

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2966

Mary Lou Williams

DON BYAS BILL COLEMAN COLEMAN HAWKINS KENNY DORHAM VIC DICKENSON FRANKIE NEWTON EDMUND HALL

THE ASCH RECORDINGS, 1944-47
COMPILED AND EDITED BY PETER O'BRIEN, S.J.



RECORD I—SIDE A

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 (651-1004A/Asch 450-1) Bernice Petkere (Bourne Company-ASCAP) Time: 3:43.

ROLL EM (653-1003A/Asch 450-2) Mary Lou Williams (Robbins Music Corp.-ASCAP) Time: 2:49.

MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Edmund Hall, clarinet; Al Lucas, bass.

YESTERDAY'S KISSES (2A/Baronet TR 3-B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:45.

Personnel as on Lullaby of the Leaves.

SATCHIL MOUTH BABY (656/Asch 502-A) Mary Lou Williams (MCA Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:52.

LITTLE JOE FROM CHICAGO (652-1002A/Asch 450-2) Mary Lou Williams-Henry Wells (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:52.

April 19, 1944: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, solo piano.

DRAG EM (661-1002B/Asch 450-3) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 3:48.

MARY'S BOOGIE (660-1003B/Asch 450-1) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:35.

ST. LOUIS BLUES (662-1004B/Asch 450-1) W.C. Handy (Handy Bros. Music Co., Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 3:13.

Date Unknown: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Nora Lee King, vocal.

BLUES-UNTIL MY BABY COMES BACK HOME (MA1228-Asch 550-2A) Time: 2:50.

RECORD I—SIDE B

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 MILI JAM SESSION (1236-1006A/Asch 552-2) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 3:15.

MAN O' MINE (1234-1006B/Asch 552-2) Mary Lou Williams-Don Byas (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 4:10.

STARDUST Part I (1239-1005A/Asch 552-1) Hoagy Carmichael (Mills Music, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 3:25.

STARDUST Part II (1235-1005B/Asch 552-1) Hoagy Carmichael (Mills Music, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 3:51.

December 15, 1944: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Coleman Hawkins, tenor-saxophone; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Eddie Robinson, bass; Denzil Best, drums.

LADY BE GOOD (MA 1303-I-1007B/Asch 552-3) George & Ira Gershwin (Warner Bros. Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 3:47.

Add: Joe Evans, alto saxophone; Claude Greene, clarinet.

SONG IN MY SOUL (MA 1300-1008A) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.) Time: 3:03.

THIS & THAT (MA 1301-1008B) Claude Greene. Time: 2:40.

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RECORD II—SIDE C

Date Unknown (4944): MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Al Hall, bass.
CARCINOMA (MA 1259-1007A/Asch 552-3) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 3:39.

August 10, 1944: Personnel as on Carcinoma.
RUSSIAN LULLABY (MA 710/Asch 351-1A) Irving Berlin Music Company-ASCAP) Time: 2:51.

BLUE SKIES (MA 711/Asch 351-1B) Irving Berlin (Irving Berlin Music Company-ASCAP) Time: 2:40.

PERSIAN RUG (MA 712/Asch 351-2A) Neil Morel (Robbins Music Corp.-ASCAP) Time: 2:39.

NIGHT AND DAY (MA 713/Asch 351-2B) Cole Porter (Warner Bros., Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:46.

YOU KNOW BABY (MA 714/Asch 351-3A) Mary Lou Williams-Frank Lewis (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:40.

I FOUND A NEW BABY (MA 715/Asch 351-3A) Jack Palmer-Spencer Williams (MCA Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:58.

December 11, 1944: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Josh White, vocal; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Jimmy Butts, bass; Eddie Dougherty, drums.

THE MINUTE MAN (MA 780/Asch 2001A) M. Ashwood-F. Johnson-C. Hopkins-M.L. Williams. Time: 2:05.

FROGGY BOTTOM (MA 784/Asch 2001B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:54.

February 16, 1946: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, solo piano.

HOW HIGH THE MOON (MA 235/Disc 612-5025A) Morgan Lewis (Chappell & Co., Inc.) Time: 2:12.

CLOUDY/WHAT'S YOUR STORY MORNING GLORY (MA 237/Disc 612-5025B) Mary Lou Williams/Mary Lou Williams-J. Lawrence-P.F. Webster (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc./Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-Warner Bros. Music Corp.-Whale Music Corp.-ASCAP) Time: 2:17.

BLUE SKIES (MA/Disc 612-5026A) Irving Berlin (Irving Berlin Music Co.-ASCAP) Time: 2:12.

THE MAN I LOVE (MA 236/Disc 612-5026B) George Gershwin (New World Music Corp.-ASCAP) Time: 2:22.

THESE FOOLISH THINGS REMIND ME OF YOU (MA 239-Disc 612-5027A) Jack Strachey (Bourne Co.-ASCAP) Time: 2:22.

LONELY MOMENTS (MA 240/Disc 612-5027B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:29.

Date Unknown (1947?): Milton Orent-Frank Roth Orchestra (supervised by MARY LOU WILLIAMS arrangements Mary Lou Williams/Milton Orent): Irving Kustin, Leon Schwartz, Edward Sadowski, trumpets; Martin Ghasar, Allan Feldman, Maurice Lopez, reeds; Orlando Wright (Musa Kaleem), tenor sax; Frank Roth, piano; Milton Orent, bass; Jack "the Bear" Parker, drums—there is some question about the pianist on Whistle Blues: Frank Roth OR Mary Lou Williams.

LONELY MOMENTS (656/Disc 6067A) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:55.

WHISTLE BLUES (658/Disc 6067B) Mary Lou Williams (Hamm Music Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:56.

Date Unknown (1947): MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Kenny Dorham, trumpet; John H. Smith, Jr., guitar; Grachan Moncur, bass.

KOOL (833/Disc 5033B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:43.

MARY LOU (832/Disc 5033A) Lyman-Wagner-Robinson (Venus Music Corp.-Mills Music Inc.-ASCAP) Time: 2:16.

Mary Lou Williams

THE ASCH RECORDINGS 1944-47
COMPILED AND EDITED BY PETER OBREN'S J

DON BYAS BILL COLEMAN
COLEMAN HAWKINS

KENNY DORHAM VIC DICKENSON
FRANKIE NEWTON EDMUND HALL

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER DRAWING BY DAVID STONE MARTIN

Mary Lou Williams

This double LP set *Mary Lou Williams—the Asch Recordings 1944-47* brings together 35 sides (over 100 minutes of music) recorded by Mary Lou Williams in various settings: solo piano; small-group sessions with Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, Frankie Newton, Vic Dickenson, Kenny Dorham; vocal accompaniment with Josh White; Big Band; and the famous trio recordings with Al Hall on bass and Bill Coleman on trumpet. Twenty eight of these sides were previously released on 78 rpm only—no side has never been released in the United States. More importantly, brought together this way for the first time, they offer a kind of portrait of change and development. They were recorded during the explosively creative years for Jazz that brought about the change from Swing to Bop or Modern. These were vivid years for Jazz and they were important years for Mary Lou Williams. In these records Miss Williams may, at one moment, be looking back toward the music of the previous decade and era (though always with nuance and absolute authority) and ahead toward more modern sounds with unusual and deft twists of melody and phrasing and chords until the final recordings of the set when she has clearly developed into a modern pianist of exceptional taste.

The tapes for these LPs were made entirely from original 78 rpm Asch and Disc recordings. The original 78s were largely from the collection of Mary Lou Williams. Other 78s were graciously loaned by The Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University (through the kindness of Dan Morgenstern) and by collector Kenneth G. Noble, M.D.—Our thanks.

This set of LPs *Mary Lou Williams—the Asch Recordings 1944-47* together with *The Zodiac Suite* (Folkways 32844), *Mary Lou Williams—Footnotes to Jazz Vol. 2* (Folkways 2292), and *Piano Jazz Greats* (Folkways 2852) make available on LP all the recordings Mary Lou Williams made for Asch-Disc during a highly creative and transitional period for Jazz and for Mary Lou Williams: the mid 1940s.

Mary Lou Williams may also be heard on the following recordings:

Mary Lou Williams (Black Christ of the Andes/St. Martin de Porres) winner Grand Prix du Disque Français (Folkways 32843)

Mary Lou's Mass (Mary Records—M102) with small orchestra and chorus—scored for the Albin Ailey American Dance Theatre—performed at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City.

Zoning (Mary Records—M103) Mary Lou Williams today—her most recent piano recording.

Produced and Recorded by Moses Asch
Reissue Conceived, sequenced, and annotated by Peter F. O'Brien, S.J.
Transfers and Editing: George Hansen, Cue Recording Inc., N.Y.C.
Cover Portrait of Mary Lou Williams: David Stone Martin
Design & Art Direction: Ronald Clyne

MARY LOU WILLIAMS

is the most important female instrumentalist in Jazz. Her musical stature, however, can no longer be measured in such limiting terms. She has long since outgrown any reference to gender and belongs quite simply among the greatest names in Jazz. Some of them appear with her on this album: Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, Kenny Dorham, Bill Coleman, Frankie Newton. She is, moreover, the only living Jazz Artist who has not only lived through but *played through* all the eras in the History of Jazz. Her music has changed and developed as the music itself moved forward. She was, at times, instrumental in some of those changes herself. Her playing and composing and arranging were always advanced. Duke Ellington called it (her music) "always contemporary—always a little ahead." She has been so constantly contemporary and developing that critics have referred to *her* as the history of Jazz.

She learned the Spirituals and Ragtime from her mother. The Blues were an early and profound part of Miss Williams' music and remain an essential and central element in everything that she plays—no matter how far out—to this day. Miss Williams calls the feeling of the Blues, a soulful feeling, characteristic of all good Jazz no matter how complex. Duke Ellington again said it exactly: "She is like soul on soul." Mary Lou Williams played the music of the small Jazzbands—music played with an insistent beat—as a member of John Williams' Syncopators. The period was the mid and later twenties. John was her first husband and the combo toured widely with a vaudeville show Buzz n' Harris and then with the team of Seymour and Jeannette on the TOBA and Keith Orpheum Circuits. Scattered recordings of this early group exist under either John Williams Syncopators or Jeannette James' Synco-Jazzers.

During the thirties Miss Williams achieved wide fame as pianist-composer-arranger for Andy Kirk's *Clouds of Joy*. The scene was Kansas City—the Swing Era—and Miss Williams' strong playing—especially in the left hand—together with her many original compositions and unusual arrangements did much to spread the style known as Kansas City Swing: the strong blues based and joyful music most widely known through Count Basie. Jam sessions during the era also tended to increase the musicians solo inventiveness. During the same period, Miss Williams wrote and arranged for all the Big Bands of the era including those of Louis Armstrong, the Dorseys, Benny Goodman (*Roll Em and Camel Hop*), Jimmie Lunceford (*What's Your Story Morning Glory*)—during the twenties Mary Lou had a small band in Memphis, Tennessee—she was the leader of this combo when she was all of seventeen—one of the sidemen was Jimmie Lunceford—and Glen Gray and the Casa Lomas among others. For Kirk she wrote *Little Joe from Chicago* (the first Big Band boogie-woogie thus arranged), *Cloudy*, *Walkin' and Swingin'* (much loved by musicians for the unusual voicing in the arrangement and bought and played by all the Bands of the period), *Steppin' Pretty*, *Scratchin' in the Gravel*, *Bearcat Shuffle*, *Messa Stomp*, and many more. Miss Williams has written more than three hundred and fifty compositions to date. During the thirties she recorded extensively with Kirk for Decca. At times during the period she also made trio or small group recordings with units from the Band. One set of four sides deserves special mention: they were recorded for Varsity and the group was called: Six Men and a Girl. The group included Harold Baker on trumpet (Mary Lou's second and to date last husband) who later joined the Ellington Band, and the brilliant tenorist with the Kirk Band: Dick Wilson. Hopefully these sides will soon find their way on to LP. They have never been reissued. Miss Williams remained with the Kirk Band until 1941.

In '41 Mary Lou Williams traveled with and wrote for the Duke Ellington Band for about six months producing some fifteen to twenty arrangements. The most durable of these was a brilliant version of *Blue Skies* (melody completely hidden) called *Trumpet No End*, which was a showcase for the fabulous Ellington trumpet section which by that time included Harold Baker. The arrangement was recorded in 1946 by the Ellington Band. Mary Lou also traveled awhile as a leader of a small group that included Baker, Orlando Wright (Musa Kaleem) who is heard on Side D of this collection on two tunes: *Lonely Moments* and *Whistle Blues*, and an 18 year old drummer from Mary Lou's home town of Pittsburgh, Pa, named Art Blakey. Regretfully this group was never recorded. Any airchecks etc, out there? Please wire collect!

In the early forties Miss Williams began a long and happy engagement at Cafe Society Downtown in New York City. She had moved to N.Y. permanently in 1941. She played off and on at Cafe Society (mostly on) for a good five years beginning in 1943 from what I am able to gather. Those years from 1941 through 1948 were a period of intense creativity in Jazz. And the place of creation was New York City. Mary Lou arrived on the scene at the right time. Varied influences were brought to bear on the music of Mary Lou Williams during those years. One was her already mentioned more or less constant "gig" at Cafe Society. If Cafe Society encouraged a look back over the shoulder toward what was best in the music of Kansas City and the Swing Era in general, that was no loss. By the forties Swing was mature and many of the most brilliant players from the era found employment at Cafe Society: Teddy Wilson, Eddie Heywood, Billie Holiday. Some of them appear on this record: Vic Dickenson, Edmund Hall, and Frankie Newton who led the house band there for awhile. Then there's Josh White who, in another category, was one of Cafe Society's biggest stars.

The second influence was a group of musicians together with three locations. The musicians and two of the locations are widely known—even famous—the third place only moderately known. Many of the musicians might be referred to as “the original boppers.” Among them figured Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clarke, Oscar Pettiford, Miles Davis, Tadd Dameron, J.J. Johnson, Kenny Dorham, Charlie Parker, and most especially vis-a-vis Mary Lou Williams, Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk who were in her company almost daily. All these musicians were intensely and creatively busy in bringing to birth a new form of Jazz that would later be labelled Bop or Modern. The two widely known locations were Minton’s Playhouse in upper Manhattan (the house that built Bop) and New York’s 52nd Street. The third not so widely publicized meeting place was Mary Lou Williams’ apartment.

Before, in between, and after work at Cafe Society Downtown, Mary Lou Williams was to be found at Minton’s. Here Dizzy, Monk, and Charlie Parker were at work late at night playing and creating new sounds in music. Mary Lou Williams was an early appreciator of their work and an encourager of the new music—so much so that she was at times ‘put down’ by musicians of the previous era. She was also often found in the clubs along 52nd Street listening—sitting in—after her regular performances at Cafe Society. In the middle late forties Miss Williams left Cafe Society in favor of the clubs along ‘the Street’ where the new music was beginning to have a hearing and where her playing began to advance rapidly along modern lines. Of course she herself had always been ‘modern’. In Kansas City during the thirties after regular Jam Sessions musicians would often gather around the piano and ask Mary Lou to play “Zombie” for them. The ‘outré’ chords Mary Lou played on such occasions were new and ‘out’ harmonies—based off ‘sounds’ in Mary Lou’s words—chords she says were ‘modern’ even ‘avant-garde’ as these terms are used concerning Jazz today. They were merely, even at that time, the product of an experimental and advancing musical intelligence at work.

In the meantime her apartment had become almost immediately upon her arrival in New York in 1941 a haven for many of the younger musicians. All the experimenters, the inchoate boppers, were there from time to time—many most of the time (Dizzy Gillespie and Tadd Dameron especially) and two all the time: Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. They brought their compositions to her to listen to and the musical sessions which extended through the night and into the next day on Hamilton Terrace were long and constant and might involve Eroll Garner or Mel Torme or Sarah Vaughan or Miles Davis or Oscar Pettiford, etc.

Almost all of Mary Lou Williams’ work on records during the period of 1944-47 was done for Asch and Disc. She went unrecorded from the time she left Kirk in 1941 until the first session on Side A of these recordings in 1944. There was a session for RCA Victor in 1946 produced by Leonard Feather who brought together an all girl group. But all of Miss Williams’ important recordings of the period were done for Asch. These LPs bring together 35 of those sides—all but ten of these were recorded in 1944. Six others were recorded in 1946 and the four remaining in 1946-7 (??). Her recording activities during 1945 produced *The Zodiac Suite* (Folkways 32844) a musical interpretation in twelve parts of the twelve signs of the zodiac. During that time Miss Williams had first presented the *Zodiac Suite* weekly (one sign at a time) on her own radio program *The Mary Lou Williams Piano Workshop* on WNEW. Then she scored it for 18 piece orchestra (with Ben Webster included) and that version was presented in concert at Town Hall in 1945—Barney Josephson the owner of Cafe Society Producer. The concert was recorded but the tapes were stolen and are lost. SOS—In the following year three of the sections of the suite were re-written and scored by Miss Williams for the New York Philharmonic. These three sections were played by that orchestra with Miss Williams as guest artist in a concert at Carnegie Hall and the occasion marked the first meeting of Jazz and the Symphony. This too was recorded together with a Charlie Parker Blues-boogie written by Miss Williams for piano and strings. Isolated disks of the music exist. There also exist some 80 acetates in Miss Williams’ possession—transcripts from her WNEW broadcasts. But all of her deliberate and important recordings between the years 1944-47 are contained on the Asch-Folkways *The Zodiac Suite* and on this double set: *Mary Lou Williams—The Asch Recordings 1944-47*.

They are all the more important because of the way they were produced. The atmosphere at the Asch studios was good. Moe Asch reports that during those days they had “an open session.” People arrived and departed by plan and at random. This state of affairs explains Mary Lou Williams’ presence of three of the ‘vocal’ sides in this collection: Nora Lee King’s *Blues—Until My Baby Comes Back Home* and Josh White’s *The Minute Man* and *Froggy Bottom*. On the first, Mary Lou’s blues and Kansas City roots show clearly in the strong

accompaniment and solo. The second is notable for Bill Coleman’s dancing in and out with pretty obbligato, the chauvinistic lyrics “like the rock of Gibraltar, we’ll never falter, and Mary Lou’s strong accompanying chords, while the third, a Mary Lou Williams original that had been a hit for the Kirk Band in the thirties and existed in the Band’s repertoire even before that (*Froggy Bottom* was a small town near Washington DC.—the tune is a strong boogie-bass Blues and even before Mary Lou Williams was the regular pianist with the Kirk Band and when she was merely travelling along with her husband a member of that Band, Mary Lou would be called in to play “*Froggy Bottom*” and bail the band out and liven things up) offers some strong driving Mary Lou and again some tasty Bill Coleman. The first two are mainly included for completeness sake. Mary Lou was around when Nora Lee King was around and the two made the record more or less impromptu. Miss Williams also walked in on the ‘Minute Man’ session and was asked to play for Josh and she, in turn, must have convinced them all to do *Froggy Bottom* as well. I’m glad she did.

More importantly about the productions methods at Asch: the producer never interfered with the musicians. Mary Lou Williams reports that “Moe would turn on the tapes, go downstairs, and leave us alone. These sides, therefore, present Mary Lou as Mary Lou. No interference from an A&R man or Producer waters them down. Her ideas and music are here recorded as she wished or as the music or musicians dictated. Moe Asch was, and remains, basically an historian or archivist interested in preserving authentic expression. These recordings retain an extra value for that reason. They are doubly valuable because of the period during which they were recorded. They document an important and changing musician during an especially important period of change for Jazz: the period of the mid forties when the transit from Swing to Modern was taking place.

The most important influence of all, of course, on Mary Lou Williams was Mary Lou Williams herself. Evidence of her strong originality, of her desire and ability to produce something different and new is strikingly in evidence throughout her recorded career. Similar and constant evidence of a highly individual and original musical mind can be found everywhere on these thirty sides. For instance:

The entire opening set of five tunes. The arrangement of *Lullaby of the Leaves* is by Edgar Sampson who wrote *Stompin’ at the Savoy*. The other four arrangements are by MLW. The relaxed tempos that give full value to tone and soulful feeling are unusual. *Roll Em* and *Little Joe* are reworkings of two of her earlier compositions. *Roll Em* was a hit for Benny Goodman in 1937 and formed part of the 1938 Carnegie Hall Concert. Both are taken at slower, laid back tempos. The harmonies and voicings are mellow and creamy. This is boogie-woogie with a jazz difference and the conception is not commercial though these sides were recorded during the boogie-woogie craze of the forties. Miss Williams was never a boogie-woogie pianist but having been trained to play all styles and because of her own flexibility, she played it too. I like Frankie Newton’s beautifully constructed and thoughtful solo on *Lullaby* and his delineation of the melody line on the introduction of *Little Joe*: soulful tone—beautiful feeling—the sort of music that makes me wish I’d known the man. *Yesterday’s Kisses* has an odd and inventive melody line. Mary Lou does not remember the tune or recording it. It was released in Europe on Baronet by Timme Rosenkrantz and has never before been released in the US. The personnel listed on the original 78rpm recording label listed all six members of the group heard on the other four songs in this set. This is obviously inaccurate information. We hear only piano, bass, and clarinet. It must be Edmund Hall on Clarinet though it sounds like Benny Goodman. The piano sounds like no one but Mary Lou. Musicologists step forward and clear up this mystery please! *Satchel Mouth Baby* became a hit in the late forties for Billy Williams under the title *Pretty Eyed Baby* and in Italy, *Piccolo Baby*. Throughout the set Mary Lou’s presence is felt guiding, pushing, shaping, leading, and blending the music. The tempos are slow and relaxed but the music swings. This has always been one of Miss Williams’ outstanding characteristics: her ability to swing at any tempo. The music coheres—it holds together—it doesn’t drag. The set also boasts the beauty of Vic Dickenson’s very balladlike and mellow trombone.

The three piano solos on Side A are mostly a look back—probably the sort of music expected at Cafe Society. They are, however, all music. Notice the perfect time—the constant invention and surprise—again swinging or just the right amount of tension at slow tempos. Notice the intricacy of pattern and variation in *Mary’s Boogie* (it’s original and different—a pretty boogie). *St. Louis Blues* reminds me of certain passages in *Nightlife*, Mary Lou’s first recorded piano solo in 1929.

Mary Lou likes *Gjon Mili Jam Session* named for the great Life Magazine photographer who made a motion picture in the forties also titled *Gjon Mili’s Jam Session* in which Lester Young figured promi-

nently. Gjon followed Mary in the forties for months and finally got the photograph of her he wanted in Boston. It went on exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art before photographs were 'in' as 'art'. An acetate of this tune and arrangement taken at breakneck speed with Charlie Shavers on trumpet exists from one of MLW's WNEW broadcasts in 1945. *Man o Mine* written by Don Byas and Mary Lou is a beauty. Notice the interplay between piano and tenor in the opening chorus. Both parts of *Stardust* taken at relaxed tempos and staying quite close to the melody are subtly arranged. The voicings beautifully blended. There is great feeling in these four sides with Byas—a lush chorus from him on *Stardust Part II* and beautiful soulful piano throughout.

This I think is the earliest recording of the Coleman Hawkins line on *Lady Be Good*. In 1944 it was referred to as the only impromptu recording of the session that included *Song of My Soul* and *This and That* and possibly *Carcinoma*. Fats Navarro called it *Fats Blows* and Monk called it *Riff tide*. Hawkins and Mary Lou both take fine solos here. Mary Lou's solo on *Songin' My Soul* is especially interesting. It fits the context of Hawkins' playing so well. Another example of her ability to listen to the musicians around her. *This and That* is exactly a little of this and a little of that. Strict Swing Era arranging alternates with an odd modern melody line—not strictly bop but modern nonetheless. In fact the whole of Side B—the four selections with Byas and the three with Hawkins—while rhythmically more or less still of the Swing Era betray a more modern approach: the melodies twist and turn in modern and odd directions—the accent is on harmony and voicings. The subtleties in these musical areas in Mary Lou's composing and arranging on these sides and her approach to the piano in playing them presage what is to come.

Side C absolutely knocks me out. *Carcinoma* is the high point on all four sides for me. The relaxed tempo and the beautiful melody are matched by the taste of the three players. In introducing the Records on Side A of this collection, Charles Edward Smith wrote in the original notes accompanying the 78s: "Ensemble piano talent is rare in jazz and Mary Lou Williams has it to an unusual degree. Here acceptance of other musicians is not—here are thirty two bars and I'll be back later—but a really collaborative effort." His words seem even more true of these sides with Bill Coleman and Al Hall. The music is a real blend—the arrangements don't abruptly leave off and begin—the three players play their parts and one whole results. Mary Lou is modest in what she takes for herself. No show business here—only the requirements of the music. *Carcinoma* was recorded during the Hawkins' date I think—it was released in an album with that material at any rate. The other six sides were released together in an Album. The date was supposed to have been for solo piano. The producer uncharacteristically responded with displeasure when Mary Lou arrived with Coleman and Hall at the studio. They had been working together for a month to prepare for the date and the lady came armed with arrangements and musicians. She won. The album became well known. Moe Asch recently called it a very important album. Orrin Keepnews singled it out after thirty years. He loved *Russian Lullaby*. Dizzy Gillespie is crazy about the records and at one time asked Mary Lou to do a similar date with him. Perhaps that will still come about. At any rate, the records are highly musical. They betray originality in conception—an unusual combination of instruments—a mutual respect and a high degree of listening on the part of the musicians to each other—a unity of tone—a freshness of invention in the arrangements—to say nothing of the performing and playing of the two soloists. My own favorites are *Blue Skies* and *Night and Day*. They're relaxed. All six sides swing and each tune and the whole set taken together offer a unified concept not just a series of loosely connected solo choruses. All these things combine here in fresh and original and perceptive music that remains alive to this day.

Side D offers Mary Lou in six piano solos two years later. The intervening year of 1945 is represented on records by The Mary Lou Williams Trio in *The Zodiac Suite* (Folkways 32844). The original notes for the Disc release of these six solos were written by Inez Cavanaugh. She began this way: "Off goes the ceiling to your feeling when you listen to this DISC album of MARY LOU WILLIAMS' piano solos. You'll be happier because you 'sat in' on the *stylistic evolution* (emphasis added) of a truly great artist." That emphasized phrase is interesting. The conception is more modern—more musically varied—perhaps because everything depended on those two hands and on nothing else. I have heard Miss Williams outdo herself several times when circumstances forced her into solo performance. On one occasion, a string on Milton Suggs' bass broke during a set at The Cookey in New York. Neither a replacement for the instrument nor a substitute bass player could be found. Miss Williams finished that set and two others solo. The results were breathtaking. The year was 1975 and her own evolution by that time has proceeded by several more coils. Everyone from Fats Waller to Monk to McCoy Tyner to the music of and beyond

the spheres got into things that night. Her imagination was untrammelled and uninterfered with. She seemed to be bringing all of her powers of invention and all her pianistic ability to bear on the music that night. The result was not overplaying but something again different. The same might be said in a milder way for these six solos. They are purely Mary Lou. And a joy throughout. Inez continued in her notes in 1946: "Here is a brilliant musical mind happily blessed with TWO knowing hands to faithfully and faultlessly execute its fruitful findings." She hit it on the head there again. Mary Lou remains these days one of the few TWO HANDED piano players extant. I wish that I had had a tape recorder that night in the Cookery. The same on one occasion in the home of Dr. Sam Atkinson in Summit, N.J. where Mary Lou played a private party for her friend the good Doctor. Late at night after the sets with the bass player had been completed, Mary Lou sat at the piano alone no longer performing but composing as she played. It would have been her greatest record. Recently her solo version of *I Can't Get Started* at the end of her joint concert with Cecil Taylor in Carnegie Hall in NYC topped anything by either artist all evening.

Here in this set I particularly like *Blue Skies* (a song you will notice in two different versions in this album). The tune originally labeled *Cloudy* on the Disc 78 is actually a combination of *Cloudy* and *What's Your Story Morning Glory* and back to *Cloudy* to close. There are little tinges of Gershwin-esque phrases but here authentic Jazz. *These Foolish Things* stays close to the melody but listen to the harmonies and the feeling. It is simply wonderful. *How High the Moon* is simply heavenly and the silly joke reminds me that Langston Hughes was an ardent and happy fan of Mary Lou's during the period of these recordings. I've always liked *Lonely Moments*. The muffled bass drumlike sound in the background is the pianist-composer's foot keeping time. I'd like to hear a new arrangement of this modern melody line.

The next two sides are by a band put together by Milton Orent—the bassist. He and Mary Lou were close friends during the mid and late forties. Among other things he was a staff arranger with NBC. He lost his job there once because his musical ideas and harmonies proved too advanced for the arrangements he provided Kate Smith. He and Mary Lou also wrote the bop fairy tale *In the Land of Oo Bla Dee* together. *Lonely Moments* and *Whistle Blues* were co-arranged by Mary Lou Williams and Milton Orent. The original label copy announced that the session was "Supervised by Mary Lou Williams". My ears also tell me that Miss Williams plays piano on *Whistle Blues* despite the fact that the original label copy and discographies give that assignment to Frank Roth. Miss Williams denies that she is the pianist on the recording. At one moment she thought she might have sat down for that side. Another tune called *Spring* was recorded during that session. It was never issued. The acetates seem to be among the missing. *Whistle Blues* also became a hit for Benny Goodman during the late forties. Notice the tenor of Orlando Wright (Musa Kaleem) on both sides but especially on *Whistle* distinguish the two sides.

We come finally to the last two compositions. *Kool*, another Mary Lou Williams; original, caused author Ira Gitler to make special mention of Mary Lou Williams in his book *Jazz Masters of the Forties*. For though she had gained her fame as a strong, swinging left handed pianist, of the Swing Era in the 1930s, she was by this recording clearly a modern pianist of exceptional taste. Here the chords, the phrasing, the style, the approach, everything are clearly boppish and modern. Mary Lou also thinks that this is the best chorus Kenny Dorham ever took. Another Jazztype of some experience thinks that this is the first time that Kenny exhibited completely artistic mastery in his own voice on records. Looking back over the music in this collection it is easy to see the signs pointing to the style arrived at in *Kool*. Absolute knowledge, loftiness of invention, musical curiosity and restlessness were always part of Mary Lou Williams' original musical makeup. The musicians on the session were so happy about *Kool* during a rehearsal prior to the date that they decided to do a version of *Mary Lou*. It ends this collection. On it Miss Williams plays in a style that exhibits the strongest development that marks her playing to this day: a modern sound with roots. The lyrics that Kenny Dorham invented to go along with the music in the last selection on this album are apt: Mary Lou—we thank you.

Peter F. O'Brien, S.J.
New York—August 19, 1977

The odd sound quality on *Kool* and *Mary Lou* is not an esoteric idea on the part of the composer and arranger. The 78rpm recording from which the transfer to tape was made seems to have been defectively pressed. We could find no other. The speed moved variously from 76rpm to 80rpm. This defect in technical matters hopefully will not interfere with your enjoyment of the music. It would have been a great loss to leave the two important and musical sides out.

P.S. Miss Williams' career did not stop with the last of these recordings. Many journeys, geographical, spiritual, and musical took her into many corners in the thirties years since. Her religious conversion became musically important in her extended compositions for sacred purposes especially: *Hymn in Honor of Saint Martin de Porres* and her three Masses including *Mary Lou's Mass* which was choreographed by Alvin Ailey and which was the first Jazz composition performed in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in NYC (1975). Many honors have come Miss Williams' way—the naming of Mary Lou Williams Lane in Kansas City—two Guggenheim Fellowships—a half dozen Honorary Degrees. More importantly she has continued to compose and play and invent musically. She is currently beginning a new period in her life—that of Full Professor teaching fulltime at Duke University in Durham, N.C. She is also currently at work on her autobiography: *Zoning the History of Jazz*.

Record I - Side A

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 (651 - 1004A / Asch 450-1) Bernice Petkere (Bourne Company, - ASCAP) time: 3:43

Roll Em (653 - 1003A / Asch 450-2) Mary Lou Williams (Robbins Music Corp. - ASCAP) time: 2:49

MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Edmund Hall, clarinet; Al Lucas, bass

Yesterday's Kisses (2A / Baronet TR 3-B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:45

Personnel as on *Lullaby of the Leaves*

Satchel Mouth Baby (656 / Asch 502-A) Mary Lou Williams (MCA Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:52

Little Joe From Chicago (652 - 1002A / Asch 450-2) Mary Lou Williams-Henry Wells (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:52

April 19, 1944: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, solo piano

Drag Em (661 - 1002B / Asch 450-3) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 3:48

Mary's Boogie (660 - 1003B / Asch 450-1) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:35

St. Louis Blues (662 - 1004B / Asch 450-1) W. C. Handy (Handy Bros. Music Co., Inc. - ASCAP) time: 3:13

Date Unknown - ??: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Nora Lee King, vocal

Blues - Until My Baby Comes Back Home (MA1228 - Asch 550-2A) time: 2:50

Record I - Side B

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 Mili Jam Session (1236-1006A / Asch 552-2) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 3:15

Man o, Mine (1234 - 1006B / Asch 552-2) Mary Lou Williams-Don Byas (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 4:10

Stardust Part I (1239-1005A / Asch 552-1) Hoagy Carmichael (Mills Music, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 3:25

Stardust Part II (1235-1005B / Asch 552-1) Hoagy Carmichael (Mills Music, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 3:51

December 15, 1944: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Coleman Hawkins, tenor-saxophone; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Eddie Robinson, bass; Denzil Best, drums

Lady Be Good (MA 1302-1 - 1007B / Asch 552-3) George & Ira Gershwin (Warner Bros., Inc. - ASCAP) time: 3:47

add: Joe Evans, alto saxophone; Claude Greene, clarinet

Song in My Soul (MA 1300 - 1008A) Mary Lou Williams, (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc.) time: 3:03

This & That (MA 1301 - 1008B) Claude Greene - time: 2:40

Record II - Side C

Date Unknown (1944): MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Al Hall, bass

Carcinoma (MA 1259 - 1007A / Asch 552-3) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 3:39

August 10, 1944: Personnel as on *Carcinoma*

Russian Lullaby (MA 710 / Asch 351 - 1A) Irving Berlin (Irving Berlin Music Company - ASCAP) time: 2:51

Blue Skies (MA 711 / Asch 351 - 1B) Irving Berlin (Irving Berlin Music Company - ASCAP) time: 2:40

Persian Rug (MA 712 / Asch 351 - 2A) Neil Moret (Robbins Music Corp. - ASCAP) time: 2:39

Night and Day (MA 713 / Asch 351 - 2B) Cole Porter (Warner Bros. Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:46

You Know Baby (MA 714 / Asch 351 - 3A) Mary Lou Williams-Frank Lewis (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:40

I Found a New Baby (MA 715 / Asch 351 - 3A) Jack Palmer-Spencer Williams (MCA Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:58

December 11, 1944: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Josh White, vocal; Bill Coleman, trumpet; Jimmy Butts, bass; Eddie Dougherty, drums

The Minute Man (MA 780 / Asch 2001 A) M. Ashwood-F. Johnson-C. Hopkins-M. L. Williams / time: 2:05

Froggy Bottom (MA 784 / Asch 2001 B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:54

Record II - Side D

February 16, 1946: MARY LOU WILLIAMS, solo piano

How High the Moon (MA 235 / Disc 612 - 5025A) Morgan Lewis (Chappell & Co. Inc. 0 time: 2:12

Cloudy/What's Your Story Morning Glory (MA 237 / Disc 612 - 5025B) Mary Lou Williams / Mary Lou Williams-J. Lawrence-P.F. Webster (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. / Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - Warner Bros. Music Corp.-Whale Music Corp. - ASCAP) time: 2:17

Blue Skies (MA 238 / Disc 612 - 5026A) Irving Berlin (Irving Berlin Music Co. - ASCAP) time: 2:12

The Man I Love (MA 236 / Disc 612 - 5026B) George Gershwin (New World Music Corp. - ASCAP) time: 2:22

These Foolish Things Remind Me Of You (MA 239 - Disc 612 - 5027A) Jack Strachey (Bourne Co. - ASCAP) time: 2:22

Lonely Moments (MA 240 / Disc 612 - 5027B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:29

Date Unknown (1947): Milton Orent-Frank Roth Orchestra (supervised by MARY LOU WILLIAMS—arrangements Mary Lou Williams/Milton Orent): Irving Kustin, Leon Schwartz, Edward Sadowski, trumpets; Martin Glaser, Allan Feldman, Maurice Lopez, reeds; Orlando Wright (Musa Kaleem), tenor sax.; Frank Roth, piano; Milton Orent, bass; Jack 'the Bear' Parker, drums—there is some question about the pianist on *Whistle Blues*: Frank Roth or Mary Lou Williams.

Lonely Moments (656 / Disc 6067A) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:55

Whistle Blues (658 / Disc 6067B) Mary Lou Williams (Harman Music Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:56

Date Unknown (1947): MARY LOU WILLIAMS, piano; Kenny Dorham, trumpet; John H. Smith, Jr., guitar; Grachan Moncur, bass

Kool (833 / Disc 5033B) Mary Lou Williams (Cecilia Music Publishers, Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:43

Mary Lou (832 / Disc 5033A) Lyman-Wagner-Robinson (Venus Music Corp. - Mills Music Inc. - ASCAP) time: 2:16