Guide to the Joseph Bruhl Territory Band Collection

NMAH.AC.0869
Kimberley Braun
2005
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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title: Joseph Bruhl Territory Band Collection
Identifier: NMAH.AC.0869
Date: 1925-1938
Extent: 1.33 Cubic feet (3 boxes)
Creator: Bruhl, Joseph R., 1909-
Language: English
Summary: The collection primarily consists of photographs and a scrapbook documenting Joseph Bruhl's experiences playing with territory bands from the early 1920s through the late 1930s. There are also some materials that relate to his personal life.
Digital Content: Image(s): Joseph Bruhl Territory Band Scrapbook

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
Donated to the Archives Center in 2004 by Joseph Bruhl's nephew George M. Bruhl.

Processing Information
Processed by Kimberley Braun (intern), 2005; supervised by Vanessa Broussard Simmons, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Restrictions on Access
The collection is open for research. Unprotected photographs must be handled with gloves.

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Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning intellectual property rights. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.
Biographical Note

Joseph Robert Bruhl (December 7, 1909- October 11, 1980) was born in Plattsmouth, Nebraska and attended Mitchell High School in Lincoln, Nebraska. From the time of his first engagement to play piano at local radio station WMAH at the age of twelve, Joseph Bruhl immersed himself in music. Bruhl played in local bands, and after two years in college decided to become a professional musician. Proficient with the banjo, guitar and piano, Bruhl traveled from the mid-1920s until the late-1930s with what were then popularly known as "territory bands." Such bands journeyed to various locales within a fixed geographic range to play for local events. Bruhl's early engagements spanned Nebraska, Wyoming and the Dakotas, where he accompanied a series of traveling orchestras to play in ballrooms, theaters, and at other local celebrations. Such travels required long trips over unpaved roads, and also necessitated the acquisition of transfer passes from the Lincoln chapter of the American Federation of Musicians (Local # 463), of which Bruhl was a member. From the beginning of his career as a full-time musician, Bruhl avidly collected and preserved performance billings and other memorabilia from his travels.

From 1927 on, Bruhl's performances reached listeners across the West and Midwest on several early radio stations, including WNAX, WOW, KGHL, KFAB, and KFSO. In 1929, Bruhl married Vera Halsted, while he continued to build his career as a musician traveling with various bands. Stints playing with orchestras led by Russ Henegar and Milt Askew in the late 1920s and early 1930s preceded Bruhl's 1934 move to the San Francisco Bay area. From there he assumed his most prominent role as the piano player in Joaquin Grill's Orchestra (1935-1939). With Grill and company, Bruhl traveled even more widely, reaching as far as Lake Tahoe and several southwestern states in 1937 and 1938.

Drafted during World War II, Bruhl became the leader of an Army band unit. After the war, he returned to broadcast radio. Bruhl eventually settled in San Leandro, California, where he opened and operated a successful Fender franchise guitar school and music store in the 1950s and 1960s.

Scope and Contents

This collection is organized into two series. Series One contains personal papers, and Series Two contains scrapbooks. Bruhl's personal papers consist of official documents, such as his high school diploma, United States Armed Services discharge notice, a notarized certification of birth, and the Bruhls' death certificates. Other personal papers include his correspondence, his writings, publicity materials promoting him, and photographs of Bruhl pictured in various stages of his long career. The scrapbook series includes two scrapbooks, one featuring Bruhl's wedding and honeymoon, and the second, larger book documenting Bruhl's travels as a territory band musician.

Bruhl's wedding scrapbook contains records of his 1929 marriage to Vera Bruhl, née Halsted. The scrapbook also includes photographs, postcards and brochures from their honeymoon, as well as several letters and telegrams of congratulation from the Bruhls' family and friends.

Bruhl's territory band scrapbook contains numerous photographs dating to the 1920s and 1930s, including many captioned snapshots of small-town main streets, roadways and local attractions as well as of the musicians and their friends. Accompanying these photographs in the scrapbook are performance billings and posters, letters of recommendation, newspaper clippings, women's dance cards, association and labor union cards, business cards, menus, and radio broadcast schedules. Items appear in the scrapbook roughly chronologically and were grouped and annotated by Bruhl, reflecting his membership in a series of territory bands.
Arrangement

The collection is arranged into two series.

Series 1: Personal Papers, 1922-1980; undated

Series 2: Scrapbooks, 1925-1938

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:
  Bands (Music) -- 1920-1930
  Bands (Music) -- 1930-1940
  Military discharge -- United States
  Musicians -- 20th century
  Weddings

Types of Materials:
  Letters (correspondence) -- 20th century.
  Menus
  Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- 1900-1950
  Posters -- 20th century
  Scrapbooks -- 1900-1950
## Container Listing

**Series 1: Personal Papers, 1922-1980**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1</td>
<td>Folder 1</td>
<td>Official documents, 1922-1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1</td>
<td>Folder 2</td>
<td>Correspondence, 1929-1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1</td>
<td>Folder 3</td>
<td>Writings, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1</td>
<td>Folder 4</td>
<td>Publicity material, 1974, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1</td>
<td>Folder 5</td>
<td>Photographs, circa 1929-1960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Series 2: Scrapbooks, 1925-1938

Box 2, Folder 1  Wedding, 1929
Box 2, Folder 2  Wedding encloures and loose items, undated
Box 2, Folder 3  Wedding, blank pages, undated
Box 2, Folder 4  Wedding covers, undated
Box 3, Folder 1  Territory Band, pages 1-24, early career, circa 1925-1931

Image(s)

Jesse Stone and His Blue Serenaders [card]
1 Item (Black ink on blue paper.; approx. 4" x 7").

Image(s): Jesse Stone and His Blue Serenaders [card].
Stone, Jesse, Advertiser
Card contains a reproduction of a photograph of the band and text: "This Is the Band / that is / Going to Set Sioux / City on Fire / at the / Roof Garden ... In a Battle of Music with Tracy / Brown's Oklahomoans." The band's permanent address is given as 115 West 5th Street, Kansas City, Mo.

Local Numbers
AC0869-0000001.tif (AC Scan No.)

Topic:  Bands (Music) -- 1920-1930
Concerts
Musicians -- 1900-1950

Place:  Iowa
Kansas City (Mo.) -- 1910-1960
Sioux City (Iowa)

Genre/ Form:  Advertising cards
Photographs -- 1920-1930 -- Reproductions

Box 3, Folder 2  Territory Band, pages 25-47, late career, 1937-1938
Box 3, Folder 3  Territory Band, loose scrapbook photographs, pages 39 and 47, undated
Box 3, Folder 4  Territory Band, front cover, undated
Box 3, Folder 5  Territory Band, back cover, undated

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