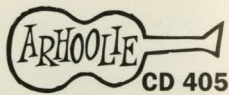


# CLAUDE WILLIAMS

## Live at J's, Vol. 1



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(Frank Smith) (3:50)

Total Time: 69:40



Claude Williams – Fiddle & vocals;

With James Chirillo – guitar; Ron Mathews – piano; Akira Tana – drums; and Al McKibbon – bass. Recorded live at "J's," New York, N.Y. May 1, 1989.

On #12, same as above but Grady Tate replaces Akira Tana on drums, recorded April 24, 1989.

Location recording by Passport Recording, NYC. Scott Lehrer - engineer.

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Cover photo by Russ Dantzler

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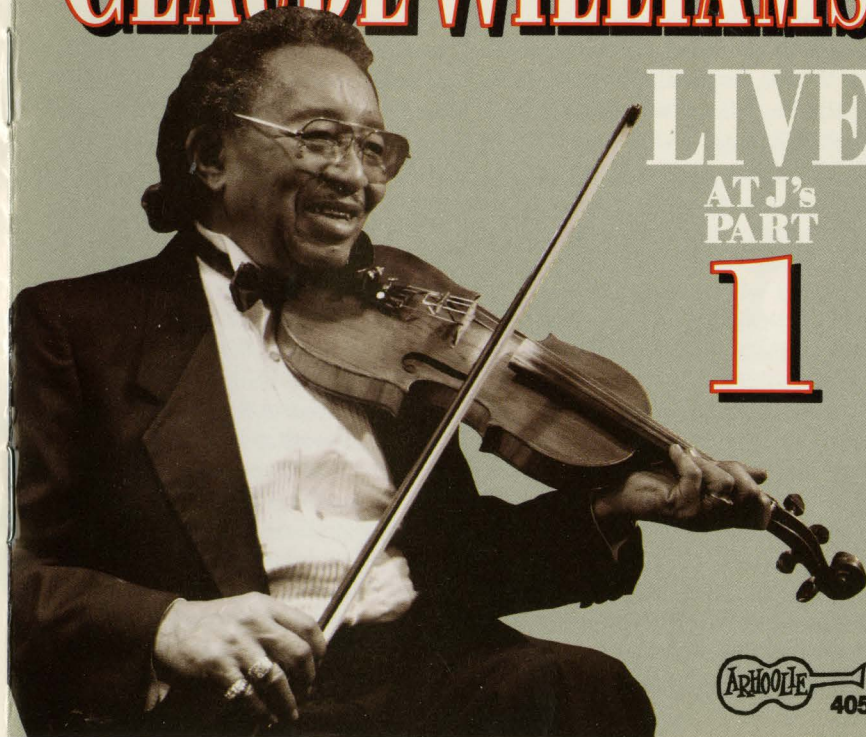
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# CLAUDE WILLIAMS

## LIVE

### AT J's PART

# 1



# CLAUDE WILLIAMS – *Live at J's, Vol. 1*

In the entire history of jazz, one can count the truly great violinists on the fingers of one hand—such figures as Joe Venuti, Stephane Grappelli, Stuff Smith, Ray Nance, and Claude “Fiddler” Williams. Today only Fiddler and Stephane survive, both octogenarians at the top of their form, creating inspired music. The last few years have brought Fiddler before a wider audience who delight in “discovering” this swing giant who has been part of the music scene for over 70 years.

During the late 1980s, Fiddler appeared in both the Paris and Broadway productions of **Black and Blue**. Since 1990 he has been featured on CBS Sunday Morning, played Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Chicago Jazz Festival, and the Clinton Presidential Inauguration festivities on the Mall in Washington, DC.

These two CDs, Fiddler’s first re-

cordings as lead artist in almost fifteen years, were recorded live at one of New York City’s leading jazz clubs, J’s, which sadly closed recently. Williams’ collaborators are such highly regarded jazz luminaries as pianist Ron Mathews, bassist Al McKibbin, drummers Grady Tate and Akira Tana, and guitarist James Chirillo. Chirillo and Fiddler have a special rapport that belies the more than 50 years between their ages. They have performed and recorded together often and James is Williams’ first choice of guitarists. Chirillo played in Benny Goodman’s last band, as well as with Buck Clayton, Louie Bellson, Ruby Braff, and others who appreciated his skills both as a soloist and as a rhythm guitarist.

The tunes range from jazz standards *Cherokee*, *After You’ve Gone* to bossa nova *Wave*, jazz ballads like *Lil’ Darlin’*, *Our Love Is Here To Stay*, to a remarkably spirited version of the

bebop classic *Billie’s Bounce*. Everyone will have their favorite selections, but to this listener the top honors go to *The Fiddler*. If they had ever done square dancing at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem it would have been to music like this. As for Claude’s vocal on *You’re My Désire*, no 85-year-old-man

has any right to sound so romantic.

If we ever attain cultural sanity in our country, they’ll build statues to creative geniuses like Claude “Fiddler” Williams. “Till then we’ll just have to content ourselves with wonderful CDs like this one.

**Bravo Fiddler!!**

Jack Kleinsinger

Producer of “Highlights in Jazz”

(*New York’s longest running jazz concert series*)

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## Producer’s Note

“When I started playing, they weren’t even calling it jazz!” recalls Claude “Fiddler” Williams. Born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 1908, Williams played guitar, mandolin, banjo and cello by the time he was ten. He heard Joe Venuti’s violin at a local pavilion “above the orchestra, on top of all the other instruments” and convinced his family to buy him his first fiddle the next day. By the time he went to bed that night, he was playing *You’ve Got To See Your Mama Every*

*Night, Or You Don’t See Your Mama At All* on his violin. Fiddler’s playing work began with his brother-in-law Ben Johnson’s string band, a group of young musicians playing barber shops, hotels, and front yards. Claude remembers making good tip money in an evening, “six or seven dollars apiece ... and folks were working all week for five to six dollars then.” The Pettiford Family Band, with the young Oscar Pettiford, was the first of many “territory” bands to feature Claude.



Fiddler moved to Kansas City in 1928 when it was a breeding ground for swing, which became the popular music of the era. Claude still insists the best musicians could only make it big after a K.C. trial. According to him, they "had to earn their Kansas City Stamp, then they could go anywhere." While the rest of the nation suffered the effects of prohibition and depression, Kansas City was wide open with good musicians finding plenty of work in an active club scene. Claude's first recordings were made in 1928 playing guitar and violin with the Twelve Clouds of Joy for the Brunswick label. This band was first led by Terrence Holder, then by Andy Kirk, and included the great Mary Lou Williams arranging and composing at the piano. A jitney dance, or ten-cents-a-dance, was a common event for this band. Anxious young men would buy tickets to trade for the opportunity to dance with girls. A whistle blew to stop each dance before dancers could glide around the floor once. The band

had to know a lot of tunes.

In 1930 the Twelve Clouds of Joy with Claude made their New York debut playing the Roseland Ballroom and Harlem's Savoy. The band returned to K.C. where 50 clubs near 18th and Vine were employing bands. Battles of the bands, jam sessions and cutting contests occurred around the clock. Lester Young dominated some jam sessions which included Ben Webster, Hershel Evans and Buddy Tate. Horn players such as Lester Young had a major influence on Claude's unique style. Fiddler either battled or was a member of the best bands in Kansas City—he joined Alphonso Trent's band and George E. Lee before moving out of that area.

Count Basie searched for the great guitarist and fiddler he remembered from Kansas City jam sessions when assembling his first big band in 1936. Basie found Claude in Chicago, where he had been playing with Eddie Cole's band. Eddie's brother Nat, later Nat "King" Cole, played in that band. Wil-

liams said "Nat was just playing piano then—he didn't even know he could sing, but he could play a whole lot of piano. He was the best in Chicago." As part of the Count Basie Orchestra, Claude Williams rose to national fame. After participating in the very first Basie recordings for Decca, Fiddler was voted "Best Guitarist of The Year" in a Downbeat national readers' poll. But, Claude now thanks Freddie Green for replacing him on guitar in the Basie Orchestra, saying that, "if I had stayed with Count, I would have just been playing that ching-ching rhythm guitar for forty years."

In the 1940s, Claude worked with a WPA band in Michigan and The Four Shades of Rhythm in Chicago. He also played with Austin Powell's Quintet in New York, including a performance on the Arthur Godfrey Show. Fiddler began using amplification on his fiddle in 1950. He was with Roy Milton's Blues Band in Los Angeles in 1951 and 1952. In 1953, Fiddler moved back to Kansas City to lead his own combo on

fiddle and guitar. Saxophone player Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson was a member of that group. Claude freelanced and led bands around Kansas City through the 1960s and did brief stints in Denver and Las Vegas before his final return to his Kansas City home in 1969.

The 1970s were Fiddler's decade of European tours. He worked often with pianist Jay McShann, who recorded with Claude. A classic session, "The Man From Muskogee" (Sackville), was produced in 1972 in Toronto with Williams and McShann supported by Don Thompson on bass and Paul Gunther on drums. SteepleChase Records recorded "Call For The Fiddler" with Horace Parlan on piano, Lars Blach on guitar, Hugo Rasmussen on bass and Hans Nymand on drums in Copenhagen in 1976.

In 1980, Classic Jazz released "Fiddler's Dream" with Jay McShann and Andre Persiany alternating on piano, Gus Johnson on drums and Gene Ramey on bass. "Fiddler's Dream" was



the last recording to feature Claude's guitar work—since then he has stayed exclusively with the violin. "Claude Williams' Kansas City Giants" was made with Frank Smith on piano, Gerry Leonard on bass and Richard Ross providing drum and vocal work. "Giants" was released on Big Bear in England in 1980. The Frankfurt Swing All Stars recorded "Jive At Five" in 1988 in Germany with Fiddler fronting the band for Bellaphon (CDLR 40025).

**Black and Blue** was conceived as a revue of original Black American art forms for presentation in Paris with Fiddler in its orchestra. It moved to Broadway, playing for several years and garnering multiple Tony awards. On stage were

the greatest living dancers and female vocalists available, and behind them was a showcase orchestra. Claude Williams had seniority in that eighteen member unit which included Ron Mathews, Al McKibbin and Grady Tate. Reading sheet music for eight performances each week left these creative musicians hungry for improvisation. As a result, they came together on a series of Monday nights at J's in New York City to perfect and record these two live sessions. *(Continued on Claude Williams – Live at J's, Volume 2, Arhoolie CD 406.)*

Russ Dantzler  
Hot Jazz Management  
(212) 586-8125

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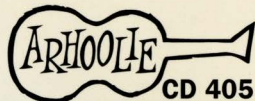


James Chirillo

Photo by Russ Dantzler

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