

THE MARY LOU WILLIAMS RESURGENCE PROJECT'S

Sacred and Secular Music of Mary Lou Williams

In 2000 Our Lady of Victory Church in Brooklyn, NY asked composer and vibraphonist Cecilia Smith to perform a concert totally devoted to the compositional work of Mary Lou Williams. Cecilia's earlier studies had not identified Ms. Williams as a composer but merely a jazz pianist. Her preparation for this project led her to the Mary Lou Williams Archives, housed at Rutgers University Jazz Institute, where she uncovered a plethora of compositional information.

The breadth and complexity of Ms. Williams' composition work was awe-inspiring. Her library comprised more than 350 works for Big Band, Small Ensemble and Chorus and was on par with recognized jazz greats like Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk. Yet this great artist, for the most part, had not been recognized by jazz historians.

Since that concert, Cecilia Smith has continued researching Mary Lou Williams and performing her work, resulting in the Mary Lou Williams Resurgence Project (MLWRP), Ms. Smith's tribute to this phenomenal musician.

In addition to showcasing Ms. Williams' music with a band that reflected her career, Ms. Smith wanted to illustrate the timelessness of Mary Lou's work and created new arrangements of several of her compositions that use contemporary straight-ahead, R&B, hip-hop and classical concepts that bring them into the new millennium.

The first concert series of the MLWRP, *The Sacred and Secular Music of Mary Lou Williams*, evolved from a four-month residency Ms. Smith did at the New England Conservatory in 2002 that culminated in a concert of Ms. Williams' works for Big Band, Small Ensemble and Chorus using NEC students. Following this residency, renowned musician and educator, Cecil Bridgewater, who has mentored Ms. Smith, as well as other women interest in a career in jazz, encouraged her to consider repeating this program with professional musicians capable of mastering the harmonic and rhythmic complexities of the work.

As the idea for this concert evolved, Ms. Smith and Mr. Bridgewater decided that the MLWRP Big Band should

reflect the multi-generational, mixed-gendered array of musicians Ms. Williams worked with and was influenced by during her career. Cecil Bridgewater agreed to serve as the contractor for the big band and was invaluable in helping Cecilia identify and recruit the band's members. At inaugural performance of *The Sacred and Secular Music of Mary Lou Williams* in May 2005 for the Kennedy Center's 10th Annual Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Festival, the ensemble of 19 musicians included jazz veterans, noted mid-career professionals and promising newcomers to the jazz scene.

Horace Silver, Jimmy Smith, Sonny Stitt, Grady Tate, Henry Threadgill, McCoy Tyner, Randy Weston, James Williams and Gerald Wilson.

The other members of the Kennedy Center ensemble—Lakecia Benjamin, Iantheia Calhoun, Montez Coleman, Tanya Darby, Kenny Davis, Elon Robin Dixon, Tia Fuller, Carlton Holmes, Jennifer Krupa, Keith Loftis, Cecilia Smith, and Debra Weisz—have resumes that are equally as impressive. Like the band's veterans they have performed and recorded with some of the greatest names in pop and jazz including Donald Byrd, Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Clark

Terry and Stevie Wonder; performed in bands ranging from the NBC's *The Tonight Show Band* to the famed Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, led their own groups and recorded as leaders. Artistic Director, Cecilia Smith, was the first female vibraphonist to record as a leader (*The Takeoff*, CSQ—*Volume II*, *High Standards*, and *Leave No Stone Unturned*); she can also be heard on CDs by Cassandra Wilson, Digable

Planets, Lonnie Plaxico, Yoshi Katori, Leonora Zenzalai Helms, J-Curve and Hesterian; and has written works commissioned by the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Langston Hughes Public Library, Cambridge Children's Performance Arts Project and the Boston Museum.

This prestigious group of nineteen jazz professionals has performed at festivals, in clubs and on concert stages on all seven continents and acquainted audiences with the multifaceted world of jazz through both performance and recordings.

If you would like to receive additional information about *The Sacred and Secular Music of Mary Lou Williams* or are interested in booking the concert, please contact:

CEA Music
186 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1R
Brooklyn NY 11217
(718) 398-2946

Please note that the choir for this concert series will be hired locally and that the concert is available for booking in a variety of formats.

Kennedy Center photographs courtesy of Margot Shulman
Rehearsal photographs courtesy of Shem Rajoon



The band's veterans—Cecil Bridgewater, Benny Powell, Howard Johnson, Jack Jeffers, Amina Claudine Myers,

Bill Easley, and Eddie Allen—combined careers total more than 250 years, longer than the history of this country. Most of these seasoned musicians have led their own ensembles and worked with many of the well know jazz orchestras including the Count Basie Orchestra, the Duke Ellington Orchestra (Jack Jeffers led Duke's orchestra for several weeks at New York's famed Birdland) the Chico O'Farrill Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. They have performed with many of the greatest names in the music cannon including: Muhal Richard Abrahams, Ajaramu (Jerold Donavan), Gene Ammons, Gato Barbieri, Count Basie, Louis Bellson, Art Blakey, Lester Bowie, Ruth Brown, Benny Carter, Ron Carter, Cyrus Chestnut, Hank Crawford, Mercer Ellington, Gil Evans, Frank Foster, Panama Francis, Dizzy Gillespie, Lionel Hampton, Sir Roland Hanna, Jimmy Heath, Abdullah Ibrahim, Illinois Jacquet, J.J. Johnson, Quincey Jones, Kalaparush (Maurice McIntyre), B.B. King, John Lennon, Taj Mahal, Wynton Marsalis, Earl May, Jimmy McGriff, Charles McPhearson, Charles Mingus, Oliver Nelson, Nicholas Payton, Buddy Rich, Mongo Santamaria, John Scofield, Archie Shepp, Bobby Short,