonic, subdominant and dominant**.
- The basic sequence of chords in this type of music is called the **changes**.
- Most chords are in **root position**, e.g. the 'comping' chords from bar 7 onwards.
- There is an **augmented dominant triad** in bar 6. The F sharp acts as a kind of leading note to the 3rd of chord I in the next bar.
- **7th chords** are found occasionally, e.g. bar 10 (chord I7).
- **Substitution chords** are used sometimes to provide variety. These are chords used in place of the expected harmony. They are quite common in 12 bar blues structures, where they are used to replace the expected tonic, subdominant or dominant chords. An example is in bar 20, where all the chords are substitution chords - substituted for the original tonic harmony. In bar 24 the expected A flat major chord is substituted by an A flat minor chord.
- At the end of each set of 12 bars there is a **chromatic progression**.
- The pair of **chromatic chords** at the end of bar 17 occur several times later in the piece. They can be described as a **diminished 7th** followed by **Ab6**.
- At the end of the piece there is a long **dominant pedal** (bars 63-5).
- The final cadence is a **chromatic** version of a **plagal cadence**.
- The last chord is a **6th chord** (Eb6).

Rhythm and metre

- A feature of the comping rhythm from bar 7 is the **steady crotchets**. This continuous rhythm dominates the piece.
- **Triplets** are common, right from bar 1.
- Curiously, in this piece Armstrong himself makes less use of **swing rhythm** than his colleagues in the band. Swing rhythm involves the playing of 'straight' quavers as unequal, usually long-short notes. This example shows an approximate version of what might be notated and played in these circumstances.



- The editor of this transcription has notated the swing notes as **dotted quaver-semiquaver**. The dotted note groupings in the trombone part in bar 25, for instance, are played more as standard swung quavers, i.e. as in the 'played' rhythm shown above.
- Armstrong quite often plays in a more jerky style in this piece. The dotted note groupings in bar 8 are played closer to the written rhythm (i.e. not swung). The dotted note itself is played quite staccato.
- He changes to swing style in his scat duet with the clarinetist.
- Rhythmically, his playing is often very free, especially in the opening cadenza.
- A passage of more precise rhythm occurs in the **continuous semiquavers** of bar 59.
- A distinctive feature of the rhythm is the use of **long held notes** over four bars of music (55-8).
- The pianist begins his solo with rippling **demisemiquavers**.
- The occasional **scotch snap** rhythm (e.g. trumpet part, beginning of bar 9) is a feature of early jazz that became much less common in later styles. This rhythm usually involves a semiquaver followed by a dotted quaver, as here.
- The piece is in simple **Common Time** throughout.
- The transcriber has notated bar 66 as being in **triple time**. This is more of a **free time** miniature cadenza like phrase. Certainly Armstrong would not have considered that he was suddenly playing in triple time at this point.