



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Richard Becker Collection of Alex Bradford Gospel Music Materials

NMAH.AC.0761

Doretha K. Williams, program manager and Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, archivist

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Archives Center, National Museum of American History
P.O. Box 37012
Suite 1100, MRC 601
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012
archivescenter@si.edu
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/archives>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Richard Becker Collection of Alex Bradford Gospel Music Materials
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0761
Date:	1950-1997 undated
Extent:	0.25 Cubic feet (2 boxes)
Creator:	Becker, Richard Bradford, Alex
Language:	English Collection is in English.
Summary:	Papers relating to Alex Bradford's career as a composer of Gospel music. Included among the materials are playbills, published sheet music, music manuscripts, gospel song books, play scripts, newspaper clippings and articles, and one LP record.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Richard Becker donated the materials to the Museum in January 2001

Related Materials

Program in African American Culture, 1850-2003

Processing Information

Collection processed by Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, 2015.

Preferred Citation

Richard Becker Collection of Alex Bradford Gospel Music Materials, 1950-1997, undated
Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Biographical / Historical

Alex Bradford was a musical and theater legend who served as a bridge between the gospel and secular worlds in music and performance. Bradford was responsible for the rise and popularity of the mass gospel choir. Alex Bradford was born in Bessemer, Alabama in the late 1920s during an era of racial segregation. A racially-motivated altercation eventually led his mother to send him to New York. Before he left Alabama, Bradford performed on stage and sang in various children's choirs. Bradford was a talented and influential gospel singer, performer, song writer, and stage play author. Richard Becker, an accomplished music producer, worked with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Becker's first collaboration with Bradford resulted in their production of *Black Nativity*, based on a play by Langston Hughes. Commissioned to do a second stage musical, the two created *Your Arms Too Short to Box With God*, based on the Biblical book of Matthew. *Your Arms* was the first musical production fully funded at the Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC. The musical made its debut on Broadway at the Lyceum Theatre, on December 22, 1976. The original cast included Al Green, Patti LaBelle, and newcomer Jennifer Holliday.

Scope and Contents

The collection documents the career of Alex Bradford as a composer of gospel music. Most of these materials relate to the musical production *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God* including playbills and an LP. There is a small amount of music manuscripts and published sheet music of songs written by Bradford. His music is also included in three Gospel song books that form part of this collection. In addition, there is one folder of playscripts for some of Bradford's other musical productions. Biographical information about Bradford and the importance of his work to the African American community is found in the newspaper clippings and articles in the collection. There are playbills from the League of New York Theatres and Producers Antoinette Perry Award (Tony Awards) ceremonies. The materials are arranged in chronological order.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into one series.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Gospel music

Types of Materials:

Clippings -- 20th century
Music -- Manuscripts
Parts (musical)
Playbills
Programs
Scripts (documents)
Sheet music -- 20th century
Songbooks
Sound recordings -- 1930-1990
Theater programs -- 1970-1980

Container Listing

- Box 1, Folder 1 *Sallie Martin Presents Bowles Favorite Combined Heralds*, numbers 28 and 30, Bowles Music House, 1950
- Box 1, Folder 2 *Songs of the Roberta Martin Singers*, volume 3 , 1954
- Box 1, Folder 3 *Martin and Morris Gospel Star Songbook*, number one, Alex Bradford Specials, 1958
- Box 1, Folder 4 *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, advertisement, 1975 December 12
- Box 1, Folder 5 Playscripts , 1975
- Box 1, Folder 6 Playbill, *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, Lyceum Theatre, 1977
- Box 1, Folder 7 Piano/Vocal Selections from *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, 1978
- Box 1, Folder 8 Playbill for *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, Ambassador Theatre, 1980
- Box 1, Folder 9 Playbill for *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, Gershwin Theatre, 1983
- Box 1, Folder 10 Playbill for *What's A Friend For?*, in memory of Alex Bradford, undated
- Box 1, Folder 11 Playscript, *What's A Friend For?*, undated
- Box 1, Folder 12 Playscript, *Black Nativity*, undated
- Box 1, Folder 13 Published sheet music with words and music written by Alex E. Bradford, 1953-1963
- Box 1, Folder 14 Playbill for *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, Ford's Theatre, 1975
- Box 1, Folder 15 Playbills, Shubert Theater , 1977-1978
- Box 1, Folder 16 Blue Pearl Music Corporation banking information, 1977
- Box 1, Folder 17 Playbill for *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, Belasco Theatre, 1980
- Box 2, Folder 1 Newspaper clippings, 1996-1997
- Box 2, Folder 2 Music manuscript, undated

Box 2, Folder 3	Music manuscript , undated
Box 2, Folder 4	Photograph , undated
Box 3, Folder 1	Record for <i>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God</i> , 1975