



**The Wonderful World of Louis Armstrong All Stars Set to
Release *A Gift to Pops* with Special Guests
Wynton Marsalis and Common**

**Co-Produced by Wycliffe Gordon, Nicholas Payton,
and Jackie Harris with Liner Notes from George Wein**

Available October 15 via Verve Records

While New Orleans native **Louis Armstrong** passed away in 1971 at the age of 69, today his legacy as the kingpin of jazz continues to grow. The most significant example of this is the ensemble **The Wonderful World of Louis Armstrong All Stars**, comprised largely of top-of-the-line Crescent City musicians paying tribute to him with the brilliant album ***A Gift to Pops***. The inventive re-envisioning of music associated with the trumpeter/vocalist during his five-decade career features new arrangements and new performances of stalwart tunes ranging from the “The Peanut Vendor” (recorded by him in 1930) to “What a Wonderful World” (recorded in 1968 and the most successful tune of his career). Special guests include **Wynton Marsalis** and **Common**.

“We decided to make a recording that captures the essence of Pops,” says co-producer **Wycliffe Gordon**, who is well-versed in the music but is the only member of the band not born in New Orleans. “We wanted to perform the music the way he might have played it if he were still alive. We all had ideas for how to pull this off, by including songs influenced by gospel, the blues, the traditional brass band sounds, popular music and rap.”

In the liner notes, impresario **George Wein** wrote: “With this recording, this music of Louis Armstrong demonstrates how he created the language of jazz and influenced all the music that followed—from swing to bebop and even to rap, as demonstrated by Common. But there’s one thing for sure: This band and record demonstrate that there was nothing common about Louis Armstrong.”

The project emanated in 2018 by the **Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation** through the recommendation of **Jackie Harris**, executive director of LAEF, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the New York organization founded in 1969 by Louis and his wife Lucille “to give back to the world some of the goodness he received.” Harris says the recording was a team effort started by the Foundation and the wonderful musicians who appear on this recording.

“We wanted to make this recording of the major 20th century artist who instructs and intersects with artists of the 21st century,” says Harris. “All the musicians we asked to participate, even Wynton and Common, were honored to be a part of this. Each artist had a say on the music. We allowed all the musicians to put their own signatures on the songs.”

Harris notes that the 50th anniversary is a tad late, but other factors interceded, including the difficulty of recording during the pandemic and some artists living in different cities around the country and contributing in different studios.

Nicholas Payton, who arranged seven of the songs, plays emotive and thrilling trumpet with engaging solos throughout, including on his own arrangements such as the swinging, party-like rendering of “Strutting with Some Barbeque,” the lyrical, bluesy “A Kiss to Dream On,” and the playful “I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead,” with the devilish vocals by Gordon, drummer **Herlin Riley** and bassist **Reginald Veal**.

Payton takes the lead vocals on his modern arrangement of Fats Waller’s “Black and Blue,” a tune about racial consciousness and prejudice, that starts out wild and frantic before the bass and drums take it into an R&B-flavored groove. In the midst of the tune, **Common** delivers his rap poetry on the theme that includes lines such as, “Went through black and blue for the bright day,” and “My school of thought is black openness/To define and redefine what the culture is.”

Wycliffe comments: “Common added a different spin to the tune. It seemed like things we had talked about as a country had changed, but they didn’t, which is why this is important.” Harris adds: “We’re hoping Common will draw young people into Louis Armstrong. We’re out to make changes.”

Arrangements are also offered by Gordon on “Up a Lazy River” with his and Riley’s vocals; Veal’s “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” gospel hymn; pianist **Davell Crawford** diving into the blues by singing “Rockin’ Chair” by Hoagy Carmichael; and Riley’s percussion-spiced, festive take on “The Peanut Vendor,” where he sings with a gravelly voice and Marsalis joins in on the fun with an extended solo.

“Louis Armstrong’s singing, playing and his interpretations illuminate timeless human fundamentals,” Marsalis says. “His grace, eloquence, intelligence and naturalness are still showing us how to play and what playing means. Rightfully beloved across the world, he embodied what is best about America. In these trying times, his music and memory are the perfect inspiration for us to rise up and be the very best of ourselves as artists, citizens and as people.”

The band also features trumpeters **Ashlin Parker** and **Wendell Brunious**, tenor saxophonist **Roderick Paulin**, pianist **Courtney Bryan**, banjo player **Don Vappie**, vocalists **Niki Haris** and **Menia Chester**, and guitarist **Derwin “Big D” Perkins** in a special guest cameo on “Black and Blue.”

Pops himself stars in the bookends of the album. The CD version opens with a take on “When It’s Sleepy Time Down South” with Pops in his charismatic mode of trumpeting and singing with his sextet. It was recorded in 1964 in Sparks, Nevada and had been discovered on a tape in Louis’ personal collection a couple of years ago. It is now part of the Louis Armstrong House Museum. The album closes with a short, taped excerpt of him expounding in conversation on “Philosophy of Life.”

Wein weighs in on this compelling collection in his liners: “After listening to *A Gift to Pops* performed by The Wonderful World of Louis Armstrong All Stars and produced collectively by Wycliffe Gordon, Jackie Harris and Nicholas Payton, I am happy to advise the true Louis Armstrong fan that his music is alive and well with this fascinating group of New Orleans musicians.”

About the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation:

Founded by Louis and Lucille Armstrong in 1969, the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation funds organizations that support jazz musicians, educators, and students. Mr. Armstrong, iconic trumpeter and singer, is the foundation of jazz and of American musical virtuosity in the 20th Century. His earliest recordings taught musicians how to improvise and sing jazz, blues, the American Popular Song and all styles of American vernacular music. His discoveries gave listeners around the world a new way to experience music, and his way of “being natural” in public created another understanding of what it meant to be human. Pops, his nickname which was also the name he called everyone, was a man of the people and all walks of life were given a seat of welcome at his and Lucille’s table. In addition to his legendary artistry, he established this foundation to ensure that future generations would be taught to play and appreciate the art of jazz.

From 1943 to the end of his life, Mr. Armstrong was a resident of Corona, Queens, where he enjoyed traveling across the New York boroughs performing and listening to music.

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