

“Heebie Jeebies” Artifact Sheet

Below are two statements regarding the scat chorus from Armstrong’s 1926 recording of “Heebie Jeebies.”

Artifact 1

“[W]hen I dropped the paper, I immediately turned into the horn and started to Scatting. Just as nothing had happened. When I finished the record I just knew the recording people would throw it out. And to my surprise they all came running out of the controlling booth and said ‘Leave that in.’ My, my, I gave a big sigh of relief. And sure enough – they did publish “Heebie Jeebies” the same way it was mistakenly recorded”

Louis Armstrong, 1951 *Esquire* Interview

Artifact 2

“Armstrong always insisted that the sheet music slipped from the stand and he started scatting to save the take. His unforgettable vocal is the high point of an otherwise uninspired performance, and it’s hard to believe he didn’t know exactly what he was doing. That chorus did more than introduce a language of nonsense syllables that jazz singers could use when the song’s lyric proved too constricting; it embodied a joyous, vernacular, and convincing attitude that complimented the spontaneous nature of the new music”

Gary Giddins, *Satchmo*, 1988

According to legend, Armstrong began to scat when he dropped the sheet music during recording. How believable is this story? Most critics argue that the account is fictional, what does this say about Armstrong’s character?

Compare what Armstrong said about the recording of “Heebie Jeebies” with what Giddins says. Which viewpoint is more convincing? Why? Does adding time to an event offer a better or different perspective?