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KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

**PODCAST
"I'VE SEEN THE WALL"**

**TRANSCRIPT EPISODE 2
"WAYS BACK HOME"**

**Paola Malavassi and Jason Moran in conversation with Regina
Bain**

**Recorded at the Louis Armstrong Center in Corona, Queens,
New York, in November 2023**

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[Music playing] Jason Moran: "Body and Soul with intimate Friends (Shadow)"

Paola Malavassi:

Hi all, this is our second podcast accompanying the show *I've Seen the Wall: Louis Armstrong on Tour in the GDR in 1965*, we are Jason Moran and Paola Malavassi, curators of the exhibition.

Jason Moran:

And just as a quick preface during our first episode, we kept talking about all these wonderful songs and that you actually want to listen to them in full length and with the time and space they deserve, and they take up. So, we decided to create a playlist with all of the songs and all the artists mentioned, and you can find that online by searching: "I've seen the Wall. Louis Armstrong. The Podcast."

Paola Malavassi:

Please also take a look at our show notes, where you can find selected articles by the authors and activists we talked about and further links about the artists in the exhibition. We'll be updating both lists after each new episode, so they'll be growing.

Thanks, everybody for tuning in. This is our second episode after "Setting the Pace". This episode is about "Ways Back Home". We will be talking about the ways home after and while being on the road as a touring musician.

Jason Moran:

And now we welcome Regina Bain, executive director of the Louis Armstrong House Museum and Center. Thank you for being here.

Regina Bain:

Thank you for having me.

Jason Moran:

And thank you for Regina for welcoming us to Queens, too.

Regina Bain:

Welcome the Queens. Welcome to the house that Louis and Lucille built.

Paola Malavassi:

Yes. We're sitting here in the brand-new Louis Armstrong Center in Corona, Queens, New York, in the jazz room. Right? This beautiful red room for performances. And this year, Regina, you opened this new 14,000 square feet Armstrong Center, is that right?

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Regina Bain:
Yes.

Paola Malavassi:

Housing this multimedia exhibit curated by you, Jason, this performance space for 75 people and the 60,000-piece-Armstrong-Archives, the largest archives of any jazz musician and one of the largest of any Black musician. Wow! If we had an audience, I would just do it your style, Jason, and ask for applause for Regina.

(clapping hands)

Paola Malavassi:

You and your team are in charge of the new center and the house here across the street in which Lucille and Louis Armstrong used to live. Tell us how it went, your road to this center, what we can already see right now and what we can expect in the future here.

Regina Bain:

Yes. So the baton was passed to me from a lineage of ancestors, some who are with us, some who are not, who had a dream about this space that we are in right now. And, of course, the core of that dream was Louis and Lucille. They lived on this block, on this street, on 107 Street in Corona, Queens.

Lucille bought the home and for a Black woman in the 1940's, to buy a home is a miracle, and a miracle that was powered by will as well as God. And so, she made that happen. She brought Louis into that home, and they made a life for 30 years. And then we made a museum for 30 years.

But in that 30 years, there was a dream that there wanted to be more space for this huge legacy. His legacy is so huge. We need a little more space than the house to really see it bloom full. And so there was this dream for this space. And across the street from the historic house, the land was helped to be purchased by the Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation.

Regina Bain:

And in 1999 the Queens College had an article in their newsletter that said "The land has been purchased and on it will be built, this space." Well, that was 1999. It took 24 years and 24 years of persistence from individuals in the community to make this happen. \$26 million later. But now we're here and we get to have a year of play. We get to have a year of doing whatever we think we need to in this space. And so, I'm very excited and very thankful to the people who came before me.

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Paola Malavassi:
Wow. Congratulations.

Regina Bain:
Thank you.

Paola Malavassi:
Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? I read in our script: artist, educator and executive director of the Louis Armstrong House Museum.

Regina Bain:
Yes.

Paola Malavassi:
Artist? I didn't know that.

Regina Bain:
Artist. Educator. Executive director. So let's go back to the beginning. My grandmother, Wilhelmina, my mother, Francina. Born in Florida, went to school at the Yale School of Drama for undergrad and grad, studied African-American studies and theater, and then went to the Yale School of Drama for acting. And it was seven years straight. It was challenging. Started acting professionally. And then volunteered for an organization. And then college access and leadership. And my family have always been educators. My mother was a high school P.E. teacher who became a principal. My grandmother was the first to be a teacher in our family. She had many kids, very young, and she knew that teaching was a way to make things possible. And so, education and arts have always been my family. So, for me, when it was time to think about what I wanted to do next from my previous role, I thought, I want to do something that brings art and education together. And so, I put that out to my community. I said, „This is what I want. Help me out!“ And a person in my community came back and said, „I think there's something that might be for you here at the Louis Armstrong House Museum.“ So I came, I did the tour. The tour was given to me by an amazing fellow at that time, and I started to dream into this space. So I'm thankful that I've had family who allowed me to dream into being and to take an artist's roots. And I've had friends who supported me in bringing that artist's roots and those artist's skills to what it means to lead an organization.

Jason Moran:
And also, that means, you know, what it means to step onto the stage, that terror and joy.

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Regina Bain:

Yes. Goodness. And so I like to I think part of my role is about creating space, is creating space for people to do their work, creating space for my team, my incredible team, to do their work with the literal space, the financial resources that they need for the artists who come in here, space to be vulnerable, to learn, to fail, to try again and to be adventurous, space, creating the right type of soul space for all of that. I think that's my role in this. In this role, but in life is to help people create space, whether I'm on stage or not. That's what performance is to me.

Jason Moran:

Right.

Paola Malavassi:

You're doing a lot of dialogs and conversations between the legacy of Louis Armstrong and a younger generation. Well, for example, with „Armstrong Now“, which is curated by Jake Goldbas. I have the feeling, you're opening up the house for a younger generation to touch this precious legacy. For that, you have to also open up and let them do and and give them the space to move in the room. I mean, they're doing performances in the middle of the house, right? That openness of mind, of bringing people in, and also giving them the opportunity to deal with it and really touch the material, work with it, it's fascinating because that keeps an archive alive.

Regina Bain

Most definitely. So this 60,000 piece archive is a treasure. Someone said this before: „Like any jewelry, it needs to be seen in order to be appreciated“. And so the archives can't be hidden. They can't stay hidden. As many people as possible need to interact, touch it, help it to flourish. And the idea for „Armstrong Now“ came before me. It came with an executive director before me. So giving homage to those dreams, and we've been able to bring that idea to light. And so, it is about contemporary artists who do research in the archives and create new works. It's how that picture, that song, that audio that's in our archives, sparks against their own body, their own artistic practice. And then they create anew. And part of what we have to do, is respond to what the artist brings to us, because they're all going to bring something different. And that's what we're learning in this space, how to be present to both the legacy and to the people who are interacting with the legacy and letting them be what they are.

Jason Moran:

I mean, I think especially with also an artists like Lucille and Louis, that they're kind of like making a kind of love that leaves a legacy to be investigated, too. And so, people's relationship with who they think Louis is and then how it changes drastically once they visit the house, once they visit the archive, once they start to unearth the things that have not been sold to them by what the public thought about what Louis

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Armstrong was, and more of what he and Lucille think about themselves as private people. And these are artists, you know, like also Esperanza Spalding then being in here, is important for it.

And also it must be stated that not many historical homes nor historical archives invite that kind of play with the archive. They're very hands off. You can come fond over it, but you cannot touch it. And you all have made a very, very different approach to preservation, which is you interact with the preservation, not that you stand up and leave it in the glass case.

It is something to be manipulated. It is something to be understood, and also be humbled by and then inspired, and then hopefully, I'm hoping also that these artists that walk in, and I know that I'm a recipient of this energy, is that it makes you assess your own archive, your own future, your own past.

Regina Bain:

That's what we've been asking every artist, we started to do that, is "Where are your archives?" And sometimes I've gotten very detailed responses. They are here with this institution, that this is the process. Sometimes I've gotten "I'm not Armstrong." And the intimation is, I am not worthy of that type of keeping, of that type of study. And our hope is, that more artists feel themselves worthy. More people feel themselves worthy of keeping things that are a testament to their life in their work. And there are different ways to do that. We had publishers who came and said, we don't want to give our artifacts to an institution. We want to think about other ways to archive. So that's all part of the exploration.

Paola Malavassi:

Why do you both think there was this urge to archive everything? Because it's amazing what Louis Armstrong archived: his voice, his collages, letters, I don't know, photographs, everything. Why?

Regina Bain:

One, I think he was a technology person, he just liked to see what technology could do. So that the miracle of a recorder at that time to be on the forefront of the technology of what it could do. I think that was fascinating to him and his mind. So just recording for the miracle that you can through technology, I think was part of it. And this is all conjecture. I don't know. This is me thinking, but just based on what I do know of him. I think part of it is also what it meant to be a black man in America and have your story told not by you and to have the resources to tell your own and to put those stories down in the voice that you want to put them down.

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Whenever I read Louis Armstrong, it makes me think of Zora Neale Hurston and the language that she used in both her book and her anthropology, and how she made that what it was and said, "This is beautiful." And I feel like Louis Armstrong does the same thing, with his writing, with his recording: "This is who I am and it is beautiful. And I can do that because I have this amazing miracle technology and because I want to state who I am as a Black person for now and forevermore."

Jason Moran:

I always like to point to their library. Their library is full of like autobiographies. For Black folks, literacy is Herculean and it still is to this day. So, Armstrong addresses this barrier of literacy and decides to write it down using all his slang that he uses to say it his way, so that you can almost, when you read it, hear him say it. You know, that's Zora Neale Hurston, right? Like the language finds its way onto the page and then you as the reader then have to say, like, what does he mean by "s'all"? Like you have to ask yourself, what are these sounds that he's trying to make? And then those are the sounds that he does with the microphone and the trumpet, you know, or that he does when he's scatting, as he's telling you this part of the story. So, he leaves this I mean, it's not breadcrumbs, it's gold bricks.

Regina Bain:

It's yams and potatoes.

(Laughing)

Jason Moran:

So I see that. It becomes that thing that also gives us this moment, that we can actually have this conversation about him, because he left all this for us.

Paola Malavassi:

And I wonder, you were saying this before, Jason, engaging and touching also the legacy, of course, shifts the image of an artist. I know it from the point of an art historian. When you dive deep really into the biography and into the documentation and archive of somebody, the image certainly shifts, for good, for bad, whatever, it shifts.

I was wondering, what was your first contact with Armstrong's music? Can you remember? Most people say, I was a child and it was at home. I would tell that story too, in Costa Rica, listening to a CD that my father had. And a lot of people tell me that, you know, Chrissie Iles, the curator from the Whitney Museum, was telling me "Armstrong is the soundtrack of my whole childhood and youth because my parents had it on all the time at home." So, people are also connecting it with their own homes. When we're talking about homes. But what changed for you? What was the first

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contact and what changed after working here and getting so close, so near to him?

Regina Bain:

For me, Armstrong was kind of like Aretha Franklin. I don't remember the first time I heard Aretha Franklin. She was just always there. There are artists like that, that are just always there for my cultural upbringing. And so, I don't remember the first time. But when people said the Louis Armstrong House Museum, I knew who that was. I didn't have to ask questions about who that was. So I don't know how he entered into my either cultural or musical sphere, but he was just there, and then when the time came to potentially lead this institution, for me, it was about doing that scholarly research to dig in more and being fascinated by what I found and by the context that he was living in, that made what he did, for me, even more special.

To think about the turn of the century, to think about slavery to reconstruction to segregation, that he's living through, and making music through, and making genius through, and becoming an icon through. What does that mean? And as a person who loves history and African-American history and performance and music, that was fascinating to me. And so I became enamored with thinking about that.

Paola Malavassi:

I remember this performance in the kitchen of the Louis Armstrong House with spoken words, talking about cooking in that kitchen, I don't recall every detail, but I had there the feeling that the artists really engaged with what it means to be at home and to be in a house in the daily private life. How do you imagine that life here in the house across the street?

Regina Bain:

I was really thankful to all the "Armstrong Now" artists who, during the pandemic performed in this space and you talked before about what museums normally do and how we decided to do something a little bit different, still preserving, but it's a home in homage to a musician. You have to have music in the house. She was a dancer. You have to have dance in the house. And you can still protect and preserve while sharing. And this particular way of sharing through performance, we have to do. And there were artists who took on the mantle of both caring for and sharing the space. And so, I'm so thankful to all of those artists, including the filmmaker and everyone, for caring for and sharing this space.

I think part of caring for is really delving into the story and wanting to think about what it meant to come off of the road as a traveling musician and have a space to be comfortable, that is yours, that is private, where if there are things that you didn't feel that you could say out on the road to the public in front of the camera, you can say it in into your own camera, your own audio device that you have at your kitchen table

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with your folk.

And I think that what the artists were exploring is, in their own lives, there are plenty of things they might want to say that they may or may not feel comfortable saying. And how did they navigate that with their artistry? How did they come home? What are they coming home to? How are they trying to create a home in the midst of trying to create work? And what is that strife? There were artists who were exploring sensuality and artistry and eating (laughs). The basics of life and and putting it all into into the space. I love that. I think that's what Louis would have loved. Lewis and Lucille would have loved. And so that's what we do.

Paola Malavassi:

And they also try to keep a sense of home while touring, right? And Lucille could accompany him, you cannot take that for granted. Not a lot of couples travel together.

Regina Bain:

I'm not sure, she always accompanied him. I think Lucille made some choices. I think she accompanied him when he went overseas. She wasn't always trying to go to certain places in America, depending on how she felt that she would be received and what would be there. But she was a powerful woman in that she made choices for herself, as well as choices that could support her partnership. And so, I really appreciate that. One of the things that we discovered, as we started to do our programing here, we worked with the neighborhood housing services of Queens, and they are a social service organization that helps people who want to be first time homeowners in Queens who are homeowners and are having some issue around their home. So we did a workshop in this space, and that's another thing that this space could be about, not just performance, but thinking about the legacy of Louis and Lucille and all the different issues around that and how we can play in that space for our community.

While preparing for that, we worked with Ricky Riccardi, Director of Research Collections, to really look at that mortgage and really look at the names and say, "Oh, wait a minute, as a Black woman, it was not lawful for her to purchase a home in the forties. You had to have a man cosign. You had to have these different things." So, oh, let's look at these other names. Let's do a little deeper dive investigation on those things. So what it meant to create a home was very complicated and they did it. They figured it out. She figured it out. They figured it out. And that's part of the legacy that we want to make sure that we're telling the full story here and couple it with action for community members today using this space.

They give us a lot to chew on. Let's work with it all.

[Music playing] Jason Moran "Follow the Light"

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Paola Malavassi:

We're also showing in the exhibition in Potsdam, and you saw the exhibition, Regina, you visited the exhibition...

Regina Bain:

...Congratulations. Everybody out there, go ahead. See it!

Paola Malavassi:

We're showing two of these precious collages that are on the boxes of the tapes with his voice and recordings. Can you tell us a little bit about these tapes? There are many of them, right? And the collages?

Regina Bain:

Oh, I think we can all talk about those. We can all talk about those. And he was an artist with a capital A. He needed to create in multiple ways. And this is one of the ways. He was studious and disciplined about taking the pictures, the articles, the cards and making something from them. They used to be on the walls of his home.

He used to make these collages on the walls of his home. And at least Lucille, I think, said "Maybe we can make a different design choice," (laughing), and that directed him to put things into the scrapbooks onto these gorgeous tape box covers, his own album covers that he made. But I know that you, Jason, were particularly enamored with those and really were looking to dig into those and brought Lorna Simpson to the house to discover them.

Jason Moran:

Also, she's a fellow collage artist, but just to think about him as an artist, you know, like some artists, I guess they take watercolors on the road with them, you know, like something small and compact. But he takes tape and he takes, you know, some scissors, and making recordings on the road. So then: What is this life? You know? And look and I know, I've been on the road with a lot of people, and a lot of people have all kinds of parts of their artists' selves that show up on the road. It could be a drink!

(laughing)

But for him, in his diet, that had to be part of it. And also, when you ask about like the things you learn, is you learn, "oh, no, he really considered himself a serious artist, too." You know, that's a real commitment to the day, to the calendar, to the schedule. Like, "oh, I must spend 45 minutes doing this, you know, figuring out what I want to cut up and cut out." That there's enough recordings of him hearing him talking about that process as a collage artist, you know, "I want to cut this out, removed that, I didn't

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need none of that. And I want to push this forward." You know, he says all that, he has language for it, practice language, just like any art student would have who was at Yale. You know, like they have to go through these classes where somebody comes in and ask them a question and they have to have a stance, and Armstrong has a stance as an artist. The visual side, you know, and I think he's also cared for that visual side of his own persona for so long, whether he was aware of it or not.

But I think at a certain point he understood that the image also really mattered. So, it's not lost on me that he's also cutting up his own image to make these tape covers like that. That in itself was a remix of his own two dimensions, you know, two-dimensional body to make these incredible priceless collages, which all live here. They are not like, well, some over here at the Louvre and some over here at MoMA, you know, like, no, they're all here. Well, two of them are in Germany right now...

Paola Malavassi:

...two are in Germany right now! What an honor.

Jason Moran:

It's a real treasure. Somehow, they still are here, you know, but also to make sure that an audience saw that. Because I think, when people see that work in talks I've given, they're like "Wait, say, what? He's getting down like that?" And then they're like, "Well, where are these?" Like, "Where I can see them?"

Paola Malavassi:

How many are there?

Regina Bain:

500. In different states of repair, disrepair, different states of complexity.

Paola Malavassi

They're very fragile, right? Because of the scotch tape and so on. Was it also a form of therapy? Because you once said, Jason, he's just cutting also critics and press articles and his own image, and so on. I always think there must be something like, you know, like, I don't know...

Jason Moran:

...yeah, literally "scissors".

Regina Bain:

"I don't like it, tsss, cut it out, tsss!" (singing)

But I also love when he's cutting up his own image, and what it means to just have

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some humility about yourself or some pride in yourself, and both. He's cutting pictures of himself and placing them in different ways, and is all right with who he is, in all those different spaces and is able to look at it with a sense of creation. I appreciate that.

Paola Malavassi:

And in the tapes that are inside of those boxes he speaks to Lucille, to other bandmates, too. Is there any anecdote, any story around those tapes that you want to get rid of right here?

(pause)

Regina Bain:
Jason?

Jason Moran:

(laughs) Well, I'll say this. I like the ones where he's in his hotel room talking with friends, and he's kind of "shooting the shit". He's like, "shooting the shit" is like just talking, and is kind of sometimes talking badly about friends you have, as we all do, "man, I couldn't stand when they came in here and did that", like he does that, and then he does it about people who are relatively famous, too. So, you hear like, you know, he understands his situation. It's sometimes musicians he used to work with, you know. He has choice words, as we all have choice words about things and ideas that we say at home, but that he would get together with his friends and just kind of like talk, but he would press record. You know, I wonder, could you tell how many times were the tapes played? You know, you could kind of tell, "oh he really listened to this tape a lot because it's worn down." So did he really listen to those tapes of him discussing whatever frequently, like, "oh, I remember when I made that joke," you know. Or does he just tape it just almost like an improvisation, that you bootleg. He's bootlegging his life. And, so, for me, I love him talking like that. But there's also these beautiful moments of hearing him on tour. And then you hear the quiet, maybe listening to some music in the back, but then you hear him cutting and pulling off tape. And it's a very intimate act, you know, that also is powerful to me. Those are some of the favorite things I have.

Paola Malavassi:

Yes, you can hear that in the film in Potsdam that was made by Darol Olu Kae. He tried to imagine the love while being on the road, the love between Louis and Lucille. In those scenes, you hear this original sound. We were so glad that he could use that sound for the film. And the visitors are blown away by being so close, feeling so close to Armstrong because it feels so private. Even though some of the tapes also address the audience, where thanks the German people. That is one that I love, where he's

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talking about what he loves eating in Germany (Eisbein and Sauerkraut) and then talking to his fans and thanking them for the time in Germany, that was in West Germany. So, there is also this part that he knows somebody will be listening to this in the future.

Jason Moran:
That's true.

Regina Bain:
Most definitely.

Paola Malavassi:
Not only private, but also for a public.

Regina Bain:
Yeah, I really appreciate those, and I appreciate the in-between moments. I hear loneliness, they are raucous. I'm in a social situation. I'm recording a party, I'm recording me talking with my friends. But there are the moments when he's in, I think, a hotel room alone and there are overseas, there are bells tolling. It's close to Christmas and it sounds lonely, and he's talking to us in the midst of that. And that's another aspect, I don't know that people always think about with him, is how much he was also alone and what he did to fill that time in the quiet spaces on the tapes, I also enjoy.

Paola Malavassi:
Yes, it must be lonesome to travel so intensively all over the world and meeting so much people, but: What does it mean to meet a lot of fans? I mean, the real conversations are other ones, is not these moments only with the audience, and I always wonder, because he had a very good relationship to the people and to the artists all around the world. And when he really liked somebody, he kept track, actually. And we have one letter in the exhibition where he thanks his Emcee during the tour in the GDR, Karlheinz Drechsel, eight pages long. He took the time to write that down. I mean, that is something very special. So here and there, there has been a connection, I guess, while touring with some people. But he takes the time also to then write and say, "Surprise, surprise! You thought I forgot you. I didn't..."

Regina Bain:
...here and there, everywhere, all the time, is what I've learned. Just the idea that when he passed, thousands of people wrote letters to Lucille because they wanted to honor the passing, but because he wrote them letters and that she, working with Phoebe Jacobs and the Educational Foundation, returned those letters, wrote back to them. It took them years, but they wrote back to them because they knew that's

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what he would do. So, honoring his legacy, they wrote back to him. We hear time and time again, "Louis wrote to me, and I still have the letter." And they come to our archives and often we have the letter they sent to him in our archives because Louis saved them. Here, there and everywhere, he was corresponding with the people that he met.

Jason Moran:

Yeah, just in Boston. I sat down in the front row to get ready to walk on stage to do this talk. And this guy gave me a letter, a brother, maybe he's 70 something years old and he gives me a letter and he said, "Well, you can read it now. You can read it later." And I was like „Well, I'm reading now. I want to know what this is." I opened this letter and it's him. It said "Well, when I was twelve years old or eleven years old, my father took my friend and I to meet Louis Armstrong in his motel room. And I wanted to be a trumpet player. And somehow my father, who was a friend of somebody from New Orleans who knew Louis, said that we could come visit Louis Armstrong in the daytime before his show." And they went to Louis's hotel room, and he was in there frying chicken. I said, "come on". But all that to say, he left so many seeds, you know, like of interaction that people like cherish, you know, and that I think having spaces like this or the exhibition in Potsdam, then you pull up memories for people, you know, and that is a different kind of like planting, you know, in society that he was able to do. But this happened in the mid-sixties you know but he was like "I'm coming to this talk and I'm sitting in the front row because I got to let this guy know that I met him."

Regina Bain:

And that memory lasted for decades.

Jason Moran:

It's a deep memory, you know.

Regina Bain:

We had a visitor from a gentleman, James Blake, who used to live next door to the Armstrongs, and he came back, he showed us the house that he used to live in and he talked about seeing the Armstrongs as two Black professionals when he was a young boy and what that meant to him. And we have oral histories, well we have plenty of oral histories of Louis in the tapes but we have some oral history that we've recorded of other neighborhood members. That's something we were starting to dig into. Now these are folks who are in their 60s, 70s, 80s. They still have vivid memories of Louis and Lucille. We have to record them. We have to record them because there are some artists that it might not be as relevant for, but for Louis it is extremely relevant to talk to the people who interacted with him to get a sense of who he was as a person, as a man, as an artist. So we need the oral histories of James and this guy. We're starting with Corona, because we can't go too far out, we're going to start where we are. But I

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would be fascinated. There was a gentleman when I came to the exhibit in Germany, who came up to me and said, that's my father in that picture.

Paola Malavassi:

Yes, that was Ulf Drechsel.

Regina Bain:

And what is his story? How can we record that? I'm fascinated by the oral history that is still rich for mining and that can give us new insight on who Armstrong is.

Paola Malavassi:

We also got some photographs, Jason, a lady sent us photographs. Her husband photographed Armstrong in 1965, and she had the originals and send them to us because she saw the exhibition, and this is so amazing, how many people have their memories at home...

Regina Bain:

...have their memories in their minds, but also tangible artifacts. I do believe in those 62 different countries that he went to. There are tangible artifacts right now.

(whispers): If you're listening out there, if you want to come, send some of those to us.

Jason Moran:

Yeah, don't put it up for auction. I'm tired of visiting auctions, buying letters. But anyway.

(laughing)

[Music playing] Jason Moran "Spoken in Two (Tear)"

Paola Malavassi:

There is this, I think, a kind of a misunderstanding of putting New Orleans always at the center of the biography of Armstrong, I mean internationally, people thinking "Ah, Armstrong is New Orleans," you know. When we talk about home, what is home? New Orleans or Queens?

Regina Bain:

It's New Orleans.

Paola Malavassi:

Why?

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Regina Bain:

Because that's where he was born. That's where his mama was. That is where the music came from. That is where his earliest experiences that informed his style came from. And it's also this block. It's both. It can't be one or the other. It has to be New Orleans. And it is also here. It's both, but it's definitively New Orleans, to me.

Paola Malavassi:

What do you think, Jason?

Jason Moran:

Part of that, you know, but like I always think, like, he leaves so fast. (laughs)

I mean, it's Great Migration, right? So King Oliver goes to Chicago. He goes to Chicago. Chicago is becoming an important city for Black folks. And he gets up there and, you know, he stays up there and then comes out here to New York. And being interested to really talk to a lot of Southern musicians as a fellow Southerner who left. Southerners who leave. We go back. We love where we go back to, but we're also critical of where we go back to, being from Texas, him being very critical of what New Orleans and their segregation had to offer his band, the things that he wouldn't visit, you know. You also have to say that, too.

But what I love is that he doesn't leave those important parts of his New Orleans life of how he got his footing. That's what comes up in that press conference. How, 60 years after he meets King Oliver, he is in a press conference in Germany and he's still talking about King Oliver. So, when you talk about his mom, you know, and King Oliver, you know, and what New Orleans is as a sonic of freedom, sonic place for Black people in America. It's probably the only and the oldest. When you walk the streets of New Orleans at night, at midnight, it sounds like no other city in the world. It sounds incredible. It's overwhelming, the amount of sound, different sounds that are living together on amplified to 11 past 10. And I was there a few months ago and I was like, "Oh, this is where he comes from. And this sounds like this is 2023." But if I imagine 1915, no, people write about what it sounded like. It's incredible. So that landscape has that, then he takes around the world and people have a sense of, I mean, it's a incredibly special city worth its own investigation because now it's under threat. The culture is under threat down there, just as it is in Harlem, you know, just as it is in Chicago. You know, what happens to Black culture as the country moves on?

Regina Bain:

Home is not simple. And so we can have more than one answer. We can have complicated answers to that. And I think New Orleans always has to be there. And of course, New York is there. And of course, the world is there. That's who he was.

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Paola Malavassi:

Beautiful. I still have one last question. very last. What helps you, Jason, to find your way back home (Jason laughs), ha? When you're on the road or when you would turn back?

Jason Moran:

I'll tell you what I like: I like getting off the plane, being in the taxi, going across 125th Street. I love the world, but it is not Uptown. I like seeing the things that I love, and I'm disgusted by. And I see it all on 125th Street. (laughs) And all of us Houstonians who left Houston to move to New York, you know, we moved here for a certain change in climate. And it's not just climate conceptually or socially or politically. It's also the music, too, but all those things together. And so home then becomes a place where, you know, once I get to my door, then it's like, "Can I reset when I walk in the house because I know my family? They'll want to hear some of the stories, but they have their own stories to share with you." So I need to get integrated back into the home. Do you know what I mean?

(laughing)

Paola Malavassi

Last question, what do you do, Regina, to feel back home? And I mean by that not only traveling, but also when we work a lot, we need to go back home somehow and touch base. What do you do?

Regina Bain:

I appreciate the NAP ministry and the women there, who lead a message of rest for the Black women, for people. And I find home in rest, when I stop and be still and close my eyes and think and my mind is able to wander into my histories, into my memories, into my dreams for the future. And that brings it all together for me in a sense of home. My ancestors are there, the ones who are past, the ones who are here. I really do find home in rest. I find home in music, most definitely. Listening to music that I know from the past that brings up certain memories, but also listening to the type of music that, there was a woman who came to you, one of your concerts, Jason, and she said "I was sitting there and I just I started writing poetry and I'm not a poet." There's music that makes you write poetry. And that is a sense of home for me, some music, rest and music. I think those are the things.

Paola Malavassi:

A great mix! Thank you both!

[Music playing] Jason Moran: "Body and Soul with intimate Friends (Shadow)"

DAS MINSK

KUNSTHAUS IN POTSDAM

Jason Moran:

If you're in Berlin or Potsdam, come visit the show „I've seen The Wall. Louis Armstrong on tour in the GDR 1965.“ It's on view until February 4th, 2024. We're looking forward to having you.

Paola Malavassi:

And if you're in New York, come visit the Louis Armstrong House Museum and Center in Corona, Queens.

Regina Bain:

Come on by y'all!

Music by Jason Moran, *The Sound Will Tell You*, 2021, available on Yes Records and Bandcamp