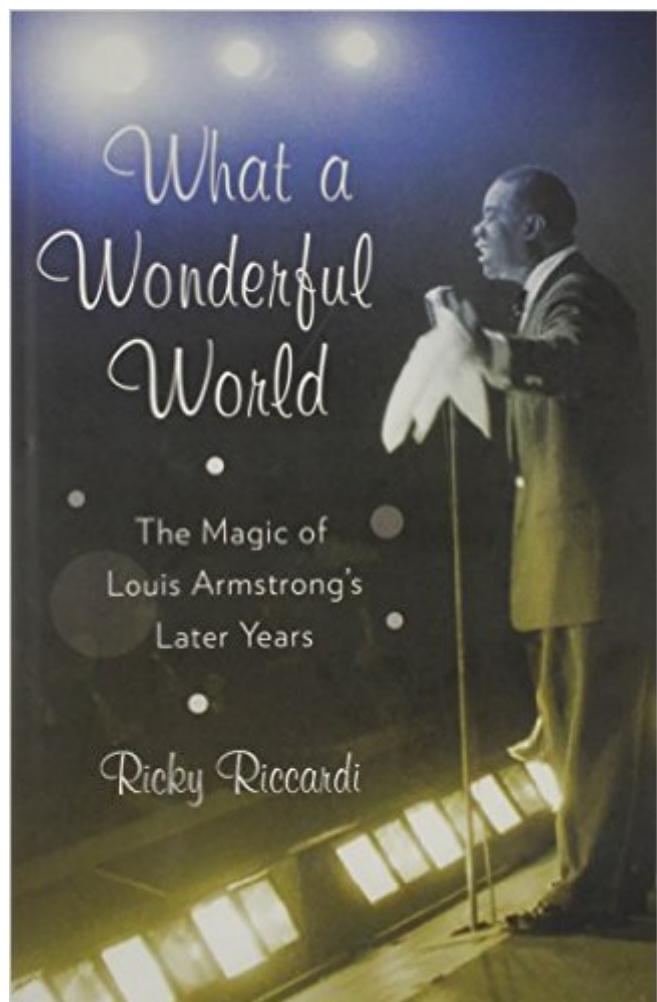


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What A Wonderful World: The Magic Of Louis Armstrong's Later Years



Synopsis

Prodigiously researched and richly detailed, this is a comprehensive account of the remarkable final twenty-five years of the life and art of one of America's greatest and most beloved musical icons. Much has been written about Louis Armstrong, but the majority of it focuses on the early and middle stages of his long career. Now, Ricky Riccardi, "jazz scholar and musician," takes an in-depth look at the years in which Armstrong was often dismissed as a buffoonish, if popular, entertainer, and shows us instead the inventiveness and depth of expression that his music evinced during this time. These are the years (from after World War II until his death in 1971) when Armstrong entertained crowds around the world and recorded his highest-charting hits, including "Mack the Knife" and "Hello, Dolly!"; years when he collaborated with, among others, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, and Dave Brubeck; when he recorded with strings and big bands, and, of course, with the All Stars, his primary recording ensemble for more than two decades. Riccardi makes clear that these were years in which Armstrong both burnished and enhanced his legacy as one of jazz's most influential figures. Eminently readable, informative, and insightful, here, finally, is a book that enlarges and completes our understanding of a peerless musical genius of commanding influence as both an instrumentalist and a vocalist.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While my personal opinion is that there could never be enough books on Louis Armstrong, by anyone's standards this is a supremely important addition to the body of attention focused on Pops.

If good art makes us see something new, and great art makes us see in a new way, this book is both good and great in bringing even the experienced reader and listener to a new relationship with the depth of Armstrong's art and humanity. If it is fair to judge a person by the standards of the times in which he lived, Pops was well ahead of the social curve of racial justice in America - much of the view of him as a Tom was made through a generational lens by younger musicians for whom he was a father figure who must be superseded. What he did behind the scenes in his own way is revealed in this book, and it should put to rest the notion that Pops was merely a genial entertainer, bowing and scraping before the White Establishment (what he really called Orval Faubus in 1957 - instead of "an uneducated plowboy" as the press rewrote his remarks - is instructive). Whatever your take on the music some call jazz, at some point in the middle of the last century it came to be acknowledged as an art form. That this made some of its greatest musicians begin to think of themselves differently was a natural development, and over time the message of the music came to mirror more and more the message of mid-twentieth century art in general - it showed the changes in the human spirit inflicted by one of humanity's most brutal centuries. A crisis in faith, an increase in alienation, a dessication of sincerity in the face of monstrous cynicism - all these elements may be found in the music of the generations who followed Pops.

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