

NEWS RELEASE

**Contact: Deanna Witkowski
212.695.4821
deannawit@earthlink.net**

Mary Lou Williams biographer Dr. Tammy Kernodle and pianist/composer Deanna Witkowski present *Moving with the Spirit: the sacred jazz of Mary Lou Williams*, Sunday, October 19, 2008 at 11 am at Duke University, Durham, NC

Witkowski's playing is consistently thrilling, and her musical imagination seems boundless.
-Rick Anderson, *All Music Guide*

Dr. Kernodle writes about Mary Lou Williams with clarity and force.
-Rev. Peter F. O'Brien, SJ, Executive Director, The Mary Lou Williams Foundation

Biographer Dr. Tammy Kernodle and New York based pianist/composer/vocalist Deanna Witkowski will present *Moving with the Spirit: the sacred jazz of Mary Lou Williams*, a program devoted to the sacred jazz works of both Mary Lou Williams and Witkowski, on Sunday, October 19, 2008 at 11 am at the Searle Conference Center/Commons Restaurant on the campus of Duke University in Durham, NC. The \$25 admission includes brunch and is open to the public. For more information, contact the Mary Lou Williams Center at 919.684.3814 or go to deannajazz.com.

Bassist Dave Ambrosio and drummer Scott Latzky will join Witkowski in musical performances featuring Williams' and Witkowski's sacred jazz. Kernodle will address Williams' contribution to the redefining of the Mass in the post-Vatican II years, and Witkowski will discuss how she has used her compositions in a myriad of denominations and worship scenarios.

The brilliant pianist/composer Mary Lou Williams (1910-1981) often stated that she wanted to be a force for emotional healing through her music. In the 1960s, Williams, who was always one step ahead of innovations in jazz, began focusing on music composition for the Catholic church. Her service music inspired Duke Ellington to write his own *Sacred Concerts*, yet differed from Ellington's work in that her pieces were meant to be used in actual services, rather than solely in concert settings. Williams' transition to composing for the church marked a seven year period that corresponded with liturgical changes within the Catholic church. From 1963 until 1970 she composed a number of hymns and three masses that garnered attention within the American Catholic church as well as from the Vatican. In 1975, jazz was played for the first time in New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral, when Williams performed her work *Mary Lou's Mass* with her trio and a 60-voice youth choir.

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Deanna Witkowski, winner of the 2002 Great American Jazz Piano Competition, is another highly regarded musician in the jazz world who actively composes sacred jazz. Upon being invited to perform at the annual Mary Lou Williams Festival at the Kennedy Center in 2000, Witkowski began immersing herself in Williams' music, and composed a tribute to Williams called "Wide Open Window" which subsequently became the title of her second recording as a bandleader. In 2003, Witkowski was a guest on Marian McPartland's *Piano Jazz*, the long-running NPR program that featured Mary Lou Williams as its first guest in 1978. Following Witkowski's performance of "Wide Open Window" on the program, McPartland remarked, "She [Williams] would have loved that."

Witkowski's interest in fusing jazz and liturgy has its roots in Chicago in 1995, when she began composing for an annual jazz service at LaSalle Street Church. Since moving to New York in 1997, she has served as music director at two Episcopal churches where she continued to compose for weekly services. Her work now includes two jazz masses as well as numerous psalm settings, gospel choir arrangements, resettings of hymn texts, and bilingual (Spanish/English) prayer responses. Her upcoming fourth recording, *From This Place*, features her sacred jazz material with saxophonist Donny McCaslin, bassist John Patitucci, and guest vocalists Kate McGarry and Peter Eldridge.

Tammy L. Kernodle is Associate Professor of Musicology at Miami University (Ohio) where she teaches jazz history, blues, gospel, and other forms of African American music. She is the author of *Soul on Soul: The Life and Music of Mary Lou Williams* (Northeastern University Press, 2004). Dr. Kernodle has lectured on the music of Williams at Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, and at numerous universities. Kernodle was a consultant for National Public Radio's broadcast of *Mary Lou's Mass* (National Cathedral, 1999) and has worked on Smithsonian Folkways' reissue of recorded works of Williams (most recently writing liner notes with Rev. Peter O'Brien for the 2005 reissue of *Mary Lou's Mass*). From 1999 to 2001, she was Head Scholar for the new Women in Jazz Initiative at the American Jazz Museum in Kansas City. She holds a BM in choral music education and piano from Virginia State University, and an MA and PhD in musicology from Ohio State University.

Kernodle and Witkowski are available for interviews; press kits/CDs are available on request.