

There Will Be Time for Jazz

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In this piece, I consider concepts of time, the history of archives and provenance, how time is treated in archival arrangement and description, and how these speak to my experiences completing the processing of three interrelated record groups at the Institute of Jazz Studies that center on the great Mary Lou Williams: the Mary Lou Williams Collection, the Mary Lou Williams Foundation Collection, and the Peter O'Brien papers. It is hoped that the piece will provide insight into the perspectives I find retrospectively meaningful when reflecting on the work of processing those materials and preparing the related finding aids, perspectives which draw from literature, philosophy, science, film, and music.¹

Time is conceptualized spatially as a circle, a line, or, when paired with other dimensions, a block. Occasionally, the first two are combined. They only go in one direction. The block is different; more below. Time is either present in its entirety *eternally* or it is pure *present*—an eternal round now, but humans only experience the present, and only then within a weird smear of anticipation and memory, riding linear time: the “specious” present.² It’s difficult to conceive of a second dimension of linear time, but it’s arguably myth—the never happened always happening—or narrative: a chain of ideas in shared causal sequence that are chunked efficiently enough that they can be drawn forth to the specious present entire at an unbending acute angle from linear time, conjured in as little as a phrase—“Shaka, when the walls fell”—or even a word—“*Pygmalion*.”³ (If the myth/narrative is so big it has to be retold, we snap back to a single dimension.) A third dimension is beyond me: time and time again and again.

¹ I am indebted to my colleagues, including one I never had the pleasure to meet, Annie Kuebler, who preceded me in working on the collections.

² Dean Buonomano, *Your Brain Is a Time Machine: The Neuroscience and Physics of Time* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2018); Benjamin Houtman, “W. H. Auden, an Appreciation,” WNYC: New York Public Radio, accessed April 29, 2026, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/w-h-auden-appreciation/>.

³ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Canongate, 2005); “Darmok,” *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, season 5, episode 2, directed by Winrich Kolbe, aired September 30, 1991, in syndication; Ovid, *The Metamorphoses* (New American Library, 1960).

The passage of time cannot be experienced directly, only as physical change. In a sense, it's *allchange*.

Time used to be tightly cyclical, and broadly linear. Some of time's circle is internalized—circadian rhythms course through us, as do the frequencies of music, and every month invites a moon and a new Zodiac sign—but it has otherwise slackened, replaced by an insistent sharpened onward rush. Day will still track into night, forth and back, but light pollutes our evening to blot the Zodiac sky; seasons clamor over each other, but their once tight rhythm has loosened and nettled; and the dynamic range for both has narrowed in our increasingly sheltered lives. Expecting one year to be roughly like the last used to be a reasonable expectation. That no longer holds. The mortal coil of time has morphed from a Slinky to a drill. People have built careers, livelihoods, and legends conjecturing why time's rhythm changes.⁴ One of the more intriguing proposals is the development of a unique section of society embracing an unusual value: let's each hold one thing still and measure another, but each of us a *different* thing—we'll call them independent and dependent variables—and then we'll talk to each other and see what happens. Let's do *science*. Under the spell of this simple narrative, humankind has effectively split time's *allchange* spectrum, taking its blinding *allcolors*—white if you're scientifically inclined; black if art is your palate—and laid claim to a band. There's a tinge of irony that science, which so depends on cycles of recurrence, should be responsible for pushing us from cyclical to linear time with its effluence of control and change, but the accumulation is astonishing. We are here in the rush.

The block concept of time, popularly known as the “block universe,” which I'm calling *blocktime*, has been around at least since Parmenides, but it has been given added heft by science, by theoretical physicists, whose bafflingly accurate predictions about reality may not require time-as-we-know-it.⁵ The block concept of time posits a past, present, and future coexisting as a single “simultaneous” strand joined with length, height, and width, existing in a frozen chunk of spacetime: a continuum, *alltime*. That's if time exists at all; science is complicated. For our purposes, the blocktime perspective is one in which *alltime* is a single thing, viewed *as a whole* as a single thing, below some omniscient eye. Were physicists not insistent that such a perspective is impossible, you could argue that maybe this gods-eye-view is where we find our third dimension of time, a consciousness joining the line and the myth. The brain bristles a bit.

Culture, too, has a hand. Consider fiction. Proust spent over 1,200,000 words *In Search of Lost Time*. Shakespeare, ever efficient, did it in a trim 266, giving the

⁴ George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky, *Sociological Theory*, 9th ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2013).

⁵ Buonomano, *Your Brain Is a Time Machine*.

character “Time” a tight thirty-two-lines in a single play, *The Winter’s Tale*. So, “Time,” what do you have to say for yourself?

I, that please some, try all—both joy and terror
Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error—
Now take upon me, in the name of Time,
To use my wings. Impute it not a crime...⁶

...and so on. Time, like history, doesn’t repeat himself, but he rhymes. Accurate. Less accurate is the idea that Time’s speech is a description of the playwright’s art. “Time” in *Winter’s Tale* is a *Deus ex Machina*, eliding a sixteen-year stretch to attach three acts of pitch-black tragedy to two acts of blinding-white farce. Andrei Tarkovsky defined the film director’s work as sculpting in time, but the metaphor is arguably equally applicable to the playwright. We’ll give him a little more space:

Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes everything that is not a part of it—so the film-maker, from a “lump of time” made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image.⁷

That’s not what Shakespeare does with “Time.” Shakespeare cedes an opaque interim of *allchange*. Or, from another perspective, Time reclaims a band of the spectrum from Shakespeare’s agency. In life, this is often the best course of action: time heals all wounds. In art, it is kind of cheating.

Science. Fiction. Remarkable as it may seem, time travel only became a ubiquitous trope in literature with H.G. Wells’s 1895 novella *The Time Machine*. It is shorter than Proust, but still TL;DR, and while a film has been made in recent years, I’m much more enamored with the campy 1960 version starring Rod Taylor, which I’m sure I watched some idle morning in a bygone era when we were allowed to be bored.⁸ His character, “H. George Wells,” climbs into his time machine—a very nice chair with bells, whistles, knobs, and umbrellas all bedecked with a silly “Victorian” flourish—and witnesses tomorrows rushing past—days, months, years, centuries, millennia—before alighting in a London 800,000+ years in the future, post-apocalypse, at time’s gasping last syllable, minutes worse for the wear. This is effectively the archivist’s dream: a box that

⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. John Pitcher (Arden Shakespeare, 2010), 4.1.

⁷ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (University of Texas Press, 1988), 63.

⁸ George Pal, *The Time Machine* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1960).

allows its contents to arrive in the future with little to no change from the day they were made—no acid hydrolysis, light exposure, or sticky shed; mold spores and silverfish given no dimension for their own proliferation; and, apparently, nuclear war and molten lava proof. This future has metal discs that, when spun, play back audio from 800,000 years ago, lasting approximately 40,000x longer than the CDs they resemble. The scientists at Hollinger Metal Edge are no doubt hard at work.

So, science has built a world of linear time, and a cult of blocktime, on an edifice of circular time. Time in fiction is a toothless demiurge, a machine. Time in art is Dali; in jazz, Brubeck; but for my money, the art and jazz of Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch* are a far richer text. I encourage you to linger there.⁹

As an archivist, I could be bounded in a clamshell box and count myself a king of infinite time were it not for provenance, a Gemini of conjugate concepts: *respect des fonds* and "original order."

Original order is one of the core sacred values of archives. Archivists like to maintain that it isn't, often better honored in the breach than in the observance should it better serve the researcher, who has come to worship at a different altar. The holy ministers of the Society of American Archivists include five quotes as citations in their definition of original order.¹⁰ *Two* them evoke religious imagery and immediately walk it back. From one of the church of archivists' most hallowed priests, T. R. Schellenberg:

While the original order of record items in a series is not a sacrosanct thing—something to be preserved at all costs—it may nonetheless be one that reveals the significance of records and makes them usable.¹¹

And this from Fredrick Stielow:

Even the sacred precepts of original order and provenance must be reconsidered in light of "virtual records," "multimedia documents," and "groupware," in which elements of a text may have been drawn from multiple data sources created by many authors at different times and places.¹²

The holy archival writ was imparted unto me by Dr. Ciaran Trace, who helmed the "Archival Enterprise" courses at the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin. It's been eleven years since I matriculated the

⁹ Eric Dolphy, *Out to Lunch!* Blue Note TYCJ-81013, 2013, CD. Originally released 1964.

¹⁰ "Original Order," *Society of American Archivists Dictionary*, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/original-order.html>.

¹¹ "Original Order," *Society of American Archivists Dictionary*.

¹² "Original Order," *Society of American Archivists Dictionary*.

iSchool, and just two since we lost her to cancer, but during her time at UT her courses were consistently valued as the most useful classes in the program. In 2020 she published a two-part piece for *American Archivist*: “Maintaining Records in Context: A Historical Exploration of the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement” and “Maintaining Records in Context? Disrupting the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement.”¹³ Between them, she tracks the development of the archival profession, how it “materialize[d], mend[ed], maintain[ed], and metamorphose[d] the links that once existed between records, their creators, the functions and activities that brought the records into being, and the record-keeping structures in which they were originally stored.”¹⁴ The two articles are basically a history of archives.

Respect des fonds—the idea that the creation, ownership, and custody of records is important information in and of itself and should be maintained—was developed in France as a reaction to the excesses of the Revolution, in which a *subject*-based flower bloomed where the *ancien régime* had been uprooted. The Prussians, tending their own state archives, took the mantle from there, insisting that not only should all records created by an entity be retained and stored together, but *the way* in which the creator of a body of records maintained their material—original order—was also significant and should be maintained.

Trace’s first article continues to explore the historical tensions between the needs of creators, researchers, archivists, and the papers themselves, as they developed from the dawn-of-recorded-time to the mid-twentieth century (inclusive; 1830s–1960s bulk), but provenance remains at the core. The tensions expressed are still with us, but as an internalized narrative in the heart of every archivist, if unthorned. The disruptions given flower in the 1960s, with which Trace begins her second article, still feel alive. While Trace discusses the obvious changes—digital and internet records, Derrida—the ascendant strife comes from an amplified argument over “whose voice to center in the archive—that of the creator... or of subsequent users (liberating archives from their initial network of relationships so that the record-user can bring them together in

¹³ Ciaran B. Trace, “Maintaining Records in Context: A Historical Exploration of the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement,” *The American Archivist* 83, no. 1 (March 2020): 91–127, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-83.1.91>; Ciaran B. Trace, “Maintaining Records in Context? Disrupting the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement,” *The American Archivist* 83, no. 2 (September 1, 2020): 322–72, <https://doi.org/10.17723/0360-9081-83.2.322>.

¹⁴ Trace, “Historical Exploration of the Theory and Practice” 95.

contexts other than the original),” and the revelations wrought by advent of Australian-rules archivry.¹⁵

The Australian approach developed from a more direct involvement with the creation of government records. Their attention to the full lifecycle of the materials placed in their care revealed a truth that other archival traditions were loath to admit: “Traditional archival thinking failed to take account of the often-substantial changes wrought in the function, structure, and mission of government departments *over time*.”¹⁶ Their proposal “called for the abandonment of the record group [i.e., the fonds] as the primary category of classification (and description) in favor of the ‘series system’ . . . From a temporal perspective, the series system and its focus on the ongoing management of all records created a perspective in which relationships between context and record unit could be understood in a synchronic (point-in-time) and a diachronic (over-time) manner. The notion that intellectual control exists at any point in time, and not just as a post hoc arrangement, posited that the work and role of the archivist could (and should) exist as part of an integrated records continuum approach.”¹⁷ The Australians effectively privileged *blocktime*, decentering provenance from archivry’s core.

The Mary Lou Williams papers were officially deposited at the Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS) in 1999 by Williams’s friend, manager, and executive director of her namesake Foundation, Peter O’Brien, as two different fonds—Williams’s own papers, and those of the Williams Foundation—to which the IJS added a third to accommodate O’Brien’s papers.¹⁸ In 2000–2001, Annie Kuebler performed *heroic* work leading a team in processing this voluminous avalanche of disorganized papers. She did not finish. The story of the processing of the Williams archives elides a twenty-three-year gap of archival drift, a largely opaque interim of unknown interventions, misplaced materials, and the deaths of Kuebler in 2012 and O’Brien in 2015—the two people who truly knew the collection—before being placed in my hands January 13, 2025. Kuebler’s processing cut off at some of the thornier sections of the papers: those that speak to the tensions inherent in the central archival values of provenance.

¹⁵ Trace, “Disrupting the Theory and Practice,” 325.

¹⁶ Trace, “Disrupting the Theory and Practice,” 328 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ Trace, “Disrupting the Theory and Practice,” 329.

¹⁸ Mary Lou Williams Collection (IJS.0060), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries, <https://archives.libraries.rutgers.edu/repositories/6/resources/1215>; Mary Lou Williams Foundation Collection (IJS.0114), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries, <https://archives.libraries.rutgers.edu/repositories/6/resources/1214>; Peter F. O’Brien papers (IJS.0156), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries, <https://archives.libraries.rutgers.edu/repositories/6/resources/215>.

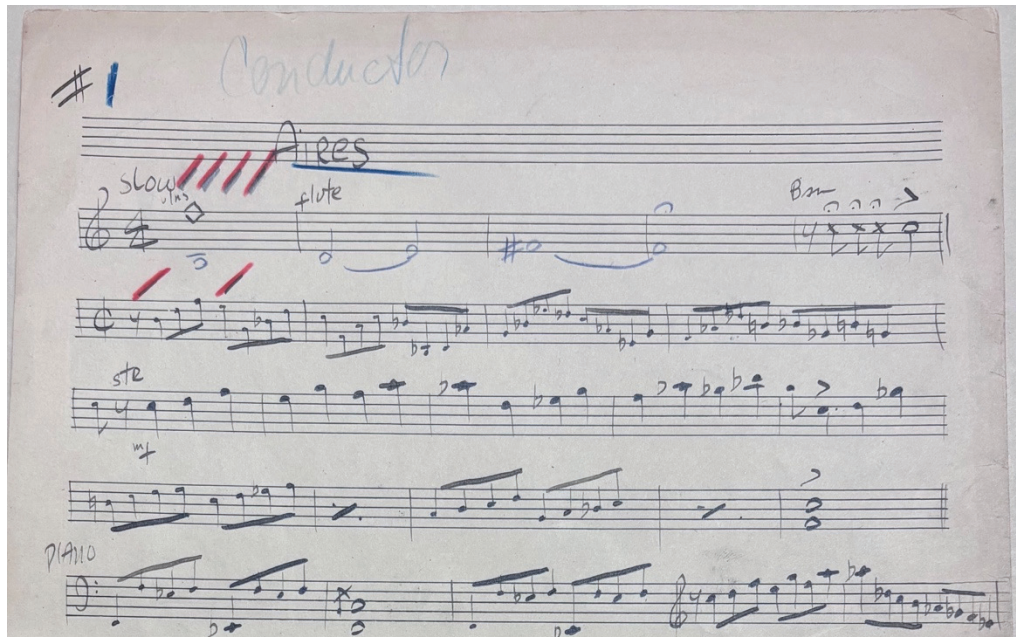


Figure 1. Aries conductor's score. Mary Lou Williams Collection (IJS.0060), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

The prickliest example is probably Williams's Estate. Each of the three fonds could have laid claim to the Estate materials: they came from Williams, but O'Brien was the executor, and except for a small allotment to her nephew, Robert Mickles, the Foundation that O'Brien ran was the primary beneficiary, per Williams's wishes. The Estate papers are an essential part of the story of each fonds, but with a traditional approach only one could lay claim. I canvassed my colleagues at the IJS at different points in the process and found consensus elusive. I ultimately elected to include the Estate materials as a subseries in the Foundation papers in order to highlight that collection and its shared interest in maintaining Williams's legacy. But what sense does it make to treat something so unstable as a central organizing principle of archival arrangement?



Figure 2. "Virgo" or "Aries" shellac 78-rpm disc. Institute of Jazz Studies collection of audio recordings (IJS.0113), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

The series system has implications for the other linchpin of provenance: original order. Consider the *Zodiac Suite*, Williams's ode to circular time. It was composed in the early 1940s, broadcast on-air from the WNEW studio, recorded by Asch Records and released on two 78-rpm albums, and was performed complete with a chamber orchestra at Town Hall, and in part with a symphony pops orchestra at Carnegie Hall, all within a two-year period, 1945-1946. The IJS has multiple scores, parts, sketches, and copyright leadsheets; writings; ephemera; notes; and recordings in both the Williams and Williams Foundation papers, received at IJS as a shuffled deck. What is the original order? A typical approach to recovering it would be to work from the published or performed versions, but this can lead to trouble. For instance, what the world now knows as "Aries" would have been known to the lay person for the much of its existence as "Virgo," due to its being released under that title on Asch Records's *Signs of the Zodiac* in 1946. What became "Aries" was also introduced on WNEW as "Gemini." The manuscript music includes an "Aries Mood" which eventually became "Virgo" (and never mind the "Aries Mood" big band score, related to neither). The 1946 Town Hall archival recording "correctly"

places "Aries" in sequence with its other Zodiac siblings, but only after our baby Aries experienced something of an identity crisis.

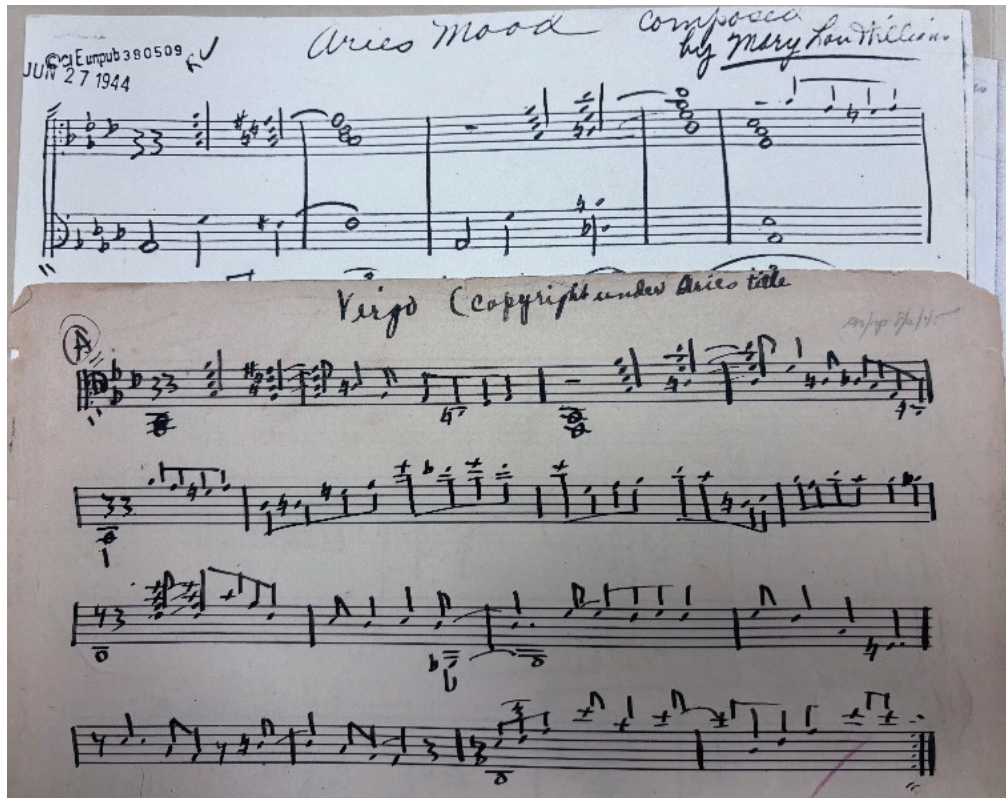


Figure 3. "Aries Mood" copyright deposit and "Virgo" manuscript. Mary Lou Williams Collection (IJS.0060), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

The Foundation would later prepare written parts and scores for performers to license based on the Town Hall performance that used both extant written music and the recording. Retaining the originals as part of the Williams papers removes the context surrounding the order of the papers when they were living records in the Foundation's possession. Even ignoring the Foundation's legitimate reasons for reordering the materials, there are multiple orders that could be established from Williams's own use. What we now know as the *Zodiac Suite* was different things at different times, and *never existed in any single state until decades after the documentation had been created*. Privileging one order suppresses others. Original order *obscures*.

In this case I elected to create a supplemental finding aid of materials related to the *Zodiac Suite* to provide linkages across time and fonds.¹⁹ I did this for Williams's liturgical works as well, finding the traditional finding aid insufficient to the task.²⁰

The *Zodiac Suite* exists in a dubious tradition of well-known works of art that do not exist in their original form in the present day. What can reasonably be considered "historically the most important rock-and-roll album ever released in America" has intermittently flickered out of print.²¹ One of the baker's dozen of hip hop recordings honored to be included in Library of Congress's National Recordings Registry cannot be heard in its original form on any streaming platform.²² And the first three films in *the* most significant science fiction franchise in cinema history are only available in doctored "director's cut" form.²³ Three of the signs released on the original *Zodiac Suite* Asch 78-rpm albums—"Leo," "Virgo," and "Libra"—*have never been rereleased*, replaced on reissued versions by alternate takes without comment.²⁴

Sacrilege? Arguably. But the *Zodiac Suite* is unique. While some signs come to us fully formed, others were improvised, and not just in the sense typical of jazz, but also in terms of the very structure of the work. Additionally, there are multiple manuscripts, made at different points in the composition, some presumably establishing the work, others groping for a final form.

What privileges the versions performed on-air on WNEW versus those recorded for Moses Asch? Or the Asch versions published in 1946, 1975, or 1995—each different—over the approximately sixty unreleased takes in our

¹⁹ Rutgers University Libraries, *Zodiac Suite Supplement*, retrieved from <https://archives.libraries.rutgers.edu/repositories/6/resources/1215>.

²⁰ Rutgers University Libraries, *Liturgical Works, a Finding Aid Supplement*, retrieved from <https://archives.libraries.rutgers.edu/repositories/6/resources/1215>.

²¹ Richard Harrington, "Smithereens, Meet the Beatles" *Washington Post*, January 11, 2007, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2007/01/12/smithereens-meet-the-beatles/189a98db-cff0-41be-ba5e-5afb00143cec/>; "The Beatles – *Meet the Beatles!*" Discogs, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://www.discogs.com/master/75259-The-Beatles-Meet-The-Beatles>.

²² "'3 Feet High and Rising'—De La Soul (1989)," accessed May 4, 2026, <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/3-Foot-High-and-Rising.pdf>.

²³ Alex Leadbeater, "Why Disney Can't Release the Original Star Wars Trilogy," *ScreenRant*, December 8, 2016, <https://screenrant.com/why-disney-cant-release-the-original-star-wars-trilogy/>.

²⁴ Mary Lou Williams, *Signs of the Zodiac*, Internet Archive, accessed May 4, 2026, https://archive.org/details/78_signs-of-the-zodiac-pisces_mary-lou-williams-mary-lou-williams_gbia8003844; https://archive.org/details/78_signs-of-the-zodiac-virgo_mary-lou-williams-al-lucas-mary-lou-williams_gbia8003845.

archives? Or the Town Hall parts and scores versus the recorded performance? Arguably, the *Zodiac Suite*, as much as any major work in the history of jazz, does not lend itself to a single definitive version, instead sprawling across archival time, the perspective of time implied by theoretical physics and Australian-rules archives: a perhaps masterpiece of accidental blocktime art. But while no one can truly get a full understanding of the work, a fully *informed* understanding is only possible with the full investigation of the archives. Whether it is deserving of this perspective is another question. In my feeling it is. The true *Zodiac Suite* is locked in blocktime. It isn't ours to experience. A "Zodiac Suite," a circular suite aligned in linear time, is.

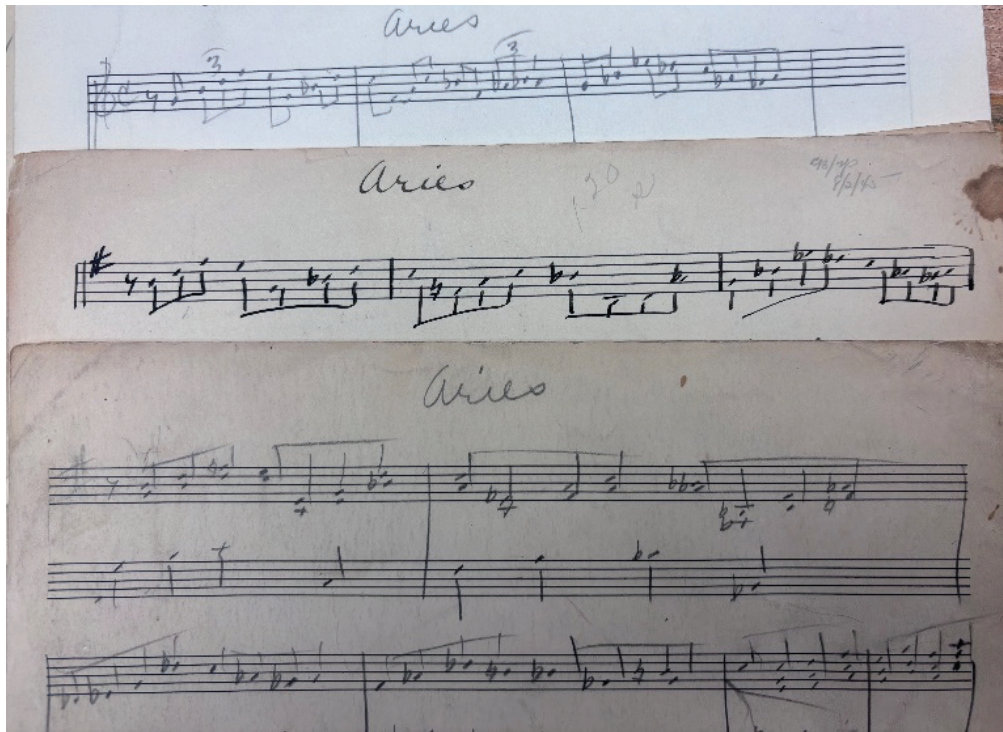


Figure 4. Three versions of "Aries." Mary Lou Williams Collection (IJS.0060), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries.

The Winter's Tale is essentially Shakespeare's *allplays*. You can chisel from it stories of vicious jealousy (*Othello*), nihilistic solipsism (*Hamlet*), impetuous rushes into violence (*MacBeth*), pastorals (*As You Like It*), magic (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)... and so on.²⁵ The only thing missing is perhaps genderplay, but it would not be lost on the audience that the "women" were all boys. The top

²⁵ Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (Vintage Books, 2005), 817–52.

half is tragedy and the back half comedy. On the whole, it is a mismatch with high highs, low lows, mostly unearned and uneven. But it ends with one of the most powerful set pieces in all of Shakespeare.

Leontes, three acts a mad king, two acts a penitent widower, whose delusional jealousy caused the death of his wife, Hermione, is brought before a hyperrealistic statue honoring her in the home—alternatively referred to as a gallery and chapel—of his courtier Paulina.²⁶ In a grief-born delusion grasping at literal thin air, Leontes imagines it breathes, and implores “what fine chisel could ever yet cut breath?,” longing for an understanding of how this work of art could so move his soul, and perhaps, *perhaps*, hers.²⁷ I love this phrase. I encourage you to linger on each word. “Could.” “Ever.” “Yet.” How they each evoke time. You’d be forgiven for thinking that Shakespeare was speaking of the playwright’s art, but when the statue steps down from its pedestal, it is cued by Paulina’s *music*: “Music, awake her! Strike! ’Tis time. Descend. Be stone no more.” Air is given shape by bursts of cyclical time—banded curlicues of frequency and amplitude—sculpted by musicians, and “Hermione” comes alive. Tarkovsky’s philosophy of art is presented in the title of his book, *Sculpting in Time*, and I’ve cited his best-known pull quote in the lapidary statement above. But he builds to that moment. A few lines earlier, he succinctly sums up music: in it, “the problem of time is [also] central. [I]ts solution is quite different [than film]: the life force of music is materialized on the brink of its own total disappearance.”²⁸ Or as Eric Dolphy put it, no less beautifully than Shakespeare or Tarkovsky, “When you hear music, after it’s over, it’s gone, in the air. You can never capture it again.”²⁹

Pace Eric, the Institute of Jazz Studies exists to do exactly that. In fact, the Institute holds in one of its unprocessed collections unpublished recordings from the masterpiece, *Out to Lunch!*, with which the above quote is forever paired: two unissued complete takes of “Gazzelloni,” an unissued complete outtake of the title-track, as well as the already-issued outtakes from “Hat and Beard” and “Something Sweet, Something Tender.” The collection also includes numerous false starts, studio banter, and multiple takes related to “Straight Up and Down,” which reveals the released version to be a chimera stitched together from take 21 and “insert 4.” That I am allowed near such sacred stuff, captured again, is astonishing.³⁰

²⁶ Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 849.

²⁷ Shakespeare, *Winter’s Tale*, 5.3. He then tries to kiss it.

²⁸ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 63.

²⁹ Dolphy, *Out to Lunch!*

³⁰ If you are interested in hearing these, please come to the Institute. Honoring the stipulations by the donor, these can only be listened to on premises. If you’re curious what other materials

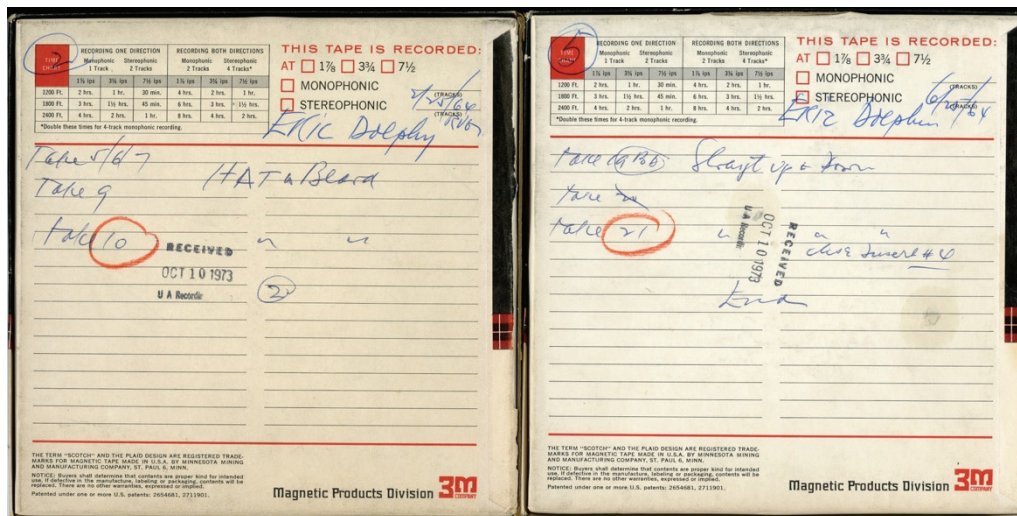


Figure 5. Eric Dolphy Out to Lunch! session reels. Michael Cuscuna papers and audio recordings (IJS.0123), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries

The music is not gone, it does not disappear, it remains with us, present, eternally present. What makes it create life?

For a biographer, the goal is simple in theory, if hard to execute in practice: every decision should feel as pressing to us as it did to the person facing them, every personal myth and shared narrative that animates their being now apparent to us, even if it isn't to them, with a future *allchange* black with dramatic irony. For the musician, every note should resound with the authority earned from understanding the composition to its core, her craft in communion with her fellow players, with the room. The soundest media from which to sculpt such songs and stories are primary sources.

Failure to sculpt from them leads to distortions. The game of “telephone” that stretches from the Mary Lou Williams Collection papers to the editors of Wikipedia implies that “Libra” was dedicated to John Coltrane, who would have been all of eighteen years old, years from making his mark on the jazz scene.³¹ Less forgivably, the 1995 CD reissue of the *Zodiac Suite* incorrectly marks several versions as previously unissued, when in fact they'd been released on the 1946 78-rpm albums from Asch Records (“Aries,” “Gemini,” “Cancer”); and as mentioned above, the CD and 1975 LP reissue both left the “Leo,” “Virgo,” and

might be unearthed, consider funding the continued processing of the Institute's unprocessed collections!

³¹ Wikipedia, “Zodiac Suite,” captured December 29, 2025,

https://web.archive.org/web/20251229212858/https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac_Suite.

“Libra” released on 78s silent to future generations, eighty years and counting.³² Simple reference to primary source material would have immediately cleared this up. But there is a richer, deeper, stronger vein of primary sources: archives. As recounted by Trace, the archives emerged as a field and established its value as a Gibraltar of provenance. There is something fortifying in being able to cite something that can be placed in situ with the retained bodies of work its creator has made, held, and themselves sculpted, in the contexts the creators established. The documents settled, even if the debates around them and the stories within them are not. Archives are primary sources at their sturdiest.

So, if the sculptor sculpts time, where does the archivist fit? I’ve struggled with how to express this conceptually. You could say the archivist plays the role of nature, fusing marble in heat and pressure over eons. Archival processing certainly *feels* like it takes forever. But this implies ceding a genuine archival agency back to time. This won’t do. Let’s consider some other options, another natural one. I’ve used floral language in recounting the archives’ rise, but something so perfectly cyclical as a flower is hardly apt. This is someone else’s metaphor, not the archives’. Archives are more an art. Painting is interesting: there is no privileged focus, even if the eye is guided. But this undercuts the multidimensionality of archives. Perhaps if that 2D portrait is wrapped around the globe: one of the beauties of the word “worldview” is that a true “world” view is impossible to the human eye without Mercator-style distortion.³³ Literature is easier to wrap one’s head around: the chapters in jazzbo Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* can be read sequentially, in an alternative order provided by Cortázar, or in whatever order you want.³⁴ Nonetheless, you’re still asked to read in linear time, and there is never enough. And music? I’ve argued that the *Zodiac Suite* is an accidental work of blocktime art, or consider “All the Things You Are,” *AlltheAlltheThingsYouAre*, from Dorsey to Dizzy too... But Dolphy is right about its effervescence. All art aspires to the condition of music, true, but all *lasting* art aspires to the condition of sculpture: so strong and sturdy, but so alive you can sense the life flowing from it—it “moves still, still so.”³⁵ Plus, music already has its role. I’ve already joined the tradition of archivists draping the archives in religious language. Perhaps there’s something to it. Archives aspire to a god’s-eye view—less the omnipotence and egoism—in time, across time, *alltime*, or as

³² This information is derived from Pierre-Antoine Badaroux, personal communication. See also: Mary Lou Williams Foundation, *The Mary Lou Williams Edition*, accessed May 4, 2026, <https://www.marylouwilliamsmusic.com/series>.

³³ Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (Penguin Books, 2014).

³⁴ Julio Cortázar, *Hopscotch, Blow-Up, We Love Glenda So Much*, trans. Gregory Rabassa and Paul Blackburn (Everyman’s Library, 2014).

³⁵ Shakespeare, *Winter’s Tale*, 4.4.

much as we can record. This is it. The archivist sculpts time, but unlike the other arts, chiseling their work into linear time, the archivist sculpts into blocktime: an act of blind faith that the legacies we sculpt are intelligible to eternity, a perspective no human can embody, but that is no less real, and to our patrons, human through and through. Shakespeare is silent on whether the magic in “Hermione” is in the marble itself, the remainder from the chiseler’s work, or some mixture of the two. I think it’s both. The archives’ magic is less the life it imbues than the integrity it lends. What fine chisel could ever yet cut breath? It is music, and with archives, it is sound.

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