



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS AND  
THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE BAND PRESENT  
FREE PERFORMANCE OF MARY LOU WILLIAMS' "ZODIAC SUITE"  
May 19, 2024, at 7:30 p.m.**

The D.C. premiere concert features pianist Aaron Diehl, whose recording of "Zodiac Suite" was nominated for a 2024 GRAMMY Award

**WASHINGTON**— Washington Performing Arts and The United States Air Force Band co-present Mary Lou Williams' rarely heard *Zodiac Suite* featuring the **Aaron Diehl Trio** (**David Wong**, bass; **Aaron Kimmel**, drums; and Diehl, piano; along with **The United States Air Force Band**, conducted by **Col. Don Schofield** on **May 19 at 7:30 p.m.** at the historic **Lincoln Theatre** (1215 U



program also features William Grant Still's *Symphony No. 1*, George Gershwin's *Lullaby for Strings*, and more. Tickets for this one-night concert event are free to reserve at [kennedy-center.org/en/events/zodiac-suite-tickets-](https://www.kennedy-center.org/en/events/zodiac-suite-tickets)

recorded in 1945, *Zodiac Suite* is considered a landmark work that made a significant contribution to the development of jazz music. The suite incorporates both classical and jazz influences, with each part corresponding to an astrological sign. Williams dedicated each part to her friends born under that sign, including Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, and

more. Pianist Aaron Diehl's [2023 recording of \*Zodiac Suite\*](#),

performed alongside New York City-based orchestra The Knights, was nominated for Best Classical Compendium at the 2024 GRAMMY awards.

Diehl dedicated himself to restoring Williams' *Zodiac Suite* after his encounter with her former manager and Executive Director of the Mary Lou Williams Foundation, Father Peter O'Brien. O'Brien was a tireless advocate for Williams, and his death in 2015 left many planned projects with her music unrealized. Diehl was inspired by O'Brien's passion to delve further into Williams' music, eventually focusing his efforts on her unfinished "Zodiac Suite." Using the first iteration on Asch Records as a framework, recorded in 1945, Diehl assembled the "Zodiac Suite" arrangement audiences will hear on May 19.

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*"Williams was determined to be taken seriously, to not be pigeonholed as a novelty," Diehl said. "As a Black woman whose career spanned much of the 20th century, she needed to sidestep the hackneyed tropes and caricatures surrounding gender and race in the music industry; in her mind, she was simply a pianist and composer, and those were enough descriptors."*

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Through the “Zodiac Suite” project and subsequent performances, Diehl hopes to generate more awareness for Williams as a composer and pianist. Her hundreds of arrangements and compositions demonstrate her ability to adapt as jazz music pushed forward. Likewise, her own music, along with her mentorship to Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Tadd Dameron, Bud Powell, and Dizzy Gillespie shaped the jazz genre for years to come. Diehl views Williams’ “Zodiac Suite” as a testament to her resilience and a reminder to continue celebrating her legacy.

*Top photo of Aaron Diehl by Evelyn Freja.*

## **FOR LISTINGS**

### **WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS**

#### **ZODIAC SUITE**

**By Mary Lou Williams**

**The United States Air Force Band, conducted by Col. Don Schofield**

**Aaron Diehl Trio**

**DATE:** May 19 at 7:30 PM

**LOCATION:** Lincoln Theatre

**TICKETS:** [Not yet available, more info here](#)

**PHOTOS:** [View here](#)

**“One of the most celebrated early examples of jazz and classical music in active synthesis — and also, in celestial terms, one of the most star-crossed.” - *WRTI Radio*, Philadelphia**

In 1945, pianist and composer Mary Lou Williams finalized and first performed her tour de force orchestral *Zodiac Suite*, 12 pieces based on the astrological signs from Aries to Pisces, dedicated to jazz greats of her era born under the signs, including Billie Holliday, Dizzy Gillespie, Ethel Waters, Thelonious Monk, Café Society owner Barney Josephson, and more. Williams debuted her celestial odyssey in a piano trio format, then arranged the work for chamber-jazz ensemble, and performed a recomposition with full orchestra at Carnegie Hall, yet the full suite was never performed during her lifetime. Pianist Aaron Diehl has devoted considerable energy to restoring Williams’s original orchestrations, first for the New York Philharmonic during pandemic lockdown, and then live with the Philadelphia Orchestra in spring 2023. Washington Performing Arts presents the Aaron Diehl Trio, The United States Air Force Band, and other works for a one-night concert event and D.C. premiere of Williams’s *Zodiac Suite* as she imagined it.

## **ABOUT AARON DIEHL**

Pianist Aaron Diehl has quietly re-defined the lines between jazz and classical, and built a global career around his nuanced, understated approach to music-making. Praised for his “melodic precision, harmonic erudition, and elegant restraint” (*The New York Times*), and his “traditional jazz sound with a sophisticated contemporary spin” (*The Guardian*), Diehl has performed with musical giants such as Wynton Marsalis, Cécile McLorin Salvant, Tyshawn Sorey, and Philip Glass, and has been a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, and the Cleveland Orchestra, working with conductors like Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Marin Alsop, and Alan Gilbert. In 2023, Diehl was named as the Artistic Director of 92NY’s Jazz in July Festival, succeeding the legendary Bill Charlap.

## **ABOUT THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE BAND**

The United States Air Force Band, led by Colonel Don Schofield, is the Air Force’s premier musical organization. Since 1941, the Band has used music to bridge cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic differences to advance international relationships and inspire positive and long-lasting impressions of the U.S. Air Force and the United States of America. The Band honors those who have served, inspires American citizens to a heightened sense of patriotism and service, and connects with the global community on behalf of the U.S. Air Force and the United States of America.

For more information, visit <http://www.music.af.mil/usafband>.

## **ABOUT WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS**

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for more than half a century with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, jazz, international genres, and more. We also have an ever-expanding artistic and educational presence on the internet, envisioning ongoing opportunities for online connection and community.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts institutions. Through events online and in myriad performance venues and neighborhoods, we engage international visiting artists in community programs and introduce local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

Our achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with three Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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