



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Red Norvo Papers

NMAH.AC.0858

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2004

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Red Norvo Papers
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0858
Date:	1932-1998
Extent:	4 Cubic feet (7 boxes)
Source:	Corlin, Portia Norvo Norvo, Red, 1908-1999
Language:	English
Summary:	Correspondence, transcripts of interviews, photographs, a biography, a discography, an award, printed material and other miscellany documenting the life and career of Red Norvo.

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The collection was donated to the Archives Center by Portia Norvo Corlin on April 1, 2004.

Related Materials

Materials in the Archives Center

Benny Carter Collection (NMAH.AC.0757)

Milt Gabler Papers (NMAH.AC.0849)

Jazz Oral History Program Collection(NMAH.AC.0808)

William Russo Music and Personal Papers(NMAH.AC.0845) Jack Siefert/Woody Herman Collection(NMAH.AC.0659) Ernie Smith Jazz Film Collection (NMAH.AC.0491)

Processing Information

Processed by Matthew Landau Friedman, 2004.

Preferred Citation

Red Norvo Papers, 1932-1997, Archives Center, National Museum of American History. Gift of Portia Norvo Corlin.

Restrictions on Access

Collection is open for research and access on site by appointment. Unprotected photographs must be handled with gloves.

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Biographical / Historical

Along with Lionel Hampton, Red Norvo stands as one of the most celebrated and influential figures in the history of Jazz vibraphone. Norvo was born Kenneth Norville in Beardstown, Illinois on March 31, 1908. He began studying marimba at an early age and played in a rhumba band in 1925. After a brief stint as a tap dancer and conductor on the Vaudeville circuit, Norvo played xylophone with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra. He later married the band's singer, Mildred Bailey, and together they were known as Mr. and Mrs. Swing. From the late 1930's through the early 1940's Norvo lead his own orchestra (with arrangements by Eddie Sauter) and his own sextet.

In 1944 Norvo switched permanently to vibraphone and joined the Benny Goodman Sextet. In 1945 the Red Norvo Selected Sextet (featuring Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie) recorded Hallelujah, Get Happy, Slam Slam Blues, and Congo Blues—an event that many critics regard as helping to commence the bebop era and the establishment of modern jazz. In 1946 Norvo played with Woody Herman's First Herd. But in Norvo's formative years it was the improvisational piano style of Teddy Wilson that most influenced his own style of play. In 1950 Norvo founded the Red Norvo Trio, which included Tal Farlow on guitar and Charles Mingus on bass. Norvo also performed and recorded with a quintet. He settled in Santa Monica, California and became a prolific recording musician with Capitol and other labels. Most of the essential singers of the period either performed or recorded with him: Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday and Peggy Lee to name a few. Norvo notably backed Sinatra on his Australian tour in 1959 and appeared with him in the 1960 film, *Ocean's Eleven*. In 1961 Norvo began to suffer hearing loss, a condition which worsened throughout the remainder of his life. In the 1970's he performed mainly in Las Vegas. He died April 6, 1999 in Santa Monica.

Scope and Contents

The Red Norvo Papers consist of correspondence, transcripts of interviews with Red Norvo, miscellaneous publications (catalogues, monographs, newsletters, pamphlets, programs), periodicals, articles and clippings, photographs, and several miscellaneous documents: various advertisements, a hotel receipt, liner notes, an award from Metronome, a biography prepared by Capitol Records, a Red Norvo discography, a concert engagement advertisement in the form of a postcard, a poster (Benny Goodman), and a Red Norvo concert tour itinerary.

Arrangement

Divided into 7 series: Series 1: Correspondence, 1939-1997; Series 2: Red Norvo Interview Transcripts, 1991-1993; Series 3: Miscellaneous Publications; Series 4: Miscellaneous Documents; Series 5: Periodicals, Series 6: Periodical Articles and News Clippings; Series 7: Photographs.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Jazz
Jazz musicians -- United States
Music -- 20th century
Periodicals
Vibraphone

Types of Materials:

Awards
Biographies
Clippings -- 20th century
Correspondence -- 20th century
Interviews -- 1990-2000
Photographs -- 20th century

Names:

Corlin, Portia Norvo

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1939-1997

The correspondence comprises two folders and is arranged alphabetically by sender. Subseries 1 comprises letters sent to Red Norvo. The Bob Mohr letter refers to an enclosed audiocassette recording, which was not included in the accession. Subseries 2 comprises a single letter from Chuck [Renke?] to Eddie Sauter. The collection does not include any correspondence written by Red Norvo.

Subseries 1.1: Letters to Red Norvo, 1943-1997

Box 1, Folder 1

(Correspondents: Marie C. Brooks, Audrey Mae Dourn, Don Hill, Floyd Levin, Bob Mohr, James C. Petrillo, Fred Reinhardt, Tom Roland, Charles Smith, Joe Spery)

Subseries 1.2: Chuck [Renke?] to Eddie Sauter, February. 10, 1939

Box 1, Folder 2

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Series 2: Red Norvo Interview Transcripts, 1991, 1993

The Jazz journalist, Floyd Levin, conducted his interview in connection with a project at Tulane University. The Bob Mohr interview centers round Norvo's recollections on the life and career of musician Joe Venuti. The Floyd Levin and Bob Mohr transcripts were originally sent to Red Norvo as enclosures with the Levin and Mohr correspondence.

Box 1 Interview by Floyd Levin, November. 20, 1991

Box 1, Folder 4 Interview by Bob Mohr, April 8, 1993

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Series 3: Miscellaneous Publications, 1945-1998

The miscellaneous publications comprise approximately .25 linear feet and are arranged alphabetically by record type from catalogues to programs.

Both catalogues, RCA Victor and Stash-Daybreak, are specifically for commercial audio recordings (audiocassettes and phonograms). The Stash-Daybreak catalogue also contains a memorandum from Bud Curry. The monograph, *Giants of Jazz, Red Norvo* by Don DeMichael was part of a Time-Life series and numbers 52 pp. The monograph includes a print of Norvo (8.5 x 8.5 in.) *The Big Band Jump News Letter* contains an interview with Red Norvo. *The Westways Auto Club News Pictorial* originates from Southern California, Norvo's home. The booking schedule/pamphlet was prepared by the Howard King Agency, presumably Norvo's representative at the time (1970). The United Stations and Great Sounds pamphlets were original enclosures to the Tom Roland correspondence. The Weflen Drum Studios and World Percussion Festival are housed together because they both deal with music education. Most of the programs are for Red Norvo performances, jazz festivals, and tribute concerts to Norvo and/or various jazz contemporaries.

Subseries 3.1: Catalogues (Audio Recordings)

Box 1, Folder 5 RCA Victor (May, 1957), Stash-Daybreak M.O. (1993). Stash-Daybreak catalogue includes Bud Curry memorandum to Red Norvo.

Subseries 3.2: Monographs

Box 4, Folder 2 Esquire's 1945 Jazz Book, 1945

Box 1, Folder 6 Giants of Jazz, Red Norvo by Don DeMichael, 1980

Subseries 3.3: Newsletters

Box 1, Folder 7 Big Band Jump News Letter, September-October 1997

Box 1, Folder 8 Westways Auto Club News Pictorial, December 1952

Subseries 3.4: Pamphlets

Howard King Agency, Booking Schedule, 1970

Box 1, Folder 10 The United Stations/The Great Sounds, (Original Enclosures to the Tom Roland Correspondence), 1985

Box 1, Folder 11 Weflen Drum Studios (undated), World Percussion Festival, 1997

Subseries 3.5: Programs

Box 1, Folder 12 Kayebill (The Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse), 1997-1998 Season, 1997

Box 1, Folder 13 The March of Jazz, March 22-24, 1996

Box 1, Folder 14 Official Program, Los Angeles Rams v. Pittsburgh Steelers, September 21, 1958

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| Box 1, Folder 15 | Pasic' 92 (Percussive Arts Society International Convention), November. 1992 |
| Box 1, Folder 16 | Traditional Jazz Series, University of New Hampshire, The Red Norvo Trio,
September 20, 1982 |
| Box 1, Folder 17 | A Tribute to Benny Carter, October 9, 1994 |

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Series 4: Miscellaneous Documents, 1941-1949

The miscellaneous documents comprise approximately .25 linear feet and are arranged alphabetically by record type from advertisements to tour/performance itinerary. The Benny Goodman poster measures 22.5 x 17.5 in. The liner notes appear to come from recent CD recordings not included in the accession.

Box 5, Folder 5	Advertisements (Mainly musical instruments), undated
Box 1, Folder 18	Hotel Receipt, Hotel Blackhawk, Davenport, Iowa, 1946
Box 4, Folder 4	Liner Notes, Various Dates, Many, undated

Metronome Certificate (Award to Red Norvo), 1946

Box 1, Folder 19

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| Box 1, Folder 20 | Red Norvo Biography (Capitol Records Information Bureau), [1949?] |
| Box 1, Folder 21 | Red Norvo Discography, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 22 | Postcard (Advertisement), Red Norvo Trio at Castle Restaurant, 1955 |
| Box 7, Folder 1 | Poster (Comprised of Benny Goodman News Clippings), undated |
| Box 1, Folder 23 | Tour/Performance Itinerary (Red Norvo), 1941-1942 |

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Series 5: Periodicals, 1941-1997

Regarding the periodicals, *Down Beat* and *Metronome* each comprise their own subseries due to the relatively large number of issues collected. All other periodicals are arranged alphabetically by title. Together, the periodicals comprise approximately 1.75 linear feet. Three periodicals are oversized: L.A. Jazz Scene (14 x 11 in.) and two issues of *Overture* (15 x 11.5 in.) The four periodical articles are arranged alphabetically by article title. Most of the periodicals deal with the U.S. Jazz music scene in the 1940's and 1950's. Subseries 1: *Down Beat* is fairly complete for the decade of the 1940's and is arranged chronologically. Subseries 2 consists of collected editions of *Metronome*. This magazine underwent a number of slight name changes so the editions are arranged this way and also by chronology. A third miscellaneous subseries is arranged alphabetically by name of periodical. This subseries contains a number of television-related periodicals, usually with announcements or advertisements for Red Norvo concert engagements.

Subseries 5.1: *Down Beat*, 1941-1967

Box 1, Folder 24	<i>Down Beat</i> , February 1, 1941-July 15, 1942
Box 1, Folder 25	<i>Down Beat</i> , January. 1, 1945-December 15, 1945
Box 2, Folder 1	<i>Down Beat</i> , January. 1, 1946-July 29, 1946
Box 2, Folder 2	<i>Down Beat</i> , January. 1, 1947-July 16, 1947
Box 2, Folder 3	<i>Down Beat</i> , February. 25, 1948-December 29, 1948
Box 2, Folder 4	<i>Down Beat</i> , January. 14, 1949-December 30, 1949
Box 3, Folder 1	<i>Down Beat</i> , May 16, 1957-April 20, 1967

Subseries 5.2: *Metronome*, (bulk 1943-1947)

Box 4, Folder 5	<i>Metronome</i> , June 1943 (fragment, cover)-December 1945
Box 4, Folder 6	<i>Metronome</i> , January 1946-December. 1946
Box 4, Folder 7	<i>Metronome</i> , May 1948-March 1951
Box 4, Folder 8	<i>Metronome Music USA</i> , October 1955-October 1958
Box 5, Folder 1	<i>Metronome Review of Modern Music</i> , April 1947-December. 1947

Subseries 5.3: Miscellaneous Periodicals, 1949-1997

Box 4, Folder 1	<i>Allegro</i> , January. 1952
Box 3, Folder 2	<i>Browser's Notes</i> , February 1994-October 1997
Box 3, Folder 3	<i>Cadence</i> , December 1982
Box 3, Folder 4	<i>Capitol News from Hollywood</i> , May 1946-October 1950

Box 3, Folder 5	Crescendo, September 1982-October 1982
Box 3, Folder 6	Diners" Club Magazine, December 1959 Fabulous Las Vegas Magazine, July 20, 1957
Box 4, Folder 3	International Musician, August 1951-February 1956 Jazz Beat, Summer 1991
Box 3, Folder 10	Jazz Today, September 1957
Box 3, Folder 11	Jazznyt, 1983
Box 7, Folder 2	L.A. Jazz Scene, August, 1997
Box 3, Folder 12	New Yorker, October 1, 1949
Box 3, Folder 13	Orkester Journalen, January 1956-May 1966
Box 5, Folder 3	Overture, November. 1949-December 1952
Box 5, Folder 4	Overture, April 1953-November 1955
Box 7, Folder 3	Overture, July, 1960-August, 1960
Box 3, Folder 14	Percussive Notes, October 1992
Box 3, Folder 15	Radio Life and Television, November 21, 1948-July 17, 1949
Box 5, Folder 6	Tele-Views, July 8, 1949
Box 3, Folder 16	This Week in Chicago, October 14, 1950
Box 3, Folder 17	TV-Radio Life, November 17, 1956
Box 3, Folder 18	Video Visions, undated

The Jazz Journal, April, May, June 1987

Box 3, Folder 9

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Series 6: Periodical Articles and News Clippings , 1932-1998

The four articles come from The Mississippi Rag, The New Yorker, Percussive Notes, and The Voice Jazz Supplement and are arranged alphabetically by title of article. The news clippings contain both reportage and reviews of Red Norvo concert stage performances and reviews of Red Norvo recordings. Norvo also collected several news items on Benny Goodman.

Subseries 6.1: Articles, 1981-1997

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| Box 3, Folder 19 | Article: "Jazz, the Red Norvo Trio: 1981" by Whitney Balliett, from The New Yorker, June 29, 1981 |
| Box 3, Folder 20 | Article: "Mr. and Mrs. Swing" by J. Lee Anderson, from The Mississippi Rag, April 1992 |
| Box 3, Folder 21 | Article: "Red Norvo: the \$100,000 Mallet Man" by Lisa Rogers, from Percussive Notes, June, 1997 |
| Box 3, Folder 22 | Article: "Red Norvo Played Everything," by Will Friedwald, from The Voice Jazz Supplement, June 10, 1997 |
| Box 3, Folder 23 | Article: "Wailin" at Vail," by Dan Morgenstern, from Down Beat, [1970?] |

Subseries 6.2: News Clippings, 1932-1998

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| Box 5, Folder 2 | News Clippings, June 26, 1932-December 20, 1998,undated |
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Series 7: Photographs, 1989, undated

Most of the photographs are 10 x 8 in. and are housed in one flat box (12.5 x 10.5 x 3 in.). The photographs are arranged into three subseries: Norvo with friends and associates, performance photos, and publicity photos. The folders are arranged alphabetically by folder name. The oversize photograph measures 13.5 x 11 in. Most of the photographs have suffered extensive water and mold damage and a great deal of curling due to dryness.

The photographic files have been divided into three subseries: Red Norvo with friends and associates, Red Norvo on the performance stage and/or identifiable concert stage tours, and Publicity Photographs (of Red Norvo and of various accompanists and associates).

Regarding the photographs of Norvo with friends and associates, these images depict candid gatherings, jam sessions, radio appearances, and the Red Norvo Quintet during a recording session. (These latter photographs of the recording session are blocked along one edge by severe water damage and will need to be handled by a conservator.)

The performance photographs contain images of a number of Norvo bands: Red Norvo King of the Vibes and his All Star Band, the Red Norvo Quintet, the Red Norvo Trio (some with accompanists). The subseries also includes Norvo with other bands: the Benny Goodman Orchestra, the Benny Goodman Sextet, and the Woody Herman's First Herd. (Regarding the file on Red Norvo King of Vibes and his All Star Band, these photographs have been blocked by severe water and mold damage and will need to be handled by a conservator. Also, one of the blocked photographs is from a later date and does not belong here.)

The publicity photographs consist mainly of undated portraits of Red Norvo alone; however there are a few known bands (the Collegiate Harmonators and Red Norvo and his Vagabond Tars.) The collection also includes a folder of publicity shots of different artists including Benny Goodman and Nora Evans. Another singer and an ensemble remain unidentified.

Subseries 7.1: Red Norvo with Friends/Associates, undated

Box 6, Folder 1	Red Norvo and Don Hill (December, 1989) and performance photo of Red Norvo Trio (Tim Talfaro on guitar and Red Kelly on bass) at Kelly's Club, (Tacoma, Washington, undated). Both photographs originally enclosures to the Don Hill letter, December 1989
Box 6, Folder 2	Red Norvo with Unidentified Radio Broadcasters from CBS, NMCA, and NBC, undated
Box 6, Folder 3	Red Norvo with Dinah Shore, undated
Box 6, Folder 4	Red Norvo with Teddy Wilson, undated
Box 6, Folder 5	Red Norvo Quintet in the Recording Studio, [Los Angeles?] (These photographs are blocked along one edge by severe water damage and will need to be handled by conservator.), undated.
Box 6, Folder 6	Red Norvo [at dinner?] with two unidentified figures, undated
Box 6, Folder 7	Red Norvo with various unidentified individuals, one photograph of Red Norvo with Frank Gifford and third unidentified figure, undated

Subseries 7.2: Performance/Tour Photographs, undated

- Box 6, Folder 8 Red Norvo King of the Vibes and his All Star Band These photographs have been blocked by severe water and mold damage and must be handled by conservator. Also, one of the blocked photographs is from a later date and does not belong here.), undated
- Box 6, Folder 9 Red Norvo Quintet, undated
- Box 6, Folder 10 Red Norvo Trio, undated
- Box 6, Folder 11 Red Norvo Trio with flute/saxophone accompanist, undated
- Box 6, Folder 12 Red Norvo Trio, one photo of Norvo and one photo of unidentified bass player, [Red Mitchell?], undated
- Box 6, Folder 13 Red Norvo Trio, Australia Tour, featuring unidentified female singer, [1955?]
- Box 6, Folder 14 Red Norvo with Benny Goodman Orchestra, undated
- Box 6, Folder 15 Red Norvo with Benny Goodman Sextet, undated
- Box 6, Folder 16 Red Norvo and Mildred Bailey, (one performance with Benny Goodman Orchestra) and one with [Paul Whiteman Orchestra?]
- Box 6, Folder 17 Red Norvo with [Woody Herman's First Herd, 1946?]
- Box 6, Folder 18 Unidentified Performances: one photograph of Red Norvo and one proof of unidentified ensemble (not featuring Red Norvo), undated

Subseries 7.3: Publicity Photographs, undated

- Box 6, Folder 19 Red Norvo with Collegiate Harmonators Road Show, Bert Levey Circuit Publicity Dept., Chicago Office, undated
- Box 6, Folder 20 Red Norvo in tuxedo and black tie by Murray Korman, undated
- Box 6, Folder 21 Red Norvo in tuxedo and white tie for the William Morris Agency, undated
- Box 6, Folder 22 Red Norvo playing Deagan Vibraharp, undated
- Box 6, Folder 23 Red Norvo in three-piece suit, undated
- Box 6, Folder 24 [Red Norvo and his Selected Sextet?], undated
- Box 6, Folder 25 Red Norvo (two photos, different photo sessions), undated
- Box 7, Folder 4 Red Norvo and his Vagabond Tars, undated
- Box 6, Folder 26 Various Artists: Benny Goodman, Nora Evans, two unidentified, undated

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