
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
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
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*, Ambassor 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 *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, 1975