

Lil Hardin Armstrong - Just for a Thrill

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 23 November 2013 19:58 - Last Updated Monday, 10 November 2014 21:42

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"Hot Miss Lil" Hardin was the most prominent woman in early jazz. She played piano, composed, and arranged for most of the important Hot Bands from New Orleans. The educated and polished Hardin was decidedly unimpressed with Armstrong's lack of sophistication, yet she recognized a wealth of untapped potential in the shy young trumpeter.

Just for a Thrill

She was born as Lillian Hardin on February 3, 1898 in Memphis, Tennessee, where she grew up in a household with her grandmother, Priscilla Martin, a former slave. During her early years, Hardin was taught hymns, spirituals, and Classics on the piano. She was drawn to popular music and later blues.



Lilian Hardin

Hardin first received piano instruction in Mrs. Hook's School of Music. *"I later learned that they*

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had taught me all the wrong things,"

Hardin recalled in 1971,

"but they meant well."

Her mother concerned that her daughter's passion for music would lead her to a sinful life, sent her to Fisk University in Nashville. Lil began taking classes in the fall of 1915; enrolling in a college preparatory program and took high school courses in English, science, Latin, and home economics in preparation for college courses.



Lilian Hardin

In 1917 Hardin and her mother moved to Chicago. A year later Lilian landed her first job as a piano player at the Jones Music Store on Chicago's South Side. One day while working at the music store Lilian met **Jelly Roll Morton**, a famous ragtime pianist whom some credit with inventing jazz.

"I don't know what he played--what pieces they were, but they were loud and the place was rockin' and the people were jumping up, keeping up with him, and I was jumping higher than anybody".



Jelly Roll Morton

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Her lucky break came when Lawrence Duhé and his New Orleans Creole Jazz Band came to Chicago looking for a piano player. Three weeks later, the band moved on to a better booking at the De Luxe Café. From there, the band moved up to the jewel of Chicago's night life, the Dreamland. Here the principal entertainers were Alberta Hunter and Ollie Powers, and there was no finer night spot in Chicago. When King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band replaced Duhé's group at the Dreamland, Oliver asked Hardin to stay with him.



King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band

His band was enjoying enormous success at the Dreamland when King Oliver sent for Louis Armstrong to join as second cornetist. Armstrong was beginning to make a name for himself in their hometown, New Orleans, and regarded "Papa Joe" as his mentor. Hardin was unimpressed with Louis. Over the course of the next few years, Hardin taught Louis how to read music, urged him to take the spotlight, and eventually became his second wife. Hardin and Louis were married on February 4, 1924.



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King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band

She collaborated with Louis on many 1920s recordings, and her compositions include *"Struttin' With Some Barbecue"*, *"Two Deuces"*, *"Doin' the Suzie-Q"*, *"Don't Jive Me"*, *"Clip Joint"*, *"Knee Drops"*, and *"Bad Boy"* (a hit by the Jive Bombers in 1957 featured in John Waters' 1990 film *"Cry-Baby"* with Johnny Depp). Ringo Starr recorded *"Bad Boy"*, too, in 1978.



Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five

But her most touching composition was **"Just For a Thrill"**, written after Louis had begun an affair with Alpha Smith. It was 1931, Lil and Louis had separated and Smith eventually threatened to sue Louis for breach of promise. The errant Armstrong beseeched Hardin not to grant him a divorce. She felt sorry for him but recalled Louis *"had two-timed me, so I gave him a divorce just to teach him a lesson—and I sued him, too."* And (with Don Raye) she wrote this song:

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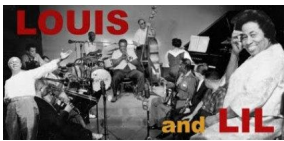
“Just for a thrill You changed the sunshine to rain Just for a thrill You filled my heart with pain”

In 1938 Lil Armstrong finally agreed to divorce Louis.



Don Raye

During the late 1930s, Lil was house pianist at Decca Records, recording twenty-six titles as a leader (mostly as a vocalist) during 1936-1940 and she seemed to lose her passion for music after her divorce. Lil spent the last decade of her life giving occasional performances and following her ex-husband's career. Louis Armstrong died on July 6, 1971, after suffering from heart and kidney problems. Lil Hardin Armstrong died just seven weeks later during a performance at a memorial concert for Louis in Chicago.



Louis and Lil

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"Just For a Thrill" became a major hit when revived by Ray Charles in 1959. Many jazz singers and instrumentalists also recorded this sultry love song: Peggy Lee, Lena Horn, Aretha Franklin, Cher, Patricia Barber, Mel Carter, Lou Donaldson and others.



Ray Charles - Just for a Thrill

Lil Hardin Armstrong helped introduce America to jazz music. She was a dedicated jazz pianist, who established a reputation as "Hot Miss Lil," one of the few female band ensemble members of the 1920's. She played on many of the first jazz recordings ever made and she wrote many of the early songs of the jazz era. Though she might be identified in the jazz world as the wife of Louis Armstrong, she was much more than that. A prolific songwriter, an energetic recording artist, and an exemplary entertainer, Lil Hardin Armstrong has been overlooked for decades.



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Just for a Thrill Lyrics

Just for a thrill You changed the sunshine to rain Just for a thrill You filled my heart with pain To me you were my pride and joy But to you, I was merely a toy A plaything, that you could toss around at will Just for a thrill You made my life one sad song Just for a thrill You just led me along Although you're free and havin' your fun To me you're still the only one Cause you made my heart stand still Just for a thrill Although you're free and havin' your fun To me you're still the only one Cause you made my heart stand still Well, it was just for a thrill And baby you, you, made my heart stand still Just for a thrill



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