

Appreciating Old “Satchmo”

Dan Morgenstern, of the Institute of Jazz Studies, wins his eighth Grammy for Best Album Notes for his insightful take on Louis Armstrong’s music.

● From the moment that Dan Morgenstern was introduced to Louis Armstrong after a show at New York City’s Roxy Theater in April 1949, the two made an immediate connection. Morgenstern, a 19-year-old jazz fan from Denmark who had arrived two years earlier in the United States, was nicknamed “Smorgasbord” by Armstrong, already a jazz giant in the United States and Europe. Shortly before Armstrong died in 1971 at the age of 70, Morgenstern, editor of *DownBeat* magazine at the time, dedicated an entire issue to “Satchmo.” “The piece included testimonials from 86 people, and Louie wrote me that the magazine treatment ‘knocked him on his ass,’ ” says Morgenstern, 80, the longtime director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers–Newark. “I’ll always treasure that letter.”

When Mosaic Records decided to release *The Complete Louis Armstrong Decca Sessions (1935–1946)*, a seven compact-disc set of newly remastered performances that were originally released as 78s, they turned to Morgenstern to compose the liner notes. “Mosaic reissues usually include large booklets, which allow for some serious annotation,” says Morgenstern. “I was already familiar with most of the performances. But as I listened to them again, I made discoveries about the other musicians and delved into the composers.”

The 32-page LP-sized booklet—containing 26 photographs from the era and Morgenstern’s essay and comments on each of the 168 performances—recently won Morgenstern his eighth Grammy Award for Best Album Notes. Morgenstern, who now holds the record for the most Grammys in the category, says: “The idea is to enhance the listening experience and make the music more accessible.”

Morgenstern, who saw “Pops” perform “too many times to count” and who was a guest on occasion at his home in Queens, New York, says “the man who created a whole new musical language, the fountainhead of jazz,” was at his peak during the Decca years. “I always trusted trumpet players over critics, and they would say, ‘You gotta hear this one,’ ” says Morgenstern. “It always turned out to be something from the Decca period.”

— Bill Glovin

To hear Morgenstern discuss the album, and hear outtakes of Armstrong’s music, go to [youtube.com/watch?v=t97UhlU5TVY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t97UhlU5TVY).



The Complete Louis Armstrong Decca Sessions (1935–1946), published by Mosaic Records, is a seven compact-disc set of remastered performances that were originally released as 78s. For further information about the limited-edition release, visit mosaicrecords.com or call 203-327-7111.