

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

PODCAST

"I'VE SEEN THE WALL"

TRANSCRIPT EPISODE 1

"SETTING THE PACE"

PAOLA MALAVASSI AND JASON MORAN

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Louis Armstrong:

"I've seen the Wall . . . I ain't worried about the Wall, I worry about the audience imma play to tomorrow night . . . I can't say what I wanna say, but if you'll accept it, I'll say it: forget about all that other bullshit!"

Announcer:

"Louis Armstrong!" (Applause)

[Music playing] Louis Armstrong and his All Stars playing the first chords of "When It's Sleepy Down South" live at Friedrichstadt-Palast, East Berlin, 1965

Paola Malavassi:

1965, four years after the Berlin Wall was built, during the Vietnam War, and in the midst of the Cold War, the African American jazz legend Louis Armstrong toured through the GDR, playing seventeen concerts in only nine days.

Jason Moran:

We are Paola Malavassi and Jason Moran, curators of the exhibition *I've Seen the Wall: Louis Armstrong on Tour in the GDR in 1965*, and in this first episode of our four-part podcast accompanying the exhibition at DAS MINSK Kunsthaus in Potsdam near Berlin, we'll be talking about music and art, about politics and all of its entanglements.

To start off, what is DAS MINSK?

Paola Malavassi:

So, DAS MINSK houses artworks from the period after 1945 with a focus on art from the former GDR, which are all part of the Hasso Plattner collection.

We opened in 2022, September last year, in the former terrace restaurant Minsk in Potsdam, which was built in the 1970s in the former modernist style of the GDR and which was a place of encounter, a very prominent one. And now it is again, but more in the shape of an exhibition space, focusing on GDR art and history in dialog with contemporary art.

I am the founding director of DAS MINSK, and I proposed this exhibition project from the very beginning, three years ago, with the aim to do a show on Louis Armstrong's tour through the GDR, which was frankly rather spectacular and still is retrospectively.

Jason Moran:

It definitely is. And that's why we're here.

Paola Malavassi:

Exactly. You're here as co-curator, Jason, of the exhibition, but you're also a musician,

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and you got me in touch with the team of the Louis Armstrong House Museum and the newly opened Louis Armstrong Center in Corona, Queens, New York, for which you curated the first show *Here to Stay*. We worked together years ago in Berlin, producing a performance to *APEX* by Arthur Jafa and have since then been in dialog about music and art from as many perspectives as possible. I am looking at things from the standpoint of an art historian and maybe a jazz audience, you from the standpoint of an artist and a musician onstage, backstage.

I dare say we both love jazz music in general. I mean, you make it, I listen to it. And we wanted to open this topic to a contemporary discourse. So, to not only look at this tour and its events from a historical point of view, but from today, and in order to see how ambivalent the invitation was, where we're at now, and what all this can mean for the production and reception of art and music today.

For that, we imagined the stage curtain at a Friedrichstadt-Palast, because we don't know the color, because all images are black and white, and the film's black and white. We just imagined it and installed it at the entrance to our exhibition as an invitation to join us to go backstage, and have a closer look and listen closer to the events.

[Music playing] Louis Armstrong and his All Stars playing the first chords of "Hello Dolly" live at Friedrichstadt-Palast, East Berlin, 1965

Paola Malavassi:

Armstrong's tour was scheduled with seventeen concerts in just nine days, so mostly playing two shows per day, which is crazy—East Berlin, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Erfurt, and Schwerin—starting on March 20, 1965, in the old Berliner Friedrichstadt-Palast, and finishing on April 8 in Schwerin. In between, he gave other concerts in the Eastern Bloc and went once to West Berlin, too. People in the GDR queued for hours and 18,000 tickets were sold in just one day.

The visit and tour of Louis Armstrong was an absolutely outstanding event, and it was maybe equally ambivalent as it is outstanding.

And we're listening now, I think, to the press conference and this inaccurate translation.

Host of the press conference on March 19, 1965, in East Berlin:

"A warm welcome to the great artist to whom belongs all our veneration and admiration, and a warm welcome also to the man Louis Armstrong, to whom belongs all our respect."

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Journalist:

"Are you going to see the Wall when you're in East Berlin?"

Louis Armstrong:

"I've seen the Wall... I saw it, when I played concerts, you know? I saw the wall... I ain't worried about the Wall, I worry about the audience imma play to tomorrow night... I don't know about the Wall, I can't say what I wanna say, but if you'll accept it, I'll say it: forget about all that other bullshit!"

Translator:

(Laughs) "Well, his expression was rather strong, in the sense that he said, we should forget about everything else and think only about the music."

Host of the press conference:

"It is interesting, however, that the only political question of that kind came not from our side but from the Western society. We recognize that with great joy."

Paola Malavassi:

There's all this tension in the press conference in the airport in East Berlin, and a lot of translations are being made from English to German, from German to English, and from English to a slightly manipulated German from the GDR.

Jason Moran:

Yeah, yeah. It's also like translated in body language too, you know? The ease of Armstrong, who is now in his mid-sixties—he's a senior, and he has moved a lot through life. And so he's also coming into another new situation and is asked to give some language to the music that he makes, or the situation that he is not in control of, you know.

And I was thinking about the way you said "this ambivalent invitation"... and I watch it now today, that cultural institutions are often asked to propose a question to the artist to give an answer before society can. And it's unfair to the artist to be put in these situations to solve the ills. But what the work does is it begins to at least ask the question. And I think the artists in the show have definitely asked that question.

And early on in our research you wrote me, you said: "The press conference made me suffer, the concert I enjoyed. And I guess that says something about the power of music and the freedom reclaimed on the stage. The words versus the music."

Paola Malavassi:

Yes, and you wrote back very rapidly, and I am just trying to do a paraphrase, you quoted Thelonious Monk, who is, can I say an idol for you? A role model?

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Jason Moran:

– Yes. He is the reason.

Paola Malavassi:

– A reason for everything! And the quote was ...?

Jason Moran:

– The quote was ... He was asked a question by his arranger, Hall Overton, in 1959, about something about his music and technique in his music. And Monk said: "Well, rather than say it, can't I just play it?" He was really tired of the interview, and he just wanted to go play. And I thought, oh my goodness, I had never heard anyone say it that way, you know, because music unlocks another language, that is hard to pin down, you know, like when we look at the side of the hieroglyphics in Egypt, you know, like we're trying to pin down: what does the cat mean actually, you know? So, what does the sound mean? What do Monk's melodies mean? What does it mean to hear Louis Armstrong slur a note for so long, you know? What does it mean when, with his body language on the stage, that he points his trumpet up into the air, that he looks over his audience? There's something in all of that for us, to kind of try to ask. And that, you know, that excited me.

So these places he played, tell me about these places.

Paola Malavassi:

The halls, with a capacity of no less than 2,000 to 3,000 seats, were quickly sold out. Around 45,000 people experienced Louis Armstrong in the GDR. This raises a lot of questions. What does it mean to listen to jazz in postwar East Germany? And a document of the Stasi, the secret police in East Germany, calls to surveil the youth attending the Louis Armstrong concert in order to prevent any kind of rioting. There was no rioting whatsoever. This manifests, however, what kind of threat the GDR government saw in the concert at the same time.

And when we talk about words versus music, I mean, music is political and music can be a very powerful statement.

You know, when we talk about stage and a concert taking place, I mean, the musicians go back home, but also the audience goes back home.

Jason Moran:

That's right.

Paola Malavassi:

So, you just experienced an amazing concert, it was music from the West, and the system in the GDR was observing every book, every record, every film that you

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watched. And everything you listened to and so on could be very risky . . . So, I imagined all of these people returning back home and thought, it is almost sarcastic to offer one hour and fifty minutes of freedom to thousands of people that actually, in real life and the reality, and they turn back to reality after the concert, didn't have this freedom. I think it was a very ambivalent invitation.

Jason Moran:
HMM.

Paola Malavassi:
And nevertheless, you always said, it's still a moment of freedom onstage. And no matter where Armstrong went to, there was this moment onstage.

Jason Moran:
Right, that allows you a moment of, what you call that, where you're able to have . . . amnesia. Just, you know, like momentary amnesia. "Oh, I've forgotten my troubles." That's for Armstrong, too.
You know, in 1965, America, it's on fire. Neighborhoods are burning. Black people have long been tired of yelling. America is trying to figure out how they can find a new way to oppress Black folk but meanwhile, say that we're going to give them some freedom, you know, whether it's in the vote or as in now, you can sit in the lunch counter. Right? So the lie continued. How were they going to fabricate a new lie for the 1970s?

Well, it started in the 1960s, and Armstrong has already grown up and seen all this stuff. And he's tired of it. He often speaks out in the press about things he's seen happening, you know, the way the children in Arkansas were not allowed to go to this high school without armed guards in Little Rock, Arkansas. He talks about this, you know, with disdain.

He talks about his relationship to the movement, you know. That if he would go to the movement, if he would go to the marches, that they would hit him in his mouth, so that he wouldn't be able to play anymore.

His camp has been infiltrated by the FBI. They planted moles in his camp as he traveled through other countries in Africa. So, he knows that there's something really troubling about the situation once he steps off the stage. But onstage, he's able to reveal something, I think, that is not just for the audiences but is for him, too, and those that are in his band. They are very well aware of the situation that they will return to, once they get off the plane in New York. And I think that's what we hear. You know, like you wisely noted, that he wasn't really performing that song "Black and Blue," but he put it near the top of the concert once he got here.

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Paola Malavassi:
For the whole tour.

Jason Moran:
Yeah. You know, like he was ready with a new set list for the moment. So, that's where we were. And there's always this thing like, "Oh yeah, democracy will save you." You know what I mean? Like, ah, ah, no, it won't. It won't.
And I don't know what wisdom I'll have as I would approach sixty-five, but hearing both Martin Luther King and Louis Armstrong enter this geography around that time, starts to give us a sense of what they thought about it, not only for themselves, but for communities worldwide. And that's important to note.

In 1958, Louis Armstrong was at the Newport Jazz Festival in Rhode Island, and he played, at 2:30 in the morning, he played "The Star-Spangled Banner," the American national anthem.

[Music playing] Louis Armstrong playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" live at Newport Jazz Festival, 1958

Jason Moran:
He sunk the song deep into the night, free of ceremony. You know, usually we played this song at the beginning of a day at school, you know, or you play this song at the beginning of a football match or baseball game. Right? Somebody sings the national anthem, as this ceremony.
But he sunk it into the night after everybody's been drinking all day, and they're drunk with music, too. And he plays this song, and our great novelist and thinker, James Baldwin, was sitting in the audience, and he leans over to someone and says: "This is the first time I've heard that song and liked it."

Paola Malavassi:
Hmm.

Jason Moran:
And I think he's not only responded to the way Armstrong is performing it, but it's also the context that Armstrong is performing it in. And that is also key to trying to understand this tour, too. It's in 1965. This is like a very kind of watershed moment for the modern culture period; and trying to understand where we are going to move forward toward. And he is being used as a person who's going to bring a possible answer.

Paola Malavassi:
Hmm... and bring freedom, maybe. It is a moment of freedom.

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Jason Moran:

Yeah. It is a moment of freedom. And even if the freedom sounds old-fashioned, you know, meaning he's not necessarily playing new music, you know? I mean, he has a hit song, you know, around that time with "Hello, Dolly." But we couldn't say that that was a new style of song. I mean, literally, John Coltrane is playing "A Love Supreme," you know, Motown music from Detroit has exploded, and the beat has totally changed. And so he's still representing a kind of older idea. But there's something about what Louis puts in his music that never quite dates itself. And so it inherently has that particle in it, that always can unlock me at least, as a listener, you know?

Paola Malavassi:

During Armstrong's tour, or at least at Friedrichstadt-Palast, it's a long concert, two hours almost, and a lot of soli are being played . . . every musician has a solo in this concert. And the classic "Without a Song" is performed without its lyrics. They read:

"Without a song, the day would never end.
Without a song, the road would never bend.
When things go wrong, a man ain't got a friend
without a song . . ."

[Music playing] Louis Armstrong and his All Stars playing "Without a Song" live at Friedrichstadt-Palast, East Berlin, 1965

The trombonist (Tyree Glenn) playing this song, "Without a Song," uses a mute, and with this effect that the mute produces, you have the feeling that you're listening to a voice, that actually comes really close to the voice of Armstrong, even. You have the feeling that you're listening to a human voice.

Jason Moran:

Yeah, that's true. The trombone can do that. It has that ability to sound, you know, like a tenor voice. And with the plunger mute, it changes color. It's almost like the voice puts on a mask.

You know, the trombone puts on a mask in a way, and it unlocks another color. For brass players, it's very normal to have a collection of mutes, you know. I mean, it's such a funny phrase—in the music world is very normal. But when you bring it outside the music world: a collection of mutes . . . It's a very different kind of phrase.

And I think that's also what we're trying to do, too, is pull back some of maybe the phraseology that we use so frequently in music to discuss Armstrong and his band, but to really, like, set him inside a space that allows, well, for more of the ideas to ooze

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into one another because they need that kind of dissection as well, you know.

Paola Malavassi:

The title of the exhibition *I've Seen the Wall*, which we've heard Armstrong say in the press conference, implies that he's well aware of the political conundrum he finds himself in, when being asked about the Wall by a West German journalist whilst touring through East Germany, but he moves on rapidly. He says he's focused on the audience. "I'm worried about my audience," he says. "I'm worried about the music I'm going to play tomorrow to my audience." It's about the music. And he also says that he plays for everyone. However, it's documented that Louis Armstrong and his All Stars faced blatant racism while touring. I mean, not only in East Germany and West Germany and I mean out in the world, again and again.

Against the backdrop of the civil rights movement in the United States and the Iron Curtain in Europe: What does it mean to visit oppressive systems and dictatorships in the name of freedom? What does it mean to repeatedly experience recognition and racism at the same time on the road, and to return home to be confronted with love and racism all over again?

Jason Moran:

You know, you brought in Adrian Piper's *My Calling (Card)* #3. Adrian Piper is such a dear artist and mentor, and she really changed my entire life. I can say that affectively and truthfully. But tell us about the "calling card."

Paola Malavassi:

Oh, well, I picked up one of those in an exhibition in Berlin years ago, and it reads: "Do not touch, tap, pat, stroke, prod, pinch, poke, grope or grab me."

Jason Moran:

Hmm.

Paola Malavassi:

We also thought a lot about the experience on the road as a musician.

Jason Moran:

And also for Jewel Brown, the lone female in Armstrong's band, who was very young by that point, maybe she was twenty-four or twenty-five years old in this band. And she talked, in our interview, about what it felt like to be in the company, you know, of not only a band of men, but also the way men would react to her over here. She talked about the way that not it was worrisome to her, there was something that she had to be mindful of. And I felt like Jewel Brown needed this "Calling Card" to hand out to a

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lot of people. "Do not touch," you know, "my hair is not for poking," you know, "my body is not for groping" and also for Louis Armstrong's wife, Lucille Armstrong, that they really were receiving a different kind of glare as they traveled.

I mean, James Baldwin talks about this in "Stranger in a Village." You know, this sense . . . and when we talk about the traveling African American band of that era and for the decades before that, they're really, you know, coming to big towns and small towns, small villages across Europe and still to this day, as a traveling musician, there are moments where, you know, people could use a Piper "calling card" more frequently than maybe is acknowledged.

I think for an artist and especially a musician, we're often trying to find: How do we make impact? Some of us might think that just playing the song is enough, or the presence is enough. You know, Adrian Piper asked this question to her own self at some point during the sixties and seventies. Well, considering what's happening in the world, maybe I should switch something, you know? And for me, one of the things I learned from her, was the notion of intention around it, to not just leave it up in the air, but actually point it. And her work impacted me that way, because she was able to point directly into my chest through her works.

And I feel like Armstrong is able to do that to a degree. He was often noted and maybe maligned by younger student activists for not being vocal enough, right? But over time, all of those activists or many of those activists like Amiri Baraka, Archie Shepp, they all came back around to say, well, actually, Louis was most profound in his activism, because, as Lester Bowie, the great trumpeter said: "You know, the activist isn't the one always out there yelling on the street."

He said there's another way that people get in the room to spark change. And I felt that Armstrong does this, that he finds his way inside rooms, that the person on the street doesn't. And they do need each other as a community of activists to spark a kind of change, possible change.

For me, I felt like one of the great moments he has near the very end of his life, is that he makes this song in the sixties "What a Wonderful World," and people know it to this day, people can probably hear it in their head right now, right? But the last record he makes, he does a remix of that song. He addresses the students, the student protesters, and says, you know, the war, right? He says, okay, well, I know you all are thinking like "Pops, you know, this world is not really that wonderful," right? You know, and he's like, "I hear you. I hear you." And he says, "but man, if we just had love, you know?" He tries to turn it there.

And I think not every activist needs to try to choose love, right? Malcolm X did not choose love. He was like, nah man, we're gon' fight. It needs blood, right? But we do

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need people to share different versions of ... MLK was nonviolence, right? You know, Fannie Lou Hamer was as well. ... What are people's versions of where they see their activism lies? And as a community, it needs all that nuance in between, because no one has necessarily the golden ticket.

Paola Malavassi:

I remember you playing "What a Wonderful World" during the pandemic live online, and you never played the "World."

Jason Moran:

I never played "What a Wonderful World."

Paola Malavassi:

You kept going over this "And I think to myself ...," over this sentence, again and again.

Jason Moran:

Because he has to say that phrase when he sings it. "And I think to myself ...," and he has to pause ... and you know, like, I think all of us, all of us know we're going to do some fucked up shit, we might not be talking about. And then when you think to yourself, like, am I making this up? Or is it possible for me to seek the silver lining, and where does my energy need to go for me to get through, you know? And it's always touching to think of Armstrong in that way. We have to give him that room as an artist, that he's not simply just performing this, but that he has nuance in his emotion, too.

And so by the sixties, like I say, he's sixty something, you know, the ideas that he still has in his performances, some of those things have kind of gone out of style as performance modes, you know? Wearing a tuxedo ... it's not necessarily in style, you know.

But the other group that was also wearing a tuxedo during that time was John Coltrane. So, there's something that people are locking on to, that I feel represents classic material. And Armstrong is devoted to the classic, and love is a classic. Hate is easy to peddle, you know. Division is easy to peddle. Somehow, he keeps trying to work his way toward that.

And at the end, his last record, he centers on it by singing these gospel hymns and Negro spirituals, and "What a Wonderful World" as like a funky remix.

[Music playing] Louis Armstrong 1970s version of "What a Wonderful World" playing: "Some of you young folks have been saying to me 'Hey Pops, what do you mean 'What a Wonderful World'? How about all them wars all over the place? You call them wonderful? And how about hunger and pollution? They ain't so wonderful, either. How about listening to old Pops for a minute? It seems to me, it ain't the world that's so bad.'"

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And one of the artists we brought in was a great saxophonist and artist, Peter Brötzmann, and he spoke on the topic of freedom. He says, quote: "We are old enough to know that the term freedom can be twisted in any direction. Most people understand freedom to mean doing what they want, not letting anyone or anything tell them what to do. But in music, that has always been a misconception. Freedom is something very individual. It existed for Louis Armstrong, just as it did for Don Cherry, only as an inner attitude, not as a program."

And Brötzmann, a German musician, multidisciplinary artist, who was very much influenced by Armstrong in his youth ... he loved Louis Armstrong, he loved Sidney Bouchet, both from New Orleans, and he came from Fluxus, assisted Nam June Paik, and was one of the most notorious, and let's say, bold saxophonists until his very recent death, rest his beautiful soul. And I think, he very well reflects the multidisciplinary approach of this show.

Paola Malavassi:

Our visitors might think, ah, ok, Jason Moran brought the African American artist in and Paola Malavassi brought the German positions in. It was not like that. So, Jason Moran brought Peter Brötzmann in, Pina Bausch, I proposed Adrian Piper's "Calling Card."

Jason Moran:

That's right. Yeah, you proposed Glenn Ligon.

Paola Malavassi:

I proposed your friends.

Jason Moran:

Also, the exchange that Armstrong is also trying to accomplish, whether or not he ever says it ... But he knows that the exchange is not with him in this Wall. The exchange is with the people. And when an audience lets down their wall, then they can receive the sound.

Armstrong grows up in New Orleans, in a very segregated New Orleans. A New Orleans he left happily, and rarely returned to, to perform, because of their segregation laws. And he had an integrated band.

But what makes Armstrong the first pop star is that he's able to puncture the fourth wall, between the artist and the audience. He's able to break through and touch them with just the music, and people began to crave that feeling. And as he brought that sound around the world, they wanted to be in front of that feeling. And so when you talk about all these people buying all these tickets in the first three hours, it's

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incredible. That's how satiating the experience can be, even for an elderly artist. You know, I keep bringing that up because it's important to note that he's not twenty-two. When we think about pop artists now, their youth is the crave, you know. But he is deep into his years and there's still a clamor for him.

Paola Malavassi:

We take an historical event as a departure point, but it is an art exhibition with a multidisciplinary approach and, aside from Peter Brötzmann and Pina Bausch, and we have also photography by Evelyn Richter, Gordon Parks, Glenn Ligon's neon installation *Untitled (Bruise/Blues)* . . .

We have also one of Armstrong's original trumpets, and his own collages that he did, and Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt's typewritings *Someday We Shall Overcome (Hommage à Martin Luther King)* or *Blue Blues* from the 1970s.

Jason Moran:

It's a beautiful band, you know? I often would visit exhibitions and kind of make a mythology around the relationships the artists have to one another, not necessarily to me, but just to one another. And, thinking about the ways that Pina Bausch centered a pivotal part of her choreography around Louis Armstrong's "West End Blues," which is a pivotal part of music history . . . they found each other, right? And that's essential. It's kind of like a dream band, you know.

Paola Malavassi:

It is.

Jason Moran:

And so we're also constructing a way for the work to have a kind of counterpoint in the same way Armstrong's music does as well. So the way that Gordon Parks spent time with Armstrong, photographing him, and also creating his own scenes based on, you know, things he's read, this is part of this mythology, too. And people like Rosemarie Trockel . . . I think the first exhibition I saw of hers in New York was at the New Museum, and somehow she found counterpoint with other works that were not her own. And that, to me, was like so rare to see an artist figure that out. And I was moved by it, you know, by her ability to find the other bandmates, you know?

Paola Malavassi:

Yes. Rosemarie Trockel is in the exhibition with a record player, a vinyl record player. But it's made out of a cooking . . . how do you call it, a cooking plate? Yeah, a heating plate.

Jason Moran:

A hot plate.

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Paola Malavassi:

A hot plate, and a needle to do crochet.

Jason Moran:

Yeah, it's so interesting.

Paola Malavassi:

And a mute by Terry Adkins and mouthpieces by Lorna Simpson . . . I mean, this is all very connected to the situation in which Armstrong was during the tour and in between press conference and concert. Like, I always think, he was between the "mouthpiece," you know, making the sound and the "mute," just manipulating it . . . and then we have a lot of works, where you have the feeling there is potential sound crossing walls, or you talk about "perforating the walls."

Jason Moran:

Perforating the wall, yeah.

Paola Malavassi:

And it's not the one wall. There are a lot of walls in this world.

Jason Moran:

That's right. That's right.

Paola Malavassi:

I don't know why anyone else hasn't done it already, the show about Louis Armstrong in the GDR.

Jason Moran:

Well, Paola, that's all you! And you have that beautiful space, in Potsdam, that can ask these kinds of questions. Oftentimes, as a musician, when you get a song you can decide to play it many ways. And it's up to you to decide which way you're going to attack the piece. And especially when it comes to the solo. The solo is like, oh, I can now depart even further. And given your position at the museum and given my position at the museum in New York, at the Louis Armstrong House Museum and Center, that we find a way to make a new song by knowing each other all these years, and to ask questions that maybe even the Center in Corona, Queens, cannot ask, but then, how do you play this song? That means that you have to make it. And the only way is to actually do it.

So when you first proposed it, I thought: "She's out of her mind!" But I also thought, that's so brilliant because I would have never imagined that. That stages, and spaces, and gallery spaces have to be filled, and they have to come up with something that

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Marsalis ... I don't say Wynt'n, I say Wynton Marsalis [pronounced]. I keep it formal, because of how much respect I have for what they represent in the music. So Louis [pronounces the s] Armstrong. To me, Louis is always the way.

Sometimes, when I'm walking around in the streets in New York, and I'm wearing my Louis Armstrong shirt and somebody walks by and says "Loui(s)!" [laughter], I think, oh that's right, people refer to him as Loui(s). I keep forgetting. So every time I hear Loui(s), I am also reminded that that's also part of his beauty, that he's allowed to fit in the mouths of different people, all kinds of ways. People call him Pops, people call him Satchmo, people call him Louis or Loui(s), you know? So he feels like he's part of you in the way you speak his name.

Paola Malavassi:

We're also showing a typewriting by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt from the seventies, with this very famous sentence, coming from a gospel, right?

Jason Moran:

Mm hmm.

Paola Malavassi:

"Someday we shall overcome."

Jason Moran:

Mm hmm.

Paola Malavassi:

And she repeats that over the piece of paper, many, many times, like a mantra. But I ask myself, when will "someday" come?

Jason Moran:

Right.

Paola Malavassi:

When will it come, "someday"?

Jason Moran:

I often think about the way Ruth types, as its own sound recording ... it's almost worth a performance.

Paola Malavassi:

Oh, she types like a pianist.

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Jason Moran:

Yeah, I can feel it when you press the space bar, you know? And what MLK, Martin Luther King, says in his dedication to the Berlin Jazz Festival around one year earlier in 1964 ...

Paola Malavassi:

The very first one in 1964, it was the very first issue of this festival that still lives today.

Jason Moran:

Yeah. The last part of the quote for this text that he writes:

"Much of the power of our freedom movement in the United States has come from this music. It has strengthened us with its sweet rhythms, when courage began to fail. It has calmed us with its rich harmonies, when spirits were down. And now, Jazz is exported to the world. For in the particular struggle of the Negro in America there is something akin to the universal struggle of modern man. Everybody has the Blues."

Glenn Ligon, too.

[MLK quote continues] "Everybody longs for meaning, everybody needs to love and be loved, everybody needs to clap hands and be happy. Everybody longs for faith and in music, especially this broad category called jazz, there's a step pingstone towards all of these."

Powerful.

Paola Malavassi:

Those words are as powerful as music.

Jason Moran:

Oh yes.

Yeah, reading an MLK text is also a sound piece, because he was an incredible orator. You know, the way he'd summon an audience, it wasn't simply because of the words, it was in the delivery, too. It's in his tone, it's in his pause, it's in the rise of his voice to a crescendo. He's a musician, and he's married to the musician Coretta Scott King. She's a vocalist, a classical vocalist. They met in Boston. She went to New England Conservatory, and he was at Boston University. And so they met there. So, he's married to someone who understands the power of the music to manipulate a room, so that he's given the space, not long before he's assassinated, to say and give honor to the music that has found another home, here in Berlin and in Germany, is really powerful.

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

Paola Malavassi:

Yes, I personally love the sentence: "Everybody has the blues."

The questions that we are dealing within the exhibition. They're all contemporary questions about political statements, activism, which way we all participate in society and which different ways there are to raise awareness of the situations we're in. A lot of things had not changed a bit.

And the work by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt *Someday We Shall Overcome*, when we presented it in our show, I had the feeling, okay, this was made in the seventies, but we haven't moved a bit. Someday? I don't know. Why not today?

And we are also showing at DAS MINSK an original trumpet of Louis Armstrong, that we kindly could loan from Corona, Queens, from the Louis Armstrong House Museum. And we're showing it together with a work from our collection, by Andy Warhol, *Mona Lisa Four Times*. I mean, you said before Armstrong and the *Mona Lisa* this is just like the same, but the connection ...

Jason Moran:

Yeah, what's that quote that you had? So good.

Paola Malavassi:

Well, the quote is, Armstrong famously said something like: "A lot of cats copy the Mona Lisa, but people still queue in a line to see the original."

Jason Moran:

So good, so good.

Paola Malavassi:

It's a question of original and copy and, maybe, about live music and recording as a medium that reproduces the music. And so we have our listening room in the same space, with records.

I've Seen the Wall: Louis Armstrong on Tour in the GDR in 1965 is on until February 4, 2024. If you're in Potsdam or Berlin, come see the exhibition. We'd like to thank the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Corona, Queens, New York. And we'd also like to thank the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation.

[Music playing] Louis Armstrong and his All Stars playing "Black and Blue" live at Friedrichstadt-Palast, East Berlin, 1965: "How would it end? Ain't got a friend. My only sin is in my skin. What did I do to be so black and blue?"