

Building a Relationship with the National Museum of African American Music: Vanderbilt University's Academic Archive Purchasing Fund

Oct. 21, 2022 SEMLA Annual Conference, Tallahassee, FL



VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY



Academic Archives Purchasing Fund Vanderbilt University/National Museum of African American Music collaboration

Chancellor-Initiated Program, Organized by the Provost's Office

- Goal of the initiative:

To support an expanded collection of books, scores, sound recordings and material objects related to African American music. This collection will be available for loan, display and study at the museum and will also serve as an important resource for scholarly research on Vanderbilt's campus.

- Proposal-based initiative that involves 3 parties: VU faculty, VU librarian, NMAAM staff member
- Proposal reviewed by a VU faculty committee, then forwarded to Vice Provost and Dean of the School of Music for final approval.
- Initiative's proposal authored by Cynthia Cyrus (Musicologist, VU)

NMAAM was born out of a proposal from the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce in 2002, as a way to celebrate and preserve African Americans' influence on music and provide residents and visitors with diverse cultural offerings. The National Museum of African American Music broke ground in early 2017 and officially opened in 2021

NMAAM's mission is to educate the world, preserve the legacy, and celebrate the central role African Americans play in creating the American soundtrack.



Summary of Collections Purchased

- John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie Collection & additional A/V materials at auction
- Janet Jackson Memorabilia Collection (Two Janet Jackson costumes)
- Rissi Palmer Collection
- Dr. Yusef Abdul Lateef Collection
- Hip Hop Collection of Posters
- Otha Turner Collection





Dizzy Gillespie (1917-1993)



1990, Namibia. Gillespie with Nelson Mandela and Hage Geingob. Geingob was the first Prime Minister of Namibia from 1990 to 2002, and served as prime minister again from 2012 to 2015

Overview: This collection contains manuscripts, photographs, scrapbooks, and realia. The photographs are extensive, documenting Gillespie's entire life and career.

Purchased from James Cummins bookseller

Highlights: Middle East Scrapbooks of State Department tours starting in 1956; Dizzy's Appointment / Address books for the years 1975-1979, 1985-86, 1989-1992, heavily annotated by Dizzy; 3,000+ photographs/snapshots

Janet Jackson (1966-)

American singer, songwriter, actress, and dancer

Purchased at Auction – Julien's



This collection contains two black coats made for Janet Jackson's 1990 Rhythm Nation Tour. One coat was worn by Jackson during the opening sequence of the tour while performing "Control" and "Nasty." The other coat is a similar, second version of the first coat.

(No, this isn't the costume that malfunctioned during the 2004 SuperBowl)

Rissi Palmer (1981-

One of the most important African American Country Music singer-songwriters since 2000.

Country Girl, released in 2007, made her the first African American woman to appear on the Billboard Country Music charts since 1987

Host of Apple Music Country's show *Color Me Country Radio*

Purchased directly from artist

Overview: This collection contains songwriting notebooks, photographs, CDs, and outfits from African-American country music artist Rissi Palmer. The notebooks in particular document the majority of Palmer's songwriting career.

Highlights: Diaries; Costumes (two from music video performances and one from her debut performance at the Grand Ole Opry in 2008).





Dr. Yusef Abdul Lateef (1920-2013)

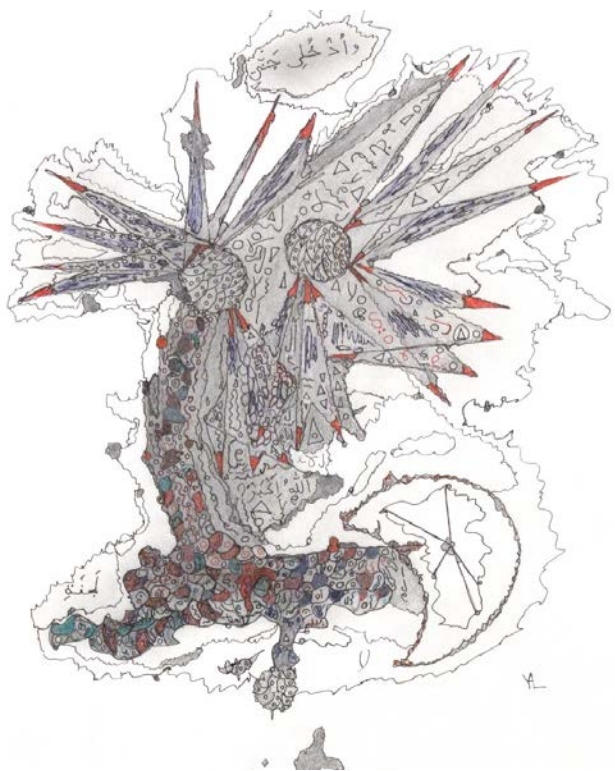
- Played tenor saxophone and flute, he also played oboe and bassoon, both rare in jazz, and non-western instruments such as the bamboo flute, shanai, shofar, xun, arghul and koto.
- Innovator in the blending of jazz with Eastern music
- Wrote *Repository of Scales and Melodic Patterns*
- One of the earliest black artists to embrace Islam
- Visual artist

Purchased from Lateef's wife, Ayesha Lateef

Overview: Musical instruments (tampuri, sitar), music manuscripts, teaching notes, business correspondence, book and method drafts, drawing, personal book collection

Highlights: pedagogical materials; 300+ scores (1960-2010), lead sheets, arrangements; drawing; drafts of *Repository of Scales*

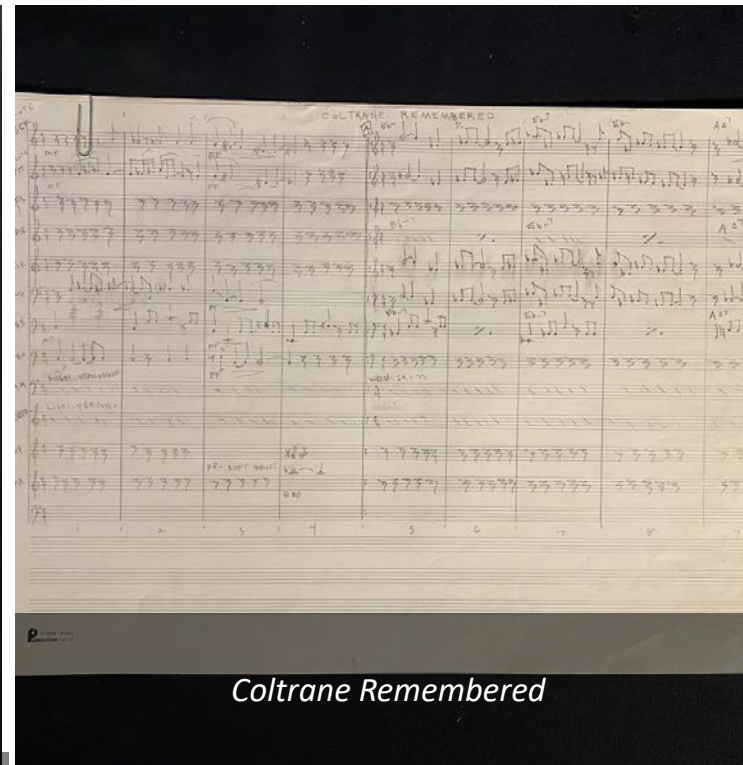
Items from Lateef Collection



Jana'at



Tampuri



Coltrane Remembered

Hip Hop Poster Collection

Overview: 13 items including Concert Posters, flyers, photographs 1973-1990

Acquired at Auction – Bonham's

Supports NMAAM's focus on the 50th anniversary of Hip Hop



Biz Markie by David Corio



Earth, Wind, & Fire and the Ohio Players Concert Poster

Otha Turner (1903-1993) Collection

Otha Turner is one of the last well-known fife players in the vanishing American fife and drum blues tradition

Overview: Photographs, correspondence, press coverage, promotional materials, musical instruments

Highlights: Handmade fife, search warrant, documentation of musical and educational program on Otha Turner held in Nashville

Acquired through a friend of Otha Turner - Bill Ramsey, Nashville attorney



SEARCH WARRANT

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI Case No. _____
COUNTY OF TATE _____

TO ANY LAWFUL OFFICER IN TATE COUNTY:

WHEREAS, DAVID D. FREEMAN, ABC AGENT
_____, affix

~~(he)~~ (has) this day made complaint on oath that ~~(he)~~ ~~(she)~~ ~~(they)~~

1. (Has) ~~(have)~~ reason to believe and (does) ~~(do)~~ believe, that certain things hereafter described are now being concealed in violation of the laws of Mississippi in or about the following place in the County of TATE, and more particularly described as follows:

From the intersection of OB McClinton Road and Gravel Springs Road in Tate County, Mississippi, travel east on Gravel Springs Road for approximately .9 mile to to a woodframe dwelling on the right.

together with all approaches and appurtenances thereto.

2. That the place described above is occupied and controlled by: PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN

3. That said things are more particularly described as follows: ALL ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES TO include MOONSHINE WHISKEY.

4. That (possession of the above described things in in itself unlawful) (or the public has a primary interest in, or primary right to possession of, the above described things), in that said things are:

IN VIOLATION OF SECTION (97-31-27, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, ANNOTATED.

against the peace and dignity of the State of Mississippi.

5. And, the undersigned, having examined and considered said affidavit, and also after having heard and considered evidence in support thereof from the affiants named therein, doth find that probable cause for the issuance of a search in the premises doth exist;

Wherefore, we command you that with such aid as in your judgement shall be needed, you do proceed in the day, or nighttime, to enter by breaking, if necessary, and to diligently search said above described places, or any of them, or said described vehicles and automobiles, in said county and state, for said intoxicating liquor, stills, and intergal parts thereof, making known to the person or persons in control thereof, if any, your authority for so doing, before making a search or forcible entry prior to said search, and if the things specified above be found, you may seize same, leaving a copy of this warrant and a receipt for things taken, and, if practicable, that you bring them before me at my office instanter, and also arrest the person or persons as may be in possession or control thereof, and bring them before me, and have then and there this writ, with your proceedings noted hereon. Herein fail not.



Challenges

- Staffing levels of both institutions
- VU's ability to overwhelm NMMAM's staff with requests and inquiries
- VU's desire to influence exhibit content
- Staffing changes at NMAAM
- Increased work to process special collections; managing staff work loads
- Digital infrastructure improvements needed at VU
- VU relatively new at community engagement

Collections-Related Successes

- Two Buchanan Library Fellowship courses:
Archives and Storytelling: Exploring the Life of Dizzy Gillespie through Photographs & *The Diverse World of Yusef A. Lateef: From Archives to Performance*
- Guest visits Jon Fadis / Maxine Gordon
- MUSL 3155: Women and Music, taught by Cynthia Cyrus: Students in course indexed the Rissi Palmer diaries and wrote a biography.
- Sophomore “Mystery Excursion” to NMAAM
- Free VU student admissions to NMAAM
- Additional donations of photographs of jazz musicians from Hank O’Neal and David Berger
- Internships (VU students at NMAAM)



Other Successes

- Collaborative Programming Initiative through the Vice Provost's Office
- Greater interest in performing the music of African American composers at the Blair School of Music
- 4 Lateef drawings currently on exhibit in the VU Art Gallery
- Student, faculty and staff growth experiences, looking at African American contributions to music through new lenses
- New faculty research interests

Major Jazz Collection Donation: Phil Schaap Collection

Philip Schaap (1951-2021) - American radio host, who specialized in jazz as a broadcaster, historian, archivist, and producer. He began presenting jazz shows on Columbia University's WKCR in 1970, and hosted *Bird Flight* and *Traditions In Swing* on WKCR for 40 years. Jazz instructor at Juilliard.

Collection Highlights:

3,000 Oral Histories with Jazz Musicians

10,000 LPs

6,000 78s

2,000 CDs

3,000 45 rpms

Photos, music scores, discography research/notes, radio broadcasts from 4 stations

Current Status: Digitization of jazz musician oral histories underway; preparing for shipment of physical collection



Discoveries and Lessons Learned

The “Back Drop”

- Recognize that most archives are located within systems of white supremacy, also known as structural racism and are often situated within institutions of power that historically have reinforced systemic oppression.
- Archives have historically been inaccessible or unwelcoming to marginalized groups.
- Archivists and music librarians are an overwhelmingly a white profession.
- Archival collecting has enshrined dominant narratives of rich, white, heterosexual, cisgender men as the most deserving of attention and preservation, while ignoring or erasing narratives of marginalized communities.
- Archival theory is rooted in concepts like provenance that promote social hierarchy and privilege document-creators (those who have the means to create and preserve records) over subjects.



What we can do

- Understand, reflect, and support the institutional missions.
- Understand power structures and differences in staffing.
- Engage collaboratively with marginalized communities, bring an open mindedness to learning and sharing authority.
- Be humble.
- “Show up” and be trustworthy, accountable; don’t promise things you can’t deliver; respond quickly to inquiries about collections.
- Relationships are import; work to prioritize relationships and build in time to reflect on how you can improve your relationships.
- Claim our identity as a white person in a racist society; work to make strategic changes in organizations/communities consistent with anti-racist analysis and vision.
- Admit that this work requires learning from mistakes and be more forgiving of our mistakes and those of others.