Guide to the Bob Arnold Collection ARS.0080

Finding aid prepared by Franz Kunst
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Descriptive Summary
Title: Bob Arnold Collection
Dates: 1958-2005
Collection number: ARS.0080
Creator: Arnold, Bob

Collection size: 14 boxes: 135 open reel tapes; 94 audiocassettes; 17 videocassettes; approx. 10 boxes of program notes, correspondence, and research
Repository: Archive of Recorded Sound

Abstract: Bob Arnold was a popular music historian and collector. His collection consists of his research and correspondence, and includes scrapbooks, program notes, interviews on cassette, and compilations on open reel tape drawn from his music collection.

Language of Material: English

Access
Open for research; material must be requested at least two business days in advance of intended use. Contact the Archive for assistance.

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Preferred Citation

Source
The Bob Arnold Collection was donated to the Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound by Carla Foster in 2006.

Sponsor
This finding aid was produced with generous financial support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Scope and Contents
The Bob Arnold Collection is named for Robert Louis Arnold (1922-2005), a researcher and collector of popular music from the 1920s through the 1940s who was based in Albany, California. His collection consists of his research projects and notes, correspondence and interviews with musicians, composers, and other researcher/discographers, and compilations he assembled on open reel tape. These tapes, along with program notes, were informally distributed to libraries as teaching aids. Arnold also kept several chronological scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, and indexed them meticulously.

Perhaps his most successful project was about a 1930s singer named Midge Williams. His tenacity resulted in bringing to light a remarkable amount of detail about Williams' life, as well as her family performing group the Williams Quartette, the Williams' history in Allensworth, California (an African-American agricultural community in Tulare County), and the manager of the Williams (and arranger/composer in his own right) Roger Segure. Arnold appeared to be in the process of assembling a book based on this research, and a few typescript chapters appear in the collection.

Indexing Terms
Popular music

Box 9, Box 2

1. Research Correspondence
Scope and Contents
Includes communication with the Association of Recorded Sound Collections (and its Northern California chapter), George Blacker, Ralph J. Gleason, John Hammond, Bill Hebden (Swingtime Records), Roger Kinkle, Len Kunstadt, Muzzy Marcellino, Brian Rust, Tom Tsotsi, and Bozy White.

2. Research Projects
2. Research Projects

A-Z subject research folders

Box 3

A-Z subject research folders

Physical Description: 41 folders

Scope and Contents

Includes correspondence with artists, songwriters, family members, associates, record dealers, researchers, archives, vital records offices, etc. Folders are labeled as follows:

"Betty Coed"; Biltmore Trio; Ernie Birchill; Werner Bochmann; Neil Buckley; Coakley Orchestra; Bernie and Walter Cummins; Gladys DuBois; Ben Ellison; English Songwriters; European Personalities; Emil H. Flindt; Jack Fulton; Eddie Gale; Bill Grantham; James Harkins; "I'm Confessin"; Stan Jacobsen; Grace Johnston; Loretta Lee; Everett Marshall; Jack Miller; Mills Brothers; Bill Moreing; Jacques Renard; Revere Sisters (aka Rhythm Girls); Roy Ringwald; Milt Shaw; Nathaniel Shilkret; Paul Small; Soundies; "Star Dust"; Philip Steele; Harold Stern; Bert Stock; Tamara; Three Girl Friends; Paul Tremaine; Vera Van; Jane Vance; Sox Wilson and Coot Grant.

Box 9

Composer/Song notes

Physical Description: 1 folder
After receiving and enjoying a tape of rare Midge Williams recordings in the mid-1980s, Arnold was drawn to find out more about her. This was quite a challenge, given the paucity of available information at the time. Virginia Louise "Midge" Williams was born in Portland, Oregon in 1915, but was raised in Allensworth and later Berkeley, California. By the mid-1920s, Midge was performing with her brothers John Lewis, Jr., Charles, and Robert as the Williams Quartette on the Fanchon and Marco circuit. The collection contains original promotional photographs of the group. By the early 1930s, the group, then known as the Williams Four, was managed by Roger Segure, a pianist and composer who is known for his arrangements for Louis Armstrong, Jimmy Lunceford, Andy Kirk, John Kirby, Mary Lou Williams, Red Allen, and Alvin Rey. Segure also worked with Langston Hughes, and a photocopy of a Hughes letter to Segure is included here. In 1933, Segure booked a tour of Asia for the Williams. Midge Williams made a few (now very rare) records in Japan, including a version of St. Louis Blues partially sung in Japanese that was to gain some notoriety in later years. There are playbills, contracts, catalogs, record labels and correspondence from this trip in the collection, which came to Arnold by way of Segure's widow.

Midge Williams might well be best known for her association with Louis Armstrong from 1938 to 1941. Although she never recorded with him, they toured around the country and she received a good deal of press (which Arnold compiled). Having moved to New York in 1936, Williams established her reputation through many radio engagements, including Rudy Vallee's Fleischmann's Hour, Al Jolson's Shell Chateau, and on several NBC sustainers (short, unsponsored programs). Besides the Japanese Columbia recordings, she also made records with Teddy Wilson, Frank Froeba (with Bunny Berigan on the session), Miff Mole (with Harry James and Glenn Miller), Lil Armstrong, and with a revolving unit known as The Jazz Jesters (with members at various times including Raymond Scott, Edmund Hall, Frankie Newton, Buster Bailey, John Kirby, and Charlie Shavers). She also recorded under her own name in 1940. Sadly, her career stalled in the early 1940s, and her last appearance was on San Francisco radio station KFRC's Jack Webb Show in 1946, delivering a version of "Cow Cow Boogie." Midge Williams, alone and impoverished, died of tuberculosis at San Francisco General Hospital in 1952. Arnold was able to track down the only surviving member of the Quartette, Robert Williams, in 2000, and uncovered enough information to pen the liner notes to a reissue of Midge Williams. Arnold appears to have been working on a full-length biography, but only a few draft chapters survive.

Scope and Contents
Book typescript drafts, chapters 2-6 ; Segure original files (correspondence, contracts, etc.) ; Original photographs ; Various photocopies ; Gloria Segure correspondence ; Allensworth history ; Photocopied press clippings ; CD-R of Midge Williams' Nipponophone (Columbia Japan) recordings
Subjects and Indexing Terms
Segure, Roger, 1905-2000
Williams, Midge
Jazz
2. Research Projects

Review for ARSC Journal of Black Entertainers in African-American Newspaper Articles (published?) 20...

Box 11

Box 2

Song Hits 1936-1953, and other lists of hit songs
Physical Description: 1 folder

3. Scrapbooks

Physical Description: 18 folders
Scope and Contents
Mostly obituaries and criticism from the entertainment world. Majority taken from the San Francisco Chronicle, including columns by Ralph Gleason, Phil Elwood, Joel Selvin, Herb Caen, etc. Both photocopies (all pre-1964 are copies) and original clippings.

Box 4

Scrapbooks I - VII 7/1926-1/79 1926-1979

Box 8

Scrapbooks VIII - XIV 12/1979-12/93 1979-1993

Box 9

Scrapbooks XV - XVII 1/94-12/04 1994-2004

4. Program Notes

Physical Description: 15 folders

Box 9

Contents listing for tape compilations: 1924A-1952B, SP and HR series, etc.

Box 11

Thematic compilation folders
Scope and Contents
Russ Morgan ; The Ink Spots ; Reinald Werrenrath ; Dixieland Flavor ; WWI ; Love and Romance ; Hit Parader 1941, 1942, 1943 ; New York ; Memories (for Gray family) ; The Acoustic 20s ; The 20s ; The Early 30s.

5. Indexes

Box 12

Current Projects

Box 13, Box 12

Records by Song Title A-Z

Box 11

Scrapbook index

6. Tapes (open reel)
6. Tapes (open reel)

**Acoustic 20s, Electric 20s**

- **Box 15**
  - **Acoustic 20s, Electric 20s**
  - Physical Description: 9 7" open reel tapes

- **Box 5**
  - **1924A-1940A**
  - Physical Description: 38 7" open reel tapes

- **Box 6**
  - **1940A2-1952B plus misc**
  - Physical Description: 41 open reel tapes 36 7" ; 5 3-5"

- **Box 7**
  - **SP-001-10, SP099-101, HR-2, HR-A-Y, Misc.**
  - Physical Description: 37 open reel tapes 30 7" ; 7 3-5"

- **Box 10**
  - **Misc.**
  - Physical Description: 26 7" open reel tapes

- **Box 15**
  - **7. Tapes (audiocassettes)**
  - Physical Description: 94 audiocassettes
  - **Scope and Contents**
  - Includes six on Midge Williams; Tom Coakley private recording from 1975; Interviews 1990-2001 with Max Herman, Harry Bluestone, Peter Henderson, Rabbi John M. Sherwood, Sally Henderson Maxwell, June Shafer Ellis, Mrs. George Ward (Vera Van), Stella Friend Harris, Walter Cummins, Ron Harris, Bernard J. Cummins, Jr., Dick Webster, Harris, Ellis and Maxwell, Gloria Segure, Robert Williams, Penny Eldridge, Philip John Steele, Bonnie Anderson/Geraldine Sour, Dorothea Civitarese, Dorothy Grantham, Mary Miller, Altman, Sherwood, Perkins, Laura Clark, Leon and Virginia Green.

- **Box 10**
  - **8. Videocassettes (miscellaneous)**
  - Physical Description: 17 videocassettes