
NMAH.AC.0761

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

Processing and encoding funded by a grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources.

2015
Table of Contents

Collection Overview ........................................................................................................ 1
Administrative Information .............................................................................................. 1
Scope and Contents........................................................................................................... 2
Biographical / Historical................................................................................................. 2
Arrangement..................................................................................................................... 2
Names and Subjects ......................................................................................................... 2
Container Listing .............................................................................................................. 4
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

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

Related Materials
Program in African American Culture, 1850-2003, undated

Processing Information
Collection processed by Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, 2015.

Preferred Citation
Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions
Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use
Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.
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 13  Published sheet music with words and music written by Alex E. Bradford, 1953-1963

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 14  Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Ford's Theatre, playbill, 1975

Box 1, Folder 6  Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Lyceum Theatre, playbill, 1977

Box 1, Folder 16  Blue Pearl Music Corporation, banking information, 1977

Box 1, Folder 15  Shubert Theater, playbills, 1977-1978

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 17  Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Belasco Theatre, playbill, 1980

Box 1, Folder 9  Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Gershwin Theatre, playbill, 1983

Box 2, Folder 1  Newspaper clippings, 1996-1997

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 2, Folder 2  Music manuscript, undated
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2, Folder 3</th>
<th>Music manuscript, undated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 4</td>
<td>Photograph, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 1</td>
<td><em>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God</em>, record, 1975</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>