

Text of Recording of  
**THE HISTORY OF JAZZ**  
**Mary Lou Williams**

Side I

Hi, I am Mary Lou Williams,

I have played through all the eras of Jazz. The spirituals, ragtime which my mother taught me when I was three years old. Then the time with John Williams when the Jazz bands was the name of any small group which played with a beat. And then the Kansas City Swing era with Andy Kirk's band. Then bop, the Dizzy Gillespie era.

From suffering came the spirituals. Songs of joy and songs of sorrow. The main origin of American Jazz is a spiritual. Because of the deeply religious background of the Black American he was able to mix this strong influence with rhythms that reach deep enough into the inner self to give expression to outcrys of censored joy which became known as Jazz. For sake of clarity many musicians and myself have objected to the use of the single word Jazz to cover so many diversified approaches. Nevertheless, it seems that the title Jazz has survived it all.

After the bop era it seemed that the creation and the heritage was a little bit lost. If it continues in this direction we'll never have another great Art Tatum, Bud Powell, Dizzy Gillespie, Louie Armstrong and many, many other great names.

Now we come to a period of the music wherein the disturbance and unrest of the world has crept in to destroy the roots and heritage. Titles are misused and confusing and much kissing and hugging but very little charity and love.

I'd like to define two titles used constantly to describe people or music namely Soul and Jazz. Soul is a musician with love, charity and sacrifice for his fellow man in his music. The presence of God through suffering. It is also a substitute title for a Black American. Other definitions for Jazz are shameful and dishonorable for such soulful and religious music. It has been called other names down through the years. Ragtime, Swing, Bop and Avante Garde, but whenever there's a strong beat people always want to degrade the music by calling it Jazz. And when it is called Jazz other soulful, creative and artistic aspects in the music are lost.

I'd like to play another one of my compositions I composed in the late 50's predicting new sounds in the music that would almost destroy the roots and heritage of the Black man. When I played this composition for my good friend, Lorraine Gillespie, Dizzy Gillespie's wife she gave it the title of: A Fungus Amungus. So here goes A Fungus Amungus.

Only boogie woogie and the blues were considered Jazz. But there are so many different kinds of music created from the spiritual roots.

It was my pleasure to bring you through the history of Jazz. You may not realize this but you're lucky. On the other hand, to bring this history to you I had to go through muck and mud.

## Side II

In the year of 1929 - the greatest Jazz era of them all - The Kansas City Swing era What a great time for creative musicians and the last era of the well trained musicians. And out of this era great musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Art Blakey, Max Roach and Charlie Parker. And many of the bop era musicians were born.

There was much love and charity among musicians in Kansas City To develop new techniques and ideas younger musicians listened to older musicians. All were very dedicated and devoted. Famous musicians from all over the world came to Kansas City to sit in on jam sessions to find to their surprise they had tackled such great giants as Lester Young, Joe Jones, Count Basie, Ben Webster on tenor, Herschel Evans on tenor, Charlie Parker on alto, James Russian a great singer, Buzz Mouton, Benny Mouton, Pete Johnson, a great boogie woogie pianist, Hot Lips Page, Walter Page, George and Jr. Lee and several great women pianists and countless other high school musicians.

During this period Jack Capp who owned Brunswick Records, in Chicago had heard about my playing and sent for me to come to Chicago so he could hear me play piano Whenever I was asked to play piano for someone I would compose new music while playing. Not realizing I was being recorded while I was playing the piano I composed the next tune you will hear and it's called Night Life. And it happens to be my first recording.

During this great swing period a pianist had to have two strong hands. Especially a good swinging left hand to compete as a top pianist.

During this period boogie woogie was also very popular. I was never considered a top boogie woogie pianist but was trained to play all styles. Now I would like to play my Hesitation Boogie.

A new era of music called Be Bop came about during the early 40's. Most of the musicians were my friends and they often visited my apartment to write or play their ideas. I loved them. They were more or less like the Kansas City musicians. So much love flowing from them. Through association I learned a great deal about their chord changes and style of expression. The old blues took on a new look. The bop era blues chords added a great richness and more technique. I'd like to give you a demonstration of the old blues and the new blues.

As far as being identified with anything played with a beat or soulful feeling one must not always think of slow blues, foxtrot and loud drum beating as the only possible form of Jazz. There are many, many other forms including slow blues, fast blues, ballads, modern, semi-classical. It's a very interesting art for creating new sounds. The spiritual feeling is characteristic of good Jazz. This feeling, the deep conversation and the mental telepathy going on between base, drums and a number of other soloists are the permanent characteristics of good Jazz. The conversation can be of any type: exciting, soulful and even humorous debating.

Now the creative process of improvisations. Improvisation cannot be easily explained. The moment a soloist's hand touches his instrument ideas start to flow from the mind, through the heart and out the fingertips. Or at least it is the way it should be. Therefore, if the mind stops there are no ideas just mechanical patterns. If the heart doesn't fulfill its role there will be very little feeling or none at all.

Most musicians dislike playing in nightclubs. Often noises break the concentration, the purpose is lost and yet the performance must continue. Those of you who are able to understand the conversation and the feeling of Jazz, your participation through listening with your ears and your heart will allow you to enjoy fully this exchange of ideas, to sense these various moods and to reap the full therapeutic rewards that good music always brings to all who dig the sounds.

Now I would like to play for you my interpretation of all the eras of Jazz beginning with the spirituals - one of my originals called: Lord Have Mercy.

Now ragtime: I'd like to play a tune my mother taught me. It's called: Who Stole The Lock Off The Henhouse Door.

Now I would like to play a slow blues of that era that my stepfather taught me. I think this is the most beautiful ballad I've ever heard. The title is: My Mama Pinned A Rose On Me. It's about a very fancy guy who was a gambler and his mother never knew that. She thought he was a beautiful son, wonderful. But the whole town knew what he was like.

Before playing the history of Jazz I would like to acknowledge a long overdue tribute to one of the most important people in the world of Jazz, Moe Asch of Folkways Records. It has been Moe's continuing faith in artists - especially creative musicians, and his total dedication making the world aware of such a priceless heritage. Without his sacrifices the world would never have known such great artists as Leadbelly, Muddy Waters, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and a great many other artists including a great concert pianist, Bella Bartop.

No one even thought about recording folk singers until the late 50's. Moe Asch, on several occasions, exhausted his last funds to make sure that a musician was recorded and heard. I am always inspired recording for such a kind and generous man as Moe Asch. And to tell the truth there would be very little, if anything to tell about our only American art born through the suffering of slaves if it were not for him and his great company, Folkways Records.

Well, Moe, I'm late doing the history of Jazz you requested at least 10 years ago but here it is.]

## a woman at the top of the jazz scene

By JACK ARMITAGE

### Top Lady Musician

Apart from some singers, few lady musicians have equalled their male counterparts in the jazz field but nobody can dispute Mary Lou Williams' right to her place at the top of the tree either as pianist, composer, arranger or innovator. She made a notable impression with her very first appearance on records with Andy Kirk and his Twelve Clouds of Joy way back in 1927 while 2 piano solos she waxed in 1929 were attributed by the famous jazz critic John Hammond to James P. Johnson, the Dean of Harlem pianists, whom he suspected of having recorded them under a pseudonym for contractual reasons.

Her arrangements were largely responsible for setting the style and character of the Andy Kirk Orchestra in the '30s but in the ensuing years she became involved in the bop revolution and has subsequently kept abreast of modern developments. However I must confess to preferring her older style of playing and this is what we mainly get on the double LP set **Mary Lou Williams — The Asch Recordings 1944-47** (Folkways FA2966). Many of the tracks, processed from the original 78s, are sadly lacking in quality of reproduction, but for the most

part the excellence of the music compensates for this.

Miss Williams is presented variously as piano soloist, accompanist to vocalists and director of both small and large groups in which she receives the valuable assistance of such notables as Frank Newton, Dick Vance and Bill Coleman (trumpet), Vic Dickenson (trombone), Ed Hall (clarinet), Don Byas and Coleman Hawkins (tenor sax), Al Lucas and Al Hall (bass) and Eddie Dougherty (drums). Modern tendencies intrude noticeably only during the last 4 tracks so this is an album worth adding to your collection provided you can tolerate the reproduction shortcomings.

**Mary Lou Williams — The Asch Recordings 1944-47** Folkways FA2966

A superior two record set, well annotated, featuring Ms. Williams' work during the bop years, though most of the music here is distinctly pre-bop in outlook. Good playing from the leader, Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, Edmund Hall and others, most of it laid back and all of it recommended, fine not by virtue of being exceptional but by being representative. Excellent writing by Mary Lou throughout. The recorded sound is fair. — R.Z.

**FA 2966 MARY LOU WILLIAMS—THE ASCH RECORDINGS 1944-1947.** March 12, 1944: Mary Lou Williams, piano; Frankie Newton, trumpet; Edmund Hall, Clarinet; Vic Dickenson, trombone; Al Lucas, bass; Jack Parker, drums. Lullaby of the Leaves, Roll Em. Mary Lou Williams, piano; Edmund Hall, clarinet, Al Lucas, bass. Yesterday's Kisses. Personnel as on Lullaby of the Leaves. Satchel Mouth Baby, Little Joe From Chicago. April 19, 1944: Mary Lou Williams, solo piano. Drag Em, Mary's Boogie, St. Louis Blues. Date Unknown: Mary Lou Williams, piano; Nora Lee King, vocal. Blues—Until My Baby Comes Back Home. June 5, 1944: Mary Lou Williams, piano; Don Byas, tenor saxophone; Dick Vance, trumpet; Vic Dickenson, trombone; Claude Greene, clarinet; Al Lucas, bass; Jack Parker, drums. Gjon Mill Jam Session, Man o' Mine, Stardust, Part 1, Stardust, Part 11. December 15, 1944: Mary Lou Williams, piano; Coleman Hawkins, tenor saxophone; Bill Coleman, trumpet, Eddie Robinson, bass; Denzil Best, drums. Lady Be Good. Add: Joe Evans, alto saxophone; Claude Greene, clarinet. Song in My Soul, This & That. Date Unknown (1944): Mary Lou Williams, piano; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Al Hall, bass. Carcinoma. August 10, 1944: Personnel as on Carcinoma. Russian Lullaby, Blue Skies, Persian Rug, Night and Day, You Know Baby, I Found a New Baby. December 11, 1944: Mary Lou Williams, piano; Josh White, vocal; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Jimmy Butts, bass; Eddie Dougherty, drums. The Minute Man, Froggy Bottom. February 16, 1946: Mary Lou Williams, solo piano. How High the Moon, Cloudy/What's Your Story Morning Glory, Blue Skies, The Man I Love, These Foolish Things Remind Me Of You, Lonely Moments. Date Unknown (1947?): Milton Orent-Frank Roth Orchestra (supervised by Mary Lou Williams—arrangements Mary Lou Williams/Milton Orent). Lonely Moments, Whistle Blues. Date Unknown (1947): Mary Lou Williams, piano; Kenny Dorham, trumpet, John H. Smith, Jr., guitar; Grachan Moncur, bass. Kool, Mary Lou. Descriptive Notes by Peter O'Brien, S.J. 2-12" LP's \$13.96

# THE HISTORY OF JAZZ

## Mary Lou Williams



Mary Lou Williams at the Cookery, N.Y.C. - 1972.

Mary Lou Williams recorded this narration and this music tracing the history of Jazz in her apartment in New York City in late 1970. She wrote the narration and recorded herself using her Tandberg tape recorder. She then turned to her Hamilton (Baldwin) piano and delineated the various unfolding eras in the development of Jazz through which she herself has played. The apartment and the piano are famous in the history of Jazz. It was this apartment that functioned as a kind of salon for the musicians of the Bop Era. They gathered there nightly during the forties and played through the dawn well into the next day. Almost every important Jazz Pianist has played on this piano at one time or another and it was on this particular piano that Monk and Bud Powell explored almost daily in the presence of Mary Lou Williams.

Mary Lou Williams' narrations on the history and nature of Jazz have been preserved on NewsFilm and in the archives of many radio stations. But this is the only recording that I know of on which she speaks for any great length. The narration is carefully prepared and delivered. Miss Williams' well considered statements offer a succinct and comprehensive Jazz Story—the music speaks for itself.

Peter F. O'Brien, S.J.  
January 8, 1978



Hits & Bits—Vaudeville on TOBA circuit-1925.  
Mary Lou Williams lower right—her husband John Williams to her immediate right.

MARY LOU WILLIAMS, pianist-composer-arranger, is the only major Jazz Artist who has lived and *played through* all the eras in the history and development of Jazz. Critics indeed, have called *her* the History of Jazz. She is the only artist who has constantly changed and developed as the music grew. Nat Shapiro has observed: "Mary Lou Williams is the best example of a musician who has refused to be imprisoned by either style or tradition." Barry Ulanov wrote that "she has steadily met the demanding art of Jazz keyboard performance" (progressing) "from the early years to great skill in all the modern idioms." She has absorbed and distilled all that she has heard. She has often influenced the development of the music herself. Today she is a modern pianist with roots in the entire Jazz heritage.



The Keith Time—with Seymour & Jeanette—Mary Lou Williams seated.

She has been playing the piano since the age of three. Self-taught, and highly observant, she was early exposed to the music of professional playing musicians. She never took a formal music lesson in her life. She is, in reality, a creative musical source, who never left the piano from the time she first approached it, and who spent ten to twelve hours daily at her instrument in search of the sounds she wished to express. That search continues to the present day and makes Mary Lou Williams the unique repository of Jazz History that she is. In her playing today there is heard an authentic compendium, stated or implied, of the entire sweep and development of this American musical art-form known as Jazz.

Mary Lou Williams first heard the *Spirituals* and *Ragtime* from her mother and soon became adept at playing them herself. She was widely known in Pittsburgh, Pa. (her hometown) as "the little piano girl" and was often heard at private parties, including those of the Mellons and Olivers, well before she was ten years old. A thorough professional by the time she was in her early teens, Miss Williams toured widely with John Williams (later her husband) when the *Blues* and the music of the small combos that played with a beat known as *Jazzbands* were beginning to be nationally known.

Miss Williams began a long association with Andy Kirk and the Clouds of Joy that lasted throughout the *Swing Era*. She remained with the Kirk organization as pianist, arranger, and composer of original material throughout the thirties and was





Mary Lou Williams—Publicity Still—1930's.



Andy Kirk and his 12 Clouds of Joy—Fairyland Park, Kansas City, Mo.—1936.



Mary Lou Williams, 3rd from left—Andy Kirk to her right—Pha Terrell, the band's vocalist, to her left.



At The Pearl Theatre—Philadelphia, 1930—Andy Kirk Band—fronted here by Blanche Calloway who does the split—Mary Lou Williams at the Tom Thumb—Marion Jackson was the band's regular pianist and Ms. Williams played specialty numbers on the Tom Thumb. During this same engagement, Ethel Waters appeared on the bill as its star. Ms. Waters' pianist, Pearl Wright, lost her mother. During Ms. Waters' engagement, Mary Lou Williams doubled as her pianist.

highly influential in developing the style of music that became known as *Kansas City Swing*. Possessed of a strong, swinging left hand, Miss Williams first gained wide recognition for the power, as well as the musical subtlety, of her playing. It has often been said that "she plays like a man." Many men are complimented if they are told that they play like Mary Lou Williams. During the Swing Era, Miss Williams wrote and arranged for all the *Big Bands* including those of Kirk (*Walkin' and Swingin', Mary's Idea, Froggy Bottom, Cloudy*), Benny Goodman (*Roll Em and Camel Hop*), Jimmie Lunceford (*What's Your Story Morning Glory*), the Dorseys, Cab Calloway, Glen Gray and the Casa Lomas, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington (*Trumpet No End*).



1945—Glamour photo of Mary Lou Williams taken in conjunction with an appearance at Cafe Society Uptown, N.Y.C.

Mary Lou Williams successfully made the transition from the Swing to the *Bop* or *Modern* era. Her home in New York became a kind of salon or headquarters for all the young musicians who were, at that time, experimenting and creating *Modern Jazz*. She inspired and encouraged Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Tadd Dameron, Art Blakey, Kenny Dorham, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Dizzy Gillespie. Always an experimentalist herself, Miss Williams developed into an expert modern pianist of exceptional taste and scope. She became widely known as a leader of small groups, especially *Trios*, playing at Cafe Society Downtown and Uptown, along 52nd street, in clubs and on the concert stage throughout the United States and Europe, continued to compose in a variety of situations, and recorded for every major record company.



Don Byas, Mary Lou Williams, Buch Clayton, Paris, 1953.

In 1945 Mary Lou Williams composed the *Zodiac Suite*. It was originally heard with the Mary Lou Williams Trio on WNEW radio in New York on Miss Williams' own radio show *The Mary Lou Williams Piano Workshop*. She composed and played an interpretation of each of the astrological signs—one weekly—for twelve weeks. She then scored the entire work for an eighteen piece band, including strings, and performed the work with the band in a concert at Town Hall. The following year, 1946, Miss Williams scored three of the signs from *The Zodiac Suite* for the New York Philharmonic and played the music with that orchestra in Carnegie Hall, N.Y.C. That occasion marked the first time that Jazz and the *Symphony* met.

She is also the composer of the bop fairy tale *In the Land of Oo Bla Dee* recorded by the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band. Miss Williams has some 350 musical compositions to her credit.

Miss Williams broke new ground for Jazz in 1962 when she composed and recorded her *Hymn in Honor of St. Martin de Porres*. She was the first Jazz Composer to write for sacred purposed. Since that time she has composed three complete Masses including *Mary Lou's Mass* which received wide recognition and acclaim when it was performed by Miss Williams, at an actual liturgy, in Saint Patrick's Cathedral, New York City, in 1975. (see brochure on *Mary Lou's Mass*) The work also forms the musical basis for the series of dances, also known as *Mary Lou's Mass*, by choreographer Alvin Ailey.



Mary Lou's Mass—St. Patrick's Cathedral, N.Y.C.—January 18, 1975—A Jazz First.

Mary Lou Williams is, today, thoroughly involved in her music, and in the fight to expose Jazz and see that it survives and develops further. She most frequently finds herself involved in Concerts, Workshops, Residencies, Lecture-Demonstrations, Discussions, Radio, T.V., and Rehearsals, on the *College Campus*. A three or five day residency on a Campus will find her on stage in concert with her trio, in a music or black history class, in lecture-demonstrations in large halls detailing, on the piano and in question and answer periods, the

roots and history and course of Black American Music and Jazz, with the college archivist taping oral history for the future, in rehearsing the college band, or the college Glee Club for a performance with her of *Mary Lou's Mass*.

Miss Williams also appears in clubs, on the concert stage, in the recording studio, on radio and TV, in churches large and small in performances of her Mass, in grade and high schools playing and lecturing at assemblies—in short: she is in the forefront of music which is exactly where she belongs.

Mary Lou Williams recently teamed with Avant Garde Pianist Cecil Taylor in a concert at Carnegie Hall, NYC marking the first time that a musician of Miss Williams' background and an eminent musician from the Avant Garde attempted to make music together. The concert was called *Mary Lou Williams & Cecil Taylor Embraced*. In her performance of *A Fungus Amungus* on this recording might be heard Avant-Garde or Free Jazz replete with the history of Jazz that preceded that form. The formance of the Fungus is impressionistically beautiful and shaped with feeling.

In the Fall of 1977 Miss Williams began a stay at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina that hopes to prove somewhat permanent. As Artist in Residence there and a member of the music department, she is involved in teaching non-musicians a course introducing them to Jazz in all its forms. In addition, she writes for and directs Duke's Jazz Ensemble. In January of 1978, Miss Williams appeared with Benny Goodman in the 40th Anniversary of his 1938 concert—again this time, at Carnegie Hall. Her versatility and the scope of her abilities in this music might be made clear in just these two Carnegie Hall appearances within one year: with Goodman and, at the oppo-

site pole, with Taylor. A third appearance at Carnegie Hall is slated for June 1978 when Miss Williams will appear on a solo piano concert with Herbie Hancock and McCoy Tyner at the Newport Festival.

Miss Williams may be heard on the following two recordings from her own company—Mary Records, P.O. Box 32 Hamilton Grange, N.Y., N.Y. 10031.

M 102 — *Mary Lou's Mass*

M 103 — *Zoning*

as well as on the following titles on Folkways:

*Mary Lou Williams - The Asch Recordings 1944-1947*

a two volume boxed set of 35 recordings alone and with Don Byas, Coleman Hawkins, Frankie Newton, Bill Coleman, etc.—FJ 2966.

*The Zodiac Suite 32844*

*Rehearsal Volume 2* (Roll Em & Little Joe From Chicago) 2292.

*Piano Greats* (2852)

with Art Tatum, Erroll Garner, Teddy Wilson, Meade Lux Lewis.

*Mary Lou Williams Present St. Martin dePorres - Black Christ of the Andes* 2843 32843 Winner of the Grand Prix du Disque Francais.

*New American Music* 33901

with Milford Graves and others.

also recommended from the Folkways catalog in conjunction with the History of Jazz:

*Jazz Volumes 1 through 11* — 2801-2811

*The Story of Jazz by Langston Hughes* — 7312

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