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

NMAH.AC.0761

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

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Richard Becker Collection of Alex Bradford Gospel Music Materials
NMAH.AC.0761

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

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
Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions
Collection is open for research.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 1</th>
<th>Sallie Martin Presents Bowles Favorite Combined Heralds, numbers 28 and 30, Bowles Music House, 1950</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 13</td>
<td>Published sheet music with words and music written by Alex E. Bradford, 1953-1963</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 2</td>
<td>Songs of the Roberta Martin Singers, volume 3, 1954</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 3</td>
<td>Martin and Morris Gospel Star Songbook, number one, Alex Bradford Specials, 1958</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 4</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, advertisement, 1975 December 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 5</td>
<td>Playscripts, 1975</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 14</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Ford's Theatre, playbill, 1975</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 1</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, record, 1975</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 6</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Lyceum Theatre, playbill, 1977</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 16</td>
<td>Blue Pearl Music Corporation, banking information, 1977</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 15</td>
<td>Shubert Theater, playbills, 1977-1978</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 7</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, piano and vocal selections, 1978</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 8</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Ambassor Theatre, playbill, 1980</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 17</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Belasco Theatre, playbill, 1980</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 9</td>
<td>Your Arms Too Short to Box with God, Gershwin Theatre, playbill, 1983</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 1</td>
<td>Newspaper clippings, 1996-1997</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 10</td>
<td>What's A Friend For?, in memory of Alex Bradford, playbill, undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 11</td>
<td>What's A Friend For?, playscript, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 12</td>
<td>Black Nativity, playscript, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 2</td>
<td>Music manuscript, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 3</td>
<td>Music manuscript, undated</td>
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</table>
Box 2, Folder 4    Photograph, undated