

JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

Presents

ZODIAC SUITE

IN TWELVE MOVEMENTS

COMPOSED AND ARRANGED BY MARY LOU WILLIAMS

PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY JEFFREY SULTANOF AND ROB DUBOFF

COMPLETE SCORE

FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

JLP-8835

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JAZZ LINES PUBLICATIONS

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ZODIAC SUITE (1945)

Background:

In 1945, Mary Lou Williams was playing at a club called Café Society, owned by Barney Josephson. She also had a weekly radio program. Josephson suggested that she write something ambitious for the radio show, and she wound up conceiving a suite based on the signs of the zodiac. The individual pieces were to honor her friends born under each of the signs. It was Josephson who conceived of a concert of the suite, and produced it at Town Hall on New Year's Eve day of 1945.

The Music:

Mary Lou recorded the entire suite with a trio for Asch Records (which later became Folkways); these masters are now owned by the Smithsonian Institution and are easily available. Williams orchestrated the suite for chamber orchestra and premiered this version at the Town Hall concert with her teacher Milt Orent conducting from one-line conductor parts (these may be in his handwriting). There was very little rehearsal, and Williams wound up playing a couple of the movements as piano solos, even though they'd been fully orchestrated. The experience was not a positive one for her. By the end of the concert, she was upset and frustrated. Gathering up all of the music, she left the hall quickly, and as far as is known, this version of the *Zodiac Suite* was never played again during her lifetime.

I continue to do independent research on concert music in various forms that is either jazz and pop flavored or has jazz soloists, from James Reese Europe and Paul Whiteman to Duke Ellington, John Graas and beyond. When I began this research back in 1972, much of this music was unavailable. The *Zodiac Suite* was in Mary Lou's possession, as well as all of her other music (archivist Anne Kuebler noted that Williams kept nearly everything, from dry cleaning receipts to napkins with the names of songs on them given to her as requests when she appeared at a club). Based on the trio recordings, this suite held great fascination for me for a variety of reasons: Williams was already an established composer/arranger/pianist, and this was her first attempt at writing for orchestra. She was also growing as a musician and composer based on her music studies.

Acetates made at the concert were lost for many years, but they turned up and became available on CD. They revealed the performance of the *Zodiac Suite* to be dominated by Williams's piano, with contributions by tenor saxophonist Ben Webster, clarinetist Eddie Barefield and trumpeter Irving "Mousie" Randolph. In spite of some obvious moments where the ensemble was ragged or did not come in on time, the piece seemed to come off well.

With due respect to performances, which obviously bring the music to life, the source materials (in this case the original scores and parts) are the direct communication to the conductor and musicians to realize the wishes of the composer in the case of a concert work. When I was finally able to examine the existing sources of the *Zodiac Suite*, they revealed an intriguing and probably disturbing experience for the composer. Their various problems certainly explain why Mary Lou Williams was upset at concert's end, and perhaps why this version was probably never performed again in her lifetime. In fact, she originally had great ambitions for the *Zodiac Suite*, orchestrating three movements for full symphony orchestra, which were played at a concert at Carnegie Hall. She may have abandoned further work on *Zodiac* based on her disappointment at Town Hall, only to adapt a few of the movements when she appeared with Dizzy Gillespie's Orchestra for a 1957 appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival.

Some of these problems were caused by her inexperience in the concert arena. The music is sometimes written in keys such as E Major, Db Major and even Gb Major, creating major problems with regard to blending and intonation.

More importantly, the score has numerous note errors, transposition errors, missing notes, sections with unnecessary accidentals, and confusion over the alto and tenor clefs for viola and bassoon parts, all typical of a novice orchestral composer. These sorts of errors can also be found in manuscripts of her big band compositions as well, particularly when she copied the parts herself. When extracting the parts for *Zodiac*, copyist Al Hall did not question many of these errors, and introduced mistakes of his own. Williams also changed some of the music during rehearsals; these fixes were marked in the parts by the musicians themselves. It is obvious that the one-line conductor parts were written out last; they reflect the way the music was played at the concert, telling us that musical decisions were 'locked in' by performance time. This forward serves to document the most salient issues that needed to be dealt with so that this music could be published and performed.

Williams wound up cutting some of the orchestration partly due to the rubato nature of many of the movements, and the resulting inability of the orchestra to play in synchronization with the piano. In addition, the numerous copy errors were never fully ironed out, forcing her to make additional cuts; if someone wanted to use the parts for future performances, they would have to have been heavily edited and corrected. In two cases, the orchestration was cut altogether and these movements were played as piano solos. Except for solo passages, the piano parts were written as condensed scores in the full scores, and Williams frequently played along with the instrumentalists to 'cover' them during sections that were meant to be played by the orchestra only. Some pieces had to have musical changes that ultimately caused them to be cut in performance (*Aquarius* has instances where bars are added and rhythms rewritten; one change had been caught before the parts were copied, others were done after the fact. Ultimately the relevant sections were not played.)

When the participants are gone and there is no one to consult to make key decisions, an editor of historic music must make judgments and assumptions to properly serve the music. With regard to the *Zodiac Suite*, I have taken the attitude that the scores that were written by Williams were the way she ultimately wanted the work to be played, and whatever cuts that she made for the Town Hall performance were temporary so that the piece could be presented (however, there are instances where she made musical revisions, such as harmonies). As a result, the editorial work needed was to clarify rhythms, fix incorrect pitches and transpositions, and make the dynamics consistent (instead of an overall dynamic if woodwinds and brass are playing together, Williams tended to write different dynamics for each instrument in an attempt to indicate sonic balances. This can tend to be confusing, so it has been fixed here). In only one instance have I altered the orchestration, and this is an addition to bring out a musical line; it can be omitted at the conductor's discretion.

The most important decision was to omit the piano 'coverings' of the sections where instruments are playing solo lines or harmonies, as the piano tends to swallow instrumental colors, particularly in the case of smaller ensembles in performance. Williams' orchestrations deserve to be heard in all their glory, not doubled by the piano. This approach also highlights the sections where the piano is the solo voice, helping it to stand out.

At the bottom left-hand corner of all score pages, there appears "Famous Music Corporation, Publishers to Paramount Pictures, 1619 Broadway, New York, NY." Since Williams had no direct connection to Famous Music that we know of, I believe that Orent obtained the score paper for her use. Like many other arrangers of the era, he was probably involved in writing stock arrangements or preparing piano/vocal editions of popular songs of the time, hence his possible relationship to the publisher. It was not uncommon for publishers, radio networks and motion picture studios to print their own manuscript paper for use by composers and arrangers.

Notes on Individual Movements:

Movement #1: Aries:

The five-bar introduction is not in the full score (although it appears on the one-line conductor part) and was probably added during rehearsals. It is copied in pencil in a hand other than Hall's on the top stave of the first page of each part. There is a theory that the bars were added to be played during Williams' entrance to the stage, as there is applause during these bars on the recording. The flute solo at the beginning was originally written an octave lower on the part; it has been changed here to reflect the recording.

On the original score, the swing figures in the woodwinds are written as triplets. For ease of reading, this has been changed to eighth notes with indications to play swing or straight eighths as they occur in the score. She later said that this movement should have been played faster.

Movement #2: Taurus:

This was played as a piano solo at the concert and all parts marked tacet. We assume that the parts could not be learned in time for the performance so they were discarded.

Movement #3: Gemini:

The solo at letter D was originally written on the score as a piano solo, and the clarinet has a written part. At the concert, clarinetist Eddie Barefield was featured; he was a veteran of the Cab Calloway, Fletcher Henderson, Don Redman and Ella Fitzgerald bands, and worked with many other performers as a session musician on the New York scene for many years. The conductor may opt to have this solo played by the piano, in which case the clarinetist plays the written part. Because the bassoon would be nearly inaudible playing the musical line starting at letter D, I have doubled it by splitting the cellos. Williams noted that the bass moves in one direction, the piano in the opposite direction.

Movement #4: Cancer:

This is the only movement that includes an additional instrument, tenor saxophonist Ben Webster, and his performance was a highlight of the concert. The part is reproduced exactly as written on the score, but chord changes have been added to the written sections to allow the soloist freedom to interpret it his/her own way as Webster did.

Movement #5: Leo:

Since this composition is in the key of E Major, the original clarinet and trumpet parts were written in the key of F# Major. For ease of reading, the parts are presented in the key of Gb Major.

Movement #6: Virgo

This movement was originally written to feature clarinet but for the Town Hall performance it was changed into a trumpet feature. The solo part is written for the clarinet and cued in the trumpet so that it may be played either way.

Movement #7: Libra

This movement features trumpet and an un-accompanied piano solo.

Movement #8: Scorpio

Except for a couple of instrumental soli, this was played as a trio at the concert (piano, bass, drums, although the bass is nearly inaudible).

Movement #9: Sagittarius

This movement was written for reeds, brass, and piano without the strings, bass, and drums.

Movement #10: Capricorn

This movement begins with a piano solo in a dirge-like setting. It is important to play this slowly to retain this feel.

Movement #11: Aquarius

The live recording shows that this piece was cut. The one-line conductor part matches the form of this performance.

Cuts were: Letters B to D and Letter G

Movement #12: Pisces

The original performance featured concert artist Hope Foye. The author of the lyrics is unknown, but it is probably Williams herself. When work began to prepare the *Zodiac Suite* for publication, the words to the vocal part were a first-class mystery – no copy of them seems to exist. They were transcribed, but some of the words were inaudible. Happily Ms. Foye was living in California, and while she barely remembered the performance and did not know that the concert was recorded, she happily volunteered to listen to the recording and supply the missing words in January of 2011. She remembered that she first met and got to know Williams while they were both performing at Café Society, and used to meet frequently at that time. Foye herself has quite a history; she was a blacklisted artist because she participated in a competition in East Germany during the McCarthy era, and has been honored for her work and her courage during a very difficult period in American history. From bars 4-9 of letter B, Williams changed the bass line in her part, and this change has been incorporated.

Afterword:

As stated earlier, with regard to concert music, a composer communicates most directly to a musical interpreter through the score. Unfortunately, the *Zodiac Suite* will always be a work in progress, as Williams never got a chance to evaluate and revise the work to her satisfaction. But at least now it can be studied and played, and one more piece to the American music puzzle is now ours to treasure. To me, this is a work of considerable charm, although I agree with composer/historian Andrew Homzy, who wrote that some of the movements could have been developed more. But this is a wonderful first effort by an experienced big band composer writing in a medium in which she had no experience, and as in the case of James P. Johnson, who knows what she might have contributed further in this arena had she been given a chance. Ultimately, along with Duke Ellington, the aforementioned Johnson, William Dawson, Julia Perry, Florence Price and William Grant Still, Williams can now be added as an important African-American composer creating symphonic music during the 1940s.

Acknowledgements:

Special thanks to Father Peter O'Brien for his continued support and encouragement in our efforts to make Mary Lou Williams's music available in the best editions possible. Also a very special thank you to Hope Foye, who was surprised and delighted to experience a lost piece of her own history.

Jeffrey Sultanof

- January 2011

Why I Wrote the Zodiac Suite

By Mary Lou Williams

(From the liner notes for the Folkways Records 1975 release of her piano trio recordings of the Zodiac Suite)

It seems that man has always utilized the stars and heavenly bodies to guide him and his destinies in making new inroads in the words in which we live; so I adopted the signs of the zodiac themes for writing my latest compositions, released under the Asch record label.

I have always thought of astrology and the study of the stars as understanding one of the influences that molds man's destiny and I have given the signs the musical interpretation which I feel they warranted

To carry through my ideas about the signs of the Zodiac and to give musical expression to the quotation "stars guide man's life and fortunes," I based each sign on people I know in the creative world.

So far as I have been able to determine, the only other composer who has utilized astrological concepts in writing music was the English musician Robert Forsythe. However, his selections cover only a few of the signs.

Aries:

For instance, in writing Aries (the sign of the ram) I utilized the two people whom I felt best typified the moods and personalities governed by the sign. Both Billie Holiday, the songstress, and Ben Webster, the saxophonist, come under this sign. Changeable, moody, and impulsive, they seemed to me the examples I should choose for my composition

Taurus:

In writing the music for those born under the sign of the bull, Taurus, I wrote an interpretation for those who are creative and said to be lovers of the arts. Music and art usually dominate the lives of these individuals. And what better examples could I select than Duke Ellington, Joe Louis, and Bing Crosby? I have also tried to portray the stubborn quality of individuals born under Taurus, and my music for the sign of the bull begins and ends with the same theme to indicate the personality that "only changes when it is forced to do so."

Gemini:

Gemini, the twin sign, is dedicated to two men I have known and admired for many years. Both of them are well known for their versatility in many pursuits. Benny Goodman, a famous musician and clarinetist, is as well known for his work with symphonic concert orchestras as he is for his own swing band, Paul Robeson is a man who has become universally known as a great singer, actor, and world citizen. Each of these outstanding people are at home doing "two things as one time," and to me seemed like wonderful examples of the "dual personality" Gemini represents. And so in my music, I have used two themes, in discord equally balanced to set the pattern of those born under the sign of the twin.

Cancer:

Cancer is the composition I have dedicated to those who like order, peace, and tranquility. The general traits of those born under the sign of the crab are well accented in my selection which was modeled after the lovely actress Lena Horne, whom I have known for a long time.

Leo:

Leo, the lion, the sign for kings and those "born to rule," is written with the pomp and circumstance it deserves. I have given the opening chords a trumpet-like effect to set the stage for this piece. If you examine history, you will find many leaders born under the sign of Leo.

Virgo:

It is said that all Virgo-born are favored for adventure, initiative and a go-getter spirit, so I have chose Phil Moore, the pianist and band leader, as an appropriate subject for musical portrayal of those born under Virgo. Flowing rhythms and running chords suggest these people who seem to be more intellectual than emotional personalities.

Libra:

Libra, the sign for those who love beauty and art, was written in a harmonious and melodic mood. It was meant to identify one of the great American musicians of our time, Art Tatum.

Scorpio:

Scorpio is the sign of those who are creative, intense, and passionate. Imogene Coca, the popular comedienne, is one of the artists born under this sign who I have known; Al Lucas, the bassist, is another. The music for Scorpio people is set in a strong and forceful pattern to indicate some of the moods which they themselves follow.

Sagittarius:

Sagittarius, the sign of the archer, governs those who are usually successful, noble, and magnanimous: "The young man who sees visions and the old man who dreams dreams" are Sagittarius. Alan Comfrey, radio music commentator was born under this sign. John Hammond, the musician impresario who has done so much for American musicians and music, is influenced by this sign. I set this piece in a triumphant and varied mood for those headed for "success and glory," and made the bars of the music full and resounding as possible to achieve the kind of effect I wanted for the portrayal of Sagittarius individuals.

Capricorn:

Capricorn people are generally considered persistent, moody, and hard working. My Capricorn is written with a dirge-like, half hammer beat, and it builds slowly to suggest a deliberate and head-strong personality. Pearl Primus, the dancer, and Frankie Newton, the trumpeter, are wonderful examples of the perfectionist-body type of individual I have in mind in this music.

Aquarius:

Aquarius, the sign of the water-bearer, is a light, happy, and jovial composition. It is written for such outgoing people and humanitarians as are suggested by the personality of the late Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Pisces:

Pisces, the sign of the fish and the last of the signs of the Zodiac, I composed while broadcasting one Sunday afternoon. There is a theme but no set pattern written for this composition because I think of Pisces people as freedom-loving and imaginative. Of course, those influenced by this sign are thought to be arrogant and "high minded" too – and as the music unfolds I have injected those notes which I thought best captured the spirit of these people.

The personalities of those influenced by the stars have been interpreted freely, so that I could achieve the scope and effect I wanted in each case. I know that man has thought of the stars mystically since the beginning of time; giving musical expression to the signs has been a very satisfying experience for me.

As a composer and musician, I have worked all my life to write and develop serious music that is both original and creative. The Zodiac Suite is the beginning of a real fulfillment of one of my ambitions.

MEDIUM SWING BOOGIE ♩ = 138

Aries

Conductor

Flute

Oboe

Clarinets

Bassoon

Horns

B♭

Trumpets

Trombones

Drums

Violins

Viola

Cello

Bass

Guitar

Piano

Above the first page of Mary Lou Williams's pencil score for the first movement, Aries.

Flute

VIRGO

Handwritten musical score for Flute, titled "VIRGO". The score is written on a grand staff with two staves per system. It includes a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature (C). The score is divided into sections A, B, C, D, and E, marked with boxed letters. Section A starts with a treble clef and a common time signature. Section B is marked "Solo" and "mp". Section C is marked "mp". Section D is marked "p". Section E is marked "p". The score contains various musical notations including notes, rests, slurs, and fingerings. There are also some handwritten annotations like "Solo will B" and "Play the E".

Above is the original first page of the flute part for Virgo.

ZODIAC SUITE: ARIES

SCORE

COMPOSED AND ARRANGED BY MARY LOU WILLIAMS
PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY JEFFREY SULTANOF AND ROB DUBOFF

VERY SLOWLY

The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Flute:** Starts with a melodic line in the second measure, marked *mf*. It features a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure and a half note in the fourth measure.
- Oboe:** Enters in the fourth measure with a melodic line, marked *mf*.
- Clarinet:** Remains silent throughout the piece.
- Bassoon:** Enters in the fifth measure with a melodic line, marked *mf*.
- Trumpet, Horn in F, Trombone:** All three parts are silent throughout the piece.
- Violin 1 & 2:** Play sustained notes in the first, second, and fourth measures, marked *mf*. They have a long slur over the notes in the third and fourth measures.
- Viola 1 & 2:** Play sustained notes in the first, second, and fourth measures, marked *mf*. They have a long slur over the notes in the third and fourth measures.
- Cello:** Play sustained notes in the first, second, and fourth measures, marked *mf*. It has a long slur over the notes in the third and fourth measures.
- Piano:** Remains silent throughout the piece.
- Bass:** Plays a sustained note in the first, second, and fourth measures, marked *mf*. It has a long slur over the notes in the third and fourth measures. It includes performance instructions *(Arco)* and *(Pizz.)*.
- Drums:** Plays a single stroke in the first measure, marked *mf*, with the instruction *(Timp Sticks)*.

The score is divided into five measures, numbered 1 through 5 at the bottom. Measure 1 starts with a *mf* dynamic and a crescendo hairpin leading into measure 2.

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MEDIUM SWING/BOOGIE ♩ = 138

⑥

FL. *f*

Ob. *f*

CL. *f*

BSN. *mf*

TRP.

HN.

TBN.

VLA. 1 *f* (Pizz.) *ff*

VLA. 2 *f* (Pizz.) *ff*

VLA. 1 *f* (Pizz.) *ff*

VLA. 2 *f* (Pizz.) *ff*

VLC. *f* (Pizz.) *ff*

PNO.

BS. *mf*

DR. (R.S.)

6 (LN 2) 7 8 9

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral layout. The top section includes woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon) and brass (Trumpet, Horn, Trombone). The middle section features strings (Violin 1 & 2, Viola, Violoncello). The bottom section includes Piano, Bass, and Drums. The score is divided into measures 10, 11, 12, and 13. Dynamics range from *pp* to *mf*. Performance instructions include *(SOLI)*, *(ARCO)*, *sf*, and *mf*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

14 STRAIGHT *♩*s SWING

FL. *mp* *Cresc.* *f*

Ob. *mp* *Cresc.* *f*

CL. *mp* *Cresc.* *f*

BSN. *ff* *mp* *Cresc.* *f*

(SOLI) *ff* *f*

(SOLI) *ff* *f*

(SOLI) *ff* *f*

Vln. 1 *ff* *f*

Vln. 2 *ff* *f*

Vla. 1 *ff* *f*

Vla. 2 *ff* *f*

Vlc. *ff* *mp* *f*

PNO.

BS. *ff* (Pizz.) *mp* (Arco) *f*

Dr. *mf* *mp* *f*

14 15 16 17 18 19 *mp*