



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Eubie Blake Letter and Music Manuscripts

NMAH.AC.1400

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Eubie Blake Letter and Music Manuscripts
Date:	1969 - 1969
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1400
Creator:	Blake, Eubie (James Herbert), 1883-1983 (Composer) Dwyer, Lawrence (Donor)
Extent:	0.15 Cubic feet (1 folder)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Collection consists of one letter and six music manuscripts by James H. "Eubie" Blake.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution by Lawrence Dwyer in 2016.

Processing Information

Processed by Nelse Greenway, volunteer, 2019; supervised by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr. archivist.

Preferred Citation

Eubie Blake Letter and Music Manuscripts, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

James Herbert "Eubie" Blake, noted ragtime pianist, was born February 7, 1883 in Baltimore, Maryland. Some government records show his birth year as 1887. His parents Emily "Emma" Johnston and James Sumner Blake had formerly been enslaved. Blake was their only child to live to maturity. Blake learned to play the pump organ and the piano while still a young child. Blake began his career as a pianist, songwriter, and arranger in 1915 in Baltimore playing piano in Aggie Shelton's bordello. He formed a songwriting partnership with Noble Sissle in 1915. In 1921, their musical *Shuffle Along* became a hit on Broadway and ran for fourteen

months. Blake's career spanned his entire life. Perhaps his most recognizable song, *I'm Just Wild About Harry*, is considered a standard of the American musical canon. His life was the subject of the Broadway musical, *Eubie*, that premiered in 1978.

Blake married twice first to Avis Elizabeth Cecelia Lee (1881-1939) the daughter of Lawrence and Florence Lee. After her death from tuberculosis in March 1939, Blake married Marion Gant Tyler (1896-1982), widow of Willie Tyler, violinist, and daughter of James H. Gant and Nattie Thomas, on December 27, 1945 in Norfolk, Virginia. Marion acted as his business manager until her death.

Blake died in Brooklyn, New York, on 1983 February 12. He and Marion are both buried in Cypress Hills Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York.

Sources

The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, page 114. Death certificate for Avis Blake, dated 1939, New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795-1949," database Family Search, accessed July 5, 2019

Certificate of Marriage for James Hubert Blake and Marion Louise Gant, dated 1945 December 27, Virginia Marriage Certificates, 1936-1988, Family Search, accessed July 5, 2019

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of one handwritten letter by Eubie Blake to Professor John Garvey, director of the University of Illinois Jazz Band, dated August 3, 1969. There are five undated manuscripts in Blake's hand of his arrangements for the songs *Manda*, *Poor Archie*, *Brittwood Rag*, *March of the Senegalese*, and the W.C. Handy song, *Yellow Dog Blues*. In the letter Blake requests that Garvey, when playing any of these songs (for which he enclosed the manuscripts,) please mention his (Blake's) name as the arranger.

In the letter Blake also mentions *Here Tis*, but that manuscript was not included in this donation.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged in one series.

Series 1: Letter and Music Manuscripts, 1969

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Arrangement (Music)
Jazz

Types of Materials:

Correspondence -- 1960-1970
Manuscripts -- Music -- 1960-1970
Music -- Manuscripts

Container Listing

Series 1: Letter and Music Manuscripts, 1969

Box 1, Folder 1 Letter and music manuscripts, 1969

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