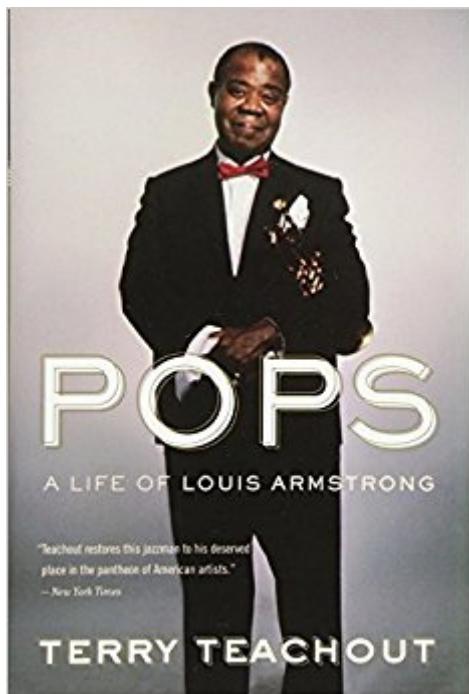


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# Pops: A Life Of Louis Armstrong



## Synopsis

Louis Armstrong is widely known as the greatest jazz musician of the twentieth century. He was a phenomenally gifted and imaginative artist, and an entertainer so irresistibly magnetic that he knocked the Beatles off the top of the charts four decades after he cut his first record. Offstage he was witty, introspective, and unexpectedly complex, a beloved colleague with an explosive temper whose larger-than-life personality was tougher and more sharp-edged than his worshiping fans ever knew. Wall Street Journal critic Terry Teachout has drawn on a cache of important new sources unavailable to previous biographers, including hundreds of candid after-hours recordings made by Armstrong himself, to craft a sweeping new narrative biography. Certain to be the definitive word on Armstrong for our generation, Pops paints a gripping portrait of the man, his world, and his music that will stand alongside Gary Giddins' *Bing Crosby and Peter Guralnick's Last Train to Memphis* as a classic biography of a major American musician.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, December 2009: Crafted with a musician's ear and an historian's eye, Pops is a vibrant biography of the iconic Louis Armstrong that resonates with the same warmth as ol' Satchmo's distinctive voice. Wall Street Journal critic Terry Teachout draws from a wealth of previously unavailable material—including over 650 reels of Armstrong's own personal tape recordings—to create an engaging profile that slips behind the jazz legend's megawatt smile. Teachout reveals that the beaming visage of "Reverend Satchelmouth" was not a mark of racial subservience, but a clear symbol of Louis's refusal to let anything cloud the joy he

derived from blowing his horn. "Faced with the terrible realities of the time and place into which he had been born," explains Teachout, "he didn't repine, but returned love for hatred and sought salvation in work." Armstrong was hardly impervious to the injustices of his era, but in his mind, nothing was more sacred than the music. --Dave Callanan Product Description Louis Armstrong was the greatest jazz musician of the twentieth century and a giant of modern American culture. He knocked the Beatles off the top of the charts, wrote the finest of all jazz autobiographies--without a collaborator--and created collages that have been compared to the art of Romare Bearden. The ranks of his admirers included Johnny Cash, Jackson Pollock and Orson Welles. Offstage he was witty, introspective and unexpectedly complex, a beloved colleague with an explosive temper whose larger-than-life personality was tougher and more sharp-edged than his worshipping fans ever knew. Wall Street Journal arts columnist Terry Teachout has drawn on a cache of important new sources unavailable to previous Armstrong biographers, including hundreds of private recordings of backstage and after-hours conversations that Armstrong made throughout the second half of his life, to craft a sweeping new narrative biography of this towering figure that shares full, accurate versions of such storied events as Armstrong's decision to break up his big band and his quarrel with President Eisenhower for the first time. Certain to be the definitive word on Armstrong for our generation, Pops paints a gripping portrait of the man, his world and his music that will stand alongside Gary Giddins' *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams* and Peter Guralnick's *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* as a classic biography of a major American musician.

Exclusive: A Letter from Terry Teachout, Author of *Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong*

Starred Review. Following his biographies of H.L. Mencken and George Balanchine, Teachout turns to another mighty pillar of 20th-century American culture, Louis Armstrong, a black man born at the turn of the century in the poorest quarter of New Orleans who by the end of his life was known and loved in every corner of the earth. It may seem odd to speak of someone of Louis Armstrong's stature as needing recuperation, but his popularity has long been held against him by jazz purists and other music critics. Teachout brings a fresh perspective that, while candid about the ways Pops could hold himself back artistically, celebrates his ambition and capacity for renewal. The other knock against Armstrong is that if white Americans loved him so much, he must have been an Uncle Tom, a notion Teachout neatly demolishes. While Armstrong was keenly aware of the social realities of his time, his relentless work ethic was fueled by an equally intense optimism. (His patience, however, was not infinite; he publicly criticized President Eisenhower as having no guts for failing to enforce desegregation.) One of the few celebrities who could be so outspoken

without suffering substantial backlash.) Teachout's portrait reminds us why we fell in love with Armstrong's music in the first place. B&w photos throughout, many previously unpublished. (Dec. 2) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Aside from phonograph records, my own and on radio (no television in those days) and brief appearances in film and on such as the Bing Crosby radio show, I had the good fortune to see and hear live, Satchmo in his two vehicles of performance during the forties: fronting a big band and, as the big band Swing and Jazz era collapsed, the small group. In the forefront of my memory are his appearance with his band at one of the NYC movie palaces which alternated a stage show with a first run movie in its first showing in the City. As I recall, Ella Fitzgerald was also on the "live" bill with him. Most prominent, is the key event of which Teachout writes, the Town Hall appearance of 1947, not his first in that era but the key test of its possibility, in which he led a small group put together for the appearance, with Jack Teagarden, Bobby Hackett and Bobby Haggard, the only ones I correctly remembered, when I came to that section of the book, although I also was right on target with the announcement that Sidney Bechet, scheduled for the night's session, was said to have been taken ill. The true reason is Teachout's to tell..although his sources seemingly did not give the whole statement as I recall it, that he had suffered a heart attack on the subway coming over. Later I did see Louis at work in a Club with the first of the regular group employed as Armstrong began with the routine that he pursued for the rest of his working life.Utilizing resources that were not available before his working career, Teachout has done a fine job of portraying a simple yet very complex man who was among those to create the music that was Jazz. He places in social context the New Jazz and gives a balanced portrait of the middle aged and elderly figure who had to confront the inevitable rise of a yet newer Jazz which rejected not only his music but his personal style. For he was always what he wanted to be: not only a player of music but an entertainer, a person who made his audience feel good. Difficult as the task is of providing a balanced view of the struggle between the new and the old, Teachout does a reasonable job of handling it within the confines of a book with limited space to penetrate deeply into the complex intellectual and emotional currents stirred up by changing concepts, not only of music, but of appropriate behavior for members of his Race when facing the public.Teachout writes clearly, never descending into the intellectualism in content and style, which often produces a mind-dulling prolixity whose occasional emptiness is masked by its incomprehensibility. Perhaps because I came into the World early in his career (he was born the same year as my father was) the book was exciting to me, one which led me to marathon reading, a

rarity in my life these days. I can wholeheartedly recommend it not only to fans of Jazz in any era, but also to those who want to see how talent, fierce determination, and a commitment to the virtues of hard work and self-improvement, led someone who started from the Lower Depths, to achieve recognition throughout the world.

Love it. I have not finished the book yet, but I am loving the look at the life of one of the United States most important and loved artists and entertainers. Louie was known as America's goodwill ambassador to the world for a large portion of his life, and you will see why. It is making me not just going back and playing my Satchmo CD's but urging me to get more. The book is opening a new world to me of a long gone era, and the number one creative force who not only shaped jazz, but has influenced all of the music we have today. It is impossible to imagine what the music of today would sound like without Louis Armstrong's magic.

As a casual jazz fan, I've enjoyed Armstrong's music but have never really been enthralled by it. I've been aware of a sort of ambient contempt for the man in certain highbrow jazz circles -- I've known that some viewed him as a shallow shuck 'n' jiver, especially in his later years. That's why this biography kicked my butt. Armstrong was as real, as authentic and even raw in some ways, as a jazz man could be. His polished performances and ingratiating stage manner were not phony; they were earned through decades of impossibly tumultuous living and incredibly dedicated work. He was one of the midwives at the birth of jazz and he accompanied it through its growing pains and on into sophisticated maturity. Now that I know more about his raucous childhood and his years of struggle, not only for his art but with his peers and with a racist society, I understand both the joy and the pain in his music so much better. Every song has more depth to me now. Get this book if: 1. You want to understand the history of jazz; 2. you want to open up a whole new way to understand Louis' music; 3. you just want to read a gripping story of a life of adventure and art. Thank you, Terry Teachout!

History records soldiers, academics and others as american heroes. Rarely, if ever, are great artists so dubbed, although they are able to shape our thinking, change our perceptions and, subsequently, make changes in the world we live in. POPS, Terry Teachout's biography of Louis Armstrong does that. With the skill of a fine writer, the accuracy of a fine journalist and the sensitivity of a musician (all of which he is) he approaches Louis Armstrong's innovative musical talent within the context of America's history; of the time that the book covers and America's past. Those things

that made the man and his genius and personality almost inevitable. Armstrong had many critics, particularly among some of his younger colleagues who saw him as an "uncle tom". Teachout explores his attitudes and concludes, at one point, that he was an "accommodationist". He believed that white people could grease the wheels for black people and acted accordingly, whether it was on stage, with his grinning and dancing, or in his relationship with his manager, Joe Glazer, who exploited him and undoubtedly stole from him. But he was a generous and loving man, who cared very much for his own people and everyone who loved the music that he made. For musicians and music lovers it's a must-read.

I've read every Armstrong biography and autobiography and this is the best. Sympathetic, but not fawning. Reveals the many dimensions of the man and musician. Puts Armstrong in the proper (lofty) perspective and gives overdue homage to his vocal skills and later achievements as an arranger/vocalist. If you love reading about music and culture, this book will make your life better.

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