

LOUIS WISHES YOU A COOL YULE

Armstrong As Santa Claus, the title of a 1957 collection of Louis Armstrong's holiday music, couldn't be more apt when one considers the number of gifts Pops dispensed in his lifetime—and continues to deliver over 50 years after his death. Beloved around the world by kids of all ages just like Jolly Old St. Nick, Jolly Old St. Satchelmouth devoted his life to “the cause of happiness,” as he once put it, giving the gift of joy every time he put his trumpet to his lips or crooned with his gravel voice.

Armstrong did not hail from the mythical North Pole, of course, but rather the mystical streets of New Orleans. He did not have much time for Christmas, however; life necessitated that he drop out of school and go to work while still a young boy to help support his mother and sister. After becoming a star, Louis married Lucille Wilson in October of 1942 with the newlyweds spending their honeymoon on the road on a string of one-nighters. With the holidays approaching, Lucille bought a small Christmas tree and set it up in their hotel room. According to Lucille, Louis “just looked at it and looked at it and told me, ‘This is the first tree I’ve ever had.’” Louis refused to let Lucille take it down and insisted they take it with them on the rest of the tour. The Armstrongs would continue this tradition, Lucille later remarking that they continued setting up “a table tree and holiday fixings in whatever hotel in whatever country we happen to be in. There are always friends we’ve made from previous trips to help us have a really homey Christmas.”

Since his passing in 1971, Armstrong has become one of the most oft-played artists during the holiday season, his golden trumpet tone still able to cut

through the din of even the most bustling shopping mall. Nearly the entirety of his holiday output can be found here: six Decca singles from the 1950s; a pair of duets with two of his favorite vocal partners, Ella Fitzgerald and Velma Middleton; “What a Wonderful World,” which has become something of a yearlong hymn of hope; and one bonus gift in his touching reading of Samuel Clement Moore’s poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” also known as “The Night Before Christmas.”

The circumstances behind that last recording remain shrouded in mystery. Alone in his den and ailing, Armstrong read it twice on one of his reel-to-reel tapes on February 26, 1971. Why was he reading a Christmas poem two months after the holidays passed? Could he have been planning one final gift for his fans? For this release, one of Armstrong’s unedited readings is being issued for the first time, set to a dazzling new accompaniment by Sullivan Fortner, who demonstrates the history of modern jazz piano in his sensitive, yet groovy backing.

Santa Claus will never go out of style and neither will Louis Armstrong. Believe in Pops and his gift of joy will never stop giving.

- Ricky Riccardi

Ricky Riccardi is Director of Research Collections for the Louis Armstrong House Museum and author of two Armstrong biographies, Heart Full of Rhythm and What a Wonderful World. He has lectured on Armstrong at venues around the world and won a GRAMMY for Best Album Notes in 2022.

On A Visit From St. Nicholas:

Poem recorded by Louis Armstrong at his home on Feb. 26, 1971

Sullivan Fortner's piano accompaniment recorded May 17, 2022 at Sear Sound, NYC

Recording Engineer: Chris Allen

Mixing Engineer: Seth Foster

Special Thanks: Lisa Cohen, Jackie Harris, Jamie Krents, Wynton Marsalis, Chris Mees, Dawn Olejar, Joan Pattarozzi, Bruce Resnikoff, Ricky Riccardi, Dickon Stainer, Ashley Warren, Harry Weinger

Producer: Ken Druker

Production Assistance: Clay Mallory

A&R Management: Emerson Sudbury

A&R Administration: Femi Onafowokan

Marketing: Oliver Schrage

Production / Release Coordination: Tom Arndt

Art Direction & Design: Ryan Rogers

Mastering: Seth Foster at Universal Music Mastering Studios, NY

The tunes are:

COOL YULE

WINTER WONDERLAND

**I'VE GOT MY LOVE TO KEEP ME WARM
(FEATURING ELLA FITZGERALD)**

'ZAT YOU, SANTA CLAUS?

CHRISTMAS IN NEW ORLEANS

WHITE CHRISTMAS



CHRISTMAS NIGHT IN HARLEM

**BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE
(FEATURING VELMA MIDDLETON)**

MOMENTS TO REMEMBER

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

**A VISIT FROM ST. NICHOLAS
BY CLEMENT CLARKE MOORE**

**Read by Louis Armstrong with piano
accompaniment by Sullivan Fortner**

