Reading Passage III
Questions 21-30

Passage III

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from the article “Wherever He Went, Joy Was Sure to Follow” by Stanley Crouch (©2000 by The New York Times Company). Tin Pan Alley is a district famous for its composers and publishers of popular music.

As a jazz trumpeter and a singer, Louis Armstrong asserted a level of individuality in musical interpretation, recomposition and embellishment far more radical than any that had preceded it in Western music. When faced with a musical theme, Armstrong improvised an arrangement that boldly rephrased it, dropping notes he didn’t want to play and adding others. His featured improvisations brought the role of the jazz soloist to the fore. The immaculate logic of his improvised melodies, full of rhythmic surprises and virtuosic turns, influenced show-tune writers, jazz composers, big band arrangers and tap dancers. His harmonic innovations, as fellow trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has noted, were the most brilliant in the history of jazz: Armstrong figured out how to articulate the sound of the blues through Tin Pan Alley popular-music tunes without abandoning their harmonic underpinnings. “Louis Armstrong took two different melodies and fused them so that they sounded perfectly compatible,” Mr. Marsalis says.

It was during the 1920’s and 30’s that Armstrong’s reputation took off. He set the music scene in his home town of New Orleans on fire before traveling to Chicago in 1921 to join his mentor, the cornetist King Oliver. For a year he went to New York, where he joined Fletcher Henderson’s jazz orchestra and turned the rhythm of the music around with his conception of playing with a swinging beat. Now almost a national musical terror, Armstrong returned to Chicago, then finally settled in New York in 1929.

From 1925 through the early 1930’s, he recorded dozens of masterpieces with large and small bands, popularized scat singing (jazz singing that uses nonsense syllables) and took on Tin Pan Alley, introducing one tune after another into jazz, where they became part of his repertory. His tone could be broad, soft and luminous or vocal or comical, or suddenly and indelibly noble, and when his music conquered Europe in the 30’s, it carried the tragic optimism of the American sensibility into the world at large. Wherever he went, swing was sure to follow. He almost single-handedly began a new spirit of freelwheeling but perfectly controlled improvisation, tinged with playfulness, sorrow and sardonic irony.

Like all innovators, Armstrong was also called upon to perform superhuman feats. Armstrong had endless energy and could play and play and play with the evangelical fire and charisma that brings a new art into being. He extended the range of his instrument, asserted unprecedented rhythmic fluidity and had the greatest endurance of any trumpet player who ever lived. As a young man, he could play five shows in a theater a day, be the featured soloist on virtually every piece and end each show with 100 high C notes. His glissandos—rapid slides up or down a musical scale—were so pronounced that trumpeters of the London Philharmonic Orchestra had to inspect his horn to be convinced that it was not made differently from theirs.

By his death in 1971, Armstrong had influenced the entirety of American music, instrumentally and vocally, inspiring his own generation and successive ones. I can recall some 30 years ago talking with a concert percussionist who knew Armstrong and the rest of the people who were rising to the top during the middle and late 20’s. Referring to a certain concert piece, which had a more extensive drum part than usual, he said, “When I get that going, I can put my Louis Armstrong influence in and, without them even knowing it, the orchestra starts to swing for a bit.” On a more recent occasion, unless I was imagining it, I even heard rapper Heavy D slip a phrase over the mechanical hip-hop beat that had an Armstrong arch to it.

To get right down to it, no one in jazz ever played with greater emotional range than Armstrong, whose New Orleans experiences meant that he worked everything from christenings to funerals. In the streets, he picked up all the folk chants and songs. While traveling around town, he heard traces of French and Italian opera that suffused his sensibility and his memory. But beyond all that, what Armstrong wanted to give his listeners was the kind of pleasure music gave him, which is what most artists are after. When he wrote or talked of New Orleans, of being out there with his horn or following the parades or listening to mentors like Joe Oliver, Armstrong never failed to project a joy so profound that it became an antidote to the blues of daily living. He had a determination to swallow experience whole and taste it all and only then to spit out the bitter parts.

21. Which of the following statements best expresses the main idea of the passage?
   A. Armstrong was an exceedingly gifted musician whose emotional range was nonetheless somewhat narrow.
   B. One of the greatest jazz trumpeters of all time, Armstrong is best known for his soft and luminous tone.
   C. Armstrong has had a profound effect on music, one that has been both wide ranging and long lasting.
   D. A pioneering jazz trumpeter and singer, Armstrong recorded numerous masterpieces in the mid to late 1920s.
22. Which of the following questions is NOT answered in the passage?
   F. In terms of Western music history, what was so radical about Armstrong's playing and singing?
   G. What aspect of Armstrong's music brought the role of the jazz soloist to the fore?
   H. What style of jazz singing did Armstrong popularize?
   J. Which of Armstrong's recorded masterpieces most changed American music?

23. The passage suggests that Armstrong's most important contribution to jazz was his:
   A. musical conquest of Europe.
   B. emphasis on improvisation.
   C. work with King Oliver.
   D. invention of the blues sound.

24. The main function of the second paragraph (lines 20–29) is to:
   F. identify some of Armstrong's mentors, such as King Oliver.
   G. list some of the early events in Armstrong's developing career.
   H. contrast Armstrong's opinions of King Oliver and Fletcher Henderson.
   J. describe the musical style Armstrong developed jointly with Fletcher Henderson.

25. All of the following details are used in the passage to demonstrate Armstrong's endurance as a young musician EXCEPT that he:
   A. would be the featured soloist on almost every piece in a show.
   B. ended shows with a long series of high notes.
   C. once managed to play for an entire night.
   D. could play five shows a day.

26. The last paragraph establishes all of the following about Armstrong EXCEPT:
   F. his strong desire to reshape American music.
   G. his cheerful demeanor and sense of mission.
   H. the range of influences on his music.
   J. the varied settings in which he performed.

27. One of the main points in the last paragraph is that through his music, Armstrong attempted to promote in his listeners a sense of:
   A. awe.
   B. determination.
   C. pleasure.
   D. nostalgia.

28. According to the passage, which of the following cities is the last one Armstrong is said to have lived in?
   F. New Orleans
   G. New York
   H. Chicago
   J. Paris

29. The author most likely includes the information in lines 53–57 to suggest:
   A. Armstrong's highly developed skill.
   B. Armstrong's unease with orchestral music.
   C. that Armstrong used an unusual trumpet.
   D. that Armstrong invented the glissando.

30. Which of the following words best describes how the orchestra referred to in the fifth paragraph (lines 58–71) is said to have started to swing?
   F. Reluctantly
   G. Intentionally
   H. Unconsciously
   J. Optimistically
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Answer key

21. C
22. J
23. B
24. G
25. C
26. F
27. C
28. G
29. A
30. H