Introductory Remarks, delivered at the Dedication of Louis Armstrong Theatre on October 25, 1971

Arend D. Lubbers

Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches

Part of the Archival Science Commons, Education Commons, and the History Commons

Recommended Citation


https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/25

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
Each person wants his life to count for something, and hopefully each life is perpetuated in the lives of others through some helpful deed, a kindness, or an idea. Many people, however, strive to leave some visible symbol of their achievements and thereby carve out a niche of immortality. To a few people, immortality comes because they give themselves completely to their art, to their destiny. Total commitment harnessed to unusual talent propels them to a place in history without their being completely aware of it until after it has happened. I think Louis Armstrong may have been such a person. Today, we dedicate this theatre of the performing arts to his achievements and give it his name. We do this not to perpetuate his name -- that isn't necessary -- but rather in recognition of his lasting contribution to music.

We are here to eulogize, and eulogies often overstate the case, but I believe it is fair to place Louis Armstrong in the "dress circle" of an American musical hall of fame. I do not believe it is chauvinistic for Americans to take pride in the fact that he was an American and that his expression was of the best that America has to offer musically. I do not believe that it is racist for black people to take pride in the fact that he was a black man and that his musical articulation is part of a
long, deep, cultural heritage that is rooted in the experience of black people.

Art is usually rooted in a specific tradition, but when it is expressed through great talent it becomes universal. So this black American musician, Louis Armstrong, has his place as a citizen of the musical world. In homes, theatres, clubs, and schools from Moscow to Tokyo, from Paris to Nairobi, all over the world, the music of Louis Armstrong has become a familiar sound and expression for people of all races and origins.

Grand Valley State Colleges are proud to have the name of Louis Armstrong established on the campus. We honor him as a musician and a person. To share in this occasion, the President of the United States sent the following telegram:

"It pleased me greatly to learn through Congressman Jerry Ford that Grand Valley State College will be dedicating a Louis Armstrong Theater in its Fine Arts building. As one of the most enthusiastic admirers of this great American artist, I welcome the opportunity to join you in memorializing his contributions to our national heritage.

Richard Nixon"

In our search for a fitting tribute to Louis Armstrong as we dedicate this theatre to him, we naturally turned to his close friend and associate, Mr. Tyree Glenn. Mr. Glenn was putting together a group for Mr. Armstrong to take on tour when the great Satchmo died. We are honored to have Tyree Glenn and his associates, Hank Jones, Arvel Shaw, and Jo Jones to perform this dedicatory concert.

Mr. Glenn.
THE LOUIS ARMSTRONG THEATRE

Dedicated to the memory of a great musician, showman, and American.

Grand Valley State College
October 25, 1971
Mr. Daniel Louis Armstrong
LOUIS ARMSTRONG
1900-1971

Born in New Orleans, Louis Armstrong discovered music at the age of five. By the time he was 16, he was fronting his own band, playing lead cornet. He spent a couple of years working the excursion boats up and down the Mississippi before his idol, Trumpeter King Oliver, hired him for his Chicago band in 1922. From that time on his fame and popularity spread quickly. By the middle '30s he was touring the Continent extensively.

His first film role as musician and actor came in 1936 with Bing Crosby in *Pennies from Heaven*. Shortly afterwards he began cutting the first of nearly 2,000 recordings. Many have become classics, such as *Ol’ Man Mose*, *Brother Bill*, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, *Musk Rat Ramble*, *Basin Street Blues*, *When the Saints Go Marching In*, and *Hello Dolly*.

Legend recalls that Armstrong invented “scat singing” in 1926. While recording *Heebie Jeebies*, Armstrong dropped the sheet music and began ad-libbing nonsense syllables.

His nickname “Satchmo,” a contraction of “Satchel Mouth” came about out of his concern to keep his lips firm for playing the trumpet. “What’s the good of having music in your mind if you can’t get it past your pucker?” he once asked.

Armstrong’s death on July 6th, two days after his 71st birthday, came as a tragic surprise. His recovery from a critical illness in March seemed complete enough to allow him to return to the work he loved so much. At the time of his death, Tyree Glenn was putting together a new group for Armstrong to take on tour.

Louis Armstrong was a man who took jazz, which evolved out of the New Orleans melting pot of African, Spanish and French influence, and used it as an ambassador of goodwill throughout the world. His wonderful personality and unique musical style will long be remembered.

PROGRAM

Introductory remarks . . . . . . . Arend D. Lubbers, president, Grand Valley State College

Presentation of Louis Armstrong pictures . . . . . . . Tyree Glenn

Music & reminiscence . . . . . . . Tyree Glenn & Quartet

Tyree Glenn . . . . . . . . . . . . . trombone and vibraphone
Hank Jones . . . . . . . . . . . . . piano
Arvel Shaw . . . . . . . . . . . . . bass
Jo Jones . . . . . . . . . . . . . drums

TYREE GLENN

Tyree Glenn has been associated with Louis Armstrong for many years.

Glenn arrived on the New York music scene several years ago as part of Ethel Water’s group. In the ’30s and ’40s he was also associated with people like Eddie Mallory, Benny Carter, Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington.

He made his first European tour in 1940 with an all-star group, headed by Don Redmond. While in Heidelberg, Germany, he composed *How Could You Do a Thing Like That to Me?*, a song recorded by many, including Frank Sinatra, Errol Garner, Henry Mancini, Harry James, Duke Ellington (as *Sultry Serenade*), and Glenn’s own group.

Glenn’s credits also include several television and radio associations, notably “Once Upon A Time,” “The Ted Steele Show” and the “Mike Wallace P.M.” shows on television, and the “Jack Sterling Show” on WCBS radio. He also has recorded several albums on the Roulette label.
Grand Valley State College is a four-year, state-supported institution of higher education, located 12 miles west of Grand Rapids.

The original student body of 226 students in 1963 has grown to 4,174 students now enrolled in the three colleges which compose Grand Valley State College.

The Louis Armstrong Theatre is an integral part of the recently completed Fine Arts Center, which provides facilities for art, drama, and music. Both students and professionals will make their theatrical and musical presentations here. Distinguished lecturers will provide programs of intellectual and cultural enrichment. It is our desire that from this stage minds will be moved, spirits generated, and the brotherhood of man expanded.