



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

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Richard Becker Collection of Alex Bradford Gospel Music Materials
Date:	1950-1997, undated
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0761
Creator:	Becker, Richard Bradford, Alex
Extent:	0.66 Cubic feet (2 boxes)
Language:	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 Archives Center, National Museum of American History in January 2001.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Eugene D. Smallwood Gospel Music Collection NMAH.AC.0456

Martin and Morris Company Records NMAH.AC.0492

Wade in the Water Radio Series Collection NMAH.AC.0516

Program in African American Culture NMAH.AC.0408

Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music, Series 36: Folios and Songbooks NMAH.AC.0300

Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Series: Music NMAH.AC.0060

Duke Ellington Collection NMAH.AC.0301

Processing Information

Collection processed by Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, archivist, 2015.

Preferred Citation

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

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

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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

Collection documents the career of Alex Bradford as a composer of gospel music. Most of the materials relate to the musical production *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God* and include playbills and an LP. There are music manuscripts, published sheet music, and three Gospel song books of Bradford's music. In addition, there are playscripts for some of Bradford's other musical productions. Newspaper clippings and magazine articles document the importance of Bradford's creative work to the African American community. Lastly, playbills from the League of New York Theatres and Producers Antoinette Perry Award (Tony Awards) ceremonies are also found among the materials. 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	Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Lyceum Theatre, playbill, 1977
Box 1, Folder 7	Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, piano and vocal selections, 1978
Box 1, Folder 8	Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Ambassador Theatre, playbill, 1980
Box 1, Folder 9	Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Gershwin Theatre, playbill, 1983
Box 1, Folder 10	What's A Friend For?, in memory of Alex Bradford, playbill, undated
Box 1, Folder 11	What's A Friend For?, playscript, undated
Box 1, Folder 12	Black Nativity, playscript, undated
Box 1, Folder 13	Published sheet music with words and music written by Alex E. Bradford, 1953-1963
Box 1, Folder 14	Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Ford's Theatre, playbill, 1975
Box 1, Folder 15	Shubert Theater, playbills, 1977-1978
Box 1, Folder 16	Blue Pearl Music Corporation, banking information, 1977
Box 1, Folder 17	Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Belasco Theatre, playbill, 1980
Box 2	Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, 1977 1 Sound recording
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