

## Mary Lou Williams – My Mama Pinned A Rose On Me (2005)

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1 *The Blues* 5:37 2 *N.G. Blues* 2:27 3 *Dirge Blues* 5:52 4 *Baby Bear Boogie* 2:23 5 *Turtle Speed Blues* 2:11 6 *Blues For Peter* 4:17 7 *My Mama Pinned A Rose On Me* 3:04 8 *Prelude To Prism* 3:20 9 *Prism* 2:50 10 *What's Your Story Morning Glory* 3:58 11 *Prelude To Love Roots* 1:59 12 *Love Roots* 2:02 13 *Rhythmic Pattern* 2:34 14 *J.B.'s Waltz* 4:34 15 *The Blues* 0:44 16 *No Title Blues* 4:41 17 *Syl-O-Gism (Bonus Track)* 6:30 Bass – Butch Williams Piano, Producer, Liner Notes – Mary Lou Williams Vocals – Cynthia Tyson (tracks: 1, 15), Mary Lou Williams (tracks: 7)

In this studio set with bassist Buster Williams and the occasional vocals of Cynthia Tyson, pianist Mary Lou Williams performs a full set of original blues. A certain sameness is heard after a while, but in general the music is quite stimulating, showing that Williams (even this late in her career) had not lost her power and authority at the keyboard. ---Scott Yanow, AllMusic Review

Mary Lou Williams (1910-1981)—pianist, composer, arranger and teacher—was not only the First Lady of jazz; she has a place at the very top echelon of the jazz pantheon. Among her few peers in the over half- century she was active were Duke Ellington, Benny Carter and Sonny Blount aka Sun Ra, all musicians, composers and arrangers who successfully remained contemporary through vast stylistic shifts in the history of jazz, from before swing until well after bebop. Indeed Ellington captured her well, calling her "perpetually contemporary". Williams came to prominence in the late '20s and '30s as the principal composer-arranger and pianist for Andy Kirk and His Twelve Clouds of Joy, enhancing her reputation by contributing to the big band books of Benny Goodman, Earl Hines, Tommy Dorsey and, later, Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie. She became an early champion of bebop, adapting its modern harmonies and rhythms to her blues and boogie rooted piano style. In the '50s she had a spiritual crisis that led

her to abandon music for about three years; she became a Roman Catholic. From that point she devoted most of her career to spiritual music, much of it (unlike Ellington's ecumenical "Sacred Concerts", which would not sound out-of-place in today's feel-good mega-churches) written for the specific, Eucharistic liturgy of the Catholic mass.

Mary Lou's Mass brings together the music she originally recorded as the LP Music for Peace with additional recordings that together became the music for Alvin Ailey's full-length ballet, Mary Lou's Mass, plus some additional material, including two choral pieces she wrote for Martin Luther King Jr. after his assassination, recorded at the Vatican. Most of the music is recorded by a Williams-led trio with voices, plus a flute and/or guitar. Although she herself didn't consider all of this music jazz, you can hear how she incorporates jazz harmonies, rhythms (including Afro-Cuban) and phrasing into her spiritual approach. And her "Our Father", soulfully sung by Carline Ray, is one of the most striking settings of "The Lord's Prayer" in all of music.

My Mama Pinned a Rose on Me is Williams' salute to the blues, recorded late in her career (1977). It is a piano tour-de-force, Williams alone or joined by bassist Buster Williams and, on two tracks, singer Cynthia Tyson. That same year Williams recorded a duo concert with pianist Cecil Taylor in New York. Having been at that concert, this reviewer wishes Taylor had deigned actually to embrace (the resultant album, ironically, was titled Embraced) Williams in a blues dialogue instead of playing as if she wasn't even on stage, for Williams proves on this wonderful, career-embracing outing that she commanded the totality of jazz piano techniques in her blues approach. ---George Kanzler, [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com)

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