

On this day in jazz (July 08)

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 05 July 2015 13:17 - Last Updated Monday, 16 April 2018 17:47

On this day in 1975, pianist [Mary Lou Williams](#) recorded the album *Free Spirits*. Joining Mary on the album were Buster Williams on bass and Mickey Rocker on the drums. Although Mary recorded over 100 records in her career, this was only the ninth that she recorded as a leader.

Mary was born Mary Elfrieda Scruggs in Atlanta, GA, but grew up in Pittsburgh, PA. She taught herself to play the piano and made her first public performance at six years old. She started playing professionally with Duke Ellington at the age of 12, and once at the ripe old age of 15, Louis Armstrong heard her playing in Harlem, and after the song he went up to her, picked her up and gave her a kiss. At 17, she married saxophonist John Williams and moved to Memphis, TN. In 1942, divorced from her husband, she returned to Pittsburgh for a while before moving to Europe for two years in 1952. In 1956 she became a Roman Catholic, quit performing and dedicated her time to the Bel Canto Foundation which helped musicians with drug addictions quit and return to performing. However, two priests and Duke Ellington convinced her to start performing again...and that brings you up with her history leading into yesterday's profiled album, *Ellington at Newport*.

Some of the awards and honors she received over her career were the following:

- Guggenheim Fellowships in both 1972 and 1977
- Nominee in the 1971 Grammy's for Best Jazz Performance - Group
- Founded the Mary Lou Williams Foundation in 1980
- Duke University's Duke's Trinity Award for service to the university in 1981; in 1983 Duke established the Mary Lou Williams Center for Black Culture
- In 1996, The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. established the annual Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Festival

Another interesting bit of trivia for this day...it's the day I published my last blog post for **On this day in jazz**

. I started a year ago, profiling Miles Davis and Charles Mingus'

Blue Moods

. While I admit the first few points left something to be desired, I think that I hit my stride by the end of the first month. I hope that you have enjoyed the journey and have learned a thing or two about this great art form.

Here's Mary with "[Ode to St. Cecile](#)":

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FREE SPIRITS
MARY LOU WILLIAMS TRIO

SteepleChase

Track listing:

1. Dat Dere (Bobby Timmons) 4:48
2. Baby Man, No.2 (John Stubblefield) 7:56
3. Baby Man (John Stubblefield) 8:31
4. All Blues (Miles Davis) 6:59
5. Temptation (Lew Brown) 5:08
6. Pale Blue (Buster Williams) 4:27
7. Free Spirits #2 (John Stubblefield) 5:04
8. Free Spirits (John Stubblefield) 5:25
9. Blues for Timme (Mary Lou Williams) 5:37
10. Ode to Saint Cecile (Mary Lou Williams) 5:55
11. Surrey With the Fringe on Top (Oscar Hammerstein II / Richard Rodgers) 2:58
12. Gloria (Mary Lou Williams) 5:31