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What a Wonderful World: The Magic of Louis Armstrong's Later Years

Ricky Riccardi

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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.

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