

## BORDER CROSSINGS: THE GREAT MIGRATION AND WOMEN IN JAZZ



Mary Lou Williams – Circa 1940  
**Birth name** Mary Elfrieda Scruggs

- **Influenced by** Lovie Austin
- **Origin/Grew Up** – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.
- **Genres** – Swing, Big Band and Bebop
- **Instruments** - Piano, Arranging
- **Associated acts** – Andy Kirk, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington
- **1910 – Born** May 8 - Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.
- 1924 – Toured on the Orpheum Circuit.
- 1925 – Performing with Duke Ellington and his early small band, the Washingtonians
- 1927 – Married saxophonist John Williams
- 1929 – Her husband, John, accepted an invitation to join Andy Kirk's band in Oklahoma City, leaving 19-year-old Mary Lou to head the Memphis band for its remaining tour dates. Williams eventually joined her husband in Oklahoma City but did not play with the band. The group, now known as Andy Kirk's "Twelve Clouds of Joy", relocated to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Williams spent her free time transporting bodies for an undertaker. When the Clouds of Joy accepted a longstanding engagement in Kansas City, Missouri, Williams joined her husband there and began sitting in with the band, as well as serving as its arranger and composer.
- 1937 – Begin arranging for Benny Goodman
- 1942 – Divorced her husband, left the "Twelve Clouds of Joy" band, returning again to Pittsburgh. She was joined by band mate Harold "Shorty" Baker, with whom she formed a six-piece ensemble that included Art Blakey on drums. After a lengthy engagement in Cleveland, Baker left to join Duke Ellington's orchestra. Williams joined the band in New

York, and then traveled to Baltimore, where she and Baker were married. She traveled with Ellington and arranged several tunes for him

- 1943 – Left Baker and the group and returned to New York
- 1945 – Accepted a regular gig at the Café Society Downtown, started a weekly radio show called *Mary Lou Williams' Piano Workshop* on WNEW, and began mentoring and collaborating with many younger bebop musicians, most notably Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk, Composed and performed the *Zodiac Suite* at New York's Town Hall
- 1952 – Toured in England and ended up staying in Europe for two years
- 1956 – Converted in 1956 to Roman Catholicism. Her energies were devoted mainly to the Bel Canto Foundation, an effort she initiated to help addicted musicians return to performing
- 1957 - Two priests and Dizzy Gillespie convinced her to return to playing, which she did at the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival with Dizzy's band
- 1960s – Composed Mary Lou's Mass - Throughout the 1960s her composing focused on sacred music - hymns and masses. One of the masses, *Music for Peace*, was choreographed and performed by the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater as “Mary Lou's Mass”
- 1972 and 1977 – Guggenheim Fellowships,
- 1971 – Grammy Awards Nomination, Best Jazz Performance - Group, for the album *Giants*, Dizzy Gillespie, Bobby Hackett, Mary Lou Williams
- 1973 – Honorary degree, from Fordham University in New York
- 1980 – Founded the Mary Lou Williams Foundation
- 1981 – Received the Duke University's Duke's Trinity Award for service to the university
- 1983 – Duke University established the **Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture**
- 1996 – The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. has an annual Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Festival

Track #	Song Title	CD Title	Year	Element
1	Mary's Idea	*	1937	Call & Response/Counterpoint
2	Virgo	**	1945	Impressionism
3	Jesus Is	***	1964	Gospel
4	Jitterbug Waltz	****	1971	Jazz Waltz
5	Love For Sale	****	1971	Fast Swing
6	Mr. Roger's Neighborhood	N/A	1973	Teaching Scat Singing

\*The Very Best Of Andy Kirk

\*\*Zodiac Suite

\*\*\*Mary Lou's Mass

\*\*\*\*Mary Lou Williams and the Trumpet Giants