

THE UNITED STATES ARMY FIELD BAND

JAZZ AMBASSADORS



The Legacy of MARY LOU WILLIAMS

Colonel Thomas H. Palmatier, Commander
Chief Warrant Officer Gordon K. Kippola, Director

1. Roll 'Em (3:25) Mary Lou Williams
2. Messa Stomp (2:51) Mary Lou Williams
3. Walkin' and Swingin' (3:05) Mary Lou Williams
4. Scorpio (5:47) Mary Lou Williams
5. Blue Skies (3:02) Irving Berlin arr. Mary Lou Williams
6. Big Jim Blues (3:07) Mary Lou Williams
7. In The Land of Oo Bla Dee (4:08) Mary Lou Williams and Milton Orent
adapt. SFC Andrew Layton
8. Chunka Lunka (3:44) Mary Lou Williams
9. Tisherome (5:06) Mary Lou Williams arr. SGM Darryl Brenzel
10. Knowledge (5:26) Mary Lou Williams arr. SGM Eugene Thorne
11. What's Your Story Morning Glory (4:03) Jack Lawrence,
Paul Francis Webster, and Mary Lou Williams arr. MSG Vince Norman
12. Rosa Mae (5:20) Lary Gales and Mary Lou Williams arr. SFC Paul Armstrong
13. Miss D.D. (5:32) Mary Lou Williams arr. MSG Jeffrey Jopez
14. Act of Contrition (5:48) Mary Lou Williams arr. SFC Todd Harrison

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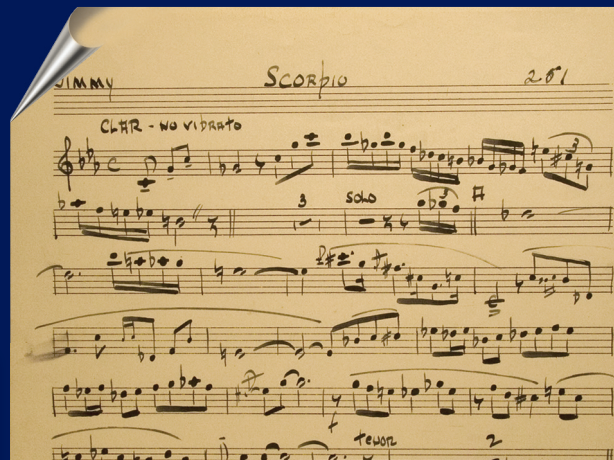


The Legacy of MARY LOU WILLIAMS



Washington, D.C.

Featuring
Guest Artists
Gerri Allen &
Andy Bey



AMERICA'S BIG BAND



America's Big Band
Washington, DC

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The United States Congress has proclaimed jazz "a national treasure." The Jazz Ambassadors proudly present this unique American music throughout our country and the world.

The Jazz Ambassadors, America's Big Band, is the United States Army's premier touring jazz orchestra. As a component of The U.S. Army Field Band of Washington, DC, this 19-piece big band has received great acclaim both at home and abroad performing America's original art form, jazz.

Concerts by the Jazz Ambassadors are designed to entertain all types of audiences. Custom compositions and arrangements highlight the group's creative talent



"The Musical Ambassadors of the Army"

Educational Outreach

The U.S. Army Field Band is strongly committed to education and the arts, supporting the National Standards for Arts Education through an extensive outreach program that ranges from preschool to post-graduate. Each year, the Musical Ambassadors of the Army present more than 650 educational activities throughout the country, reaching over 100,000 students.

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Instrumental parts for these great Mary Lou Williams compositions and arrangements, as performed by the Jazz Ambassadors, are available as PDF files for study and for performance. The copyright holder has granted permission for these arrangements to be publicly performed.



Please visit www.armyfieldband.com to download music and to learn more about the Jazz Ambassadors, America's Big Band and The Musical Ambassadors of the Army.

www.armyfieldband.com

Jazz Ambassadors Personnel

Colonel Thomas H. Palmatier, Commander
Chief Warrant Officer Gordon K. Kippola, Director

Alto Saxophones	SGM Darryl Brenzel SFC Andrew Layton
Tenor Saxophones	SGM Patrick Dillon SSG Patrick Shook
Baritone Saxophone	SGM Eugene Thorne
Trumpets	MSG Kevin Watt MSG Michael Johnston MSG Jack Wengrosky SFC Paul Armstrong SFC Paul Stephens
Trombones	MSG Michael Buckley SFC Jeff Adams SFC Major Bailey SSG Michael Bravin
Piano	SFC Tim Young
Guitar	SSG Stephen Lesche
Bass	MSG Jeff Lopez
Drums	SFC Todd Harrison
Vocalist	MSG Marva Lewis
Euphonium (track 13)	SFC Major Bailey
Tuba (tracks 2 & 13)	SFC Matthew Nelson

The Legacy of **MARY LOU WILLIAMS**

About This Recording

The Jazz Ambassadors of The United States Army Field Band present the fifth in a series of recordings honoring the lives and music of individuals who have made significant contributions to jazz. Designed primarily as an educational resource, this recording is thoroughly researched to present standard performance practices and to reflect the original intent of the composer.

As a pianist, composer, arranger, and educator, Mary Lou Williams was in a class of her own. She stands as the only jazz musician to “play” through all of the eras of jazz. A top-notch pianist and arranger whose influence is still strongly felt more than twenty-five years after her death, Mary Lou Williams’ musicianship continues to shine. The Jazz Ambassadors are proud to present a small portion of Mary Lou Williams’ musical legacy to the public. This album was recorded in April 2007 in Devers Hall, Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, using multi-track digital equipment.

The Legacy of
MARY LOU WILLIAMS

The Little Piano Girl

“I just never left the piano.”
—Mary Lou Williams¹

Mary Lou Williams was born Mary Elfrieda Scruggs on May 8, 1910 in Atlanta, Georgia. She learned to play while sitting on her mother’s lap. As a toddler, Mary Lou surprised her mother by repeating a melody she had just played on the organ. Her fantastic ear and perfect pitch soon attracted notice.



Mary Lou in Pittsburgh at age 10

When she was five, the family moved to the East Liberty area of Pittsburgh. She played on neighbors’ pianos, and often was paid. This brought home some much-needed income, all before she was ten.

More opportunities kept Mary Lou² focused on the piano. She accompanied silent movies, community events, and school dances. When her stepfather saved enough money to purchase a player piano, they spent hours playing the piano rolls of Jelly Roll Morton and James P. Johnson, two

Andy Bey

Born in 1939, former child prodigy Andy Bey performed as a pianist and singer, appearing at the Apollo Theater and on television before age eighteen. With his sisters, he performed regularly at The Blue Note in Paris and other venues in Europe from the late 1950s into the early 1960s.



Geri Allen and Andy Bey at Devers Hall recording studio, April 2007

Upon returning to the United States, Bey recorded and performed with notables including McCoy Tyner, Lonnie Liston Smith, and Eddie Harris. He appeared as featured vocalist on Gary Bartz’s acclaimed Harlem Bush Music projects and with Horace Silver. In 1991, Bey left to teach voice in Austria; two years later he returned to the States for his first solo recording in many years.

The release of *Ballads, Blues, & Bey* and *Shades of Bey*, recorded with Bartz, Victor Lewis, Peter Washington and others in 1998, heralded Bey’s “renaissance,” to the bemusement of the artist: “I don’t know about this ‘renaissance.’ It’s...well, it’s new in a sense, but it’s not like I left the business.”



Andy Bey

Guest Artists

Geri Allen

A Detroit native, Geri Allen is presently Associate Professor of Jazz Piano and Improvisation Studies at the University of Michigan.

Since 1982, she has recorded or performed with artists as diverse as Sir Simon Rattle and the Birmingham Symphony, Vernon Reid, Me'Shell Ndegelocello, Marian McPartland, Charlie Haden, and Kenny Clarke. She has released a number of recordings, including the critically acclaimed Telarc release *Geri Allen: Timeless Portraits and Dreams*.

Ms. Allen has participated in many collaborations including performances on *Miles: Cool and Collected*, tenure in the Ornette Coleman Quartet from 1991–1995, and the Mary Lou Williams Collective, for which she serves as musical director. She portrayed Mary Lou Williams in Robert Altman's celebrated film *Kansas City*, and continues to perform and collaborate with her husband, Wallace Roney.

Ms. Allen's work as a composer has garnered numerous awards from SESAC (the Society of European Stage Authors & Composers) and commissions from Lincoln Center, Music Theatre Group, and most recently, from the Walt Whitman Arts Center, who commissioned *For the Healing of the Nations*, a sacred jazz work commemorating the attacks of September 11, 2001.



Geri Allen

masters of early jazz and ragtime piano. Watching and trying to play along with the rolls helped her to learn how to play like the masters.

Mary Lou's name circulated around town quickly. Fans began to refer to her as "the little piano girl of East Liberty." Life as a traveling musician lured her away from home when she was just thirteen years old.

Life On The Vaudeville Circuit

"She played note for note anything that she heard, Earl Hines, Jelly Roll Morton, and heavy like a man, not light piano. At fourteen!"

—John Williams³

Mary Lou's first experience on the road lasted all of two weeks, until her mother tracked her down and brought her back home to Pittsburgh. When school let out for the summer in 1924, Mary Lou again went on the road, this time to earn family income lost by her stepfather's illness.

As a last-minute replacement for The Williams Syncop-Jazzers, a touring show led by comedian Buzzin' Harris, she began life on the notorious Theater Owners Booking Association vaudeville circuit, known colloquially as "Tough on Black Artists." The leader of this band, saxophonist John Williams, was very impressed by the talents of the fourteen-year-old, calling her the



John Williams, circa 1926

best pianist with whom he had ever played. Mary Lou soon married John Williams, combining their incomes on the T.O.B.A. circuit.

When the act folded in Kansas City in 1925, the suddenly unemployed group members soon backed other area vaudeville acts. An act called Seymour and Jeanette hired them for touring across the country on the Pantages circuit, a vast improvement over the T.O.B.A. Seymour James' sudden death ended the act, and the band found itself stranded once again. The Synco-Jazzers settled in Memphis and found enough steady work to survive.

Hoping to leave Memphis as soon as he could, John Williams replaced the saxophonist in a band led by Terrance "T" Holder. They moved to Oklahoma City, to the Holder band's headquarters. At Christmas that year, Holder gambled away the entire payroll of the band and was fired. Andy Kirk, voted the new bandleader, changed the name of the group



The John Williams Synco-Jazzers, 1926, with Mary Lou at the piano

to Andy Kirk and his Twelve Clouds of Joy. The Clouds of Joy prospered in Oklahoma City but were run out of town in 1929 by the white musicians' union. With the help of friends up north, the band moved to Kansas City.

8. **Chunka Lunka (3:44)** Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
SFC Tim Young; SGM Pat Dillon, flute; SGM Eugene Thorne, baritone sax
9. **Tisherome (5:06)** Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
arr. SGM Darryl Brenzel
SSG Mike Bravin, trombone; SGM Darryl Brenzel, soprano sax
10. **Knowledge (5:26)** Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
arr. SGM Eugene Thorne
SFC Andrew Layton, alto sax; MSG Michael Johnston, trumpet
11. **What's Your Story Morning Glory (4:03)** Jack Lawrence,
Paul Francis Webster, and Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing,*
Range Road Music, and Warner Chappell) arr. MSG Vincent Norman
MSG Marva Lewis, vocal; SFC Pat Shook, tenor sax; MSG Jack Wengrosky, trumpet
12. **Rosa Mae (5:20)** Lary Gales and Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
arr. SFC Paul Armstrong
SFC Andrew Layton, soprano sax
13. **Miss D.D. (5:32)** Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
arr. MSG Jeffrey Lopez
SFC Pat Shook, clarinet; MSG Michael Johnston, cornet; SFC Jeff Adams, trombone
14. **Act of Contrition (5:48)** Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
arr. SFC Todd Harrison
Soldiers' Chorus; MSG Marva Lewis, vocal; SFC Andrew Layton, soprano sax
MSG Kevin Watt, flugelhorn; MSG Victor Cenales, vocal

The Legacy of
MARY LOU WILLIAMS

1. **Roll 'Em (3:25)**..... Mary Lou Williams (*EMI Robbins*)
SFC Tim Young, piano; SGM Eugene Thorne, clarinet
SFC Paul Armstrong, trumpet
2. **Messa Stomp (2:51)**..... Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
SFC Andrew Layton, clarinet; MSG Michael Johnston, trumpet
SFC Tim Young, piano; SSG Steve Lesche, guitar
3. **Walkin' and Swingin' (3:05)** Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
SFC Tim Young, piano; SFC Pat Shook, tenor sax
4. **Scorpio (5:47)**..... Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
SFC Pat Shook, clarinet; SSG Mike Bravin, trombone; Geri Allen, piano
5. **Blue Skies (3:02)**..... Irving Berlin (*Irving Berlin Music*) arr. Mary Lou Williams
SFC Pat Shook, clarinet; SFC Paul Armstrong, trumpet
SFC Jeff Adams, trombone; SGM Pat Dillon, tenor sax
SFC Paul Stephens, lead trumpet; SFC Andrew Layton, alto sax
6. **Big Jim Blues (3:07)** Mary Lou Williams (*Cecilia Music Publishing*)
SSG Steve Lesche, guitar; SFC Jeff Adams, trombone
7. **In The Land of Oo Bla Dee (4:08)**..... Mary Lou Williams and Milton Orent
(Criterion Music Corp) arr. Mary Lou Williams, adapt. SFC Andrew Layton
Andy Bey, vocal; MSG Michael Johnston, trumpet; Geri Allen, piano

Andy Kirk and Kansas City

“I didn’t hang around the Subway Club too often because the Subway also used to be one of Mary Lou Williams’ stopping off places....Anytime she was in the neighborhood, I used to find myself another little territory, because Mary Lou was tearing everybody up.”
 —William “Count” Basie ⁴

Kansas City epitomized the term “roaring twenties.” Bandleaders ruled the town, including George E. Lee, Walter Page, Andy Kirk, and Bennie Moten, whose band would eventually become the Count Basie Orchestra. Still not a member of the Kirk band, Mary Lou began to establish her name on the all-night jam session circuit in Kansas City, playing and soaking up the piano sounds of Count Basie, Pete Johnson, and Jay McShann.



Andy Kirk and the Clouds of Joy, 1921

Mary Lou’s aggressive, two-handed style on the piano surprised most musicians because they had never heard a woman play that way. She finally received a break with Andy Kirk in the fall of 1929 when Jack Kapp, record producer for Brunswick Records, decided to record some of the better bands in Kansas City. Kapp scheduled an audition for the Clouds of Joy, but band pianist Marion Jackson never arrived. John Williams convinced

Andy Kirk that Mary Lou could fill in, and the audition continued. Mary Lou's playing melded seamlessly with the band. Kapp loved the Clouds of Joy and scheduled a recording session the very next week. Since Mary Lou had played the audition, Kirk hired her for the session.

John Williams shared Mary Lou's arranging aspirations with Kirk. When the band made its initial recording, five of Mary Lou's compositions were included. The lessons she learned from Andy Kirk and from listening to arranger Don Redman's work resulted in highly innovative settings that showcased her strong ensemble writing, usually surrounding one of Mary Lou's own piano solos. The melodies of her original compositions were both catchy and deceptively difficult. These compositions became the main attraction of the Clouds of Joy, and when Jackson continued to miss engagements, Mary Lou joined the band full-time.

As Mary Lou's arrangements and soloing increased with the Clouds of Joy, so did her fame. Her tunes during this time, including her first composition, "Messa Stomp," became hits. Her writing on "Walkin' and Swingin'" turned heads; the soli writing during the second chorus shows an intellectual and technical mastery of the era's idiom. Thelonious Monk later based his tune "Rhythm-A-Ning" on the second phrase of the soli.

Mary Lou's writing and arranging also earned her outside work as she wrote arrangements for the top bands of the day, including that of Benny Goodman, with whom she had perhaps her biggest hit, "Roll 'Em." Many other "name bands" used Mary Lou's arrangements, including Jimmie Lunceford, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Tommy Dorsey, and Cab Calloway.

Life on the road with the Clouds of Joy eventually took its toll on

Schuller, Gunther. *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz 1930-1945*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Gitler, Ira. *The Masters of Bebop: A Listeners Guide*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1966.

Feather, Leonard. *The Encyclopedia of Jazz*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1960.

<http://www.marylouwilliamsfoundation.org>

<http://newarkwww.rutgers.edu/ijs/mlw/intro1.html>

Credits

Executive Producer:	CW4 (Retired) Kevin Laird
Producer:	MSG Kevin Watt
Recording/Mix Engineers:	SFC Michael McLaughlin and MSG Kevin Watt
Mastering Engineer:	Mr. Bill Wolf (Wolf Productions, Inc.)
Liner Notes:	SFC Andrew Layton
Editorial Staff:	SFC Jennifer Bishop, SFC Natalie Klima, SFC Erica Russo, SSG Jennifer Everhart, SSG Adam Getz, SSG Phillip Johnson, and SSG Ward Yager
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Special Thanks:	Special thanks to Rev. Peter O'Brien for his assistance and guidance during this process, for which this has all been made possible.



Endnotes

1. Linda Dahl, *Morning Glory: A Biography of Mary Lou Williams* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), 17.
2. Most scholars, including Dahl and Kernodle, typically refer to her by her first, rather than last, name.
3. Dahl 1: 44.
4. Dahl 1: 87.
5. Dahl 1: 185.
6. Tammy L. Kernodle, *Soul On Soul: The Life and Music of Mary Lou Williams* (Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 91.
7. Rev. Peter F. O'Brien, Interview with SFC Andrew Layton, April 2006.
8. Duke Ellington, as quoted by Anatol Schenker in liner notes to *Mary Lou Williams 1949-1951, The Chronological Classics*, Classics Records 2002.
9. Dahl 1: 288.
10. Rev. Peter F. O'Brien, Interview with SFC Andrew Layton, April 2006.

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- Taylor, Arthur. *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1977.

Mary Lou. The constant traveling and disagreements with Andy Kirk over money and composing credits led to her departure from the band. Her marriage to John Williams dissolved in 1939, and while at a recording session, Mary Lou met and fell for trumpeter Harold “Shorty” Baker. She decided to leave Kansas City for New York when Duke Ellington hired Baker. Ellington also hired Mary Lou as a member of his arranging staff until 1943. Her best-known arrangement for his band was “Blue Skies,” the Irving Berlin composition that Ellington later retitled “Trumpets No End.”

In the summer of 1943, Mary Lou was hired to play as a headliner at Café Society, a Greenwich Village jazz club—the beginning of her life as a solo act.



Mary Lou Williams Band at Café Society, 1942, (L to R) Vic Dickenson, Orlando Wright, Harold Baker, and Mary Lou Williams

Bebop and New York

“The guys used to come to my house then—Bud Powell, Tadd Dameron, Monk, Miles, Mel Torme, Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy—all the boppers.”
—Mary Lou Williams⁵

Mary Lou’s gig at the Café Society coincided with a revolution in jazz music. Jazz was transforming from swing to bebop, and many of the young boppers gathered in her apartment to explore new ideas. Both Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, two prominent young pianists, learned harmonic and technical skills from Mary Lou. Also, Art Blakey, Dizzy Gillespie, and Billy Taylor considered her an influence on their music and styles. Her



Mary Lou with trumpeter Bill Coleman and bassist Al Hall, 1941

piano style, as conceived in the twenties, still featured a heavy left-handed stride, boogie-woogie style; yet bebop transformed her playing, amalgamating the swing and motion of the traditional stride style with new bebop harmonies. Her music became a bridge from old jazz to new.

Mary Lou’s newer compositions demonstrated her willingness to acknowledge the new direction in music. “Knowledge,” “Tisherome,” “Kool,” and “Lonely Moments” all featured the small group instrumentation of bebop, a frontline of trumpet and saxophone with a backing rhythm section.

Act of Contrition

SFC Todd Harrison has arranged this selection from Mary Lou’s Mass. Expanding upon the brief original, SFC Harrison uses choir with big band to lengthen the piece and elaborate upon its short melody with funky rhythms and thick choral textures.



Knowledge

SGM Eugene Thorne has rearranged this small group piece into an example of the free explorations made by Miles Davis's late sixties quintet. A solo on the drums breaks up the initial statement of the melody, and both alto sax and trumpet solos are free to explore time, harmony, and rhythm.

What's Your Story Morning Glory

Arranged by MSG Vince Norman, this vocal feature is one of the most recorded and recognized tunes by Mary Lou Williams. Ella Fitzgerald, Anita O'Day, and Teri Thornton are among those who have recorded it.

Rosa Mae

While Mary Lou's original recording leaned more towards rock 'n' roll, SFC Paul Armstrong's arrangement has more of a New Orleans flavor. Note how the bass line, guitar rhythms, and piano lines all combine to form one dense sound.

Miss D. D.

In this arrangement, MSG Jeff Lopez has departed from the original recording of *Miss D.D.* dedicated to Doris Duke. He has taken a sparse melody in the bass line and transformed it into a strong thread that lasts throughout the arrangement, passing from saxes to brass and back again.

Bebop also led to the use of the flatted-fifth interval in the melodies of many songs written during the forties. One of Mary Lou's few tunes containing lyrics during this era was "In The Land of Oo Bla Dee," which featured the flatted-fifth interval throughout.

Even though most of the compositions written during this time were derived from the twelve-bar blues and the 32-measure AABA form, Mary Lou used her big band experience as a departure point for her small group arrangements. Her introductions and dialogues between soloists set her arrangements far apart from the norm of the day.

In 1945, Mary Lou wrote one of her largest works, *Zodiac Suite*. In twelve parts and based on signs of the Zodiac, the suite was dedicated to friends who were born under a particular sign. Certain movements were written for individuals, while other movements were dedicated to more than one person; for example, she wrote "Aries" for her friend from Kansas City, tenor saxophonist Ben Webster, and "Gemini" for Benny Goodman, Harold Baker, and Miles Davis. Each movement set a mood, and, unlike other contemporary pieces, was tightly composed with short interludes for improvisation. Mary Lou wrote the original *Zodiac Suite* for piano trio, and later versions for big band, orchestra, solo piano, and piano and bass duet.

In 1948, Mary Lou joined Benny Goodman's bebop combo. She hoped to make more money by writing for one of the biggest names in jazz, but personality conflicts with Benny Goodman, and the monotony of his scripted, predictable shows, made her quit the band. When an opportunity to tour England as a headliner came her way, she gladly took it in spite of her love for New York.

England and Beyond

“I didn’t marry men. I married horns. After about two weeks of marriage I was ready to get up and write some music.”

—Mary Lou Williams⁶



Signing autographs in England, 1953

Mary Lou joined a tour that included Cab Calloway, but unfortunately, low audience numbers and cancelled shows were its legacy. Mary Lou recorded a few times but scandalized the United Kingdom with her new style—England wasn’t ready for modern jazz. Some music critics panned her records, while others considered her one of the best jazz pianists of the time.

Mary Lou’s reputation still won her a few jobs in Holland and Paris, and while touring, Mary Lou decided to relocate to Paris. Once there, she began an extended engagement at a club renamed the Chez Mary Lou, where she reunited with old friends from the States like Don Byas, Annie Ross, and Sidney Bechet.

While she was in Paris, Mary Lou underwent a life-changing religious epiphany. Her friend Colonel Edward Brennan, a wealthy American who lived in Paris and loved jazz, introduced her to Catholicism at a time when life in Europe had become difficult for her. After several months in Paris, Mary Lou had spiraled into depression. She found a cure for her depression within the pages of the Bible.

Blue Skies

Arranged in 1943 for the Duke Ellington Orchestra, this Irving Berlin standard features many soloists, none more prominently than the lead trumpet that soars during the last chorus. Ellington kept this arrangement in his book for years, eventually changing its name to “Trumpets No End.”

Big Jim Blues

Recorded in 1939 with the Andy Kirk band, this arrangement was co-composed with trumpeter Harry “Big Jim” Lawson. Understated from beginning to end, the tune showcases a haunting, bluesy melody in the clarinets and trumpet.

In The Land of Oo Bla Dee

Mary Lou wrote this composition and arrangement in 1949 for the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra. This particular version combines some elements of her small group arrangement with the big band arrangement. Andy Bey provides the vocal.

Chunka Lunka

Mary Lou penned this arrangement in 1968 during a stay in Copenhagen. It is a medium tempo blues with a boogie-woogie melody played by the piano. Special note should be taken of the extremely tight harmonies used throughout this piece, particularly in the accompaniments for each soloist.

Fisherome

This work, recorded at the same session as “Knowledge” in 1949, joins the 21st century in SGM Darryl Brenzel’s arrangement. In contrast to the original swung melody, this arrangement brings new life with a straightened melodic line. Muted trumpets, reed doublings, and mallets on the drums are a few of the colors for which to listen.

Program Notes

Roll 'Em

Written in 1937 for the Benny Goodman Orchestra, this piece pays tribute to the legendary Kansas City pianist, Pete Johnson. The melody in the saxophone section is actually the left-hand pattern in a boogie-woogie piano style. This chart became one of Goodman's biggest hits and one of Mary Lou's most recorded tunes.

Messa Stomp

This composition was Mary Lou's first arrangement for big band. Arranged for Andy Kirk and his Twelve Clouds of Joy in 1929, it represents a transition from Dixieland to swing. A sousaphone replaces the more common string bass, while two trumpets and one trombone represent the brass section, and one clarinet and two saxophones round out the reed section. The unaccompanied piano solo represents Mary Lou's stride style at its best.

Walkin' and Swingin'

Written and arranged in 1936, this piece represents a giant leap forward for Mary Lou. One of her bigger hits, it was recorded by a number of name bands, even that of Louis Armstrong. The writing in the soli section of "Walkin' and Swingin'," with the trumpet leading the saxophone section, showed technical and harmonic innovation in its difficult triplet figures and large interval leaps.

Scorpio

From Mary Lou's famed *Zodiac Suite*, Scorpio was dedicated to Al Lucas, the bass player on the original trio recording of the Suite. This piece also showcases pianist Geri Allen, leader of the Mary Lou Williams Collective.

Retirement and Rebirth

*"The music is her legacy. The music. Thank God she was a composer."
—Rev. Peter F. O'Brien⁷*

Within months of her epiphany, Mary Lou returned to the United States. Then, in early 1955, the great alto saxophonist Charlie Parker died from an apparent drug overdose. Mary Lou was inconsolable; deciding to dedicate the rest of her life to helping musicians in need, she stopped playing altogether. She offered her apartment for people to stay when they had nowhere else to go, and fed musicians who would otherwise have gone hungry.

During a two-year retirement, Mary Lou spent countless hours praying at Our Lady of Lourdes, a Catholic Church in New York,



(L to R) Ronnie Free, Mose Allison, Lester Young, Mary Lou Williams, Charlie Rouse, and Oscar Pettiford. Photo by Dizzy Gillespie, 1958

attempting to rid herself of all vices. Fathers John Crowley and Anthony S. Woods, both introduced to her by musicians, convinced Mary Lou that God intended for her to make music. In May 1957, she was baptized and confirmed in the Catholic Church—one day after her forty-seventh birthday.

After more encouragement from the priests and from Dizzy Gillespie, Mary Lou returned to performing at the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival as a guest with Dizzy's big band. They performed three movements from her *Zodiac Suite*, with Mary Lou as piano soloist. This command performance led to other gigs, necessitated by Mary Lou's lack of any real income.

Mary Lou's charitable works also continued with the creation of her Bel Canto Foundation, intended to provide care for drug-addicted musicians. Mary Lou opened second-hand stores around New York City to fund the foundation, mostly stocked with items donated by her musician friends.

Sacred Works

"Mary Lou Williams is perpetually contemporary. Her writing and performing have always been just a little ahead throughout her career... but her music retains and maintains a standard of quality that is timeless. She is like soul on soul."

—Duke Ellington⁸

As the late fifties turned into the sixties, jazz music changed once again. Free jazz, or avant-garde music, blossomed alongside the Civil Rights



Mary Lou at CBS studios in New York, 1947

Remembering Mary Lou



SFC Andrew Layton and
Rev. Peter O'Brien, 2007

Mary Lou Williams, during the last twenty-five years of her life, was determined to define the history of jazz. Late in life, she played through its eras in a solo piano medley at the beginnings of concerts and sets in clubs. Then, joined by her bassist and drummer, she would play “the way I play now.” In her sixties she sounded more like McCoy Tyner, twenty-eight years her junior, than James P. Johnson, the hero of her youth.

The music you will hear on this recording details jazz history, not only as Mary Lou Williams lived it, but as she played it and composed it. These compositions cover forty-five years of her writing life. If you listen with attention, and with “the ears of your heart,” you will experience the very evolution of this music.

It is appropriate that the Jazz Ambassadors play her music. It is, after all, AMERICAN music. Mary Lou Williams would be proud of this central acknowledgement by her own country. For a musician, this is even better than being put on a stamp. This recording’s availability to any school, library, or teacher in our country who asks for it would be “right up her alley.” Who knows what six-year-old musical genius will hear this recording, invent something entirely new, and extend the history of jazz?

— Rev. Peter F. O'Brien, S.J.
Jersey City, N.J.
February 9, 2007



Mary Lou's Mass, 1975

Movement. The term “freedom” was everywhere: in music, on television, and in the streets. Mary Lou, as always, adapted to the new trends. Her piano playing still held strong onto stride and boogie-woogie but incorporated “free” characteristics, including bitonal melodies and tunes with no steady beat.

Mary Lou began to write and perform jazz works based on sacred hymns and passages from the Bible. She based her first major choral work on the life of St. Martin De Porres, the first black saint of the Catholic Church. The resulting album, *Mary Lou Williams Presents St. Martin de Porres*, contained some of Mary Lou’s best playing of the 1960s. It strengthened her presence in New York City, where she met her future manager and mentor, Father Peter F. O’Brien.

With the encouragement of Fr. O’Brien and others, Mary Lou wrote three jazz masses, including her best-known mass, *Music for Peace*. This work was later re-titled *Mary Lou’s Mass*, and encompassed everything she had done musically, blending elements of rock ‘n’ roll, funk, jazz, and gospel music. The great choreographer Alvin Ailey created a ballet to accompany the mass, and the mass’s 1975 performance at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City attracted the largest audience ever assembled there.

The Final Years

“I decided to work with teens to try to save the one American-born art.”
—Mary Lou Williams⁹



Bringing jazz choral music to teens, 1975

Live at the Keystone, and a renewed interest in her playing led to more touring and performing throughout the United States. Although nearing seventy years old, Mary Lou remained lively and vibrant.

By 1977, Mary Lou moved to Durham, North Carolina, where she took her last full-time position as an artist-in-residence at Duke University, teaching jazz history and conducting both a jazz chorus and a big band.

Before she died of bladder cancer in 1981, Mary Lou created The Mary Lou Williams Foundation, a charitable organization dedicated to

As Mary Lou Williams entered the last phase of her life, education and performing became her focus. With Fr. O'Brien as her manager, Mary Lou made a number of successful albums, including *Live at the Cookery* and

advancing her music and bringing jazz to children. She left her entire estate to the foundation, and Fr. O'Brien became its head. He and pianist Geri Allen also run the Mary Lou Williams Collective, a group dedicated to the preservation of Mary Lou's music.



Coaching young instrumentalists



(L to R) - Rev. Clemens J. McNapsy, Mary Lou Williams, Rev. Peter O'Brien, and Loyola University President Rev. William Byron, on the conferring of an honorary degree from Loyola University

“This is thrilling - both the preservation and extension of Mary's music - I also love the idea that it is the military that is doing this - and also that these recordings wind up in schools and libraries.”

—Rev. Peter F. O'Brien¹⁰