Descriptive Summary
Title: Glenn Spearman Papers
Dates: 1969-2000
Collection Number: Consult repository.
Creator/Collector: Spearman, Glenn
Extent: Approximately 25 linear feet.
Repository: Mills College
Oakland, California 94613
Abstract: Personal papers of tenor saxophonist Glenn Spearman.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
Contact the Special Collections Curator, F.W. Olin Library, Mills College, for copyright information and permission to publish.
Preferred Citation
Glenn Spearman Papers. Mills College
Acquisition Information
Donated by the family of Glenn Spearman in 2009.
Biography/Administrative History
Glenn Spearman, musician, composer, writer and teacher, was born in New York City on February 14, 1947 then moved west with his mother at an early age. He graduated from Mount Diablo High School in Concord, California in 1964, attended Colorado State University from 1964-1966 on a football scholarship, majoring in sociology, then studied psychology, sociology and anthropology from 1966-1968 at San Jose State. He died in Berkeley on October 8, 1998. Glenn began piano lessons at the age of six and tried several instruments before settling on the tenor saxophone in college. He had important mentors: first, his stepfather, David Ellis, a talented multi-instrumentalist who showed him the basics on piano, violin and sax. He was soon inspired by the post-Coltrane style of Albert Ayler and others and when Donald Garrett told him he sounded like saxophonist Frank Wright, he went to Paris to find him, did so in two days and they began playing together. At the urging of Wright, he turned to “master musician” pianist Cecil Taylor in New York, where he coincided with Jimmy Lyons and Raphe Malik. David Bernstein of the Mills music department has said that “to be in the Cecil Taylor Unit—it’s like getting a Ph.D in improvisation. Glenn was a very advanced virtuoso, a musical thinker and composer.” (Weekly obituary) Spearman’s role in the avant-garde scene had started in Oakland and Berkeley in the late sixties. Inspired by the Black Power movement of those years, he found his vocation in music rooted in black traditions. In 1972 in Paris, he founded his own group, Emergency. He recorded three albums there, performed at the Avignon festival and the American Center for Artists, and appeared on French radio and television. The following year he was artist-in-residence, leader and composer for a student orchestra in Rotterdam. For the next few years, he toured Europe extensively with both his own ensemble and other American and European avant-garde musicians. In 1983 he was back in the States as a member of Cecil Taylor’s New York-based Big Band and Dance Orchestra, as well as the Cecil Taylor Unit. He became a Bay Area resident in 1984 and remained so until his death, with frequent performances elsewhere, including New York, Boston, Montreal, and European venues and jazz festivals. He created or was member of numerous small ensembles—duets, trios, quartets, quintets, his Double Trio—and a few large ones; his musician associates would come together in fluid groupings as opportunity offered all of his performing life. These prominently included Raphe Malik, Donald Robinson, Paul Murphy, Kash Killion, William Parker, Paul Plimley, Ben Lindgren, Lisle Ellis, Larry Ochs, Marco Eneidi, Matthew Goodheart, Berkeley’s Jack Foley, and Mills music professors Chris Brown and William Winant. Spearman was a prolific composer for tenor sax and for small ensembles, and a major part of the archive consists of his scores. 99 Hooker gives an explanation of Spearman’s system of musical notation in his October 1998 tribute on the Beanbender website (see link on Lopez): “He [Glenn] and the people he worked with used a notation they’d developed working with Cecil Taylor, writing the letters and not the notes — ‘A’ ‘Bb’ etc.— on the page. The vertical location and density of the letters signified tempo and dynamics. The letters created a head structure and also the basic improvisational set-up, naturally, with the clumps and strands forming a sort of pictorial chord chart.” Glenn Spearman had come to Mills College as guest lecturer for a seminar given by David Bernstein and Thomas Strychacz in 1992. Bernstein: “The minute Glenn started talking, we knew he was a gifted teacher.” (Mills College Weekly obituary) He joined the Mills music faculty in 1993, taking on the Creative Music Tradition course, lecturing on the jazz greats, and eventually adding a course in the practice of music improvisation. He taught at Mills for six years and had
private students as well. In general, he was well-known as a mentor to many young local musicians in the Bay Area and looked for opportunities for them to perform for local audiences. Over the years he had numerous artist and teaching residencies elsewhere. He was visiting professor at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, and played annually at nearby Fire in the Valley festival. Closer to home, he was artist-in-residence at Marin Headlands Institute and board member of New Langton Arts in San Francisco. Spearman received a “Goldie” award from the San Francisco Bay Guardian in 1992 for taking “fringe music to the future.” He was also nominated twice for a “whammie Music Award” by the SF Weekly. His umbrella work, an ongoing collection of poetry, philosophical writings, and lyrical theories about music over the years, entitled Musa-Physics—Myth, Science, Poetics—was published in 1996.

Scope and Content of Collection
Personal papers of tenor saxophonist Glenn Spearman. Record Group 1. Papers, consists of material from Spearman’s working life as an artist and composer, performer and teacher. Subgroup 1 includes reviews and chronologies of Spearman’s creative history: resumes, biographies, artist statements, discographies; Subgroup 2 consists of original artwork; Subgroup 3 consists of Spearman’s writings including poetry and prose, “Musaphysics” materials, compositions and teaching materials, and writings by colleagues and friends; Subgroup 4, Music, consists of compositions, performances, teaching materials; Subgroup 5 consists of performance ephemera including flyers, performance programs, and press clippings; Subgroup 6. Correspondence; Subgroup 7, Death of Spearman, includes responses, memorial statements, concerts, and ceremonies. Record Group 2, Photographs, consists of snapshots of family and friends and photographs of Spearman and his musician associates in performance or posed for publicity. See also Correspondence files for Janice Bradley, Michael Ehlers, J.D. Parran, and Michael Wilderman. Record Group 3, Personal effects, consists of diverse performance-related items, materials for teaching, and small personal notebooks. Teaching materials for the classroom include notes and ideas on music, photocopies on jazz and ethnomusicology, and periodical issues with features on black jazz. There are 47 student essays and a copy of Matthew Goodheart’s master’s thesis, all dated 1996. Record Group 4, Glenn Spearman Library, reflects Spearman’s wide range of reading and inspiration, including books, literary periodicals, and reference materials collected by Spearman on a diverse range of topics. Record Group 5, Audio-visual Materials, consists of musical recordings in several media of Spearman’s and others’ performances.

Indexing Terms
Improvisation (Music)
Avant-garde (Music)
Saxophone music.
Jazz.
Music -- 20th century -- Philosophy and aesthetics.

Spearman Inventory