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# The Little Piano Girl: The Story Of Mary Lou Williams, Jazz Legend



## Synopsis

What if you loved music more than anything? Suppose you had just learned to play the piano. Imagine that your family has to move to a new city and you have to leave your piano behind. People don't like you in the new city because of what you look like. How will you make yourself feel better? Mary Lou Williams, like Mozart, began playing the piano when she was four; at eight she became a professional musician. She wrote and arranged music for Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and was one of the most powerful women in jazz. This is the story of Mary Lou's childhood in Pittsburgh, where she played the piano for anyone who would listen.

## Book Information

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Hardcover: 32 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars See all reviews (16 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

## Customer Reviews

This is the story of Mary Lou Williams a famous female jazz musician. She played around the world and composed and arranged music for Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman. Duke Ellington said of her, Mary's music retains a standard of quality that is timeless. She is like soul on soul." (the above came from the afterword) The story itself is a wonderful look at a female jazz musician many might unfamiliar with (including myself) When Mary Lou Williams was three years old she would sit on her mother's lap and play a tune on the piano. Mary Lou spent most of her time playing the piano. When the Williams family moved to Pittsburgh in search of employment at the steel mills, they had to leave

the piano behind. Mary Lou was bullied in Pittsburgh. Though she had no piano that didn't keep her from playing. "Ugly names and cruel words. Mary called them bad sounds, and she taught herself to play them out. Even without a keyboard, she could do it. Tapping on the tabletop, she beat back the bad sounds. She crooned and whispered and shouted out until her spirit was lifted free." I love the rhythm of that passage, and many others. The authors give readers a very good appreciation of Mary Lou's musical skill and how much people enjoyed it. "When Mary cut loose, people couldn't stay still. They set to clapping, tapping, finger-snapping. Her blue notes made people want to cry at just how hard life can be. Her crazy chords made people shimmy their shoulders and shake their heads, high and happy. Mary would play a deep, powerful bass with one hand and lay a lacework of edgy blues over the top of it with the other. Her music rolled and slid and jumped along, zigzagging and giant-stepping." The illustrations are great and a perfect fit for the text. I always love Potter's use of color. While reading, I was reminded of something else illustrated by Giselle Potter and it finally came to me. The album cover for Jazz for Kids: a great jazz CD for kids. The Little Piano would be a great addition to any library. ages 5up. It could be paired nicely with Piano Starts Here: by Robert A. Parker. A biography on jazz great Art Tatum.

Will be using this in my classroom during black history month. I've downloaded some of her selections and plan to play them while I read the story, then we'll open up my piano and check out how it works, great experience for 1st graders!

The Little Piano Girl is a touching and poignant depiction of jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams' childhood. Filled with colorful illustrations, the story is lively and fast-paced and sure to capture the interest and imagination of children. It's wonderful that books for all ages are finally being written about this great jazz legend, whose contribution to jazz has not been fully recognized. I am an elementary school music teacher as well as a writer, and my young students thoroughly enjoyed the story of young Mary's amazing early life. Sarah Bruce Kelly Author of JAZZ GIRL, a novel of Mary Lou Williams and her early life

What a wonderful book about an under celebrated jazz musician from the golden age of jazz. In addition to telling a little bit about jazz history's most prolific female jazz composer, this is a great story about a little girl who was very special in her own way. Any family with a budding musician would love this book.

The book was read to our group by the author. I am ordering the book to have in my library, because it is so uplifting. It is a highly motivational story for young people (and anyone). The story follows the amazing talent and determination of a delightful little girl despite the odds against her, and tells how she grew up to be a great woman in the jazz world.

I just read this book to my five year old daughter who loves coming up with her own tunes on the piano and we were both so inspired! The illustrations are wonderful and the prose perfectly jazzy and bluesy!

Maryann's words skip as lightly and deftly over the pages as Mary Lou Williams' fingers skipped over the piano keyboard. The book is full of sounds - the sound of the train taking her away from her home, the thunder when she pounded on the keys, the rain when she tapped them. The reader can feel Mary Lou's joy, as they can feel her sadness at other times in her young life. This is a book for not only children and jazz aficionados, but for all music lovers who keep on performing, learning, and playing against the odds.

I feel kind of stupid because I did not read the reviews--just knew I wanted to read about Mary Lou Williams' life. Everything should have told me it was written for children, the cover, the title. I guess I just assumed--wrongly--that it was for adults. But, working at a library the way I do, I do know lots of children who will love this book, when I'm finished:-)

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