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THE FUNCTION OF ORAL TRADITION IN *MARY LOU'S MASS* BY MARY LOU WILLIAMS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the

University of North Texas in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

By

France Fledderus, B.C.S.

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The musical and spiritual life of Mary Lou Williams (1910 - 1981) came together in her later years in the writing of *Mary Lou's Mass*. Being both Roman Catholic and a jazz pianist and composer, it was inevitable that Williams would be the first jazz composer to write a setting of the mass. The degree of success resulting from the combination of jazz and the traditional forms of Western art music has always been controversial. Because of Williams's personal faith and aesthetics of music, however, she had little choice but to attempt the union of jazz and liturgical worship. After a biography of Williams, discussed in the context of her musical aesthetics, this thesis investigates the elements of conventional mass settings and oral tradition found in *Mary Lou's Mass*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Towards A Critical Aesthetic

Much has been made in sociological circles of the differences in communication between oral and literate cultures.

> A primary function of communication in any society is the transmission and preservation of culture. In European society this function is expressed fundamentally through a written tradition...Both in African societies and Black American communities, culture was and is transmitted through an expressive oral tradition (Baber 1987, 81).

The differences between European written and African oral cultures can be broadly defined such that "if the chief characteristic of the written word is permanence, then we may say that one of the central features of a non-literate culture is changeability" (Small 1987, 225).

Of course, the differing cultural approaches of permanence and changeability have immense influence on both the practice of the arts and the aesthetic assumptions by which the arts of the respective cultures are judged. While this fact has many ramifications for music, it is rarely discussed in musicological circles. From Oritz M. Walton's article on oral culture we can distill the applications of this cultural aesthetic to music. He writes that

improvisation in Africa

> can be seen as a natural development in a culture that encouraged free expression of emotion through art. The accent culturally and aesthetically was on spontaneity. Spontaneity in turn means to express feelings as they occur, hence improvisation becomes instrumental toward the attainment of spontaneity (Walton 1971, 161).

While in African culture, improvisation is only allowed by the well-trained master drummer, it is utilized on a wider basis in the music of African-Americans.

> Contrasted with the music-for-the-elite philosophy prevalent in the West, African music retained its functional and collective characteristics. The element of improvisation was developed rather than abandoned, and it found its way into Black music in this country. Similarly, the unifying element of audience participation was also retained (Ibid., 166).

While in general African-American music today is still characterized by improvisation, both in performance style and audience reception, Western art music is not. This is because differences between oral and literate musics exist at a more fundamental level than mere improvisation. The aesthetics of the two differ in the very conception of how music should function. The differing views of the function of music are evident in how the critics of literate Western art music and oral African-American music judge the respective arts.

Aesthetically, in Western music since the nineteenth century, art has been viewed as either cultivated (classical) or vernacular (popular). In both of these scenarios the resulting object or product is frequently detached from the person performing. Either the composition is not written by the performer, or

the product produced is made so accessible for its audience that it means little to the performer as a work of art. In African-American culture, by contrast, popular music is exalted by the performers and because it is written for the people, the art is the property of the entire community (Sidran 1971, xiii).

Furthermore, because actually creating music in performance is an end unto itself in African-American culture, once the moment of performance is over, the end result, such as a recording, is of little use or value. Black Nationalist Jimmy Stewart explained,

> Art, in our sense, must be understood as the accomplishment of creating, the operation of creating. What results therefrom is merely the momentary residue of that operation--a perishable object and nothing more, and anything else you might imbue it with (which the white aesthetic purports to do) is nothing else but mummification. The point is--and this is the crux of our two opposing conceptions of being--that the imperishability of creation is not in what is created, is not in the art product, is not in the thing as it exists as an object, but in the procedure of its becoming what it is (Stewart 1971, 84).

In short, it is the process, not the product which is preserved and handed down in African-American oral tradition.

In light of the differing aesthetics between Western art music and African-American music it stands to reason that the products of one tradition cannot be judged by the aesthetics of the other. Western art music critics cannot expect the same formal musical phenomenon from a jazz performance as they do from a classical music score, for example. Nor should they, because

> when a musician improvises, the act of creation is experienced at first hand, with the active participation of all those present, listeners as well as performers; while in fully-composed music the

> act is already in the past, complete before the first sound is heard; it is abstracted, distanced from the performers and listeners alike. That this abstraction and distancing have made possible the creation of magnificent sound-structures which have fascinated, and continue to fascinate, generations of players and listeners should not blind us to the price we pay for them, or give us leave to assume the inherent inferiority of other ways of musicking [that is, the practice of making music]...It is not just that Mozart, J. S. Bach, Beethoven and Liszt, as well as numberless other musicians great and forgotten, would protest at such an assumption, but we also have evidence that many of their most felicitous ideas grew out of improvisation, which strongly suggests that the existence of a thriving tradition of notated music depends not only on a thriving tradition of improvisation but also on an intimate connection between the two. (Small 1987, 290).

In fact, it would not be incorrect to think of the compositions of the Western art composers cited by Small as improvisations of which they approved. Lacking the technology we have today, the Western art music masters disseminated their art by writing it out, rather than recorded their improvisations, thus reinforcing if not adding to the literacy of Western art music. However, it is important to note that in the process of writing, one can always go back and make changes, whereas in the process of improvisation, once a note is sounded, there is not room for revision. This is what makes jazz music so exciting.

That jazz music is rooted in an oral tradition is a given. But also true is the fact that jazz is rooted in the church. Frontier revivals, black spirituals, gospel hymns, and New Orleans funeral music are all examples of religious manifestations of the oral tradition which has influenced jazz. These sacred musics do not, however, remain separated from their 'secular' counterparts, as

is the tendency in literate societies.

As there is a correlation in Africa between music and ritual, so in African-American music there is a correlation between the sacred and the secular.

> The Black American tradition comprises many different musical forms, including spirituals, blues, gospel, jazz, and popular music. Each of these genres, which includes a complex of subdivisions, is associated with a particular social context and historical period. Although these two factors serve to distinguish the various types of music from each other, the Black world view serves to unify them into a conceptual whole (Burnim and Maultsby 1987, 111).

This is evident in the similarity between African-American sacred and secular music. Indeed, Ben Sidran argues that White America desperately needs African-American music both for its spirituality and its capacity to combine life and art (Sidran 1971, 22).

This holistic view from oral culture combining life and music is recognized by African-Americans themselves.

> Afro-Americans repeatedly point to a resonance between Black sacred and secular musical performances, which have in common certain components: dance, vocal and instrumental technique, style of delivery, manipulation of text, timbre, rhythm, visual image (e.g., dress), and audience feedback. For each type of music, the principles underlying the performance remain the same; only the outward manifestations of the components differ, and frequently these differences are negligible. From the creation of the Negro spiritual in the eighteenth century to the development of the most contemporary forms of Afro-American music, the organizational principles, aesthetic components, and ideological premises on which Black music is based have remained constant (Burnim and Maultsby 1987, 132 - 133).

These aesthetic and ideological principles will be discussed in Chapter III.

Being aware of the religious influence on African-American music history, it is perhaps surprising that jazz music was not used as a liturgical vehicle until the mid-fifties. In this decade, jazz musicians consciously began for the first time to play jazz music in churches as an expression of worship. In particular, the *Sacred Concerts* of Duke Ellington (beginning 1965) contributed to the growing movement attempting to make liturgical music more relevant to the times.

In fact, jazz liturgies became somewhat of a fad in the 1960s. Partly, this trend grew out of genuine religious conviction on the part of certain jazz musicians, but it also reflected protests against authority and tradition, especially in the congregations of some college and university chapels. Jazz could easily function as a music of rebellion there because "Americans have a conservative attitude towards their church music. They avoid changes and innovations and like to attach themselves to traditional sound-making" (Riedel 1975, 138). Any music as earthy as jazz would necessarily seem rebellious to conservatives in the sixties. While liturgical jazz still is performed in isolated instances today, by the late 1970s the fad had cooled.

One of the greatest contributors to the genre of sacred jazz music during its heyday was pianist, composer, arranger, and teacher Mary Lou Williams (1910 - 1981). To analyze the contributions that Williams made to jazz music I

believe it is necessary to understand the aesthetic framework from which she was working. Thus the biography of Williams discusses not only her life and works, but also her musical aesthetics.

As necessary background information, how the oral tradition functions in both jazz and African-American churches will be explained, as well as how this aesthetic poses practical problems for musicians brought up with the literate tradition. I will then discuss the formal conflicts that arise from the use of improvisation from oral tradition in notated compositions. Because jazz composer Duke Ellington (1899 - 1974), whose career parallels Williams's in both time and content, had to deal with the tension between pre-composed and improvised materials, the formal and improvisational aspects of his compositions will be mentioned briefly.

Finally, Mary Lou Williams's magnus opus, *Mary Lou's Mass,* will be discussed in the context of her musical aesthetics. This mass is an attempt, the first by a jazz composer, to fuse together liturgical worship and elements of oral tradition utilized in jazz music. Although there may be an inherent clash in the aesthetics of the two in regard to their respective definitions of spirituality, I propose that the writing of *Mary Lou's Mass* was the natural culmination of Williams's unique experiences as a jazz pianist, arranger, teacher, and composer and her personal convictions as a Roman Catholic.

Furthermore, it may seem ironic to analyze a composition which is more composed than improvised in light of the emphasis I have placed on the

importance of improvisation to African-American culture. However, I wish to show that even in the context of a completely composed work by Mary Lou Williams, manifestations of the oral tradition are still evident.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

Life and Works

Williams's career in jazz, both as a performer and arranger was a very accomplished one. Her playing was "characterized by a rock-steady rhythmic pulse and a deft, rolling attack on the keyboard--a smooth but driving swing combined with often delicate and always melodic ideas" (Dahl 1984, 67). Some writers have criticized her style, saying that she had no sound of her own, but Williams had this to say in response:

> I consider that a compliment, although I think that everyone with ears can identify me without difficulty. But it's true that I am always experimenting, always changing, always finding new things. Why back in Kansas City I found chords they're just beginning to use now. What happens to so many good pianists is that they become so stylized that they can't break out of the prison of their styles and absorb ideas and new techniques. Some of them play the same thing night after night--something I just couldn't do (Berendt 1975, 254).

Williams's career was unique in that it spanned virtually all of the style periods in the history of jazz--from blues to ragtime to boogie-woogie to Kansas City swing to bebop to the avant garde. Despite having her aesthetics of music formed during only the first three styles cited, Williams remained very progressive in her music and even added to the last two movements. She

explained,

> I experiment quite a bit when I write; in fact, I do when I play also...I break all the rules--as long as I don't run a man out of his range. When I start writing, you may hear some peculiar sounds. It's just a thing with me; I have to create with everything I touch (Williams 1987, 18).

This is hardly an exaggeration, for Williams was the only stride pianist of the twenties to remain modern for the next fifty years. In the 1970s, she sounded like she was a product of the 1950s or 1960s, rather than three decades earlier. As Duke Ellington commented,

> Mary Lou Williams is perpetually contemporary. Her writing and performing are and have always been just a little ahead throughout her career...Her music retains--and maintains--a standard of quality that is timeless. She is like soul on soul (Ellington and Kennedy 1973, 169).

Mary Lou Williams was born Mary Elfrieda Scruggs on May 8, 1910, in Atlanta, Georgia. Her father left home around the time of her birth, and when she was four her family moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There she subsequently took on the names Mary Lou Winn and later Mary Lou Burley, after her respective step-fathers. Williams learned to play piano already in Atlanta, however, where her mother was the organist for the local Baptist church. By the time she was three Williams was playing piano by herself. Williams explained,

> My mother played for the church, and it seemed like I was always getting into trouble of some kind while she practiced on the organ; so she used to hold me on her lap for quite a while. One day, when I was two or three, she stopped and sat me on the stool--and I began playing. Picking out the melody, you know. She ran and got the neighbors to hear me (Williams 1987,

16).

Although her mother taught her spirituals and ragtime, she would not let Williams take formal lessons because, being a true advocate of oral culture, she believed that Mary Lou would not be able to improvise after lessons. Instead, she brought musicians to their house and Williams learned to play by ear. It helped that Williams had perfect pitch, a fact she realized in the second grade; but still, Williams practiced what these visiting musicians played sometimes for ten or twelve hours a day. "Jazz is a self-taught art, and I was a loner" (Dahl 1984, 61), Williams explained.

Williams commented that when she was learning to play in Pittsburgh, she listened to

> Jelly Roll Morton, Earl Hines, J. P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Willie the Lion [Smith]. The right hand didn't mean a thing back then. If you didn't have a strong left hand, you weren't considered a good pianist. The right hand became important around the mid-thirties with Teddy Wilson. The left hand gave you strength and a great beat in your head. You didn't have to stride after that. You could play rhythmic things on top because that beat was embedded in your head. In bebop, the left hand became more similar to the drums in style. The drummer was dropping bombs. That's why they called it bop. He'd go *bop! baba-bop! bop!* (Lyons 1983, 70 - 71).

Williams also recalled that "The man I really patterned after--he never became known. He was a terrific boogie-woogie pianist named Jack Howard; he had me playing piano exactly like a man" (Williams 1987, 16).

At the age of six, Williams began performing professionally. Her step-father was the first to pay her to play his favorite songs. In her teens, he also

took her to black theaters and clubs where she became the darling of older pianists. In Cleveland Art Tatum would take her on tours of the jazz clubs there, and back in Pittsburgh she met local legends Earl Hines and Fats Waller. The latter was so excited about her playing that he picked her up and threw her in the air. He would always tell Williams before they started to perform which keys to play in so that she would sound good, because many times certain piano keys were missing (Mitchell 1985, 140).

From age eight to fourteen, Williams played neighborhood parties including the homes of rich white socialites. She would frequently come home with handkerchiefs full of money. Already in the fifth and sixth grades Williams started to tour. She recalled,

> In Pittsburgh originally, I worked with the local union bands. Then when the Cottonpickers and all the fast bands came to town my mother would allow them to take me out to play with them, to places like Memphis, Tennessee, and Kansas City (Williams 1987, 16).

Williams also received some rudimentary music education from Mrs. Alexander at Westinghouse Junior High School. She was the woman who taught both Billy Strayhorn and Earl Hines. This did not last long, however, because as Williams explained,

> I was in vaudeville when I was twelve. The *Hits And Bits* show came to Pittsburgh, and their particular pianist was quite a drunkard; this particular time, he didn't show up at all. Someone told the manager of the show: "There's a little girl out East City that can do the job." Well, they brought him the six miles from downtown out to East Liberty--and there I was outside on the sidewalk, playing hopscotch with the kids. He was disgusted: "You're recommending *her* for my show--that's ridiculous."

> However, we went in the house, and he had me sit down and play for him. Immediately, he wanted to sign me up. My mother had to arrange for me to have two-and-a-half months away from school to play with this show. About two years later they came through again and I went out with them (Ibid.).

During the summer of 1924, to financially aid her family of eight, Williams toured with a carnival called the Home Talent Show. But even when not on the road, local performances were a good source of income for Williams. "By the time Mary Lou was fifteen, she was playing in a club where Fats Waller had been appearing, earning a salary of seventy-five dollars a week, a remarkable wage for a teenage piano player in 1925" (Holmes 1986, 34). Williams also played for a raunchy vaudeville troupe called the Hottentots, who toured with comedian Buzzin' Harris in 1925. About this experience Williams commented, "It was an animal life. The *worst* kinds of people" (Balliet 1977, 76).

From this training, however, Williams learned to become quite an unrestrained performer. She recalls,

> When I was fifteen years old, I was tearin' it up in Pittsburgh. I played with a sheet over my head. I played with my elbows, my feet, and I'd play turned around with my back to the piano. I was known as the "little piano girl" on all the talent shows. I was a clown. One day when I came down off the stand, a man of thirty-five years old came over to me and said, "I heard you play three good chords. Drop the clowning and stick to them" (Lyons 1983, 70).

Williams took this to heart, and it is perhaps from this experience that she gained her aesthetic of soulfulness in music.

Although she was a good student, Williams quit high school after her

first year and from 1926 - 1927 joined full-time a small combo called the Syncopators. This group, led by alto saxophonist John "Bearcat" Williams, toured with two vaudeville groups: Buzzin' Harris and Seymour and Jeannette. Dance team Seymour and Jeannette toured on the TOBA and Keith circuits, which eventually brought them to New York City. There Williams sat in with Duke Ellington's Washingtonians and met Sonny Greer, Tricky Sam Nanton, Jelly Roll Morton, and others.

Being a vaudeville pianist in John Williams's band was not always easy for Mary Lou. But she knew John Williams from her second tour with *Hits and Bits*, and he

> often came to her aid and fought for her right to play piano; managers and performers were simply not accustomed to working with a woman player and would often refuse to do so unless cajoled. John Williams smoothed some of the rough edges of the band life for the young Mary Lou (Dahl 1984, 62).

In 1926, at the age of sixteen, Mary Lou married John Williams in his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee.

In 1926 the Syncopators also made some recordings. From these we find that already at the age of sixteen, Williams's solos had both an advanced conception and execution. On "Midnight Stomp" and "Now Cut Loose" Williams utilized such virtuoso techniques as broken walking tenths, right hand octaves, tremolos in the style of Hines, stomping shifted rhythmic accents, and fleet crossing over-hand cascading figures (Schuller 1989, 351).

Later that year, John Williams went to Oklahoma City to tour with

Terence Holder's band, the Clouds of Joy. Mary Lou stayed in Memphis and took over leadership of their small group, hiring the then unknown Jimmie Lunceford, who was teaching school in Memphis at the time. Mary Lou's band of Tennessee musicians was together for about two months, but then in late 1926 Mary Lou went to Oklahoma City to rejoin John Williams. They toured roadhouses, dancehalls, and saloons in the Midwest and Southwest as a territory band.

In the winter of 1928 - 1929 Andy Kirk, baritone saxophone player for the Clouds of Joy, took over the leadership of the band from Terence Holder, who had originally formed the group in Dallas, Texas in 1925. Holder, a brilliant trumpet player, was neither a skilled manager nor a reliable bandleader and had been dismissed in Oklahoma City by his fellow band members for mismanagement. When he left, so did their alto saxophone player, Fats Wall. In January of 1929 John Williams found himself stranded in Oklahoma City after a tour with Seymour and Jeannette. He was hired full-time by Andy Kirk to replace Wall for an engagement at the Winter Gardens, a leading ballroom in Oklahoma City.

At first Mary Lou was not an official player for the Clouds, she just drove one of the cars with which the Andy Kirk's band traveled. She recalled,

> I'd wait outside ballrooms in the car, and if things went bad and people weren't dancing, they would send somebody to get me and I'd go in and play "Froggy Bottom" or some other boogie-woogie number--and things would jump (Dahl 1984, 62).

But as Williams sat in with the group she learned more and more about music.

She explained,

> I got most of my musical knowledge while I was with the Andy Kirk band; those well-trained musicians taught me how to arrange music, read, and everything else...Andy Kirk knew I had ideas for arranging; he'd sit with me from eleven o'clock until twelve at night. In about a week's time I was writing--just through watching him. Paul Whiteman's father was his teacher, you know; so he was a very good musician (Williams 1987, 16).

After a successful winter and spring in Oklahoma City, Kirk's band relocated for a summer engagement in Tulsa. The George E. Lee Orchestra of Kansas City took over their Winter Gardens job. After hearing the Twelve Clouds of Joy (as they were now called) play in Tulsa and singing with them, Lee recommended Kirk's band for a long-term engagement at the Pla-Mor Ballroom in Kansas City. Lee had liked the band's smooth style and clean section work and, arriving at an agreement with Kirk regarding minimum fees and a division of jobs, they proceeded to take over the Kansas-Oklahoma area (Russell 1971, 164). Thus Mary Lou and John Williams moved their base from Oklahoma to Kansas City and stayed there from 1930 - 1935, excluding a visit to New York City's Savoy Ballroom.

Musically, Kansas City was an excellent place to be in the 1920s and 1930s because it entertained a variety of musical styles. Present in Kansas City at this time were jazz players from the south (particularly New Orleans), and blues singers from the cities, the Mississippi Delta, Texas-Arkansas, and Oklahoma (Southern 1971, 389). Thomas J. Pendergast was largely responsible for this abundance of musicians.

> Under the control of the Pendergast political machine, even as the roaring twenties slid into the Depression, Kansas City had plenty of money to spend on gambling, drinking, and whoring. That meant plenty of jobs for musicians who flocked to the city (Dahl 1984, 60).

In addition, Kansas City was both a wealthy trading center--being at the junction of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers--and an important railway junction connecting east to west with direct links to Chicago and St. Louis. Musicians would challenge each other to "cutting contests" (see below) in Kansas City clubs between the changing trains from the east, Chicago, and the west, early into the morning after the dances they played were over. Kansas City was not the only place where such contests occurred, but because of the sheer quantity of musicians there, the competition was more intense than elsewhere. These "jam sessions required the musicians to have a mastery of the blues, standard tunes, shouts, rags, dance tunes, ballads, and the riff originals that were common property of all Southwestern jazz musicians who came from this environment" (Taylor 1980, 77).

Williams recalled one of the most famous cutting contests at the Cherry Blossom in Kansas City in 1934 when the famous Coleman Hawkins from Fletcher Henderson's band was beaten:

> Around four A. M. I awoke to hear someone pecking on my screen. Opened the window on Ben Webster. He was saying, "Get up, pussycat, we're jammin' and all the pianists are tired out now. Hawkins has got his shirt off and is still blowing..." Sure enough, when I got there, Hawkins was in his singlet, taking turns with the Kaycee men. It seems he had run into something he didn't expect. Lester's style was light and...it took him maybe five choruses to warm up. But then he would really blow, then

> you couldn't handle him at a cutting session. That was how Hawkins got hung up. The Henderson band was playing in St. Louis that evening, and Bean knew he ought to be on the way. But he kept trying to blow something to beat Ben [Webster] and Herschel [Evans] and Lester [Young]. I heard he'd just bought a new Cadillac and that he burnt it out trying to make the job on time. Yes, Hawkins was king until he met those crazy Kansas City tenor men (Russell 1971, 29).

These improvising competitions were based on a strong sense of community, and had their roots back in the oral tradition of West Africa. Jimmy Stewart explained that cutting contests were

> a fundamental practice that was traditionally expressive of our culture. Our poets engaged each other in contests of improvisational verse-making. One that immediately comes to mind is such a contest the Swahili poets used to participate in, called *kufumbana,* in which two poets try to "trip each other up" by composing two lines of verse, which the other must complete by two lines in the same meter and rhyme. But in addition to this, the fact that each line had to have sixteen syllables with a caesura, which is a pause denoting the rhythmic division in a line of verse, should give you an idea of the skill that was required. This is what went on in our "jam sessions" in our music in this country (Stewart 1971, 93).

The type of music played in big bands by many cutting contest participants was Kansas City swing, which was a mix of blues, boogie-woogie, and swing. Kansas City swing is particularly defined by its dependence upon the improvisations of soloists and the use of riffs, which are short, rhythmic, harmonic passages utilized repeatedly. Because of the use of riffs, the pianist was very important in Kansas City swing. Williams explained, "The Kansas City style was a swinging left hand...If a pianist didn't have a strong left hand, well, he was not considered very good at all. Nobody would play with him"

(Pearson 1987, 115).

Kansas City swing was unlike any other music of the day because it was based much more on oral tradition than the music of the swing bands in Eastern cities (Sidran 1971, 22). In New York, for example, band members were frequently excellent sight readers. The members in the bands from Kansas City, by contrast, were often poor readers. Thus, instead of playing from notated scores, Kansas City swing arrangements utilized easy to memorize riffs as the basis for the opening chorus. This was then repeated by the full ensemble, often in unison by the brasses and sometimes by the rhythm section, to support the solos (Southern 1983, 383).

Perhaps because of the added emphasis on listening and memorizing inherent in oral music, players in Kansas City bands tended to be excellent improvisers. Although Andy Kirk kept his band small and flexible because he abhorred the brassy sound of Eastern swing bands, he employed several strong soloists. Mary Lou Williams (piano), Dick Wilson and later Don Byas (saxophone), Edward "Crackshot" McNeil and later Ben Thigpen (drums), Floyd Smith (guitar), and Pha Terrell (vocals) all excelled at improvisation.

The members of Count Basie's Kansas City swing band were particularly known for their improvisational prowess. In fact, the compositional structure of the head charts they played was so loose that members of the band (as opposed to Basie alone) frequently composed arrangements via group improvisation, creating riff-within-a-riff performances.

> 'Setting riffs' (creating the riff structure), building new compositions through riff-based improvisation, and using the base of swinging riffs for extended solos were all part of a musical ethos and were a splendidly effective way to blend dance music with improvisational jazz (Pearson 1987, 114).

Kansas City swing, like all other oral music, was functional in that it was meant to be danced to. Kirk's band in particular played music to please dancers (Russell 1971, 165). Jazz soloists of that era, such as Lester Young, have pointed out how the players were not only inspired by each other, but also by the rhythm of the movements of the dancers.

> Background riffs set by rhythm, horn, and reed sections provided a foundation for both dancers and soloists. The persistence of the dance rhythm gave the soloist freedom to depart from it, to weave his musical concepts in relatively free time around this rhythmic core (Pearson 1987, 114).

Shortly after securing the Pla-Mor engagement in Kansas City, Jack Kapp from Brunswick Records heard the Kirk band playing dance music. He was looking for a Kansas City group that could compete with the Moten band who recorded on the Victor label, and so invited the band to audition for a Brunswick contract. The day of the audition the Clouds' pianist failed to make an appearance (according to Cloud member Claude Williams this was due to an automobile accident), and Williams substituted for him at the last minute.

After hearing Williams play on this audition, Jack Kapp, who later became the head of Decca, insisted on using Williams as the band pianist on all subsequent Kirk recording dates (Dahl 1984, 64). Williams's two-fisted solos from the 1930 session still show the influence of Earl Hines. His

trademarks of breaking up the stride time through displaced chords and disjunct harmonies and the wandering melodic left hand are exhibited in these solos (Schuller 1989, 351). Lest anyone question Williams's abilities as a performing artist, remarks from Count Basie, himself a successful Kansas City swing pianist, should assuage any doubts.

> Sometimes I used to sit in at the Subway Club...But I didn't hang around there too often because the Subway also used to be one of Mary Lou Williams's stopping off places and I always used to get out of her way. Anytime she was in the neighborhood, I used to find myself another little territory because Mary Lou was tearing everybody up (Murray 1985, 110).

Despite her obvious self assurance at playing swing keyboard, Williams was not the full time pianist for the Kirk band until 1931, so in her spare time she began to write. Although the Kirk band did not record again until 1936 (this time at Decca with Kapp), Williams, in the meantime, recorded some of her original compositions in Chicago for Brunswick with Kirk sidemen. Songs such as "Drag 'em," "The Pearls," "Swingin' for Joy," and "Harmony Blues" were released with success under the title of Mary Lou Williams and her Kansas City Seven. "Night Life," recorded in 1930 with this group, was a historic solo piano recording because it was "something she improvised on the spot, unaware that it was even being recorded" (Placksin 1982, 45).

Almost as soon as Williams became the full time pianist for the Kirk band, she also started arranging for it. Through her arranging Williams was very influential in developing the Kansas City swing style. Sharing Kirk's aesthetic of lean arrangements, Williams managed to combine simple voicings

in infinitely subtle variants (Schuller 1989, 358).

> By 1936 swing was officially in. But by not slavishly capitulating to the prevailing dictates, the Kirk band was able to maintain a high degree of individuality, exemplified by an emphasis on improvised solos, buttressed by light-toned arrangements. And arranger Mary Lou Williams, with her light touch and sense of clarity was the ideal molder of the band's identity (Schuller 1989, 353).

Working with the Kirk band was a period of great happiness for Williams. Even though these years occurred in the midst of the Depression the Clouds worked steadily. Williams recalled,

> During the years I was with Andy Kirk we starved almost. I remember not eating for practically a month several times. But we were very, very happy because the music was so interesting, and you forgot to eat, anyway. Everything was laughter and we had a great time. During the Depression we played engagements and we knew we weren't going to get any money because Andy would scratch his face when he was walking toward the band and the trumpet player would pull out his horn and play the "Weary Blues." And we'd laugh about it. We hadn't eaten in a couple of days and nothing was said, because the music was our survival, I think (Stokes 1991, 42).

At times, however, being a successful musician, arranger, and recording artist was rather stressful for Williams. "'I was very high-strung and sensitive,' she remembered, 'and when the boys fooled around at rehearsals with what I wrote I would get mad and snatch the music off the stands and begin to cry and go home to bed'" (Christopher 1983, 82).

Despite these negative experiences, however, Williams excelled at composing. She worked

> like a painter who lays out four or five basic colors, which then can be mixed in various combinations and used in pure discrete

> form. She could isolate certain timbral duos, combine them into quartets, or by adding one extra voice into quintets and by doing so delineate the basic structure of the piece: timbre at the service of form (Schuller 1989, 359).

From 1931 - 1942 Williams provided such originals as "Froggy Bottom," "Mary's Idea," "Close to Five," and "Dunkin' a Doughnut" for the Andy Kirk band.

Williams further disseminated the Kansas City swing style by writing arrangements for other swing bands. She

> expanded her knowledge with the help of such excellent writer-arrangers as Don Redman and Edgar Sampson, and most of the best band leaders of the swing era...sought her out. Goodman, for whom she had done a very popular arrangement of her "Roll 'Em" tried to secure her exclusive services, but she refused, preferring to free-lance...She recalled her output, "In '36, the Kirk band traveled thousands of miles a week on one-nighters all through the South. By now I was writing for some half-dozen bands each week. As we were making perhaps 500 miles per night, I used to write in the car by flashlight between engagements" (Dahl 1984, 64).

Throughout the late thirties and early forties Williams contributed arrangements and originals to the bands of Benny Goodman ("Roll 'em," and "Camel Hop"), Jimmie Lunceford ("What's Your Story, Morning Glory"), and Dizzy Gillespie ("In the Land of Ol Bla Dee," a pop fairy tale written with Milt Orent). As well, the Bob Crosby, Earl Hines, Louis Armstrong, Glen Grey, and Tommy Dorsey bands performed her work.

From the beginning Williams was harmonically innovative in her compositions. She recalled,

When I was arranging in the early thirties, I started using the

> sixth of the chord, and Andy Kirk told me it was against the rules. They only used triads, but we did it because it sounded good. Harmonies were very limited then. It was the beat and the feeling that mattered (Lyons 1983, 71).

With her left hand dexterity on the piano, it is not surprising that when boogie-woogie became the rage in 1936, Williams's "Little Joe From Chicago" became a hit. Williams recalled those days, "During the Andy Kirk Era, people were so wild about jazz...People would come up and kiss your hands, and you had to stop playing. This was in the late thirties, and the audiences were young" (Shaw 1971, 221).

Success aside, however, Williams eventually tired of the now conventional sounds of swing music. Ironically, the success of the Kirk band, largely a result of Williams's contributions, led her to feel limited in what she could play and write for the group. This was the beginning of the end of Kansas City swing and Williams changed her style. "Walkin' and Swingin'" from 1940 was one of the first experiments in jazz to utilize modern sounds (Schuller 1989, 758). Williams explained,

> Ben Webster inspired that, really. All the musicians liked it because it was difficult...It was something different, I guess. I had four saxophones and one trumpet on a fast chorus; no one had ever used that combination. I always wanted to hear five saxophones; so I'd either put a trumpet in that or a trombone, to blend the five-part harmony (Williams 1987, 17).

While in the late twenties and early thirties, Kansas City had boomed, in the late thirties and early forties there was a mass exodus from Kansas City for several reasons. In 1938 and 1939 the fall of Pendergast came about, and then

with World War Two there was no money to support big bands. Even Count Basie's band, which was strongly associated with Kansas City left for New York already in 1936. Because the level of improvisation practiced in Kansas City was unprecedented, it was in big demand elsewhere. Mary Lou Williams explained,

> You see, what happened in Kansas City was that John Hammond came to town. He was knocked out by what was happening musically, because he'd never heard such a thing. And he began to get jobs for the musicians. He took all the good musicians out, and it hasn't been good since. It was very beneficial what he did, but it left no one there that anybody could copy or to continue what was happening, because everybody that was playing left (Pearson 1987, 184).

The Clouds of Joy were also affected by this trend. In 1936 the Kirk band relocated to New York City, and there enjoyed a string of hit recordings until 1945. The national recognition they received was due mostly to the popularity of vocalist Pha Terrell, who joined the band in 1936. Terrell's 1936 hit,

> "Until the Real Thing Comes Along" put the Clouds of Joy among the top ballroom attractions, exceeding even the rating for the Count Basie Orchestra...Once again the power of the phonograph record, not to mention the role of the omnipotent A&R man, was demonstrated as the all-important factor controlling the fate of jazz orchestras (Russell 1971, 168).

Popular success caused little satisfaction for Williams, and in 1942 she abruptly left Kirk's band after a show one night. Andy Kirk said this was due to her jealousy of the newly signed guitarist Floyd Smith, who, Williams believed, took too many solos and got too much attention (Ibid., 168).

Divorcing John Williams, who had left the band already in 1941, Mary Lou moved to Pittsburgh. There she formed a combo that included Harold "Shorty" Baker (who had joined the Clouds in 1940) on trumpet, Orlando Wright on tenor, and Art Blakey on drums. Joe Williams sang with the group on occasion as well. Williams recalled,

> We had three young cats that could really play. I had a tenor, alto and trumpet. But the parts that Harold Baker was playing--I could not find anyone to take his place after he joined Duke. He'd stand up and take five or ten choruses, and then drop back with the section, you know (Williams 1987, 17).

When Williams subsequently married Baker in 1942, the group broke up.

In 1943 Williams was hired as staff arranger in Duke Ellington's band for six months and for them wrote sixteen pieces including "Trumpets No End" and "My Gal Sal." She remarked, "When we rehearsed my arrangements, every musician in the band was always there. Any other time, you couldn't find half of 'em. I guess it was a change from what they were doing" (Ibid.). Indeed, Williams was one of the first composers to incorporate the sounds of the bebop movement into her writing.

In fact, Mary Lou Williams, Coleman Hawkins, and Earl Hines were the only early jazz musicians who successfully made the transition from the swing era to bebop. Not only did Williams incorporate the new sounds into her music, she was, in many ways also a leader in its development. In the forties Williams was a soloist both in New York and California, and

> the camaraderie with Thelonious Monk, Charlie Christian, Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Dizzy

> Gillespie led to her becoming a consummate modern pianist and composer. Her originality in handling progressions and harmony greatly influenced the stylistic advancements of other jazz soloists (Unterbrink 1983, 39).

Already in 1946, for example, Williams wrote one of the first jazz waltzes called *Waltz Boogie.* Although triple meters were used later in jazz history, in 1946 4/4 was still the standard time signature. Whitney Balliet wrote of the innovations in Williams's playing at this time.

> In the forties she advanced certain dissonant chords that became part of Thelonious Monk's permanent furniture. She also outlined the sort of Debussy impressionism that no modern pianist, confronted by an number like "Polka Dots and Moonbeams," would be caught without (Balliet 1966, 138).

From 1944 - 1948 Williams worked solo or in a trio at both the Cafe Society uptown and the Cafe Society downtown. She had mastered the techniques of Teddy Wilson, Art Tatum, and even the locked-hand style of Milt Buckner. Many of the recordings she made at this time are now collector's items. Williams became a champion of bebop, befriending and also teaching most of the bebop greats. She explained,

> Monk, Bud, Miles, Sarah Vaughan, Mel Torme, Leonard Feather used to come to the house, and we'd stay up all night jamming....So I decided I didn't want to play the other kind of music anymore; I already knew the changes because of musicians like Tadd Dameron being around the house. I played with several bop groups (Williams 1987, 18).

In addition, her New York apartment became a meeting place for serious jazz musicians at this time. Williams recalled,

> I'd leave the door open for them if I was out. Tadd Dameron would come in to write when he was out of inspiration and

> Thelonious Monk did several pieces there. Bud Powell's brother Richie learned how to improvise at my house. And everybody came or called for advice. Charlie Parker would ask what did I think about him putting a group with strings together? Or Miles Davis would ask about his group with tuba (Christopher 1983, 82 - 83).

Williams's steady employment at the Cafe Society gave her more time to compose and allowed her to become active on the air as well. She recalled,

> In the early forties I did all the radio shows. I was on NBC at a time when they were quite prejudiced. Shows like Peggy Lee's; practically every show in New York--TV and radio. Often, if a movie star became ill, CBS would call me. I did the Paul Whiteman show and they gave me a plaque. For Mildred Bailey's show I was the arranger and the band pianist. Then I had my own radio show around '45, on which I introduced my *Zodiac Suite* (Williams 1987, 17).

Williams's *Zodiac Suite* was an extended composition of twelve themes, each corresponding to an astrological sign. It was conceived as a mood portrait of individual musicians and was originally performed in 1945 by her trio on "The Mary Lou Williams Piano Workshop," a New York radio show on WNEW. Every Sunday Williams was to perform a different sign live, but as she recalled,

> I had no time to write or go into the studio and record, so after the first three I'd just sit there and play, and the music was created as we were playing. You might call that real jazz composing...We set up a system of signals--I'd shake my head for them to stop and nod for them to come in--but that was all (Morgenstern 1975, liner notes).

The *Zodiac Suite* was first performed in its entirety at the Cafe Society downtown.

In 1946 "Aquarius," "Scorpio," and "Pisces" were scored for an eighteen-

piece orchestra including strings and performed by the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall. Williams explained, "That was important because jazz had been popular for a long time, but it had never been accepted as a serious musical form. That was a big concern of mine. This concert was the first time that jazz and the symphony met" (Williams 1978, 147). She added, "I think the symphony players liked it much better than the audience; they stood up and applauded, because they had never played anything like that before" (Williams 1987, 17).

That this was the first time for an orchestra to perform the works of a genuine jazz composer should not be too surprising because, as Williams commented about symphonic arranging, "Even if you had studied for it, there was no opening for blacks at the time in that field" (Morgenstern 1975, liner notes). For this Carnegie Hall performance Williams arranged one of the pieces and Milt Orent, then arranger and bassist on the NBC network staff, arranged two others. Williams said of Orent in 1975,

> Milt was so far out, they finally fired him...The reason I was so ahead in modern harmony was that I absorbed from him. He knew so much about chords and things. I have some scores here that would be right for now...He was about thirty years ahead in sound (Ibid.).

As bebop became increasingly complex, some of the aesthetics of the oral tradition began for the first time to lose their hold on African-American jazz music. While the horn players trading fours with the drummers before the final statement of the chorus remained a reflection of the call and response

technique brought over from Africa,

> the ideologies, that the black musician freely appropriated from the white society...culminated in the monstrous display of an aesthetic individualism (an antiquated white Renaissance concept) during the bop movement...It was during the period that the words "genius" and "artist" came to signify the approbative status of aesthetic stature that most Black musicians were pursuing then and that was being bestowed on them by white critics (Stewart 1971, 87 - 88).

The new emphasis on the individual over the community changed for the first time the functional nature of African-American music. Jazz was no longer for dancing

> for in the Bop movement of the forties, a rift was becoming apparent between the music and its function in the Black community....it was apparent, without a doubt, that the days of producing our music within the context of those former departments of social activities were at an end (Ibid., 90).

Brought up from her youth with the idea that music must be functional in nature (ie, have practical applications for dancing, entertainment, worship, etc.), Williams became dissatisfied with the individualism of bebop. In 1952 Williams left the United States to tour Europe for two years, specifically France and England. She explained in detail,

> My life turned when I was in Europe. I played England for one month and spent money as fast as I made it. I was distracted and depressed. At a party given by Gerald Lascelles--he's an English jazz writer and a member of royalty--I met this G.I.. He noticed something was wrong, and he said, 'You should read the ninety-first Psalm.' I went home and read all the Psalms. They cooled me and made me feel protected. Then I went to France and played theaters and clubs, and I still didn't feel right. Dave Dochonet, a French musician, asked me to his grandmother's place in the country to rest. I stayed there six months and I just slept and ate and read the Psalms and prayed...When I came back

> from Europe, I decided not to play anymore. I was raised Protestant, but lost my religion when I was about twelve. I joined Adam Powell's [Harlem Baptist] church. I went there on Sunday, and during the week I sat in Our Lady of Lourdes, a Catholic church over on a Hundred and forty-second street. I just sat there and meditated. All kinds of people came in--needy ones and cripples--and I brought them here [her home] and gave them food and talked to them and gave them money. Music had left my head, and I hardly remembered playing. Then Father Anthony Woods--he's a Jesuit--gave Lorraine Gillespie and me instruction, and we were taken into the church in May of 1957. I became a kind of fanatic for a while. I'd live on apples and water for nine days at a time. I stopped smoking. I shut myself up here like a monk. Father Woods got worried and he told me, 'Mary, you're an artist. You belong at the piano and writing music. It's my business to help people through the church and your business to help people through music.' He got me playing again (Balliet 1966, 159 - 160).

Thus in August of 1957, after retiring from music for three years, Williams again began performing. An important step back into the American jazz world was her performance at the Newport Jazz Festival with Dizzy Gillespie's band that same year. The amount of performance Williams did had no correlation to the amount of material she recorded, however. In fact, January of 1955 was the last time that Williams was in the studio until 1959, at which time she recorded only three 45s. Her music was simply not as marketable as a player like Erroll Garner, and so this trend continued until 1963 when Williams took charge and began her own record company, Mary Records.

Throughout these years Williams had not remained idle, however. In addition to performing, Williams continued to spend considerable time doing social work in the 1960s. She explained,

> I started this thrift shop to help get my Bel Canto Foundation going. The idea for the Bel Canto came to me in 1957. It is a plan to help jazz musicians in trouble with drugs or alcohol...Almost everyone has come to me at one time or another. I put the worst cases in a room down the hall from my place I rent cheap from a neighbor. They stay a couple of weeks, and I talk to them and pray with them and help them get a job...I've also sent musicians to the Graymoor Monastery, near Garrison. Brother Mario there has been a lot of help to me. I gave a benefit concert at Carnegie Hall to get the Bel Canto started, but it used up more money than it made. Then I tramped all over downtown until I found this thrift shop. I fixed it up, and people in and out of music sent thousand-dollar coats and expensive dresses. I worked twelve hours a day collecting stuff and running the shop. In the evening I went over to Bellevue to visit with musicians who were there. I raised money but it went to rent and musicians I was helping. I was living mostly on royalty cheques from records and arrangements and then in 1960 I ran out of money and had to go work at Embers. I couldn't find anybody I could trust to run the shop. It's been closed off and on almost a year now, but I'm still working on money for the foundation (Ibid., 157 - 158).

Williams later did meet someone she could trust, when she was performing one night--a young Jesuit priest named Father Peter O'Brien, who became her manager and press agent in the 1970s. Williams recalled,

> I was playing at the Hickory House--in the early sixties, I guess. Joe Morgan, Duke Ellington's public relations man, got me to go in. Well, I was sitting there playing, and this young fellow about 18 or 19 years old, walked though the door, sat down and kept looking up at me--smiling and carrying on. He said that he had heard that I was playing at the Hickory House, and he had to come to hear me. He came regularly the whole time I was there, and he's been around me from that day to this. He went to California and called me constantly, we stayed in touch. I now let him handle everything, so that all I have to think about is the music (Williams 1980, 196).

The music of the sixties produced a new style of jazz that to many sounded like a radical departure from what had come before. Avant garde or

free jazz, while not popular, was received with much critical acclaim in the sixties. Black nationalists called it the music of revolution and white critics, probably in part because of their initial rejection of the now accessible bebop music, had little choice but to embrace the new sound wholeheartedly. Williams, however, had no qualms about criticizing the different strains of free jazz for what they were. She explained,

> When I had my foundation in New York, a couple of the 'free' musicians came to me to be helped. And I discovered that they couldn't hear chords. Quite a few of them haven't learned to play basic things, because the 'free' music is: play anything you want, but make sure you don't play a true chord. Although that can be exciting, I don't really call that music. It is certainly not as musical as some of the players have said it is (Williams 1987, 18).

She qualified, "Take a guy like Coltrane, he knows what he's doing, but these people without a knowledge of music, it's like--well, it's a very neurotic world" (McPartland 1964, 17).

Perhaps because of the lack of musical knowledge she found in some younger players, Williams made it her mission to teach jazz history to New York City street kids. She felt strongly that the younger generation must learn from the older. Teaching jazz history should not be construed as a reaction against the avant garde because Williams had improvised music in this vein (Members of the Clouds of Joy called it "Zombie Music") in rehearsals already in the forties. On the contrary, she felt an obligation keep jazz moving forwards. She could not bring the about single-handedly, however. Williams believed that if the younger generation understood the past, they could add to

the future, so teaching was her method of passing on the tradition.

A belief in the functionality of music combined with the teaching of jazz history affected Williams's approach to performance. Whitney Balliet described Williams's playing at this time as

> an instructive history of jazz piano--a kind of one-woman retrospective of an entire movement. Her technique is flawless and she has Art Tatum's touch. Fragments of boogie-woogie basses--in 6/8 rather than 4/4 or 4/8 time frequently appear in her introductions. They are relieved by muted left-hand figures and right-hand chords that abstract the melody. Spare single-note lines surface in the right hand; their arpeggios are mere serifs, and they include generous rests. These melodic lines, strung between chords of the tune like telephone wire, soon thicken, and she moves on to intense chords, often in double time or placed off the beat. Things begin to rock insistently and lightly, and after a few cloud-like melodic statements she returns to the 6/8 introduction (Balliet 1966. 139).

Williams's views on spirituality also affected her composing. From 1962 - 1972, Williams broke new ground in jazz history yet again by composing the first extended sacred works in the jazz idiom. She explained,

> Jazz is basically spiritual, religious--like all music, all art. The communication is with something higher than you, and it doesn't matter if you call that something Buddha or God or what. But the music has to be played with love, and when it is, it brings people together. You could even say it is healing. Jazz...comes directly from inside you and it has to be felt to be played. It's the same whether you are playing in a club or in a church (Williams 1978, 148).

Williams felt strongly that her religious calling was to utilize the musical gifts given to her. She commented,

> I became a Catholic several years ago, and that changed me a great deal. I used to bemoan the fact that so many of my friends were dead, like Ben Webster and Bud Powell and Erroll Garner,

> but I found out that religion can bring peace to the soul and dedication to the talent that God has given. Now we don't know if there's a heaven or a hell or what, but I know that certain things are going to happen in life, and you shouldn't be lazy about a challenge. You shouldn't waste the talent that God has sent to you (Holmes 1986, 40).

Williams's first sacred work was written in 1962. It is an a capella hymn for 16 voices with lyrics by Father Woods in honor of St. Martin De Porres. *Black Christ of the Andes,* recorded on Mary Records in 1963, contains up to seven different notes in a single chord and thus requires singers with an excellent sense of pitch. The work was first performed in 1962 at a concert shared with Dizzy Gillespie in Philharmonic Hall in New York City (today Avery Fischer) and later, in 1965, at Monterey. It has been analyzed by Gayle Murchison in an presently unpublished article entitled, "Black Christ/Black Music: Mary Lou Williams's *St Martin De Porres* and Jazz Sacred Music."

In 1964, Williams recorded three other choral pieces for Mary Records on the album *Mary Lou Williams.* The lyric of the a cappella "The Devil" was written by Ada Moore. "Anima Christi," a traditional Catholic prayer, was arranged by Melba Boliston and consisted of a lead vocalist with quartet background, piano, bass, and drums. On the recording, Grant Green is featured on guitar and Bud Johnson on bass clarinet. In addition, Boliston wrote an arrangement of Williams's "Praise the Lord," which features the same personnel, except Bud Johnson is on tenor saxophone in this case.

By 1966 Williams had been sent by Cardinal John Wright to teach jazz in a high school in Pittsburgh. At the urging of several priests who were fans

Williams wrote her first mass. *Mass 1* was actually written in the classroom.

> She would write eight bars, while she gave the kids a break, and they would later sing it. Whenever the nuns came into the room she would shift to theory, but she wrote the mass in one week. It was performed the same year at St. Paul's Cathedral in Pittsburgh, but has not been heard since then. She dismissed this as being, "like the kind of things they have in churches, it was long, drawnout, like a symphony" (Mitchell 1985, 141 - 142).

The next year, Williams wrote *Mass for the Lenten Season*, which includes two hymns with texts by Dr. Martin Luther King. This quiet piece was performed in 1968 on six Sundays during Lent at the St. Thomas the Apostle Church, at 118th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem.

Also in 1967 Williams held a successful concert of sacred music conducted by a priest named Roger Ledogar in Carnegie Hall. From this date came the record *Praise the Lord In Many Voices*, which contains, among other compositions, three sacred choral songs written for the occasion. "Thank You Jesus" is scored for instruments, chorus, and solo voice--in this case Leon Thomas. "Our Father" is written for piano, bass, drums, a chorus of 35, and vocal soloist--in this case, Honi Gordon. Finally Williams wrote her own arrangement of "Praise the Lord" for large chorus, vocal soloist, French horn, piano, bass, drums, and congos.

William's third and final mass, which eventually came to be called *Mary Lou's Mass*, is a work with a rather complex history. The events surrounding its composition will be dealt with in Chapter IV.

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s Williams frequently performed

solo or with a trio in New York nightclubs such as the Prelude, the Embers, the Cookery, and the Hickory House. These performances were followed by appearances at jazz festivals both in the United States and Europe, concert halls, and some universities. Williams also performed at Duke Ellington's funeral in 1974.

By the time she was in her sixties, Williams had become a veritable jazz institution. She had recorded for every major record company and received two Guggenheim Fellowships for Musical Composition. (The first one from 1972 enabled her to continue writing *Mary Lou's Mass.*) Williams also received honorary doctorates from Fordham University, Manhattan College, and Loyola University in New Orleans, as well as many other honors recognizing her outstanding contributions to jazz.

From 1975 - 1977 Williams taught at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and was subsequently appointed artist-in-residence at Duke University from 1977 - 1980. There Williams taught jazz history and directed the jazz orchestra. That she would eventually turn to teaching as a profession should come as no surprise because Williams felt strongly that,

> The young have to learn from the old, and not the other way around. When I was young I listened to older people tell me what to do on piano, and now I'm trying to do the same thing in my teaching at Duke University. I have played through a lot of jazz eras--ragtime, Kansas City jazz and bebop, and I have something to tell these kids about jazz (Holmes 1986, 37).

Father Peter O'Brien shared in Williams's lecture-concerts, as well. Williams explained,

> At Duke we work as a team, both of us teach, he plays the records and does some talking. Peter is very dedicated. He knows jazz history and he certainly knows the history of Mary Lou Williams. Then too, he is an excellent researcher (Williams 1980, 196).

Williams continued performing while she was teaching. She concertized at Duke University with both Benny Goodman and Cecil Taylor (the latter performance was recorded in 1978).

The success of the 1968 release by the Edwin Hawkins Singers, "O Happy Day," had

> generated a markedly expanded gospel audience, and pioneered the development of the music genre now referred to as "contemporary gospel." Contemporary gospel represents a fusion of features from all previous gospel styles with those of popular music. During the 1970s a new generation of musicians moved back and forth between clubs on Saturday nights and churches on Sunday mornings, performing both gospel and popular music (Burnim and Maultsby 1987, 127 - 128).

Williams was no exception to this trend. She played clubs during the weekdays and performed *Mary Lou's Mass* on weekends throughout the seventies.

It was quite clear that Williams did not consider her age to be a handicap. On the contrary, she explained, "You have maturity and confidence; then you don't make the mistakes that you did before. You can study all you want, but you've got to have that thing--experience. Especially in jazz" (Williams 1987, 18). And certainly Williams had experience. To keep performances challenging after a lifetime of playing, Williams commented, "For the things I play I have a skeleton, introduction, etc. Whenever I feel like

switching I change keys and start creating again" (Williams 1984, 8). When asked if she still practiced every day, Williams responded,

> I never practice. I practice with my mind. I just visualize my fingers moving. In jazz your mind has to be faster than your fingers. I also hear with my mind as much as with my ears. If I hit only a portion of a chord, my mind provides the notes that are left out. But when you stop playing for a while, your ability to use your mind like that begins to decline. If you are a jazz musician, you have to give it your total concentration (Holmes 1986, 42).

Eventually, however, Williams's total concentration was interrupted.

> She became ill and for two and a half years was incapacitated. She had a respite, and from the spring of 1980 until the fall she played in Brazil, at the Spoleto U.S.A. Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, the Knickerbockers Saloon in New York, and the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh, North Carolina. She continued to teach at Duke University until February 1981 (Mitchell 1985, 143).

Williams finally died in her home in Durham, North Carolina from cancer of the spine on May 28, 1981. *Mary Lou's Mass* was played at her funeral by members of her orchestra, and Dizzy Gillespie gave a rendition as well. She left her estate, numbering some 350 original compositions, to the Mary Lou Williams Foundation (see Appendix A), an organization founded in 1980 to enable talented young people, ages six to twelve, to study one-on-one with professional jazz artists. Father Peter O'Brien is currently the executor of the foundation.

Aesthetics of Music

From the biography of Williams's life and works, three conclusions about her aesthetics of music can be drawn. First of all, Williams had a tendency towards writing ambitious concert works. Although she started out writing simple arrangement, this disposition converged with the advancement of both her harmonic thinking, as can be seen in *Zodiac Suite* and her rhythmic thinking, as is evident in *Waltz Boogie.* It is noteworthy that most of her major sacred compositions are conceived of as concert works, and certainly, in scope, *Mary Lou's Mass* is no exception to this tendency.

The reason that Williams was so advanced in her harmonic thinking and one of the few early jazz musician who could not only make the transition from swing to bebop, but also actually aid in the latter's development had to do with her strong sense of community. This sense of community was the second aesthetic tendency evident from Williams's biography. Part of Williams's sense of community was her feeling of responsibility to it. For this reason, at the end of her life, Williams saw herself as the guardian of jazz history and strove to teach its youth about her experiences in adding to the tradition.

This sense of responsibility not only pushed Williams to develop her own musical capacity as far as she could, but also led her into the leadership role of helping develop the same in others. It is no accident that Williams's

apartment in New York was a hotbed of bebop activity. Her own sense of community dictated this. She felt a responsibility to both help and teach the fellow jazz musicians with whom she performed.

Because responsibility was so important to her and, because she achieved such a high standard of musicianship herself, Williams expected those around her to feel and do the same. From those who did not, she received a reputation as a demanding and intolerant taskmistress.

Those who knew Williams well, however, did not agree with these characterizations. Marion McPartland, for example, said of Williams,

> Here is a woman who is conscientious, introspective, sensitive, a woman who with her quiet manner, and at times almost brusque, non-committal way of speaking, has been misunderstood, thought to be lacking in warmth and compassion. The reverse is true. She feels keenly the various factions, contradictions, inequalities of the music business, wants to help people, to give of herself. A woman vulnerable. A woman hurt so many times she tends to withdraw from, and be suspicious of, others, unless she knows them well (McPartland 1964, 16).

Fellow pianist Billy Taylor explained,

> Mary Lou is looking for perfection. On the rare occasions when she had this chemical thing going that can happen between three people, she's been so excited by it that she wants it all the time. Swinging is so natural to her that she can't understand why it isn't necessarily natural to everybody all the time. She figures that they can do it, but they won't; she thinks to herself, 'Anybody I hire should be able to do this, so why don't they?' Most people associate the verb 'to swing' with the degree of loudness that they attain, but she refutes it--she'll take something pianissimo and swing just as hard as if it were double forte. She's one of the very few people I know that can do this, consistently swing in any context (Ibid., 34).

Performing with people who did not share her sense of responsibility to

the community was rather frustrating for Williams. McPartland explained it well when she said (during Williams's lifetime) that Williams engages in

> a constant search for musicians with whom she can be compatible--in a way she reminds one of a mother with her children, alternately scolding or praising them, trying to teach them, trying to instill her beliefs in them, expecting great things of them. (Ibid., 17).

While Williams expected a lot from the musicians around her, she certainly did not demand this from her audiences. On the contrary, because of her desire to fulfill the needs of community she frequently avoided disappointing them in any way. This can be seen in the fact that although she occasionally played avant garde music at rehearsals in the forties, she would not do this in performance. Similarly, although by the seventies Williams could have written *Mary Lou's Mass* with highly advanced harmonies, she chose rather to comply with an aesthetic of accessibility. The desire to meet audiences at their level, even though Williams herself was far beyond this, is a direct result of her sense of community.

A further manifestation of her aesthetic of accessibility is the use of early rock'n'roll style in *Mary Lou's Mass*. While most jazz musicians at this time lamented the popularity of the new rock 'n' roll music, citing it as the foremost enemy of their financial welfare, Williams praised the music. She said of rock 'n' roll in 1964,

> I extracted some tunes from my nephew and I found these kids are creating like jazz musicians did in the thirties. They don't know what they are doing, but if you ask them to create a song about a rose or a picture, they create just like Leadbelly or

> somebody like that. These rock 'n' roll kids say their music is modern and that music like Ornette Coleman's is corny...this rock 'n' roll is taking the place of the earlier era's jazz, jazz that is losing the heritage...It [rock] isn't corny and pushing over the beat, and if you listen careful it has an awful lot of soul. My nephew had a number with a release of a kind I'd been trying to write for fifteen years. "My goodness," I said, "I'm going to steal that!"...Why I think their's may be the music of the next era is because jazz musicians became too evil. Before jazz was a matter of love. There's a lot of music now that is played for the musicians themselves, not for the people who are listening (Williams 1989, 10).

The fact that Williams equated with evil the playing of music for oneself rather than the audience loudly confirms her aesthetic of accessibility. Certainly, Williams never indulged in gratuitous displays of technique, even though she had the facility. Rather, she was concerned with playing with honesty, and it is this characteristic which made Williams such a soulful musician.

William's soulfulness was also a manifestation of her final aesthetic tendency, that of functionality. To Williams playing jazz was not merely playing music. It was playing a spiritual music. Jazz functioned as a medium of communication, and this could be either to God, as is seen in her liturgical works, such as *Mary Lou's Mass*, or an audience. Williams did not play and write music just because she enjoyed it. In fact, as she related in the story of her conversion, music--purely in and of itself--gave her no fulfillment. She even retired for a time because of this fact.

Rather, Williams performed because she was sincerely trying to communicate, to bring together the community. Music was only truly

meaningful to her when it had a higher function than the mere creation of something beautiful. Williams felt that

> Musicians should try to help each other, not talk about each other. If you feel good inside, you can change people and make them feel it too, and that goes for audiences. If you're relaxed and you're sincere, they'll know it, and they'll start to feel the same way...I get such strong vibrations from an audience. If they're noisy or not paying attention, that's when I'll play the slowest, softest tune I can think of, and it works (McPartland 1957, 41).

Williams performed, then, because she wanted to both communicate with and be a force of healing to her audiences. Creating a healing atmosphere, like developing a relationship, is work. Williams explained,

> Jazz music doesn't just happen by itself. You don't play to an audience, you play with them. There is something like a conversation between you and the people listening. The audience gives out energy and you do the same. You feel it back. And when you're playing you feel like you're feeding them love. Because that's what music really is: love (Williams 1978, 148).

Although this is not a very competitive view of music, Williams was one of the few women successful in instrumental jazz. Much has been made of this fact. Eddie Durham recalled about Williams in the thirties,

> She was one of the pioneers who broke in people knowin' that a woman was a great musician. Mary Lou really brought the jazz on in, I'm tellin' ya. But then, they recognized Mary Lou Williams was a great musician. Before that, a lot of people didn't care about women (Placksin 1982, 108 - 109).

Indeed, seeing a woman active in jazz was rather rare then, and served to inspire others. Bassist June Rotenberg, who recorded with Williams as a member of her trio and the Mary Lou Williams Girl Stars, recalled seeing

Williams in New York in the 1940s:

> I remember the first time I met her...She was writing an arrangement for Benny Goodman--you know, on the bed, in this tiny room up there at the Hotel Cecil. Imagine a woman doing orchestral arrangements! How marvelous! She was really a first in everything (Ibid., 168).

Williams, by contrast, never saw herself as exceptional. She did not really think about her success in these terms because for her gender was not really an issue. Williams commented,

> You've got to play, that's all. They don't think of you as a woman if you can really play. I think some girls have an inferiority complex about it; and this may hold them back, but they shouldn't feel that way. If they have talent, the men will be glad to help them along. Working with men, you get to think like a man when you play. You automatically become strong, though this doesn't mean you're not feminine (McPartland 1957, 12).

Williams further explained,

> People always ask me how it is to be a woman musician. I don't think about it so much, I guess that is because I am first of all a musician. There have never been any problems performing because I was a woman. You just have to be as good or better than the man is. And if you get carried away in your work you really don't know if you are a woman or a man. When I work it's my work I think about. I don't have time to think about competing with men or taking their place. I've worked with and been around men all my life and I am used to being in the position of leader. People ask why jazz has produced so few female artists. Well, during my period a woman was supposed to be at home--washing, ironing, cooking, and doing things for a man--taking care of the house while her man was out working. A woman just never stepped out to do anything for herself. I never really set out to be different. Things just happened to me, and I guess it was because I was playing strong all my life (Williams 1978, 147 - 148).

Several black nationalists have correlated their ideologies and the jazz

music of the late sixties and early seventies. Jimmy Stewart, for example, called the piano

> the most "European" of the instruments utilized in the instrumentation of our music; the pitches' being unalterably fixed meant that it was the only instrument impervious to the pitch variations that were possible on the other instruments, which were and still are so essential to the production of our music. It was the most "white" instrument in our groups. So the music of the sixties was the force of our aesthetics, which obliged us to discard the piano. We could no longer pay obeisance to the Western tempered harmonic system in the form of the harmonic demands this instrument imposed on the music (Stewart 1971, 90).

Williams's world views, however, were formed before the height of this movement, therefore she never felt the need to discard the piano.

Certainly, however, Williams was always proud of her heritage. She commented,

> When you say boogie-woogie, it means that a Negro is playing. Jazz--a negro is playing. That's why middle-class blacks never liked it. Like soul: the only thing that was left to a Negro after he was mistreated was his soul, his kind feelings. Soul means Negro, too (Shaw 1971, 222).

She further explained,

> That's how the only American art was born--through the suffering of black American slaves. Soul came through the church and suffering...God knows what he's doing, but we don't. He put all those different colors and different people here for a reason. If we didn't have any suffering, it would be a very weak world. The thing is to overcome it and work hard in your music. Then you don't even know someone is mistreating you (Ibid., 223).

Thus, although Williams recognized jazz as a unique musical contribution of African-Americans, she never saw it as a medium to separate

either gender or differing races. Rather, she viewed its function as bringing all people together with love and healing.

CHAPTER III

THE ORAL TRADITION

Its Function in Jazz and Churches

While her belief that music has the power to heal through loving interrelationships between the audience and performers was a personal one, Williams also shared the aesthetics of music held by African-Americans as a whole. This aesthetics is based on oral tradition. Christopher Small outlined the ways in which oral tradition influences how African-American musicians work. In African-American society, he pointed out, the "gift of musicking" is open to all. Musicians just start doing what they can do, in the way in which one learns the art of speech and builds upon it. In African-American society, more time is spent playing in groups than practicing alone because African-American musicking is essentially a communal occupation. Technical virtuosity for its own sake is not much sought after; it is what a performer does with his or her skills that is valued (Small 1987, 464).

Furthermore,

> relationships between the participants in a performance are not hierarchical; the performers do not dominate the audience, nor are they dominated by any outside person such as a composer or conductor. Nor is the performance dominated, or the relationships mediated, by a written score; where notation is used

> it tends to function more as a guide or a set of promptings to performance than as a set of prescriptive instructions. Performance itself is more concerned with the exploration of relationships between the participants than it is with the feelings or spiritual adventure of any individual, more concerned with being than with becoming, with present enjoyment than with either the past or the future (Ibid., 465).

The communal aesthetics of exploring relationships in music is not one held by Williams alone, but is evident in the very way that African-American musicians talk about jazz.

> Some years ago, a quartet had just completed a particularly exhilarating set, its young Negro drummer coming off the stand grinning with satisfaction. "You sure sounded good," said a listener. "Yeah," said the drummer, "there was a lot of loving going on up there." (Hentoff 1978, 74).

Although jazz has produced many recordings now considered classic,

> the essence of Afro-American musicking lies not so much in the created objects, not so much in a repertory of songs or pieces, as in a way of musicking, which values the creative power that lies in every person more than it values those objects which, in so far as they exist at all apart from performance, do so only for as long as they continue to serve the communal function, after which they are likely to be abandoned without a second thought (Small 1987, 94).

It should not be surprising that jazz 'objects' differ from those of Western art music because the final products from the two cultures come about for entirely different reasons. Their existences serve different functions. Western art music since the nineteenth century tries to create an art work immortal for its formal greatness or linear development, while jazz performances attempt to address the issues of the moment in which they are being created, with no intention of saving the product for posterity. Small

explained,

> A composition, in the classical sense of the word, is a music-object which has an existence over and above any performance of it; the processes of composition and of performance are secondary to the existence of the object, the first taking place only to bring it into being, the second in order to bring it to realization. But improvisation is all process; there is no product. What we are taking part in is, in the first case, the re-enactment of a drama that was complete and done with before a note of it was heard, while in the second we are taking part, at first rather than at second hand, in the drama of creation itself. The improvisors are playing a dangerous game; at any point many things can go wrong, just as they can in any other living relationship, and only the most skillful, quick-thinking and above all 'accommodating to the others' as Aguzzari has it, can stay the course (Ibid., 300 - 301).

It is the act of spontaneous creation in improvisation that contributes to the artfulness of jazz music, just as linear development within complex forms is the basis of artfulness in classical music. The difference between the two practices can be exemplified in the fact that during slavery,

> narrative songs and ballads are few; as we have seen, these go against the grain of black creativity. Where ballads are sung by black singers..., they tend not to be complete narratives but rather commentaries on the story, or aspects of it which is assumed to be known to all (Ibid., 97).

The same is true of jazz today. Although performers all draw their music from the same standard repertoire, because each player has his or her own style or voice or commentary upon the given narrative, each performer literally contributes something new to the body of literature as a whole.

Art music critics who look for formal greatness instead of personal commentary when judging jazz music--a standard which is not the aim of jazz

music at all--frequently do not find formal greatness. Because of this 'lack,' they tend look down upon the entire tradition as producing inferior music. Furthermore, there are critics like Gunther Schuller who, after intensive analysis of the jazz repertoire, have, in fact, found that Ellington and a few other jazz composers have transcended style and idiom to attain mastery of an order equal to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical music (Schuller 1989, 99). I would argue, however, that although Schuller's findings are correct, it is inherently incorrect to judge jazz music by western art aesthetics. Rather, the products of oral culture must be looked at within the context of the aesthetics of oral tradition.

> We can be misled by high-culture critics concerning Afro-American music. It is not that record companies and radio stations are foisting a load of trivial and pernicious rubbish on to a helpless public, but rather that those gatekeepers, through their manner of presentation, are trivializing away a powerful means of affirming and celebrating identity, in a society whose tendency is increasingly to render the majority of its members powerless and faceless (Ibid., 420).

Understanding fully the differences in the two cultures' aesthetics, Mary Lou Williams remained unconcerned by the criticism of western art scholars. In fact, she was not only indifferent to the western art aesthetics as a whole, but also rather antagonistic to the teaching methods which western art music espouses as a manifestation of its aesthetics. Williams went so far as to correlate the lack of progression in the history of jazz after bebop upon the rise in influence on young jazz players of the western art music educational system.

Williams believed that really good jazz could not be taught utilizing the methodology employed in Western conservatories and frequently discussed the art of playing jazz. She stated,

> I'm glad that I didn't have any formal training. It's the type of music where you need only a few lessons to help you learn the instrument so you can execute your ideas. The music comes from the mind, the heart, and the fingertips. It comes faster than lightning. The exercises in classical music that they give you in school destroy the natural feelings. When you study too much of the classics, you have a tendency to put runs and fancy things into jazz. But that's wrong. The music is spiritual. It came from spirituals, ragtime, Kansas City swing, and bop, which is when we lost our creative artists. After bop they began going to school. This destroyed that healthy feeling in jazz...What you're hearing today is those exercise books from pianists who went to school (Lyons 1983, 69 - 70).

When teaching, therefore, Williams always advised her students to learn the jazz tradition from the records of the great masters by imitating them before forming their own style. In this way, Williams was a strong advocate of oral tradition rather than literate tradition.

Jimmy Stewart pointed out that learning to play jazz from the method of apprenticeship is intimately bound with the oral tradition aesthetic that jazz music should be functional. Stewart rejected this aesthetic and declared the music of the sixties to be revolutionary because of its distinct lack of functionality. Not only was free jazz art for art's sake but, as well, even the traditional process by which one was educated as an artist was overthrown with the rise of the avant garde.

> It is in this one aspect that the music of the sixties is crucially different from the music that went before it, in that in one

> fundamental sense the requirements of all our musics prior to the sixties developed out of a definite system of protocol, i.e., there was a well-defined procedure for qualification as a musician that required that the neophyte musician serve a required period of apprenticeship by studying the acknowledged masters, which he did usually by listening to records, then the arduous practicing or "shedding" where he perniciously attempted to emulate his teacher, and then finally putting all of it to the test by applying it with others in the act of making music, which meant working with combos and bands of various sizes and so forth. Concomitantly, a serious form of competitiveness was nurtured that stimulated creativity, in most cases of the kind that Basie nurtured in the bands he had (Stewart 1971, 92).

According to Stewart, with free jazz, the methodology of learning the oral jazz tradition was no longer necessary. Thus he saw the sixties as the beginning of the end of functional jazz. Stewart spoke too soon, however, because some of the greatest practitioners of avant garde jazz, John Coltrane, for instance, was not only versed in oral tradition, but also utilized free jazz as a functional music to promote peace and love. Furthermore, with Mary Lou Williams came a counterrevolution in jazz. Also working from the traditional paradigm of a functional aesthetics of performance, one of healing and love, Williams eventually began to utilize functional constructs such as the mass to express this aesthetic. Ironically, it is the same aesthetic of functional music from oral tradition that led both John Coltrane to play avant garde music and Williams to write a setting of the mass, an event which had hitherto been unheard of in the history of jazz music.

It remains odd that before Williams, the text of the mass had never been set with jazz music because the influence of oral tradition is evident not only

in the creation of jazz music, but also in the church music of African-Americans as a whole. Both African-American 'sacred' and 'secular' musics exhibit characteristics stemming from oral tradition, namely, a strong sense of community, the functional nature of the music, a worldview that does not stylistically differentiate between sacred and secular, and the use of improvisation and variation.

Furthermore, throughout their respective histories there has been a mutual interrelationship between African-American 'sacred' and 'secular' music. This is evident in the fact that,

> historically, the church has wielded tremendous power, as a religious and cultural unit. It has often been described as a conservative institution, because traditions within the church are slow to change. As Sterling Plumpp...points out, "most Black people are victims of beliefs which have their origin in the Black church whether they go to church or not or whether they have even been there" (Burnim and Maultsby 1987, 115).

Although this fact is not often recognized, historically, the influence of the church upon on African-American music has been profound.

> It is tempting to suggest that there is no specific church 'style', but that is an illusion produced by the ubiquity of the church style throughout Afro-American musicking; that musical gestures which developed in the churches should today be a part of the common musical language is an indicator of the latter's pre-eminent role in the creation and transmission of black American culture (Small 1987, 102).

The very notion of the communal-dialogue (not necessarily call and response) utilized in jazz improvisation is typical of the liturgy of black churches. While the specific liturgical plan may vary, the ecstatic drive in

charismatic black liturgies is "often characterized by emotional appeal, informality, and community emphasis on individual faith and experience, equalitarian ideal, and a lay clergy" (Riedel 1975, 61 - 62). Although there is little documentation of the liturgies of black Catholic churches in New Orleans when early jazz was coming into being, it would be reasonable to postulate that similar practices went on there at that time.

But even today, 'Sanctified,' 'Holiness,' or 'Pentecostal' churches, for example, have

> an autonomous living tradition of worship which satisfies in the present the deep and enduring need for community and involvement. These churches have as a rule no set order of service, but rely on the inspiration of the moment (that is to say, improvisation) and the interaction of congregation and preacher to bring about a condition of religious ecstacy, the coming of the 'Holy Ghost fire' which, even more than the mere preaching of the scripture, is the object of the ceremony. And when the Holy Ghost descends, sometimes immediately after the ceremony begins, sometimes only after prolonged searching, the intensity of emotion has to be felt to be believed, most especially in the feeling of unity and common purpose between all present. Speech, music and dance are the tools by means of which the Holy Ghost is invoked and brought into the midst of the congregation--not as separate arts but as aspects of the one great performance art of celebration. A gifted black preacher may cover, in his speaking voice, a range of two octaves or more; what he has to say may contain much that is wise and sensible, but the sheer prosaic sense of what he has to say is subsumed into his performance which, starting from plain speech, will grow through stages of excitement in which the sense of his words gives way to more ecstatic musicality, his often reiterated words and phrases being taken up by the congregation and thrown back to him with cries of affirmation and with Amens. Finally, by an all but imperceptible process, the whole congregation is singing, clapping their hands, often in marvelously complex interlocking rhythmic patterns, and moving their bodies each in his or her own idiomatic way. The level of ecstacy thus attained is a matter

> for each individual, who is free to find God in his or her own way, and there is always space for the talented or confident individual to take up in song the burden of the occasion, but the overwhelming feeling is of a singing, dancing, praying community (Small 1987, 103 - 104).

The descriptions of both the performers and audiences of a successful performance of jazz and an intense gospel service are strikingly similar because both are based on the aesthetics brought down over time from oral tradition.

Pitfalls and Advantages of Performance Practice Inherent in Oral Tradition

Because oral tradition emphasizes the moment of performance rather than working toward a highly-developed finished score, the only viable 'object' associated with African-American music is the recording of a performance.

> Records do form a medium by means of which a performance can be preserved and carried to the hearing of others who have never seen the performer face to face; they are documents of a kind, though different from scores in that it is performances that they preserve rather than pieces. In so far as they send performances out across the country and even the world, they have a decentralizing function, but in so far as they attract musicians to centers of recording activity they also act in the opposite direction....In the Afro-American tradition, on the other hand, the record is a means, and frequently the only means, through which the music is propagated (Small 1987, 241 - 242).

As documents, then, recordings are very important to musicologists studying African-American music.

But recordings are also important to jazz performers themselves, be they

apprenticing players or experienced practitioners. Especially since bebop,

> radio and recordings added immeasurably to the immediate availability of extemporaneous jazz performances, and innovative practices were more quickly assimilated into the common vocabulary shared by jazz musicians because of this phenomenon (Taylor 1980, 100).

While the recording industry has been a positive force in helping to spread jazz music, it has also raised a number of problems for the African-American oral tradition.

> For the classical musician, accustomed to the pre-existing limits of the score, and to the predictable length that this implies, the durational limits of recording are no great problem; the relation between the duration intended by the composer and that permitted by the recording is easily worked out in advance, and breaks made where necessary in the performance. But for the Afro-American musician, to the extent that the performance is normally improvised, and depends for its duration on such factors as audience response, the limits of the LP record, let alone the earlier three-minute 78-rpm disc...can be a Procrustes' bed (Small 1987, 396 - 397).

The same medium which has served to advance the various styles of the jazz language has ironically also served to limit its speech. Instances in which a maximum of four choruses of a given piece were taken by soloists on a recording, have found, at live performances, the soloists taking up to eight, ten, or even twelve choruses, as Williams described about Shorty Baker's live performances. (Based on popular song forms, a chorus is 12- or 16- or 32-bar refrain--the latter, usually set in an AABA form.) Because of this phenomenon, any recording of a jazz performance must be viewed as a single interpretation among many, even if it is the same song performed by the same soloist. To

get a more accurate picture of the true art of a jazz player it is preferable to see him or her live, in the context of interaction with an audience.

Finally, recordings can negatively influence improvisation even in live performances. Although the cross pollination of style is inevitable among the soloists in a single band, there have been instances when new members replacing older members preserved the essence of the original solos on subsequent recordings, rather than creating something new. When Bubber Miley left the Duke Ellington Orchestra, for example, Cootie Williams utilized the basic outline of Miley's original work.

> The solo trumpet passages in *Black and Tan Fantasy* are among the most striking examples in all of jazz of how an original contribution to a piece was played virtually unaltered by a succession of players over a period of many decades...When Cootie left the Ellington band, Ray Nance took over Miley's solos in *Black and Tan*, as did Cat Anderson when Ray Nance left, and so on (Schuller 1989, 95).

Knowing the limitations in the documentation of oral culture products, it must be pointed out that there are also several advantages in the practice of performance that frequently outweigh the disadvantages. For example, Small had this to say about jazz soloists:

> Having agreed on the tune upon which they are going to improvise, and on a tempo, they are joined together, even if they have never played together before, by the common idiom, the common stock of material and by the melody and its harmonies. But while the players are free to engage in dialogue with one another, to explore, affirm and celebrate their various identities and their relationship, in a more direct and less restrained way than when there is a score to mediate those relationships they are still bound by the requirements of the idiom; there are ways in which they may respond to one another and ways in which they

may not (Small 1987, 302).

The extent of this mutual dialoguing in jazz stands in great contrast to the conventional performance practice of the western art music tradition. Small continued writing of the jazz musician,

> Unlike the notation-dependent musician, who in reading from his score can receive messages from only one musician at a time (it would be unthinkable for a pianist to incorporate a little Stravinsky into the Chopin prelude he is playing), he is able to draw simultaneously on any number of sources; anything that catches the ear can be incorporated, whether it be melodic material, harmonies, whole solo or ensemble passages, tricks of rhythm, instrumental and vocal inflection, even stage demeanor--a performance may turn out to be a multi-layered fabric of any number of fragments from other musicians in any number of traditions, not excepting the classical. How successfully these are fused depends, of course, on the talent of the musician. Non-literate musicians tend to be very aware of the sources of their influences, not surprisingly since they are transmitted directly, without the intervention of written notes; indeed, a score, as we have seen, would be incapable of transmitting those nuances of performance which are vital elements of style in Afro-American musicking (Ibid., 240 - 241).

The flexibility in materials which can be incorporated into the jazz idiom is a result of the simple blues or song forms upon which jazz musicians base their improvisations, and this flexibility is the greatest strength of jazz music. Not only does it allow each performance to be a new experience for the player, adding much needed variety to the grind of regular performing, it also keeps the music challenging. Jazz performers are limited only by their technique and the bounds of their imagination, not the imagination of a composer--however great--as represented in her or her score.

Flexibility in jazz is also beneficial to its audience. Because jazz is a

language familiar to those brought up with the oral tradition,

> The performers do not merely "express themselves," but communicate to their listeners. Jazz improvisation reaches its greatest heights when its language is shared by both performers and listeners, so that the most subtle variation and twist of phrase immediately makes its impact on the mind; so that even when the audience is dancing, the melodic and rhythmic patterns will translate themselves into dance moods and dance patterns (Finkelstein 1975, 120).

Knowing the jazz idiom gives the audience the power to actually affect a performance. The repetitious twelve-bar blues pattern, for example,

> mediates the relationships between the musicians. Because it leaves room for a greater degree of spontaneity than...literate forms,...and because, too, the form and the content of the performance can be determined to a great degree by the response of the audience, performers and listeners are in a more intimate relationship than literate musicking can create. From the moment when a performance begins, performers and listeners are dynamically engaged with one another; the listeners respond, not with stillness and the formal signs of 'polite' attention, but with cries, handclaps, shouts, movement and dance--which are much better mannered in black society than silence. Performers and listeners are bringing into existence, if only for the duration of the performance, an ideal society very different from that created by a classical performance; it confronts the values of industrial society with a celebration of the body and its movements, an affirmation of those qualities of warmth, communality and emotional honesty, which black Americans call soul (Small 1987, 297 - 298).

Because of the power of communication inherent in jazz, this oral music remains a highly functional art form, transcending in its audiences differences of color, nationality, and even language.

Practical Problems of Using Jazz in Literate Churches - Players and Reception

Having commented on the universality of communication that jazz music can achieve, and the capacity for improvisation inherent in African-American churches, one might deduce that African-American church music is capable of a universal appeal equaling that of jazz. Indeed, there was a time in the 1960s when gospel was very popular and experimentation with jazz liturgies a trend. However, there remain today few churches that are known for their consistent implementation of jazz liturgies. (A notable exception is St. Peter's Lutheran in New York City, whose jazz liturgies were led by Pastor John Gensel from 1965 - 1981, but those services are no longer current.)

Even when it is a given that jazz is an appropriate medium for worship (and not all churches would agree with this assumption), there remain certain problems in some churches with utilizing jazz in the liturgy. Edward Neiderhiser commented,

> The main reason for the failure of jazz liturgy to take hold as an attractive and regular dimension of Christian worship is not, as commonly thought, because jazz is not a mass appeal...idiom. Rather, I would contend, the failure lies in a general lack of understanding of what is needed to maintain it. Those with facility in liturgy are generally not well acquainted with the technical dimensions of jazz. Those immersed in jazz seldom are conversant with the theological and technical dimensions of liturgy. And those with the facilities needed in both areas seldom have the time or resources to devote the effort needed. As a result, a happy marriage between the two is rarely achieved, as liturgist and jazz musician reach only a shaky cooperation for a brief moment of unsatisfactory coexistence (Neiderhiser 1981, 5).

Neiderhiser continued to say that frequently what results in liturgical performances of jazz is that those specializing in jazz tend to perform, while the congregation just watches. The lack of participation of the congregation makes the performance a private matter, rather than a group expression of adoration to God--which is the true function of a liturgy (Ibid., 6). In my opinion, however, a lack of group participation would never arise in a charismatic church--black or white--whether the music used was jazz or contemporary gospel.

Rather, it would have been more accurate for Neiderhiser to say that when transmitting an idiomatically oral expression to a church that is idiomatically literate, the culture clash produces a loss of meaning for the uninitiated literate. Playing in the jazz idiom "for the classically trained musician can be a problem" (Mattingly 1986, 16), because there are few musicians brought up in the literate tradition who have the capacity to play in the jazz style. In cases in which jazz players exist in literate congregations, more often than not, the real stumbling block in communication is in the lack of a capacity for meaningful reception by members of congregations who are unable to communicate in the modes of the oral tradition due to the distinct lack of knowledge of this tradition among them. Even in the cases in which literate congregations may understand the language of jazz, it is doubtful that they would be capable of responding to such an extent that they would affect the performance itself.

In this regard, it is interesting to note a final point raised by Neiderhiser. He described the practice in literate churches of setting the traditional liturgies such as the Lord's Prayer, Gloria Patri, Sanctus, Gloria in Excelsis, etc. to newly composed jazz music. What results according to Neiderhiser is that "the verbal accents of the traditional texts do not always fit easily with the rhythms and musical accents of jazz forms...[giving] a feeling of woodenness and sometimes even abrasiveness" (Neiderhiser 1981, 10). Neiderhiser pointed out that composing new hymns and other sacred music utilizing contemporary language tends to work better because it can be better fashioned around the rhythms of jazz (Ibid., 11).

This, of course, is a technique Mary Lou Williams utilized in the writing of *Mary Lou's Mass* (see Chapter V for a further discussion of text setting). Despite an awareness of the difficulties inherent in applying elements of oral culture to the pre-existing text of the mass, Williams went ahead and attempted to fuse the two. In light of the fact that there were in jazz no precedents to utilized as models, this must have been a difficult undertaking. Because Williams thought of jazz as a spiritual music, however, she had little choice in utilizing jazz as the medium of her setting of the mass text. Similarly, because Williams was a Roman Catholic, she had little choice but to set the text of the mass as an expression of her faith. The union of these elements in *Mary Lou's Mass* gives rise to interesting compositional problems, which will be dealt with in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPACT OF ORAL TRADITION UPON COMPOSITION

The Problems of Pre-composed Versus Improvised Materials

While there are differences in the functions between the compositions of jazz and Western art music composers, jazz compositions do indeed exist.

> The words 'composer' and 'composition'...have a very different significance in jazz from classical musicking; in jazz, as in the great age of classical music, to be a musician is primarily to be a performer, and those who compose regard compositions simply as the creation of material for themselves and their colleagues to play. It is rare, though not unknown for what is created to be a fully worked-out composition; more usually it is a springboard, which may or may not be notated from which all the musicians may take off into collaborative creation...The composer's gesture to his fellow musicians is one of love and trust in giving them a part of himself to make of it what they will, and it calls from those musicians a greater sense of responsibility and involvement than does the realization of a fully notated score (Small 1987, 316).

Jazz composition initially started out as arrangements by early musicians such as Jelly Roll Morton, linking together strings of twelve- and/or sixteen-bar song forms. In the swing era longer arrangements were composed dependent on the riff-cum-"call-and-response" formula. Despite the technical virtuosity of soloists during the bebop era who could have exploited the concerto principle, there was at this time a return to the string-of-choruses

format, that is an improvisatory rather than compositional approach (Schuller 1989, 84). Outside of this 1940s mainstream, however, rose up isolated individuals--the Bachs of jazz composition if you will--who did attempt jazz composition.

In practice, the only real difference between the compositional process of improvisation and that of writing a score is that, with a score, the forms can be extended, thereby increasing the dramatic or expressive possibilities of a work. Improvisation, by contrast, works best utilizing simple forms. Thus when it comes to composing larger jazz works there is an inherent tension between that which is pre-composed and that which is improvised. Too much of one does not leave room for the other.

Different jazz composers have dealt with this formal problem in different ways. Perhaps the greatest jazz composer of all time was Duke Ellington (1899 -1974), a contemporary of Mary Lou Williams. Ellington's career in many ways paralleled Williams's. Both were jazz pianists, band arrangers, and composers. Both began writing extended compositions and performing them in Carnegie Hall in the forties (Ellington wrote *Black, Brown, and Beige* in 1943). Both began writing extended religious works in the latter part of their careers in the late sixties. In the seventies, both had works choreographed by Alvin Ailey (Ellington's was *The Road of the Phoebe Show* in October 1970). Finally, both dealt with the musical problem of the tension between pre-composed and improvised music by writing compositions.

Before Ellington's time most jazz compositions had revealed

> a structural flaw that has plagued jazz to this day: too much reliance on a string of short solos, sandwiched in between brief ensemble interludes and modulations. Unless soloists are supreme artists, they are not likely to produce at a level comparable to the needs of a really structured performance, whether improvised, arranged, or composed. Nor is there any guarantee that such solos, given the individualism of most jazz improvisers, will have any element unifying them. If the short solos are, in addition, of the short variety espoused by [Fletcher] Henderson and [Benny] Carter, neither they nor the interspersed ensemble passages can create a meaningful single conception. One is canceled out by the other (Schuller 1968, 272).

When Duke Ellington began to compose, however, solutions to these problems began to be found.

Ellington's Solution

Like Williams, Duke Ellington started out as an arranger. For this reason, Ellington's musical

> arrangements differ from classical scores in two ways: first, in that they make no pretence to being a final, definitive version of the piece, as can be seen from the fact that a well-known tune may inspire dozens, if not hundreds, of different arrangements over the years of its existence..., appearing in as many different guises--different harmonies, different variations on the melody, different instrumental combinations, even different kinds of emotional atmosphere. And secondly, there is generally space left in the arrangement for improvised solos by individual performers; at its best an arrangement will be written, not for a generalized ensemble like 'the symphony orchestra' or 'the string quartet' but for a particular group, and built around the individual characters of the musicians who will be playing it. This was one of the strengths of the Duke Ellington Orchestra, for example; having selected his players for their individual qualities

> and disciplined them into a coherent ensemble, Ellington was able to call on what he knew they did best, and (not unimportantly) enjoyed doing, calling for suggestions from the instrumentalists as the arrangement was being put together (Small 1987, 239).

Indeed, especially early in the years of his orchestra, Ellington's band was integral to his compositional process. Gunther Schuller commented,

> It is a mark of his talent and vision as a leader that in these early days of his band, while he was learning to use the materials he had in hand, he let his musicians lead the way in forming the band's style. It is evident both from the recordings and also from the statements of contemporary musicians that Ellington was very dependent upon his players at this stage, and that they knew it. It is to Duke's credit that he fostered a fierce pride and communal attitude in his band so that it took precedence over the individual contributions and feelings of its members (Schuller 1968, 327 - 328).

Collective thinking or at least collaboration with the members of his band was a fruitful methodology of composition for Ellington. It was also a rare insight into the nature of jazz composition, especially as early as 1929. Before this date all arrangements by Eastern musicians had been functional (Ibid., 319). However,

> it was during this period of intensive experimentation that Ellington began to create, with some consistency, pieces that were not strictly functional--pieces that, although perhaps originally geared to some specific function (as background music of a Cotton Club tableau), had a life of their own, independent of that functional purpose. These are what was referred to earlier as pure or abstract musical composition. The 1927 great masterpieces, like *Black and Tan Fantasy* and some of [Jelly Roll] Morton's better creations, had already showed that jazz was capable of this. From 1928 to 1931 a number of these compositions make their appearance. They were not merely arrangements or arbitrarily thrown-together chains of choruses

> but disciplined musical creations which could be judged by standards of musical appreciation and analysis established for centuries in "classical" music...High quality and purely compositional vision do go hand in hand in *Old Man Blues, Rocky Mountain Blues*, and the incomparable *Mood Indigo* (Ibid., 352),

which was Ellington's first use of ternary form. Other later masterpieces include: *Reminiscing in Tempo, Jack the Bear, Ko-Ko, Cotton Tail,* and *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue.*

Before 1929, most jazz composers had been unable to solve the tension between improvisation and pre-composed material. In this year, however, Ellington wrote *Old Man Blues.*

> Earlier pieces like *Black and Tan Fantasy* bore the stamp of one particular musician--Miley, in that case--and we have seen how Bubber's solo talents were to some extent at odds with the prearranged musical framework fashioned by Ellington. Through the dominance of one soloist, the collective equilibrium that was such an integral part of jazz was temporarily disturbed; and, thus, the seams of the structure began to show. But here in *Old Man Blues*, the collective excitement and the feeling that the performance was truly the sum total of all its parts were re-established, and the perfect balance between composition and improvisation was achieved. This achievement is, of course, above all else, Ellington's greatest contribution to the development of jazz...[In] the form of *Old Man Blues*,...a way was found to preserve for the musician the freedom inherent in jazz, while the piece in its totality satisfied the demands of organized or pre-determined form (Ibid., 350 - 351).

Achieving this solution so early in his career, it is perhaps ironic that later on Ellington's aesthetics of communal composition changed.

> Although over the years the balance between improvisation and composition remained remarkably open (the orchestra was always capable of making superb improvised performances from simple 'head' arrangements) we find Ellington in later life being increasingly drawn to the kind of fully composed large-scale

> work for his orchestra that is usually thought more appropriate for the concert platform than for the bandstand--pieces such as *Black, Brown, and Beige, Liberian Suite, Deep South Suite* and the three *Sacred Concerts* intended for performance in church. These works have been variously praised and damned, the former often by those who like to hear something they can recognize as composition in the classical sense, the latter equally often by those who say that they are not jazz. Neither verdict has much to do with their real qualities (Small 1987, 335 - 336).

The change to writing compositions alone, rather than with the band is understandable, however. As his interest in writing large-form compositions grew, it is probable that Ellington "did not feel that he could entrust individual improvisation to any of his soloists at the time. And he was right, for none of these players could have grasped in improvisational terms the advanced complex language Ellington himself was experimenting with" (Schuller 1989, 151). For Ellington did not just score compositions in modern harmonic language specifically for the members of his band. "What is unique in Ellington's instrumental sense, compared to that of other large band arrangers, is his realization that instrumental timbre is itself a part of harmony, and harmony must be understood in terms of timbre" (Finkelstein 1975, 195).

Exploiting timbre, Ellington's extended-form compositions contained moments of greatness. It is generally conceded by critics, however, that they were never completely successful. Frequently the seams of the various sections seemed to show, as was the case with his first experiment *Black, Brown and Beige* (1943). After the critical failure of this unprecedented work, Ellington continued to write long pieces, but they were never as formally complex.

> Ellington avoided the issue henceforth, specifically by retreating to the comparative safety of the suite form. The advantage of this format--it is to all intents and purposes a non-form (in the large sense)--is that is allows the composer to bypass the basic problems inherent in constructing longer, larger orchestral designs, limiting himself instead to a loose succession of smaller forms (Schuller 1989, 149).

The extended works from the end of his life in particular suffered from this hastily patched-together technique leaving one "with the feeling that particular sections and episodes merely follow each other, haphazardly shoved together" (Ibid., 74). The development of thematic material which gives rise to drama in complex forms or even the linear development found in rhapsodies is lacking in Ellington's later large works.

> Ellington may be a rhapsodist in terms of musical expression (even this is debatable); but he certainly is no rhapsodist when it comes to form. In this respect he is a strict classicist, perhaps only surpassed by Jelly Roll Morton. And certainly Ellington's forms are more concise and symmetrical than those of any number of nineteenth-century romantic composers...This was, of course, already inherent in the principle of linking small twelve- or thirty-two-bar structures into one single larger form. The fact that Ellington was able to infuse these stereotyped forms with such life and--by the late 1930s--such seamless continuity, is one of the measures of his genius as a composer. It is precisely because he is not a rhapsodist in the formal sense that Ellington has been largely unsuccessful in the big, extended forms. He is basically a miniaturist and lacks the control and discipline a good "rhapsodist" has--and must have--in order to contain his inspiration within a logical form (Schuller 1968, 348).

While Ellington had managed to find the balance between improvisation and pre-composed materials in smaller forms, resolving this tension eluded him in larger, more complex forms. In fact,

> it is significant that improvisation in the truest and most literal

> sense is virtually suppressed by Ellington in his extended works. While earlier extended works, such as *Reminiscing in Tempo* and *Crescendo in Blue*, had simply eliminated improvisation altogether, the later works were written around individual soloists (*Perfume Suite, Far East Suite, Suite Thursday*, for example), individual movements featuring specific soloists. But these were more an extension of the concertos of the late thirties, "vignette" concertos, in which the solos were rarely true improvisation, but rather written down and/or memorized solo parts, played essentially the same way each time (Schuller 1989, 151).

Although Ellington was a master of timbre and came up with some valuable methods for integrating improvisation and pre-composed materials in smaller forms, even a composer as great as he was not completely successful at large-scale jazz composition.

Williams's Solution - Reception History

The conflict inherent in jazz between the pre-composed and the improvised is also felt in the compositions of Mary Lou Williams. This is particularly a problem in *Mary Lou's Mass*. Unlike her earlier works, which had no predetermined melodic limitations and few formal restrictions, in this composition Williams had to negotiate the set format of the text of the mass against the accommodation of the spontaneous creation of the performers. She achieved this, as Ellington had also done, by pre-composing the solo lines. The compositional tensions arising from this decision will be dealt with in Chapter V, but first, the events surrounding the composition of *Mary Lou's Mass* will be discussed.

Masses influenced by popular music were somewhat of a liturgical fad when Williams wrote *Mary Lou's Mass* and, at this time, products of African-American oral culture that were listened to by literate white America.

> The spirit of the 1960s was captured in the gospel choirs that by now had become an integral part of worship in the major Black denominations (Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal) throughout the nation. Gospel solos were decorated with vocal ornamentation like melismas, and vocal quality was frequently changed through the use of moans, grunts, and screams. Hand clapping, foot stomping, shouting, and testifying were all present in the gospel music of the 1960s, and they were collectively transferred into the genre called "soul" (Burnim and Maultsby 1987, 115).

Soul was not the only music to dominate the airwaves, however. Gospel was just as popular as its secular counterpart. To understand the full extent of the fad which gospel music produced, Martin Williams described a trendy Manhattan nightclub in 1963.

> The contrived atmosphere of the Sweet Chariot Club is bizarre almost beyond belief. There are, for example "hostesses" clad in choir robes that reach only to the thigh, where they meet opera-length stockings. Yes, and there are small wings attached to the shoulders of their gowns and wire halos topping their coiffures. Customers are offered tambourines for participating in the music. The only thing missing, it would seem, is an assurance from the management that the Chariot is insured against unexpected thunderbolts, well aimed from the blue (Williams 1980, 141 - 142).

Understanding the incredible popularity of gospel music at this time, it should come as no surprise that, after a private audience with Pope Paul in 1969, Williams was commissioned by the Vatican to write a gospel-influenced mass, called *Music for Peace.* The resulting composition "was performed for the first time at a service near the United Nations in memory of Tom Mboya, the

Kenyan leader who was assassinated in July 1969" (Mitchell 1985, 142).

In 1971, selections from *Music for Peace*, were rearranged and interpolated into a new work, called *Mary Lou's Mass*. Williams said of the compositional process,

> I didn't quite know how to start, but I prayed a lot about it and began to feel pretty holy, although I wasn't really. In trying to write that mass I learned something pretty important--that jazz is a very spiritual music. The roots of it came out of the suffering of the black slaves, and it has kept that spiritual feeling right up through Coltrane. There is a reason why not everybody can play jazz--the spiritual feeling has to be there. God did blacks a favor by creating jazz especially for them. God helps people through jazz; people have been healed through it. It has happened to me (Holmes 1986, 36).

Mary Lou's Mass was choreographed by the Alvin Ailey Dance Company to represent the rituals of a liturgical service. Kelvin Rotardier danced as the priest, while the rest of the company were the celebrants. The climax of the work, "Lazarus," was performed as a ballet within a ballet. Dudley Williams represented Lazarus and John Parks danced as the rich man. This ballet was premiered at the New York's City Center in December 1971 - January 1972 and warmly received by the critics.

It should be noted that not only was the music successful, but the choreography by Alvin Ailey--the ballet as a whole, representing the mass--was also praised. Hubert Saal remarked,

> The Williams score turns out to be almost an encyclopedia of black music, richly represented...It reflects the self-effacing style of Mary Lou Williams, both as a musician and as a woman, as well as the persuasiveness of her spiritual conviction...The work moves with the drama inherent in the Mass, rising to partake of

> communion and concluding with a recessional "Praise the Lord," in which everyone lets himself go in an ecstasy of acrobatics and supercharged motion, the ultimate display of dance as prayer (Saal 1971, 67).

Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* also commented on both the music and the dancing.

> It is a strong and joyful music, with a spirit that cuts across all religious boundaries to provide a celebration of man, God, and peace...The...religious fervor of the music, with its overtones of both jazz and gospel, and its spiritual exaltation make the score perfect for Ailey...Most of the work is concerned with the special ecstasy of grace, but there is not only happiness here, there is also the occasional touch of humor...The choreography is in Mr. Ailey's long-jumps and flowing style and exploits this grandly physical company exceptionally well (Barnes 1971, 23 [L]).

After its run as a ballet, Williams went back to *Mary Lou's Mass* and changed the order of the pieces to correspond to the traditional Roman Catholic liturgy, so that it could be performed in an actual service. At this time, however, the concept of a jazz liturgy was rather controversial. Indeed, "in Kansas City where she went to attend the dedication of a street named in her honor in 1973, picketers walked outside the church where she was to perform her mass carrying signs reading, 'No Jazz'" (Mitchell 1985, 142).

Undeterred by such incidents, Williams went to New York Cardinal Terrance Cooke and told him that

> she had written a mass and would like to present it at St. Patrick's, and to her surprise he said, 'fine.' She told him it was kind of noisy and Cardinal Cooke said, 'that's what we need.' He thought it would be a wonderful thing for young people" (Ibid., 141).

This was the first time that a jazz mass had ever been performed at a major

place of worship, and certainly at St. Patrick's, which earlier had turned down a proposal for a performance of Duke Ellington's *Sacred Concert* (Ibid., 142). Williams commented,

> Cardinal Cook permitted the performance of two jazz masses at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. For him to do that was absolutely fantastic. He could have lost many of his wealthy donors by doing that, simply because of the title (Williams 1980, 201).

For this 1975 service Williams simplified the vocal lines and trained a choir of forty voices from the grammar school of Our Lady of Lourdes, Fordam Prep in the Bronx, and Cathedral High School for Girls in Manhattan. Between the large choir and the huge congregation, the cathedral was full.

Since the time of its composition and until Williams's death, *Mary Lou's Mass* was performed frequently by the composer. Without Williams's vision to promote and play the work, however, its popularity declined. Today, however, much of Williams's music--along with the work of other jazz artists--is being rereleased. *Mary Lou's Mass* is no exception to this trend. In 1988 Kevin Whitehead reviewed a rerelease of the work. While he praised the gospel cuts, "Act of Contrition," the contrasting "Lamb of God," and the bluesy "Medi I & II," he found that, overall, the work had aged badly. He cited the out of date musical style as the reason that it is not frequently revived (Whitehead 1988, 73).

While this explanation is no doubt true, I would argue that by definition this is another literate criticism of a non-literate work. The idea that the value

of the mass lies in its power an art object outside of the service does not comply with the African-American aesthetics of the functionality of music, nor Williams's personal aesthetics. Of course the mass is out of date, it was written twenty-five years ago to fulfill the needs of the day. White's judgement is like criticizing Bach for being unromantic. It would be more helpful to analyze *Mary Lou's Mass* within the context of aesthetics from oral tradition.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF *MARY LOU'S MASS*

Pre-composed Versus Improvised Materials

It may seem ironic that in discussing the conflict inherent in jazz composition between pre-composed and improvised materials I have selected a composition that is entirely pre-composed. As seen from Williams's biography, however, the tendency towards large-scale compositions was part of her personal aesthetics of music. Indeed, there are, in *Mary Lou's Mass,* purely compositional elements taken from traditional settings of the mass; and because it is an extended work, Williams could create a sense of drama through contrasting styles and textures.

While pointing out the compositional elements of the mass that arise from the pre-determined text, I maintain that manifestations of the oral tradition remain prominent in *Mary Lou's Mass.* Williams's aesthetic of functionality in regards to performance practice stems from oral culture, as does her use of simple forms. Techniques arising from oral tradition can further be seen in Williams's work in the use of riffs and in the way in which the vocal ensemble and soloists utilize text and melody. Each of these factors will be discussed below.

Use of Riffs

One of the things that makes popular music so accessible is the repeated use of riffs, that is, short, repeated melodic motifs, memorable for their rhythmic interest. Riffs, of course, were fundamental to the Kansas City swing style, which was heavily influenced by oral tradition. Kansas City swing was also the style in which Williams wrote her first arrangements. This is significant because riffs are fundamental to the compositional process of many of the pieces in *Mary Lou's Mass.* The compositions that arise out of the use riffs are also unified by their repetition.

Even a short piece like "Act of Contrition" utilizes a riff in the bass (see Example 1). In fact, the bass melody from the first two measures runs throughout the piece, except for measures 13 and 14, and even there the rhythm of the riff remains the same. Because there are very few chords overtly voiced by the piano in the piece, the bass ostinato actively serves to unify "Act of Contrition."

Due to the prevalence of sustained harmonies in letter A of "Credo," the bass riff utilized in this piece is instrumental in creating momentum. Furthermore, because the melody of "Credo" is through-composed, the riff is the only means of creating a linear logic, which unifies the various contrasting sections of the "Credo" text. In fact, before each statement of new musical material the bass riff is consistently employed in combination with the piano at least once. The riff's function as introductory or transitional material can be

seen in measures 1 - 8, 28 - 31, and 40 - 43. In addition, in measures 21 - 23 and 60 - 71, the riff functions as closing material.

The riff in "Our Father" functions in a similar way. Every time it is employed after a contrasting section it signifies the return of the Eb minor tonality that characterizes section A of the rondo. Because "Our Father" also has a through-composed melody and the harmonizations of the riff are complex and varied, the bass melody is fundamental to creating unity in the piece. In fact, it is only through the riff that any linear development occurs in this piece.

In "Kyrie," a bass ostinato is utilized throughout the A sections to heighten the contrast with the B and C sections. What is noteworthy, however, is the great variety of harmonizations that are employed in the accompanying piano riff (See example 1). Not only are there different harmonizations of the riff in the first and last A section, in addition, the sections which serve to contrast section A utilize piano riffs differing from those which were heard before.

Thus, in addition to the usual i-VII-IV progression at measures 1 - 10 and 21 - 24, there is also the i-IV-V piano progression (beginning at measure 30) over the usual bass ostinato, and an all new V-bV-IV progression in measures 13 - 19. That repeated two-measure motifs such as these can serve to both unify through their rhythmic consistency and contrast through their differing harmonic progressions is one of the most unique aspects of the music

of oral cultures.

Example 1 - Riffs in "Kyrie" (beginning at mm. 1, 13, and 30)

"The Lord Says" uses a recurring two-bar riff played by the piano, guitar, and bass in letters A, B (except for mm. 33 - 36), and D. To create contrast in letter C, the rhythm section is sustained rather than dependent on the bass hook. Interestingly enough, the use of the bass hook in "The Lord Says" corresponds to the utilization of the call and response technique (see the following section).

The riffs in "People in Trouble" are instrumental in illustrating the ternary form of the piece. The riff from letter A begins each statement of the A section. The is evident in mm. 6 - 17, 24 - 28, and 74 - 84. Knowing the influence of oral culture in Williams's writing, the extensive use of riffs in *Mary Lou's Mass* should not be surprising. Throughout this work riffs serve as repetition that unifies the pieces thematically.

"Praise the Lord" from the prologue is unique in that the recurring two-bar riff is used in every measure of the piece in both the guitar and the piano. Although the use of riffs is a product of oral culture, the voicing of the chords in fourths in "Praise the Lord" is reminiscent of chant utilized in the Roman Catholic tradition. Regardless, the extended use of riffs in the prologue prepares the listener for the extensive use of riffs to follow throughout the mass, up to and including the gospel recessional "Praise the Lord," which contains a repeated riff in the bass and piano.

Use of Vocal Ensemble - Call and Response and Improvisation

Call and response is a vocal technique harkening back to oral tradition in West Africa. The caller is the musical leader who decides where the improvisation is applied, while the group follows his or her lead by echoing his or her melodic lines or repeating a given line throughout, as a refrain. This technique was also utilized in medieval mass settings, such as the antiphons and psalms, between the cantor and the choir. Thus, the call and response

technique, which is used repeatedly in *Mary Lou's Mass,* is a device linking both African-American and Western art traditions.

In "Kyrie" the call and response technique is used throughout the piece. The leader sings various lyrical and melodic phrases while the choir repeats the same words to the same melodic line each time in response (see Appendix A). There are slight variations in the choral lines (at measures 15 and 33, for example), but even these are repeated. Furthermore, even when the score of the piece reveals a written tag or ending, the recording itself does not include the tag, but rather sustains the call and response technique until the music fades out.

Almost all of "The Lord Says" utilizes call and response as well. In measures 1 - 32, the baritone sings a gospel-inflected line and the choir repeats his text, but employing a different melody. The choir and soloist sing together (for the most part) in measures 32 - 51, and then the call and response technique is utilized again, from measures 52 until the fadeout at the end of the piece.

The recessional "Praise the Lord" utilizes the call and response technique only in the final section of the piece, as does the final section of "Holy Holy Holy." Not content with the traditional use of binary form, Williams adds call and response exchanges of "hosanna" to the Sanctus. The leader in this case is a soprano soloist, and although on the recording "Holy Holy Holy" fades out at measure 55, from what one hears at measure 53, she has only just begun.

The listener is left with the feeling that the leader and choir could keep singing much longer than the few measures allotted in the score.

Letter D of the prologue "Praise the Lord" illustrates not only the call and response technique, but also group improvisation. The score of "Praise the Lord" indicates a 32-measure section at letter E with a six-bar coda, but in the recording of the performance both the instrumentalists and choir take improvisatory liberties. An eight-bar vamp (utilizing the same two-bar motif used throughout the piece) is added to showcase the piano and flute improvisations. Next, the call and response section at letter E (measure 81 - 88) is improvised upon four times. Only after this is the descant from measures 89 - 96 employed along with the continued call and response lines. The call and response technique persists until the fadeout, again leaving one with the impression that the singers and instrumentalists could have gone on much longer than the melody written in the score.

The influence of oral tradition is further evident in deviations from the score in "Credo." Throughout the recording of this piece the choir sings a simplified version of what is written in the score. This can be seen in the omission of vocal melismas at measures 21 and 54, the lessening of the range in measures 38 and 58, and the omitting of harmonies at measures 52 and 59. These changes are not necessarily a product of the ineptness of the small choir. Rather, they are perhaps utilized to bring contrasting moments into even greater relief, for harmonies that are not in the vocal score are improvised,

both by the choir at measure 25 and by a soprano in measure 26. Thus there are a variety of examples in *Mary Lou's Mass* in which the improvisation from oral tradition takes precedence over a literal reading of the score.

Use of Text and Melody - Improvising Soloists

While employing all the traditional elements of the common mass, *Mary Lou's Mass* also adds certain texts normally not found in the ordinary. In fact, the majority of the texts of this work make up the proper of the mass. These include "Praise the Lord," "The Lord Says," "Act of Contrition," "In His Day," "People in Trouble," "One," and the two versions of "Praise the Lord." "Old Time Spiritual" and "Medi I & II" do not have texts, but they are not part of the ordinary of the mass either. "Lazarus" and "Our Father" are settings of texts which are traditionally spoken. In addition to substituting for the mass proper, as will be shown in the section on style, each of these pieces is necessary to fulfill the palindromic structure of the work as a whole.

Many of the texts used in the mass were written by Mary Lou Williams. "Praise the Lord" was taken from Psalm 148 and "In His Day" from Psalm 72:7 and John 14:27. "Our Father" is from Matthew 6:9-13, while the Beatitude in mm. 46 - 48 is from Matthew 5:9. The text of "Lazarus," taken from Luke 16:9-13, was written by both Mary Lou Williams and guitarist Sonny Henry. In addition, because the texts of the mass were originally sung in Greek and Latin, the ordinary of the mass had to be translated into English. "Lamb of

God" was taken from John 1:29. The antiphon from "Holy Holy Holy" was taken from Psalm 34:14, while the Benedictus is from Matthew 21:9. Robert Ledogar, a trained liturgist, wrote the words to both "Kyrie" and "Gloria" (see Appendix A), which are based on the original texts.

The musical setting of the text is very important in a mass, and as seen in section C of the "Kyrie" in the discussion on form, compositional procedures often arise out of the text. This is certainly the case for all of the call and response examples cited in the prior section. A further example in which the text directly influences the music composed is the setting of the "Credo." This piece is unified with a recurring riff in the bass, but its implementation is frequently interrupted by moments of word painting, a device traditionally used in mass settings. The most striking example is the tempo change at the text traditionally known as the "Crucifixus." In addition to slowing down throughout this phrase, at measures 25 and 26 with the words "suffered under Pontius Pilate," the entire rhythm section is tacet, while the harmonies become highly chromatic. Finally, on the word "Buried" in measure 28 a descending melisma is employed. The subsequent "Et Resurrexit" is again fittingly a tempo.

What may be even more musically significant in terms of oral culture than the content of the texts is the way in which the words are utilized by singers in performance. Although the recording is based on a written score, the rhythms and notes employed in the recording of *Mary Lou's Mass*, as in

oral culture performances in general, are not necessarily those taken from the score. This is what vocal jazz improvisations by performing artists such as Billie Holiday are all about. Good jazz performers take musical liberties not only with tempo, but also melody and rhythm, to increase the personal communication between themselves and the audience. When soloists perform exactly what is written in the score of *Mary Lou's Mass* the work is interesting, but when musical liberties are taken by performers on the recording of *Mary Lou's Mass,* the work comes alive. This remains true for all live performances, be it 1971 or 1996.

Although the score of "Act of Contrition" calls for voices (i.e., chorus), it was recorded as a solo vehicle. This is probably because its difficult chromaticism could only be negotiated by an extremely proficient choir. On the recording of this piece, while retaining all of the melodic intervals, Honi Gordon often ignores the rhythms written in the score (as in measure 6, for example) in order to heighten the meaning of the words. Furthermore, despite what her own writing indicated, Williams herself did not hesitate in veering from the score. She did not enter on piano until measure 11 (rather than the second measure, as indicated), for example, and thereafter improvised the entire time upon "Act of Contrition."

"The Lord Says" also displays some improvisation by the baritone leader. In addition to the use of portamento attacks throughout, which is characteristic of all African-American music, in measures 8 and 12, the soloist

alters the given melody to be linear rather than sing the arpeggios written. Measure 47 also reveals a gospel-inflected melisma that is not written out in the score.

In contrast to these few changes, in the recording of "Kyrie-Lord Have Mercy" the leader takes more liberties with both melody and rhythm in the final section of the work. This section contains improvisation by the leader which holds virtually no regard for the written lines. As such it attains a certain fervor which probably would not occur in a straight reading of the score. In this recorded performance, the soloist seems to have found the perfect balance between that which is written and that which is improvised. That this can be achieved so frequently from the score of *Mary Lou's Mass* is a tribute to Williams as a composer attempting to fuse oral and literate traditions.

Performance Practice - The Aesthetics of Functionality

For a virtuoso musician and composer, Williams had a humble view of performance. This was due to her application of oral culture aesthetics to performance practice. Williams's aesthetics of jazz as a spiritual medium, for example, dictated that the quality of a performance be not a result of the technical virtuosity displayed by the players, but rather the spirit with which they approached the performance. For this reason, despite her own technical

prowess, Williams could comment in 1964, "If a guy's charitable, even if he can't play, I can play with him. When you get those false egos, it's a different matter. The bop era started that. During that era they were looking down on other musicians and that caused discord" (Williams 1989, 10).

Williams preferred the warmth and humanness in sincere players over good players with big egos because this led to a more communal aesthetic of music. For this reason, Williams explained "When I did the *Mass* I used a choir made up of students from local Catholic high schools and colleges. That made it more interesting and human than if I had used professional voices" (Williams 1978, 148).

Williams's aesthetic of functionality from oral tradition dictated that in each performance of a piece she composed, adjustments could be made to accommodate the strengths and weaknesses of the various performers--professional or non-professional--with whom she was working. This has extensive ramifications for performance practice and is in direct opposition to the methodology of Duke Ellington, who consistently wrote for the same group. Furthermore, it was precisely because of Williams's aesthetic of functionality that she could write a mass, while Duke Ellington could not.

Ellington could, on occasion, write compositions that, because of his capacity to write for specific performers with unique timbres, were more elevated than the audiences for whom they were written. To write a piece with a strictly liturgical function, that is, to praise the Lord, he could not do,

however, because throughout his career Ellington's writing had been within the context of performing to audiences, rather than congregations.

> The difference between playing for people, whether at the Cotton Club or Westminster Abbey, and creating for the greater glory of God, was not lost on him. When Fr. Norman O'Connor commissioned a jazz mass (apparently never completed), Ellington pondered the conflict: "One may be accustomed to speaking to people, but suddenly to attempt to speak, sing, and play directly to God--that puts one in an entirely new and different position" (Giddens 1981, 160).

By contrast, throughout her life, Williams wrote music for a variety of ensembles and events. Even while she had steady employment with the Kirk band, Williams still free-lanced extensively as a composer. Her attitude toward music was much more of a pick-up affair than Ellington's because of her aesthetics of functionality. Jazz had to be a flexible medium because, for Williams, music existed to spread love and healing to very different types of people. While some might scoff at the healing potential of music, Williams related,

> I had a guy come to the club where I was working in New York who was on the verge of suicide. He wrote me a fan letter. It said, "I walked by the Hickory House and saw your picture and just went in and sat down and listened to you. Now I can really make it and I was on the verge of committing suicide." You see, the music has healing powers in it. Everything you talk about is in it, healing the soul and all that, and people have forgotten to listen to it as a conversation. If you listen to it you'll find that it has a story (Stokes 1991, 42).

Because Williams viewed music as having a healing and communicative purpose which could be applied to various functions, a given piece used on more than one occasion not only could, but should be altered to fit the present

need. Shortly after the recording of the *Mary Lou's Mass,* for example, Williams related,

> I've rewritten and simplified the parts. Now I can use it on the road with just piano, bass, and singers. The vocal lines are in unison, and I rewrite them according to the singers' abilities in the various school, church, and community groups (Williams 1980, 207).

To Williams, the performance of *Mary Lou's Mass* was not about a direct reading of the score or the perfection of a single ideal in her mind. Rather, like composers before the twentieth century--particularly in the Baroque period, she utilized the personnel who were available on a particular occasion and altered the music to showcase strong performers and accommodate the weaker ones. This is evident in the unidiomatic scoring of the work. In the vocal solos, for example, no specific voice type is specified. Rather, whoever possessed the given range at the time of a performance fulfilled the need, be it a man or woman. Or, if an exceptional stylist such as Honi Gordon did not have the range for a given piece, the music would just be transposed to fit the singer, as in the recording of "Act of Contrition." The same is true of "Kyrie." These examples stand in stark contrast to the performance practice of Western art music in the twentieth century.

A further extension of William's belief in the functionality of music is evident in the fact that she did not have a problem with interpolating older compositions into *Mary Lou's Mass.* For this work Williams freely used all of the materials initially written for *Music for Peace* in 1969, the "Kyrie" and

"Sanctus" from *Mass for the Lenten Season,* and even "Act of Contrition" from her first setting of the mass in 1967.

A final example of functionality is the recessional "Praise the Lord." It too has a history as an autonomous work before being interpolated into *Mary Lou's Mass.* It was originally written and recorded on Mary Records in 1964. For this recording it was arranged by Mel Boliston in an early rock'n'roll style. Williams herself arranged the piece in 1967 for the concert of her sacred music in Carnegie Hall. The final recording of the piece, as the recessional in *Mary Lou's Mass,* is different again due mainly to the different leader. It has much more of a gospel sound, corresponding to its new function as part of a mass.

Style - Contrasting Juxtapositions

The flexibility in Williams's concept of performance practice must not be confused with indeterminacy. Rather, this flexibility is evidence of the influence of oral culture in *Mary Lou's Mass.* Many compositional techniques were also consistently employed in *Mary Lou's Mass,* however. It has been said that the weakness of jazz (and the improvised musics of other oral cultures) is an inherent lack of drama due to its lack of complex forms. What is successful about Williams's mass is that while leaving room for improvisation, it is still guided enough by composition to achieve a sense of drama paralleling that achieved in western art music. This drama was

achieved in *Mary Lou's Mass* through the juxtaposition of contrasting styles evident throughout the work.

Alvin Ailey, whose ballet company choreographed *Mary Lou's Mass* in 1971 said, "What is wonderful about this music is that it is a sum total of black music, a retrospective" (Placksin 1982, 302). Indeed, this work is diverse, containing varying styles, such as upbeat funk, bossa nova, blues, bebop, rock'n'roll, and gospel. But this work is not an amalgamation of different pieces unified only by the text of the mass. On the contrary, the different styles are highlighted by systematically presenting contrasting juxtapositions. In fact, the entire work is unified within a larger palindromic framework (see Figure 1). Each of the contrasting pairs of pieces leads up to the climax of the work, "Lazarus," and the four sets of pairs are framed by the two joyous settings of "Praise the Lord."

The "Praise the Lord" prologue and recessional are both long and loud settings, ending with call and response sections. The use of the call and response technique, a hallmark of church services in oral cultures, is obviously no accident. The two versions of "Praise the Lord" are then followed and preceded respectively by two shorter pieces. Next come longer pieces again, then shorter, and so on, forming a palindromic structure. The pattern is only broken (and this, only in the short-long order, not the pairings) to better highlight the gospel reading which is the climax of the service (see Figure 1). In discussing the various pieces, however, it is more sensible to view them

successively in the context of their stylistically contrasting pairs.

Figure 1 - Palindrome of *Mary Lou's Mass*

Title	Relative Length	Measures	Relative Density	Form
Praise the Lord	Long	118	Dense	Ternary
Old Time Spiritual	Short	24	Thin	Binary
The Lord Says	Long	60	Dense	Ternary
Act of Contrition	Short	20	Thin	Phrase Period
Kyrie	Long	48	Dense	Rondo
Gloria	Long	58	Dense	Chorus = Rondo
In His Day	Short	19	Thin	Binary
Lazarus	Long	125	Thin	Chorus = Rondo
Credo	Short	72	Dense	Ternary
Medi I & II	Long	82	Thin	Ternary
Holy Holy Holy	Short	64	Dense	Binary
Our Father	Long	52	Thin	Rondo
Lamb of God	Short	26	Dense	Binary
People in Trouble	Long	98	Thin	Ternary
One	Short	84	Dense	16-bar choruses
Praise the Lord	Long	134	Dense	String of choruses

After the prologue, there are two entrance hymns. The bluesy "Old Time Spiritual" is juxtaposed with the upbeat gospel selection "The Lord Says." This pair is followed by the haunting prayer "Act or Contrition" which is coupled with the pleading yet exuberant "Kyrie." The bright "Gloria" is contrasted with the slow, minor-keyed responsorial psalm, "In His Day."

Significantly, "In His Day" is the shortest piece in the entire work. Its duration serves to further highlight the importance of the gospel reading, "Lazarus," which is the longest piece in the work, and therefore also break the palindromic pair pattern. If "Lazarus" is the high point of the work because of its preaching function in the service, the shorter "Credo" with which it is paired, has a similar significance for its theological teaching function.

Next in the service is the offertory, a time when the congregation has a moment to reflect. Significantly, the "Medi I & II" (The title is probably a shortened form of the word, meditation.) is a microcosm of the contrasting pair technique, because "Medi I" and "Medi II" on their own are absolute polarities. "Medi I" is a slow blues, while "Medi II" is a fast bebop piano showcase. And yet, under the guidance of Williams, the two combine with absolute grace and logic into a seamless whole (see section on form). This hot offertory is paired with the longer and cooler Sanctus. "Holy Holy Holy" begins with the antiphon "Turn aside from evil" from the Votice Mass for Peace before breaking out into a bossa nova at section C. This is the only latin-style piece in the mass.

The cool tone slips into one of intimacy with "Our Father," a setting of the Pater Noster. The mood of the Lord's Prayer is suddenly broken, however, with the jarring juxtaposition of "Lamb of God." This highly dissonant setting of the Agnus Dei is the most striking piece in the work, with its angst-filled plea for mercy. The final pair of communion songs in *Mary Lou's Mass* are not

only musically, but also lyrically inseparable. The seeming despair at the end of "People in Trouble," with the repetition of the phrase "Now we hate each other," can only be answered by the hopefulness of "One," which calls for a unity among the races. As mentioned, the work ends with the gospel recessional, "Praise the Lord." This song, occurring directly after the act of communion itself, acts as a liturgical mini-climax, showcasing the dynamic black preacher. The speaking rather than singing of both the pastor and the choir is a final unprecedented example of contrast, achieved through the juxtaposition of differing styles in *Mary Lou's Mass.*

Texture - Drama by Contrasts and Layers

Williams's aesthetic of contrasting juxtapositions is not only manifested in length and style. In addition, it is furthered by her pairing of contrasting textures (see Figure 1). The prologue "Praise the Lord" which begins the work is very dense, employing piano, bass, drums, guitar, flute, chorus, and congos. By contrast, the miniature "Old Time Spiritual" utilizes only piano, flute, and bass. The choir is again added in "The Lord Says," exchanging call and response lines with a baritone soloist and accompanied by piano, bass, electric guitar, and drums. This piece further contains its own internal textural contrasts by slowing down letter C from the score and sustaining the instruments while the soloist freely improvises various gospel melismas before

a return to the original tempo at letter D.

Although "Act of Contrition" also employs a soloist, the feeling in this piece is far more intimate than that of "The Lord Says." This is due in part to Honi Gordon's excellence as a singer, but is mostly a result of the starkness of the instrumentation. While the upright bass is utilized quite melodically throughout, the piano does not begin accompanying until half way through the piece at measure 11. The starkness of the instrumentation is a direct reflection of the text (which is another reason for breaking the palindromic pair pattern), and makes "Act of Contrition" one of the most moving pieces in the entire mass. While "Kyrie" continues in the same key with another plaintive text, its mood is much more exuberant because of the flute solo. The funky backdrop to the flute consists of piano, electric bass, and drums. "Kyrie" also employs the call and response technique between the choir and a soloist.

"Gloria" is another dense piece utilizing piano, bass, drums, soprano and baritone soloists, and choir. It utilizes rock'n'roll guitar and introduces for the first time the unusual scoring of the French horn. The lushness of this piece lies in stark contrast with "In His Day." Although the latter uses guitar, bass, piano, drums, improvised French horn, as well as chorus with soprano and tenor soloists, these are never employed simultaneously, and the instruments are sustained throughout. Because of its starkness, a feeling of intimacy is again produced by "In His Day."

Although "Lazarus" is the climax of the mass, in instrumentation it calls

for only electric guitar and vocal soloist, in this case, sung by Carline Ray. The folk-like simplicity of such a sparse scoring illustrates Williams's aesthetic of accessibility. It also beautifully demonstrates how a work's high point does not necessarily have to be the loudest piece. Rather, playing with variety and a good sense of time can be just as effective in creating excitement as an exponentially increasing crescendo. The syllabic setting of the gospel reading is the climax of *Mary Lou's Mass* precisely because it is an anti-climax. This important point many young jazz players could learn from. In contrast, "Credo" is sung by a small chorus with piano, drums, bass, and French horn. Although this texture is much thicker than "Lazarus," because of the smallness of the choir it remains softer than the boisterous "Praise the Lord" settings, for example.

As mentioned, "Medi I & II" is a microcosm of the contrasting juxtaposition technique. This occurs not only stylistically, but also in regard to texture. "Medi I" is a piano feature, accompanied only by bass and flute. Although "Medi II" contains some hot soloing with the addition of drums and congos, the piece again ends with the slow bluesy "Medi I" texture, leaving the listener with a feeling of intimacy. "Holy Holy Holy" is much more varied in its instrumentation. It begins with a baritone solo antiphon followed by altos from the chorus with sustained piano. After four measures of a bass, drums, and piano bossa nova, the guitar is added for another four measures. Then, at the Pleni sunt Caeli ("Heaven and earth..."), the soprano soloist and flute

improvisations are added. Because of the cooler style of the verse, the feeling of intimacy is retained at first. This is soon dispelled, however, in the call and response section at letter F, where the soloist and choir shout alternating hosannas to the Lord.

"Our Father" is set for baritone soloist accompanied by drums, bass, piano, and French horn. At measure 46 the choir joins in as well with "Blessed are the Peacemakers," a text from the Beatitudes. The tranquility of this piece is contrasted with the jarring "Lamb of God." The avant garde harmonies utilized here by the choir as well as the non-traditional vocal effects make it a very powerful piece. Although it is was written mainly as a vocal vehicle, the piano, flute, and bowed bass underline the choir. The Pendereckian voice clusters utilized in "Lamb of God" make for a striking contrast with the rest of the work, which is highly tonal.

"People in Trouble" begins with guitar and a soprano soloist asking the Lord for peace. It then breaks out into an a tempo "People in Trouble" utilizing choir, bass, drums, piano, and flute. The unison lines in this piece, indicative of the text about isolation, are contrasted with the thicker texture of "One." Although "One" also uses only piano, drums, bass, chorus, and flute, there is polyphony in the chorus which causes a denser sound, representing the unity that the text of the piece calls for.

The instrumentation of the recessional "Praise the Lord" consists of leader and chorus, electric guitar, French horn, bass, drums, piano, congos, and

flute. "Praise the Lord" is unique in its juxtaposition of each chorus of call and response with an instrumental solo. As the final piece in the mass, "Praise the Lord" is also the most liturgical sounding. The reason for this is the excitement of the speaker. It is no surprise that a work as heavily influenced by oral culture as *Mary Lou's Mass* would end this way because

> historically, one of the strongest guardians of Black culture has been the church. Through this institution the technical principles that govern both sacred and secular music are transmitted to developing performers. The master teacher in this context, the transmitter of cultural style, is the dynamic Black preacher (Burnim and Maultsby 1987, 115).

"Praise the Lord" is overt in its use of black Protestant church elements, including handclapping and the verbal, rather than sung, call and response between the preacher and the congregation. "Praise the Lord," more than any of the other pieces in the mass illustrates how

> in Black communication the voice is used like a musical instrument. It is used to improvise the rhythmic pattern that gives Black speech a kind of musical, sermonizing quality. This pattern adds a soulfulness that awakens a sense of shared experience among Black Americans that mere words cannot convey (Baber 1987, 106).

It is no accident that Williams ends *Mary Lou's Mass* with an emphasis on her communal aesthetic.

In addition to the contrasting densities juxtaposed between the various pairs, drama is also achieved in individual songs by a type of crescendo technique that utilizes the layering of instruments, beginning sparsely and becoming increasingly dense. This is not so much a crescendo of volume, but

rather one of excitement or intensity. The layering procedure is best exemplified in "Praise the Lord" from the prologue. This piece begins with guitar, bass, piano, drums and the baritones from the chorus. At the pickup to letter C, however, the congo drums are added. Then at measure 61 the piano player begins improvising and by measure 67 has broken out into full fledged riffs. At measure 80 the eight-bar vamp (consisting of a two-bar harmonic motif which has been used throughout the piece) is interpolated to showcase improvisations by the flute player and pianist.

The climax of "Praise the Lord" occurs in letter E. Here the eight-bar vamp of measures 81 - 88 is stated four times. The first two choruses consist melodically of call and response exchanges between the baritones with hand clapping by the sopranos, but gradually the rest of the chorus is added as well. The third time the altos and basses sing, and the final time the sopranos join in. The joyous ensemble mood is sustained throughout the final section where the descant from measure 89 - 96 is employed in conjunction with the call and response lines until the end of the piece. Although a six-bar coda was written (see analysis in section on form), on the recording the call and response continues until the fade out.

Thus, in addition to manipulating the duration and style of the movements, contrasting textures, both within individual pieces and between the various pairs, are used to achieve drama in *Mary Lou's Mass*, which unifies the work as a whole. These compositional techniques are all evidences of

Williams's aesthetic tendency towards writing ambitious, large-scale works.

Form - The Aesthetics of Accessibility

Having seen the planning that went into the formal structure of the entire work, it is notable that the forms that Williams utilized in individual pieces are rather simple. Many pieces are either choruses of 12-bar blues or popular song forms. Simple formal designs are rather indicative of oral cultures as a whole, however, as well as Williams's aesthetic of accessibility, and so should be expected.

> Within the Afro-American tradition...effective group improvisation has remained possible because the musicians have changed the meaning of tonal harmony. Blues, as we have seen, uses simple, even banal progressions of a quite conventional kind, which are drained of dramatic content simply by repetition, so that the progression gains strength, not through surprise but through predictability. Bebop improvisation, while its harmonies are more elaborated, still repeats them in cycles of sixteen, twenty-four or thirty-two bars, the conventional lengths of the popular songs on which the improvisations are commonly based. These harmonic progressions, which might be in themselves quite elaborate,...are the 'givens' of the performance, the underpinning which holds it together, while the real interest lies elsewhere, in the ingenious and expressive improvised patterns which the players build on that foundation (Small 1987, 300).

While simple forms are certainly utilized in the pieces in *Mary Lou's Mass*, it is a tribute to Williams's art is that she is not bound by the traditional jazz forms. On the contrary, there are many uses of through-composed melodies and irregular phrase lengths in addition to the binary, ternary, and

rondo-like forms, which are utilized to achieve drama in Western art music. The forms of the various pieces will be discussed, beginning with the use of ternary form.

"People in Trouble" utilizes ternary form in a conventional way. It begins with a five-measure introduction accompanied by guitar, in which the soloist implores the Lord to "Give us peace." As in "Holy Holy Holy" the introduction is tonally ambivalent, passing through a series of secondary dominants, until the final V7 of D minor which leads into the home key of G minor. The extended use of secondary dominants in the introduction foreshadows a movement through the circle of fifths, which occurs in letter B.

Section A of the ternary form begins with repetitions of a two-measure vamp for bass and piano in G minor. What is interesting about this riff is the use of the IV chord taken from the relative major. At letter B the choir states the verse. This concludes in a full cadence in G minor at measure 24, but not before a brief section utilizing the circle of fifths in measures 18 - 24.

After a repeat of the A section, section B begins at measure 44. This section, calling for God's aid, is slower in tempo. Although starting out in G minor, C minor is tonicized, beginning with the pivot chord in measure 48, as is Eb major (beginning with the pivot chord in measure 53). At measure 54 the harmonic rhythm increases as the tempo decreases yet again. The subsequent measure, making a reference to Christ, contains chromatic harmonies. A ii-V in Bb major in measure 56 leads into the key of d minor

which results in a full cadence in D minor at measure 62. At this cadence the tempo again returns to that of the beginning of the piece.

The much slower harmonic rhythm of letter D, which tonicizes C major, acts as a transition to the return of section A at measure 74. Letters E and F are a strict repeat of the initial A section until the full cadence in G minor at measure 92 (originally, measure 24). "People in Trouble" ends with a six-measure coda of alternating bII and i chords, a chromatic technique Williams frequently uses in *Mary Lou's Mass.* On the recording the listener hears a fadeout of the lyric "Now we hate each other." With this powerful ending, it is little wonder that this piece was always a favorite in live performance.

A simpler use of ternary form is "Medi I & II." This piece consists of choruses of 12-bar blues combined in ternary form to create a single piece. This piano and flute showcase was not choreographed by Alvin Ailey, but was often used by Williams as the offertory in live masses and so was included in the recording. The A section is made up of two choruses of the bluesy "Medi I." It begins with only piano, but in measure 5 of the first chorus, the double bass and a sustained flute melody are added. The second chorus of "Medi I" contains a soulful piano solo (with flute tacet).

The B section, "Medi II," begins at a much faster tempo with a one-measure bass hook. In the next measure the drums are added. In the third measure the congos are added, and finally in the fourth a bebop piano solo begins. After a chorus and a half (counting from the downbeat of "Medi II"),

Roger Glenn takes over with a flute solo of another chorus and a half. A two-measure tag leads into the repeat of the A section. The first "Medi I" chorus is strictly repeated, but the second chorus is altered. Because it functions as a coda, it is only eight measures long.

"The Lord Says" is another fairly conventional use of ternary form (see Figure 2), except that there are cadences in two separate keys in the B section, and the A section returns in a truncated form. This piece, originally written for *Music for Peace,* is built around a two-bar riff in the key of Bb, stated in the introduction (mm. 1 - 8).

Figure 2 - Form of "The Lord Says"

Form	A		B				A	
Letter	A	B		C			D	
no. of mm.	16 +	12 +	4 +	2 +	2 +	2+	4 +	10
key	Bb		g mi	Bb	Eb	c mi	Bb	
m. no.	9-24	25-37.	38-42.	42-44	44-45	45-47.	47-51.	51-60

The A section of "The Lord Says" (mm. 9 - 38) is exciting because Williams consistently alternates between measures of I and IV, refusing to cadence until the V - I in Bb in measure 37. The B section, which begins at mm. 38, is a contrast to this in that it cadences in two different keys. After a full cadence in G minor in measure 41, Bb major is again implied with a dominant pedal in measures 43 - 44. This is interrupted, however, by a ii - V in Eb major in measures 44 - 45 and a second full cadence, this time in C

minor, in measure 47. Measures 48 - 50 are a return to the dominant pedal in Bb, which continues until the final full cadence in Bb in measure 51. The A section also returns in this measure, concluding the piece with the interplay between I and IV chords in Bb major.

While "Praise the Lord" was originally the recessional of *Music for Peace,* in the Alvin Ailey version of *Mary Lou's Mass* it became the prologue. Harmonically, this piece suggests ternary form, although there is not a strong cadence in either of the A sections (See Figure 3). Thematically, however, it is closer to binary form in its uses of theme.

Figure 3 - Form of "Praise the Lord" from the Prologue

Form	A	B		A			
Letter	A	B	C	D	E		tag
no. of mm.	24 +	20. +	16 +	20 +	16 +	16 +	6
Key	Eb	F	G - Eb	Eb			
m. no.	1-24	25-44	44-60	61-80	81-96	97-112	113-118

Section A consists of 24 bars, made up of eight measures of introduction and sixteen measures of a verse. All of this material utilizes the same riff in Eb, which is the home key of the piece. The B section, consisting of 36 measures, begins at measure 25. It starts out with the last eight measures of letter A, which forms the introduction to the next verse (beginning at measure 29). Again the riff in Eb is utilized throughout; however, section B begins in the key is F major. (Measure 24 contained the chromatic modulation from Eb

to F major.) Sixteen measures of the verse in F comes to a full cadence at measure 44; and this is followed by sixteen measures of the verse in G major, beginning at letter C. The modulation to G (at measure 44) seems more abrupt than the modulation to F major because there is no eight-bar introduction with which to orient oneself before the verse in the new key.

The return of section A begins with four measures of a new two-bar vamp in Eb, which utilizes the same rhythm as the first, but a different chord progression. The vamp now proceeds from I - ii rather than I - V. The modulation back to Eb seems less abrupt than the one to F because again the four measures of vamp function as an introduction to the sixteen-bar verse which begins at letter D. At measure 81 new melodic material is stated for the first time, suggesting binary form. This letter E material consists of 32 bars of call and response over the vamp, with the addition of a descant at measure 89 until the end of the piece. "Praise the Lord" concludes with a six bar coda in Eb, but avoids a full cadence in the home key altogether.

The Credo is traditionally the most difficult text of a mass to set because the Nicene Creed is so long. To avoid tedium Williams sets the shorter Apostle's Creed in Eb major at a quick tempo. "Credo," written in conjunction with a priest named Ed Flanagan, is in ternary form.

Both the end of the introductory drum solo (mm. 1 - 4) and the beginning of section A (mm. 5 - 8) employ a four-measure passage of a sustained dominant harmony. These phrases utilize a two-measure bass hook

which is also employed throughout section A (excluding the contrasting mm. 17 - 20). The entrance of the choir occurs at measure 4. Also at this point it becomes apparent that the dominant of Ab major heard initially is really the tonic of the piece (See Example 2). The verse continues on in Eb major until a full cadence in measure 21. After three additional measures of the bass hook, the rhythm section becomes tacit to exploit the chromatic harmonies at mm. 25 - 26. The section ends with another full cadence in Eb in measure 28.

Example 2 - Dominant Harmony in "Credo"

Any sense of stability established by the last cadence soon vanishes, however, as the B section is characterized by harmonic fluctuation. Beginning at measure 31 the keys of Eb minor and B major are tonicized before another quick cadence in Eb major at measure 36. The secondary dominant of F major is then heard before another full cadence in Eb major at measure 37. The section ends with a tonicization of the key Eb minor.

Measure 40 marks the return of the home key, but the A section becomes greatly altered already at measure 48. This letter D does, however,

utilize the bass hook from letter A, more or less (except mm. 48 - 51) until the fadeout, which is actually written in the score. This A section begins with the four-measure sustained dominant harmony of the introduction and makes extensive use of secondary dominants beginning at measure 48. This harmonic fluctuation is a throwback to the B section. Measures 51 - 56 actually employ the circle of fifths relationships, but all of this tonicization only ends with a full cadence in Eb minor, which is in the middle of the melodic phrase at measure 58. The piece closes with the dominant harmony with which it began.

Rondo-like forms (ABACA) are also utilized extensively in *Mary Lou's Mass*, but the formal application is less traditional than that of ternary form. In fact, each instance of its usage in *Mary Lou's Mass* is unique. "Kyrie - Lord Have Mercy" is similar to the prior "Act of Contrition" in both the mood of the text and key of F minor; however, the form of the former is much more complex than the latter. Although it is a rondo, because of the vocal pickups (in measures 4, 12, and 31) inherent in the various themes of the piece, the form becomes irregular in each section except for the second A--thus, 7 + 9 + 4 + 7 + 17.

After a four-bar introduction based on a two-bar riff in F minor (i-VII-IV), the first section begins. This A section, also written over the riff, states the call and response A theme from measures 5 - 10. Beginning with the pickup at measure 12 and without having heard a full cadence in F minor, the B section moves away from the i-VII-IV riff to measures of alternating C and Bb chords

that progress chromatically, as in "People in Trouble," and suggest F major.

A syncopated pickup in measure 20 indicates melodically a return of the A section. The upbeat sounds like it is a measure early, however, because measure 20 remains part of the B section tonality. The irregularity of nine measures in the B section is compensated for with the return of section A at measure 21, because it is an even four measures long. The theme of this A section is cut short at measure 25, however, as section C interrupts with the choir sustaining a bVI chord in measures 26 - 27, suggesting the key of Ab major.

The complete halt in motion here is a sensitive setting of the text by Robert Ledogar (see Appendix A). Up to this point the singers have confessed a series of sins that they have committed, but it is not until they actually have asked the Lord for mercy (significantly, in a unison which includes even the instruments in measures 28 - 31) that closure via the first full cadence in F minor is achieved at measure 31 - 32.

Also at measure 31 - 32 the A section theme returns for a final statement. This time a new riff in F minor (i-IV7-V7) is employed. Over this riff, the call and response exchanges of "Lord have mercy" continue until the end of the piece. The melodic content of the call and the rhythms of the choral response are both altered, but the effect of the A theme remains. A one-bar tag ends the piece. Again, this is a throwback to the pickup from the A theme and causes the final section to be an irregular 17 measures long.

The chorus of the fleet "Gloria" utilizes the rondo form melodically, while simultaneously exploring the idea of contrasting keys without cadencing in any of them. In fact, this piece can be seen the deconstruction of the concept of the home key because the home key of Bb major is never heard again after measure 13. The conflict between two differing melodies gives shape to the tonal fluctuation in this piece and is resolved as the longer theme from letter B becomes one with the shorter melody from letter C (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Form of "Gloria"

Form	Verse			A	B	A	B	A	
letter	Intro	A		B	C	D	E	F	tag
no. of mm.	4 +	9 +	5 +	12 +	4 +	6 +	4 +	12 +	2
key	Bb Ma		Ab.	f mi	C	G	Db	f mi	
m. no.	1-4	5-13	14-18	19-30	31-34	35-40	41-44	45-56	57-58

"Gloria" begins in the key of Bb major with a four-bar introduction that reveals a single-bar riff in the bass. This alone is impressive to hear because, although it is highly rhythmic and set at a fast tempo, it is very cleanly articulated on the recording. But then, at measure 5, the verse of letter A is added to this underpinning by a select group of choristers. This is equally impressive because the speed of the piece also makes the choral articulation difficult. At measure 14, instead of moving from VI to V7, the piano voices an Eb7 which results in a full cadence, thus modulating to Ab major. Four measures that function as an introduction to letter B as well as stating a new

bass riff (with the electric guitar, utilizing the accessible rock style, substituting for the piano) end the verse.

The actual chorus of "Gloria" begins then, at letter B with a six-bar F minor melody, sung twice by the soprano soloist. This can be considered the A section of the rondo form. The B section begins at letter C and consists of a four-measure foil to section A. This short melody, noticeable for its rhythmic rather than melodic content, tonicizes C major, but the chord progression is influenced more by the voice leading than by the tonality (see the chromatic alto line of the guitar at mm. 32 - 34).

At letter D, the A section is repeated (once), but this time it tonicizes G major and is sung by a baritone soloist. This is followed (at letter E) by the return of the B section melody. This time, however, the melody is in the key of Db major rather than its original key of C major.

At letter F, the theme from section A returns in its original key of F minor, but superimposed over this is the four-bar melody from section B. When both melodies are again simultaneously repeated in F minor--this time in harmony and ending with a two-bar tag (which could be conceived of as Ab major), we realize just how far we have traveled from the Bb major introduction. Without ever having heard a full cadence in the key, F minor has asserted itself as the actual home key of the piece. The combining of two separate melodies into one is an exciting musical even, but the combining of two melodies heard in several different keys is all the more gratifying.

Originally, "Lazarus" was a communion hymn in *Music for Peace,* but for the Alvin Ailey production of *Mary Lou's Mass,* it was moved to the center of the service as the gospel reading. This is fitting because not only is it the longest composition, but more importantly, its chorus functions as a microcosm of the formal structure of the entire work. Like Figure 1, the chorus of "Lazarus" is set up as an imperfect palindrome, with the second half of the chorus reflecting the first (see Figure 5). Letter B corresponds to letter E, letter C to G, and letter D to F. The imperfection of the palindrome (the order of the second half is B - D - C, rather than B - C - D) results from the adherence to the rondo form, which is used in the chorus.

"Lazarus" is similar to the "Gloria" in both its accessible nature and its allusion to conflict between contrasting musical materials of the chorus. In "Lazarus," however, the conflict is between keys rather than melodies. Furthermore, "Lazarus" displays a more conventional use of rondo form, as the home key both starts and ends the piece.

"Lazarus" begins in the key of C major with four bars of a single-measure guitar vamp. This vamp continues to be utilized throughout the melodically through-composed verse (mm. 1 - 42). Although there is never a full cadence in C, this key comes back repeatedly in the B section of the chorus. Furthermore, the riff utilized in the introduction also reappears later, in the four-measure coda (beginning at measure 122).

Figure 5 - Form of "Lazarus" Chorus

Form	A		B		A	B′		A	
letter	B	C	D		E	F		G	
key	d mi		D ma	d mi	d mi	C ma	dmi	C Ma	d mi
m. no.	42-50	51-9	59-72	76-83	84-91	91-7	97-100	100-113	114-121
cadence	49	59	60	82	91		100		121

The rondo chorus of "Lazarus" begins at letter B and is set apart by a new accompanying rhythm, a new melody, and a new key. The A section of the rondo form is in the key of D minor and is repeated largely unchanged after the full cadence in D minor at measure 49. The A section ends with a second full cadence at measure 59. The B section begins at letter D with a full cadence in D major in measure 60. (The modulation by modal mixture occurred in the pickup in measure 59.) A new sustained texture is also employed throughout this B section.

The return of the A section occurs at letter E, although the modulation to D minor occurred already in measure 76. It is of significance that before this modulation, C major (beginning at measure 73) was tonicized. To create further internal unity within the piece, the accompanying rhythm that was employed in the verse at letter A is used in the A section of the chorus here. The vocal line, however, is more similar to that of letter B. Section A ends with a full cadence in D minor at measure 91.

In section C (which begins at letter F, in measure 93), the alternating harmonies of letter D are employed. This time, however, the key area

perceived is C major rather than D major. In measure 97, D minor reasserts itself and, subsequently, a cadence in D minor is heard at measure 100. Immediately after this, however, another tonicization of C major occurs and remains until the return of section A.

The final statement of section A, correlated to the only remaining section of the chorus, letter C, begins at measure 114 (letter G). Throughout, the home key of D minor is retained. After a final cadence in D minor at measure 121, however, the piece ends with a four-measure coda that tonicizes C major.

"Our Father" was originally written in 1966 in memory of Father Woods for the Carnegie Hall concert of 1967. That setting of the Pater Noster employed substantial backup harmonies for the soloist, Honi Gordon. For its use in *Music for Peace,* however, these harmonies were omitted and a quote from the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God" was added. In the context of the liturgical service of *Mary Lou's Mass*, this new ending is a communion antiphon.

Although this composition written in 3/4 is melodically through-composed, it is unified by a flatted-fourth. The fourth outlines the melody in mm. 4-5, 16-17, 20, 24-25, 32, 35, 41, 43, and 47-48 and occurs intervalically in mm. 23, 29, and 46. "Our Father" also employs a rondo-like form.

Throughout the Eb minor A sections of the piece, "Our Father" consistently utilizes a riff in the bass. The variety of harmonizations

superimposed over this melody, which outlines an Eb minor chord, is truly impressive. The piece begins with an unharmonized four-bar introduction, which states the Eb minor riff for the first time. Section A then proceeds to superimpose Gb, Ab, Eb minor, Gb, D, and F minor chords over the riff, as well as tonicizing E and Bb major.

Measures 21 - 28 make up the contrasting F major B section and do not employ the bass riff. The return of the A section riff at letter C uses Ab, Eb7, and Ab7 minor 5, and Ab 6 chords over the Eb minor tonality. Section C is another contrasting passage that, again, does not use the bass riff; but this time the tonal center is C minor. In the final statement of the A section, beginning at measure 45, a Gb chord is superimposed over the bass ostinato, recalling the first harmonization heard over the Eb minor riff.

Binary form is also utilized unconventionally in *Mary Lou's Mass*. "In His Day" is not only a beautiful binary piece, but it is also rather interesting because, despite its brevity, it contains not only irregular phrase lengths, but also a meter change and modulation. "In His Day" starts out with a full cadence in Eb minor, which is followed by a seven-measure alto solo in a slow 3/4. The section closes with another full cadence in Eb minor at measure 7.

Section B begins with the meter switching to 4/4. Following a two measure bridge at mm. 8 - 9, which contains a modulation to G major, three measures of "Peace I leave with you" are stated by the tenor soloist. This section moves from G (via a ii-V in F major) to the circle of fifths and finally to

D minor at measure 13. At the coda (letter C), the piece abruptly increases in tempo. The coda concludes, in mm. 17 - 19, with the choir breaking out into repeated "Halleluias." All of this material takes up only ten measures.

Lest the complexity of this through-composed melody seem rather random, it should be noted that "In His Day" contains a striking descending minor third-ascending minor second melodic motif (in measures 12). This is later alluded to in measure 3 of "Holy Holy Holy," which is the introductory antiphon to the Sanctus (See Example 3).

Example 3 - Melodic Motif in "In His Day" and "Holy Holy Holy"

The texts for this motif both concern peace. "In His Day" quotes a benediction of Christ and, as if in response, the "Holy Holy Holy" antiphon quotes the Psalmist urging the listener to strive for peace. The angularity of this melodic motif can be recalled from measure 13 of "Act of Contrition," which talked about striving to do good, and heard later, in measure 44 of "Our Father," which talks of deliverance from evil. Thus this single melodic motif

serves underscore both melodically and textually, the main thrust of the mass as a whole.

"Holy Holy Holy" starts out with a short F minor antiphon (which also modulates to C minor in mm. 3 - 4) from the Roman Catholic Votice Mass for Peace: "Turn aside from evil and do good. Seek and strive after peace," sung by a baritone soloist. Although attached to the Sanctus in this case, the antiphon would not be used in a live liturgical service. Rather, in the context of a performance at a liturgical service, the choir would enter directly at letter B of the Sanctus following "Medi I & II."

The chorus of "Holy Holy Holy" does not begin until the bossa nova at letter D. Although harmonically the chorus consists of two parts, the form is very interesting because, melodically, it does not function as conventional binary pieces do. The melody, in fact, has more of a rondo form, except that the B section, the "Hosanna in the highest" text and melody (mm 19 - 24), comes back instead of the A section. This is further complicated by the fact that the A melody is used twice. Thus, while the chorus can be melodically conceived of as A BABCB, the form harmonically is actually, AB ABCB (see Figure 6). The C section in this scenario is contrasting in that it alone utilizes the call and response technique, but lyrically it, too, is taken from the B section.

The ordinary of the Sanctus begins, then, at letter B with a two-measure choral declamation of "Holy Holy Holy, Lord God of Host." This short verse

differs from the rest of the piece, not only because it is not a bossa nova, but also because of its lack of tonal center. Letter B begins traversing the circle of fifths, starting in the key of D minor in measure 5, and cadences in the next measure in the key of Bb major. The verse concludes with an A minor chord leading chromatically into a ii-V-i in F minor. This tonal ambiguity (foreshadowing things to come) is contrasted with the eight measures of guitar and bass at letter C, which remain in F minor throughout. All of this material serves as an introduction to the binary chorus, (a bossa nova throughout, sung by a soprano soloist), which begins at letter D.

Figure 6 - Form of "Holy Holy Holy" Chorus

Form	A	B	A	B	C	B
letter	D		E	F		
key area	i	i-V-i.	i-IV/bV	i-IV/bV	IV/bV	i.
m. no.	15-18	19-24	25-32	33-40	41-56	57-64

The first two letters of the chorus, D and E, are initially heard as the repeated binary form of ABAB, with a full cadence in F minor after the first B (in measures 24 - 25). While they utilize primarily the same melodic material (with the difference of mm. 28 - 31, which are interpolated into letter E), the harmonies underneath them lead to very different places. Letter D leaves F minor to tonicize C major (measures 21 - 22), with a V7 of C turning into a minor chord, which serves as the pivot in the ii-V-i in F minor. Letter E also ends up on a dominant, in this case the V7 of E major (in m. 37), but not

before passing, through bV and IV of F minor (mm. 29 - 32).

This detour foreshadows things to come, for the entire C section (in fact, beginning at the V7 in measure 37) consists of alternating measures of bV and IV. On the recording, the piece fades out in this tonal nether-region of letter F, but the score contains an eight-measure coda which reprises the B section and finally cadences in F minor at measure 61.

Originally in *Music for Peace,* the Agnus Dei was written as a fifteen-measure a cappella unison composition. It was never recorded, however, and Alvin Ailey specifically requested a new atonal setting of the Agnus Dei for *Mary Lou's Mass.* In Ailey's choreography, "Lamb of God" was to be a solo dance, however, at the last minute it was pulled from the performance. To create a complete liturgical mass, however, the Agnus Dei had to be included, so Father Peter O'Brien insisted that "Lamb of God" be recorded.

The original AAB Dorian melody was used as a basis for *Mary Lou's Mass* setting, but the new composition was greatly extended and obscured with various vocal effects. As well, a fourth section was added, utilizing the text "for we have sinned," resulting in a binary form. The obscured tonality and slow tempo of "Lamb of God" makes it the most striking piece of the entire mass.

Traditionally, the Agnus Dei is a cry for mercy, but the harmonies in Williams's setting are particularly filled with pain. In 1964 Williams said,

> Nowadays I have to go to the library and listen to scores with headphones on, because teaching would ruin me and I have to

> teach myself. I listen to Schoenberg, Hindemith, all the modern composers. I want to hear these sounds, not play them. Jazz is something an artist is born with. He doesn't learn it (Williams 1989, 8).

Despite this statement, however, it seems that the Western art music that Williams listened to at that time came through in her subsequent writing. The use of clusters in "Lamb of God," for example owes more to Penderecki than it does to avant garde or free jazz. The harmonies in "Lamb of God" are another example of the Western art music influences in *Mary Lou's Mass*.

"Old Time Spiritual" was originally written as a solo piano vehicle for the Carnegie hall concert of 1967. In the choreography of *Mary Lou's Mass* it was used to get the dancers on stage. Simple in form, "Old Time Spiritual" consists of two choruses of twelve-bar blues (thus using a I - V - IV harmonic progression). In the first chorus, the form is played through with just bass and the piano riffing the chords. The second time, the flute improvises over this background.

> The folk form of the Negro spiritual was the earliest music developed in the Black church. The principles that governed the performance of the spiritual in the rural South have been transferred to its twentieth century urban counterpart--gospel music. Gospel music simultaneously represents the heartbeat of the contemporary Black church and the musical core of the popular music tradition of Black America (Burnim and Maultsby 1987, 115).

Perhaps because of the link between spirituals and gospel music, Williams juxtaposed "Old Time Spiritual" and "The Lord Says."

In addition to the use of binary, ternary, and rondo-like forms, Williams

also utilizes even simpler forms. For all of its beauty, "Act of Contrition" is a simple double phrase period, for example. Beginning in F minor, "Act of Contrition" consists of a twelve-measure verse with a four-measure introduction and a four-measure coda. The verse can be divided into two six-measure sections that begin similarly; mm. 11 - 13 are a paraphrase of mm. 5 - 7. In this paraphrase, Williams has actually written out embellishments similar to those that a good soloist would utilize in performance if he or she read in the score a verbatim repetition of the earlier phrase. It is interesting that the only full cadence in F minor occurs at measure 15. This gives both the second phrase and the coda a five-measure feel, adding to the mystique of the piece.

Originally in *Music for Peace*, "One" was not the selection paired with "People in Trouble." Rather, "The World" written by Leon Thomas and arranged by Mary Lou Williams was utilized. Live, "The World" always drew big applause because Williams would extend the piano solo a great deal. With its text advocating love and racial unity, however, "One" from *Mary Lou's Mass* is a much more concrete answer to the problems described in "People in Trouble."

"One" consists of a string of sixteen-measure choruses. It begins at a quick tempo, with a four-measure piano introduction. The bass, drums, and piano enter at the same time the tenors from the choir state the lyric to the first chorus. After a second statement of the form by the choir, this time utilizing the sopranos for harmony rather than background vocals, there is an eight-

measure piano break harkening back to the introduction. The flutist then improvises a chorus before the choir states the lyrics of another chorus. The piece ends with half of a chorus. The first line is at the regular tempo, but the second and last is greatly slowed down until the fermata on the final chord.

The gospel recessional "Praise the Lord" is an expanded use of the string of choruses format. In this case, some choruses are sixteen measures long and some, twelve. To link these choruses together, "Praise the Lord" utilizes the ritornello principle, in which instrumental solos are the main thematic idea. The first one, stated in the twelve-measure introduction, harkens back to the "Credo."

"Praise the Lord" begins with a four-measure congo solo by Ralph MacDonald, after which the bass and drums are added. Four measures later the piano also joins for four bars. This is followed by two 12-measure verses spoken by the priest, behind which the piano plays riffs over the bass pedal that is utilized throughout the piece.

The second instrumental solo is again twelve measures long. The French horn enters after two measures of the rhythm section and hand clapping by the choir members. This is followed by a sixteen-measure call and response chorus, sung, this time, by the baritone preacher and choir.

The next instrumental solo is longer, consisting of 24 measures. The piano plays for six bars, the congo (with piano, bass, and drums tacet) for eight, and the French horn (now with the rhythm section) for 10 measures.

This is followed by another 16 measures of the chorus spoken by both the preacher and choir.

The final instrumental solo is the longest, containing sixteen measures of piano solo and sixteen measures of a French horn solo. This is followed by a twelve-measure coda of the choir urging those in the congregation, indeed all who listen, to likewise "Praise the Lord."

Conclusions

Williams's aesthetics of music were based on both extensive experience as a jazz musician, composer, arranger, teacher, and pianist and her personal convictions as a Roman Catholic. In the writing of *Mary Lou's Mass* these two elements came together to create the first setting of a mass by a jazz composer. To carry this procedure out, Williams drew from traditional settings of the mass and also incorporated elements of oral tradition within the work. Although these conflicting aesthetic paradigms tend to result, when combined, in works of questionable success, for Williams, the combination of the two was the inevitable result of her personal and musical experiences.

From her career can be seen evidences of Williams's technical abilities as a performer as well as her tendency to write ambitious, harmonically-advanced, large-scale works as a composer. In the setting of *Mary Lou's Mass,* however, Williams did not write in the most complex way of which she knew.

Although she planned the structure of the work as a whole to attain a sense of drama though the juxtapositions of durational and textural opposites, she did not employ complex forms within the individual pieces. This simplicity is the intentional result of her thinking about music.

Williams's aesthetics began with the premise that music is functional. To Williams, music existed to spread healing and unity through better communication among the community; and when this did not occur, it was wrong. A concrete way to achieve these ends is to write music with a text, and being a Roman Catholic, the obvious choice of text toward this goal for Williams was the mass.

The further extension of this functional aesthetic and the communally-oriented idea that music is for all people dictated that Williams set the text of the mass with jazz music. Williams thought of jazz as a particularly spiritual music, with the capacity for healing and communication. Because of this, it was only natural that she utilize jazz music in the setting of *Mary Lou's Mass.*

Yet even within the limitations of the jazz idiom, Williams set the mass in a style more simple than she could have. She avoided advanced harmonies and even utilized the rock'n'roll style popular at the time. These musical decisions were a direct result of her aesthetics of accessibility. In order to reach the greatest number of people, Williams utilized simple forms, catchy riffs, accessible lyrics, and the like. While many of the techniques that promote simplicity are products of oral culture, the work itself is completely

written out.

Williams's decision to write out the work occurred in part perhaps because of the tendency in literate societies of being unable to implement jazz into church services, due to both a lack of players familiar with improvisation and the reserved responses to oral culture by literate congregations. The success of *Mary Lou's Mass* is that it comes close to solving the former problem. Because it is entirely written out in the jazz style, even if it is performed note for note by the uninitiated, utilizing absolutely no improvisation whatsoever, it will still sound "jazzy" (although with improvisation the potential for increased personal communication increases even more).

This phenomenon is due to the fact that Williams had written out within the score of the work improvisations which a good singer or instrumentalist might employ. This was already touched on in the discussion of "Act of Contrition" in the section on form. Another example would be the embellishment of the vocal pickup in mm. 20 - 21 of the "Kyrie."

Because of Williams's belief in the functionality of music, she was sensitive to the needs of the community. This resulted in the resolution in *Mary Lou's Mass* of a very important issue in jazz composition, that of the conflict between pre-composed material and that which is improvised. By combining elements of both oral and literate culture, Williams created a work that could be utilized by both traditions. For this contribution to jazz history

alone, it can truly be said that "Mary Lou Williams not only worked to preserve and pass on the truth of the music and its roots in the black world...she had also, throughout her lifetime, created that truth" (Placksin 1982, 294).

APPENDIX A

TEXTS BY ROBERT LEDOGAR

APPENDIX A

TEXTS BY ROGER LEDOGAR

Kyrie [Lord Have Mercy]

For our lack of Faith, **Lord have mercy.**

For our failure to care, **Lord have mercy.**

For lettin' ourselves be paralyzed with fear, **Christ have mercy.**

For our division, **Christ have mercy.**

Oh for our hatred, **Lord have mercy.**

For not being peacemakers, **Lord have mercy.**

For our lies, **Lord have mercy on our souls.**

Have mercy **Lord have mercy** on my soul **Lord have mercy.**

Have mercy, Lord **Lord have mercy** on my soul **Lord have mercy.**

etc.

Gloria

Glory to God above all things.

Peace on earth to men loved by God.

We praise you, we bless you, we thank you because you are who you are.

Lord, God, King, Father, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ.

Lord, God, Lamb of God.

Lord, God, Son of God.

We praise you, we bless you, we thank you because you are who you are.

Score of *Mary Lou's Mass* Available From:

The Mary Lou Williams Foundation, Inc.

Saint Ignatius Retreat House, Searingtown Road

Manhasset, New York, 11030 Box 756

APPENDIX B

SELECTED SACRED WORKS BY OTHER COMPOSERS

APPENDIX B

SELECTED SACRED WORKS BY OTHER COMPOSERS

Baker, David. *The Beatitudes*

__________ . *Psalm 22: A Modern Jazz Oratorio*

Beaumont, Geoffrey. *20th Century Folk Mass.* Fiesta. FLP 25000.

Berets, The. *Mass for Peace.* Avant Garde. AVS 116.

Bethlehem Progressive Ensemble. *Mod Lit.* Fortress. 121-142-74.

Bonnemere, Eddie. *Mass For Every Season.* CSS 698.

______________ . *Missa Laetare.* Fortress. 32-2153-74. (Score 3-66110).

______________ . *O Happy the People.* Fortress. 32-2369-74. (Score 3-44).

Boyd, Malcolm. *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?* Columbia. CL 2548.

Brubeck, Dave. *The Gates Of Justice.* Decca. OL 710175.

___________ . *The Light in the Wilderness.* Decca. Ol 710156.

Draesel, Herbert et al. *Rejoice.* Scepter. 527. (Score Zann.)

Electric Prunes, The. *Mass In F Minor.* Reprise. 6275.

Elia, Tim. *The Toronto Mass.* North American Liturgy Resources. Cincinnati, Ohio.

Ellington, Duke. *Concert of Sacred Music.* RCA: LSP-3582 1965.

_____________ . *Second Sacred Concert.* Fantasy: 8407/8, 1968.

_____________ . *Third Sacred Concert.* RCA: APLI-0785. 1973.

Exceptions, The. *Rock 'n' Roll Mass.* Flair. 810F-8753.

Guaraldi, Vince. *At Grace Cathedral.* Fantasy 8367.

______________ . *Theme for Grace*

Haagen, Guido. *Missa Luba.* Lawsib-Gould. 51401.

Hable, Norman. *Invitation.* KFUO. KRES 769. (Score, Fortress).

Herrera, Jack. *Jazz Goes to Church.* Enterprise 513-102.

Horn, Paul. *Jazz Suite on the Mass Texts.* RCA LPM 3414.

Lewis, George. *Jazz At Vespers.* Riverside 236.

Masters, Joe. *Mass.* Columbia. CS 9398/CL 2998.

Mitchell, Ian. *The American Folk Song Mass*

____________ . *Songs of Protest and Love.* F.E.L. S292.

Newman, Joe. *O Sing to the Lord A New Song.* (Vespers) Fortress. 12-2148-74.

Parker, Horatio. *Hora Novissima.*

Prince, Bruce. *Joseph.*

____________ . *The Whole World in His Hands.*

____________ . *Missa Brevis.*

River, Father Clarence Jo. *A Mass Dedicated to the Brotherhood of Man,* 1967.
________________________ . *Resurrection.*

Ruff, Ray. *Truth of Truths.* Oak, OR 1001.

Schifrin, Lalo. *Rock Requiem.* Verve. V6-8801.

Schneider, Kent. *Celebration for Modern Man.* Delmark. DS 418.

______________ . *Liturgies of This Day.*

______________ . *Sonrise: Sounds of Inner Peace.* Center for Contemporary

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SELECTED COMPOSITIONS BY WILLIAMS

Andy Kirk and His Twelve Clouds of Joy. EMI Mainstream: MRL 399, 197-. Recorded March 1936. Includes "Walkin' and Swingin,'" "Froggy Bottom," "Until the Real Thing Comes Along," and others.

Andy Kirk and His Clouds of Joy: Instrumentally Speaking, 1936 - 1942. MCA Jazz Heritage Series: 1308.

Barrel House Piano: Eight Authentic Solos by Acknowledged Masters of the Style. Brunswick: BL 58022 or Brunswick: 7178, 1956. Various boogie-woogie artists. Sides by Williams are "Drag'em" and "Night Life."

Best Of Mary Lou Williams. Pablo: 2405 - 412, 1987. Blues by Williams. Originally released 1980. Includes "Little Joe from Chicago."

Black Christ of the Andes. Mary Records: Mary 101 or Saba 15062, 1963.

Black Swing Tradition. Savoy SJL 2246.

Cafe Society. Onyx: ORI 210, 197-. Various artists. Includes "Blues at Mary Lou's."

Dizzy Gillespie at Newport with Mary Lou Williams: Count Basie at Newport with Joe Williams. Verve: V 8244, 1957.

Don Byas. Inner City IC 7018.

Excerpts from Mary Lou's Mass. Kansas City: Helicon nine, 1985. Includes only the mass proper: "The Lord Says," "In His Day," "Peace I Leave With You," and "People in Trouble."

The Feminine Touch. Decca: DL 5486, 1953. Various artists, includes only "Mr. Freddie Blues" by Williams.

First Lady of Jazz Piano. Inner City: IC 7006, 1979. Originally recorded in London, January 23, 1953.

Free Spirits. Steeplechase Productions: SCS - 1043, 1987. Originally recorded in Klampenborg, Denmark, 1975. Includes "Gloria" and "Ode to St. Cecilie."

From the Heart. Chiaroscuro CHI 103. 1970. Contains standards.

Giants. Perception: PLP 19, 1972. Recording of standards from January 31, 1971 with a quintet including Dizzy Gillespie

Great Jazz Pianists. RCA Camden: CAL 328, 1957. Various artists. Contains Williams's rendition of Dvorak's "Humoresque."

History of Jazz: Ragtime to Avant Garde (Solo Piano and Narration). Folkways: J 2860, 1978. Originally recorded 1970.

In London. GNP Crescendo 9029, 1974. Contains standards.

Jazz Piano, The. RAC Victor, 1966. Various artists. Recorded January 20, 1965 at the Pittsburgh Jazz Festival.

Jazz Pioneers. Prestige PR 7647, 1969. Sides by Coleman Hawkins and Williams. Includes "Swingin' for Joy" and "Mary's Special" recorded March and April 1936.

Kings and Queens of Ivory, Vol 1. MCA: 1329, 1980. Various Artists, recorded 1935 - 1940.

Live At the Cookery. Chiaroscuro, SOS Productions: CHI 146, 1980. Originally recorded with Brian Torff in 1975. Includes "Praise the Lord," "Blues for Peter," "Roll 'em," and "Waltz Boogie."

Margie. Meritt: 25471 - 1A, 1979. This limited edition was originally recorded October 12, 1939 for Columbia.

Mary Lou's Mass. Mary Records: Mary 102, 1975.

Mary Lou Williams. Contemporary Records: C 2507, 1953. Standards utilizing piano, bass drums, congos.

Mary Lou Williams. Folkways: 2843; rerelease of Mary Records 1964. Includes *Black Christ of the Andes,* "The Devil," "Anima Christi," "Praise the Lord," "A Fungus Among Us," and others.

Mary Lou Williams: The Asch Recordings, 1944 - 47. Folkways: FA 2966, 1977. Includes "Little Joe From Chicago," "Roll 'em," and others.

Mary Lou Williams and Cedar Taylor Embraced. Pablo 2620 - 108, 1978. Includes "The Lord is Heavy" and other Williams compositions.

Mary Lou Williams Quartet Featuring Don Byas. Crescendo: GNPS 5-9030, 1974. Includes "Mary's Waltz."

Mary Lou Williams Trio. RCA Victor 20 - 2025, 1946. Includes "Waltz Boogie."

Mary's Idea. GRP Records: GRD - 622, 1993. Rerelease of Twelve Clouds of Joy album.

Mass from the Lenten Season, 1967.

Modern Jazz Piano. RCA Victor: LPT - 31, 1952. Various artists. This collector's item includes only "Fifth Dimension" by Williams. Recorded 1946 - 1947.

Music For Peace, Mary Records: MG - 7 - 202, 1970.

My Mama Pinned A Rose on Me. Pablo 2310 819, 1978. Blues recorded December 27, 1977.

New American Music: New York Section: Composers in the 1970s, Vol. 1. Folkways: FTS 33901, 1975. Various Artists. Includes "Gloria" and "Zoning Fungus II" by Williams.

Piano Panorama. Atlantic: AL 114, 195-. Includes "Mary's Waltz."

Praise the Lord With Many Voices, Vol. 2. Avant Garde: AVS - 103, 1967. Various artists. Recorded performance at Carnegie Hall. Includes only "Praise the Lord" by Williams.

Trumpets No End. Skata: 502, 197-. Williams with Ellington sidemen. Recorded early 1952.

Roll 'em. Audiophile Records: AP - 8, 1988. Mary Lou Williams Trio.

Solo Recital. Pablo L 2308 - 218, 1979. Recorded July 15, 1978 at Montreax Jazz Festival. Includes "Offertory Meditation," "The Lord is Heavy," "Medley," "Concerto Alone," and other Williams compositions.

Zodiac Suite. Vintage Jazz Classics: VJC 1035, 1991. Also includes "What's Your Story, Morning Glory," "Froggy Bottom," "Roll 'em," and "Lonely Moments." Originally recorded Folkways 32844, 1975. NB: Asch 620 - 21, 1945 only includes six of the twelve signs.

Zoning. Mary Records: Mary 103, 1974. Includes "Zoning Fungus II," "Intermission," "Ghost of Love," "Medi II," "Gloria," "Rosa Mae," "Praise the Lord," "Play it Momma," and "Medi I."

Zonky. New World Records: NW 284, 1977. Originally recorded under Six Men and a Girl, June 26, 1940, for Varsity: US 1319 - 1.

Recorded Interview

Marion McPartland's Piano Jazz with Guest Mary Lou Williams: Conversation and Music as Heard on National Public Radio. Jazz Alliance TJA-12019, 1995. Originally recorded 1979.

Mary Lou Williams Live On Video

Music on My Mind. New York: Women Make Movies, 1990. Biography with live performance by Williams. Narrated by Roberta Flack.