



Smithsonian

Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

Verna Gillis audio recordings
(Grabaciones sonoras de Verna Gillis)

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Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections
Title:	Verna Gillis audio recordings (Grabaciones sonoras de Verna Gillis)
Date:	1968-1979, undated (sin fecha)
Identifier:	CFCH.GILLIS
Creator:	Gillis, Verna (Researcher)
Extent:	24 Sound tape reels (Tapes VG-0001 - VG-0021 have been digitally transferred at 96kHz/24-bit with the exception of tapes VG-0018 and VG-0019. Tape VG-0018 has been transferred poorly. Tapes VG-0019, VG-0022, VG-0023, VG-0024 require conservation prior to transfer.)
Language:	Recordings in English and Haitian Creole.
Summary:	<p>~ The Verna Gillis audio recordings consist of 24 open-reel tapes. The field recordings document work done by folklorist Verna Gillis in Haiti, Oklahoma, Philadelphia, and Cuba.</p> <p>~ Las grabaciones sonoras de Verna Gillis constan de 24 cintas de carrete abierto. Las grabaciones de campo documentan el trabajo realizado por la folclorista Verna Gillis en Haití, Oklahoma, Filadelfia y Cuba.</p>

Administrative Information

Processing Information

The tapes in the Verna Gillis audio recordings were processed by Ronnie Simpkins in 2011 as a part of a digitization workflow, with an additional preservation assessment of problematic tapes by Dave Walker in 2016.

The Spanish finding aid description was added by Armando Suárez in 2025.

Nota del archivista

Las cintas de las grabaciones de audio de Verna Gillis fueron procesadas por Ronnie Simpkins en 2011 como parte de un proceso de digitalización, con una evaluación adicional de conservación de las cintas problemáticas realizada por Dave Walker en 2016.

La descripción de la guía de búsqueda en español fue añadida por Armando Suárez en 2025.

Preferred Citation

Verna Gillis audio recordings, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Cita sugerida

Grabaciones sonoras de Verna Gillis, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

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Biographical / Historical

Verna Gillis (born 1942) is a New York-based music producer and holds a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from Union Graduate School. She is known for her successful efforts to bring musicians from various immigrant communities to the forefront of the New York City music scene, helping to usher music from the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America into the mainstream of American life during the 1970s and 80s.

She was an Assistant Professor at Brooklyn College from 1974 to 1980 and at Carnegie Mellon University from 1988 to 1990. From 1972 to 1979, Gillis recorded traditional music in Afghanistan, Iran, Kashmir, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Peru, Surinam, and Ghana.

In 1979, she opened Soundscape, a non-profit multi-cultural performance space in New York City, on west 52nd Street which she directed for the next five years. A New York Times profile from 1990 described the energy and importance of the performance space at this time: Gillis would book "lectures by the jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp, voodoo ceremonies by the Haitian ensemble Troupe Makandal, art rock by the guitarist Arto Lindsay. David Byrne, Hal Wilner and Bill Laswell of the downtown musical crowd were regular listeners. The two giants of free jazz, Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman, collaborated for the first time ever in Soundscape, playing informally together over a two-week span of 1980." [1]

Soundscape also emerged as a leading presenter of a new Latin Jazz sound in New York, featuring the U.S. debut performances of Cuban musicians Daniel Ponce and Paquito D'Rivera. Gillis had to close Soundscape in 1987 after it went too deeply into debt, but she continued to be a force in the music community of the city. Gillis began a new career managing and producing international musicians including Youssou N'dour from Senegal, Yomo Toro from Puerto Rico, Salif Keita from Mali, and Carlinhos Brown from Brazil.

Gillis produced sixteen albums on Folkways/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, which include music from the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Haiti, Cuba, the Gambia, and Philadelphia, PA, as well as American Indian music and

spoken word. She was nominated for two GRAMMYs for her work as a producer: in 2000 for the Archie Shepp/Roswell Rudd Quartet Live in New York, and again in 2001 for Roswell Rudd's MALLcool.

[1] [What Really Makes New York Work: Secret Powers; Verna Gillis: The Muse of the Melting Pot](#) .

Nota biográfica/histórica

Verna Gillis (nacida en 1942) es una productora musical afincada en Nueva York y licenciada en etnomusicología por la Union Graduate School. Es conocida por sus exitosos esfuerzos por llevar a músicos de diversas comunidades inmigrantes a la cumbre de la escena musical neoyorquina, contribuyendo a introducir la música del Caribe, África y América Latina en la vida cotidiana estadounidense durante las décadas de 1970 y 1980.

Fue profesora adjunta en el Brooklyn College de 1974 a 1980 y en la Universidad Carnegie Mellon de 1988 a 1990. De 1972 a 1979, Gillis grabó música tradicional en Afganistán, Irán, Cachemira, Haití, República Dominicana, Cuba, Perú, Surinam y Ghana.

En 1979, inauguró Soundscape, un centro de actuaciones multicultural sin fines lucrativos en Nueva York, en la calle 52 oeste, que dirigió durante los cinco años siguientes. Un artículo del New York Times de 1990 describía la energía e importancia del centro en aquella época: Gillis organizaba "charlas con el saxofonista de jazz Archie Shepp, ceremonias vudú con el grupo haitiano Troupe Makandal, art rock con el guitarrista Arto Lindsay". David Byrne, Hal Wilner y Bill Laswell, entre los músicos del centro, eran espectadores habituales. Los dos gigantes del free jazz, Cecil Taylor y Ornette Coleman, colaboraron por primera vez en Soundscape, tocando juntos de manera informal durante dos semanas de 1980".[1]

Soundscape también surgió como uno de los principales difusores de un nuevo sonido de jazz latino en Nueva York, con las actuaciones debutantes en Estados Unidos de los músicos cubanos Daniel Ponce y Paquito D'Rivera. Gillis tuvo que cerrar Soundscape en 1987 tras endeudarse demasiado, pero siguió siendo una fuerza en la comunidad musical de la ciudad. Gillis empezó una nueva carrera dirigiendo y produciendo a músicos internacionales, como Youssou N'dour, de Senegal, Yomo Toro, de Puerto Rico, Salif Keita, de Malí, y Carlinhos Brown, de Brasil.

Gillis produjo dieciséis discos en Folkways/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, que incluyen música de la República Dominicana, Ghana, Haití, Cuba, Gambia y Filadelfia, así como música indígena americana y spoken word. Fue nominada a dos GRAMMY por su trabajo como productora: en 2000 por el Archie Shepp/Roswell Rudd Quartet Live in New York, y de nuevo en 2001 por el MALLcool de Roswell Rudd.

[1] [What Really Makes New York Work: Secret Powers; Verna Gillis: The Muse of the Melting Pot](#) .

Scope and Contents

The Verna Gillis audio recordings include 24 open-reel tapes, consisting of field recordings documenting the work done by folklorist Verna Gillis in Haiti, Oklahoma, Philadelphia, and Cuba between 1968-1979. Most of the recordings are of vodou ceremonies recorded in Haiti and church services led by Bishop Audrey F. Bronson. Also notable are performances by Comanche artist Joyce Lee "Doc" Tate Nevaquaya, an American Indian flute player.

Alcance y contenido

Las grabaciones sonoras de Verna Gillis incluyen 24 cintas de carrete abierto, que consisten en grabaciones de campo que documentan el trabajo realizado por la folclorista Verna Gillis en Haití, Oklahoma, Filadelfia y Cuba entre 1968 y 1979. La mayoría de las grabaciones son de ceremonias vudú grabadas en Haití y servicios religiosos dirigidos por el obispo Audrey F. Bronson. También destacan las actuaciones de la artista comanche Joyce Lee "Doc" Tate Nevaquaya, una flautista india americana.

Arrangement

The Verna Gillis audio recordings are arranged according to numbers assigned to the open reel tapes by the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections (RRFAC). Where more than one tape from the same day or event exists, those tapes are kept together in the overall arrangement.

Organización

Las grabaciones sonoras de Verna Gillis están organizadas según los números asignados a las cintas de carrete abierto por los Archivos y Colecciones de Folklore Ralph Rinzler. Cuando existe más de una cinta del mismo día o acontecimiento, éstas se mantienen juntas en la organización conjunta.

General

~ Scope and Contents notes for each tape are composed of transcribed notes from the recto and verso of tape boxes. Archivist notes are in brackets.

General

~ Las notas de alcance y contenido de cada cinta se componen de notas tomadas del anverso y el reverso de las respectivas cartucheras de las cintas. Los apuntes del archivista figuran entre paréntesis.

Shared Stewardship of Collections

The Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage acknowledges and respects the right of artists, performers, Folklife Festival participants, community-based scholars, and knowledge-keepers to collaboratively steward representations of themselves and their intangible cultural heritage in media produced, curated, and distributed by the Center. Making this collection accessible to the public is an ongoing process grounded in the Center's commitment to connecting living people and cultures to the materials this collection represents. To view the Center's full shared stewardship policy, which defines our protocols for addressing collections-related inquiries and concerns, please visit <https://doi.org/10.25573/data.21771155>.

Custodia compartida de los archivos

El Centro para la Tradición Popular y el Patrimonio Cultural reconoce y respeta el derecho de los artistas, intérpretes, participantes en el Festival de Tradición Popular, investigadores de la comunidad y portadores del patrimonio a gestionar en colaboración las representaciones de sí mismos y de su patrimonio cultural intangible en los medios producidos, comisariados y distribuidos por el Centro. Poner estos archivos a disposición del público es un proceso continuo basado en el compromiso del Centro de vincular a las personas y las culturas existentes con el material que representan. Para consultar la política general sobre custodia compartida del Centro, en la que se definen nuestros protocolos para tramitar las consultas e inquietudes relacionadas con los archivos, consulte el siguiente enlace <https://doi.org/10.25573/data.21771155>.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Church music
Native American flute
Vodou -- Haiti -- Rituals.

Types of Materials:

Sermons

Names:

Bronson, Audrey F.
Guillén, Nicolás , 1902-1989
Nevaquaya, Doc Tate, 1932-1996

Container Listing

VG-0001: American Indian flute demonstration by Doc Tate, 1978 July 18

1 Sound tape reel (10 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Sioux flute, 5 holes, white cedar, 24"

Cherokee flute, 7 holes, cherry wood, 26"

Comanche flute, 6 holes, red cedar, 24"

3/4" from the mouthpiece chamber a partition divides airflow into two channels

Tracks:

1) "The Eagle," talking "I saw an eagle fly," red cedar flute, composer Doc Tate

2) "Edmund's song" – his son, Comanche flute

3) "When the moon is full, I'll be thinking of your singsong," Comanche flute

4) "Comanche riding song," Comanche flute, two takes

5) "The wind song," Comanche flute

6) "Omaha wind song," Comanche flute, 3rd take - Sioux flute

7) "Sioux song," Richard Foolsbull

8) "Riding song"

9) "If you really loved me, you'd come back"

10) Comanche hymn, "Jesus, I want to be near you all the time"

11) "Comanche moon" 2 takes

12) Social dance similar to a round dance

Comanche greeting and in English

Listening copy available.

Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0002: Oklahoma Pow wow, undated

1 Sound tape reel (10 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: [Performance featuring group chanting and percussion by Ponca tribe and others.]

Inner tribes - Southern Plains

Tracks:

1) Round Dance (Universal), no language, chants, 6 men 8 women

2) War Dance, chant, 8 songs, last 3 in Ponca language from central Oklahoma (3x)

3) Four veterans songs, Kiowa - U.S. wars

4) Gourd dance – Kiowa (3x)

5) Eight "49" songs

Order of songs

Invocation, flag song, round dance, social (gourd), 49, veteran's closing - dedicated to WWII veterans

Listening copy available.

Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0003: Church service led by Reverend Audrey Bronson, reel 1 of 2, undated
1 Sound tape reel (10 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)
Notes: Listening copy available.
Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0004: Church service led by Reverend Audrey Bronson, reel 2 of 2, undated
1 Sound tape reel (10 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)
Notes: Listening copy available.
Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0005: Audrey and Becky I, 1978 September 17
1 Sound tape reel (10 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)
Notes: Ch 1 - Lavallier - Reverend's Ch 2 - Organist, choir
999 - Becky playing
people entering
Rev. [McDougald?]
440 - Choir enters
200 - Change speakers
083 - Rev. Augustin Hill
back to 999 - Chorus singing
670 - Young woman singer to podium
574 - Change singers
480 - back to same singer as 670
402 (changed to mike #2 - 1 making a sound)
Half track stereo, 7.5 ips
Listening copy available.

VG-0006: Audrey and Becky II, 1978
1 Sound tape reel (7 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)
Notes: Listening copy available.
Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0007: Church service led by Reverend Audrey Bronson, 1978 September 17
1 Sound tape reel (10 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)
Notes: Listening copy available.
Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0008: Voodoo ceremony, tape 1 of 3, 1975 March 22
1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)
Notes: Listening copy available.

VG-0009: Voodoo ceremony, tape 2 of 3, 1975 March 22
1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)
Notes: Listening copy available.

VG-0010: Voodoo ceremony, tape 3 of 3, 1975 March 22

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Listening copy available.

VG-0011: Voodoo ceremony, recorded in Haiti, tape 1 of 5, 1975 March 29

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: 7.5 ips

Rada Drums – 3 hand and stick

Petro - 1

Tambourines (?) - 2

Bell

Love - Erzuli

Sea -

Guinea - Bizangos - active, brutal

Listening copy available.

VG-0012: Voodoo ceremony, recorded in Haiti, tape 2 of 5, 1975 March 29

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: 7.5 ips

chain + whip

whistle

[bring on crib-like structure] + leaves

Listening copy available.

VG-0013: Voodoo ceremony, recorded in Haiti, tape 3 of 5, 1975 March 29

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: 7.5 ips

prepare fire

Listening copy available.

VG-0014: Voodoo ceremony, recorded in Haiti, tape 4 of 5, 1975 March 29

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Listening copy available.

7.5 ips

VG-0015: Voodoo ceremony, recorded in Haiti, tape 5 of 5, 1975 March 29

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Listening copy available.

7.5 ips

VG-0016: Performance in Bizoton, Haiti, undated

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: 01 - good [vaccines?], nice steady rhythm

280 – song - relatively clear

great

Listening copy available.

VG-0017: Sermon delivered by Audrey Bronson, 1978 September 17

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Listening copy available.

Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0018: Sermon delivered by Audrey Bronson, 1978 September 17

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Sermon delivered by Audrey Bronson September 17th, 1978.
Labeled Roll #4 and "Box 4 of 5."

Back of box reads "9/17/78 Audrey Bronson's Sermon Roll #4
STEREO 7.5 ips 2TRACK ORIGINAL" and written on spine reads
"Bronson Box 4 of 5" and label on reel reads "22 Bronson box 4 of 5
tail out box 4 of 5." Very poor transfer.

Listening copy available.

Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG0019: Audrey and Becky, 1978 September 17

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Half track stereo, 7.5 ips

VG-0020: Voodoo ceremony recorded in Haiti, tape 1 of 2, 1975 March 22

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: 3.75 ips

Listening copy available.

VG-0021: Voodoo ceremony recorded in Haiti, tape 2 of 2, 1975 March 22

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: 3.75 ips

Listening copy available.

VG-0022: 3-A / [Nicolás Guillén?], 1979 January

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Guillen #4 Cuba

VG-0023: 3-B / [Nicolás Guillén?], 1979 January

1 Sound tape reel (5 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)

Notes: Guillen # 5

Cuba

VG-0024: Bizotan Haiti / Lorin-Frank GMC / 4866, 1968 April 17

1 Sound tape reel (10 inch reel, 1/4 inch tape)