Guide to the Bernard Johnson Papers MS.P.053

Finding aid prepared by Joanna Lamb; Judy Chou
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Bernard Johnson papers

Title: Bernard Johnson papers
Identifier/Call Number: MS.P.053
Contributing Institution: Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 7.3 linear feet (7 boxes and 1 oversize folder)
Date: 1957-1997
Abstract: This collection documents the career of Bernard Johnson, a dancer, costume designer, director, choreographer, and teacher who served as the first professor of costume design at UC Irvine from 1991-1997. Materials document Johnson's professional work in theatre, film, and television, as well as his tenure in academia. The collection consists of original costume design artwork, clippings, correspondence, photographs, negatives, ephemera, and other material.
Creator: Johnson, Bernard, 1936-1997
Access
The collection is open for research.
Access to original video recordings is restricted; researchers may request use copies.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
For the benefit of current and future researchers, please cite any additional information about sources consulted in this collection, including permanent URLs, item or folder descriptions, and box/folder locations.
Acquisition Information
Processing History
Processed by Judy Chou, 2014.
Biography
Born on December 12, 1936, Bernard Johnson was raised in Detroit, Michigan with four sisters and one brother. At the age of eleven, Johnson voluntarily attended ballet classes with his younger sister and soon became enthralled with the art of dance. He also credited his fascination with dance to the film Red Shoes, which he viewed as a child.
Even though Johnson started off as a dancer, he soon became involved in the art of costuming. In 1954 at the age of 18, he won a scholarship to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York. At FIT, he studied fashion design and dancing, which included modern dance, tap dancing, classical, jazz, Katherine Dunham techniques, and other styles. At 5’2”, Johnson became part of the New York Negro Ballet ensemble (now the Ballet Americana) between the ages of 18 and 19. It was around this time that he met and married fellow dancer Cleo Quitman, with whom he had one son, Byian. He became the lead dancer of the “Bluebird pas de deux” from the theatrical production of Sleeping Beauty, which was held at the Edinburgh Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. During this time, he also danced the mambo and samba onstage with Josephine Baker.
After graduating, Johnson amassed an extensive list of credits as a director, choreographer, performer, costume designer, and teacher, working in theatre, television, and film. He co-choreographed, directed, and designed the costumes for Broadway Soul at Lincoln Center as a Broadway veteran. He also performed and directed numerous theatrical productions throughout the United States, South Korea, and Russia. He had his own costume design company in New York called Estudio Inc. and was eventually nicknamed the “Black Cecil Beaton.”
Throughout his career, Johnson won numerous awards including an Emmy Award for costume design for To All My Friends in 1972, a Harveys Bristol Cream Tribute to Black Designer Award in 1980, and two Tony Awards for Raisins in 1974 and Eubie in 1979. In 1977, Johnson was inducted to the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame for Costume Design. His costumes were also showcased at the now defunct Black Fashion Museum in Harlem and later Washington, D.C. Johnson taught at various schools throughout the nation, including the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, the New Dance Group Studios, the American Dance Festival (Duke University), Clark Center for the Performing Arts, and UC Irvine’s Dance Department. He also taught in Moscow, Russia in 1992 under the auspices of the American Dance Festival and was an associate director of Dance Ellington.
In 1991, on the recommendation of UC Irvine dance professor and choreographer Donald McKayle, Johnson was recruited as the first UC Irvine professor of costume design for dancers, obtaining an appointment as an assistant professor of dance. He taught students how to draw designs, create patterns, sew, and choose and work with different patterns. He also designed costumes for faculty and student concerts. On January 22, 1997, Johnson passed away at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital in Manhattan, New York at the age of 60. He was survived by his son, a grandson, two sisters, and partner George R. Bergeron. A public memorial service was held for Johnson at UC Irvine’s Concert Hall. A theatrical tribute was also held in his honor at UC Irvine’s School of Arts Dance Vision II concert.

Collection Scope and Content Summary

This collection documents the career of Bernard Johnson, a dancer, costume designer, director, choreographer, and teacher who served as the first professor of costume design at UC Irvine from 1991-1997. Materials document Johnson’s professional work in theatre, film, and television, as well as his tenure in academia. The collection consists of original costume design artwork, clippings, correspondence, photographs, negatives, ephemera, and other material.

Collection Arrangement

This collection is arranged in 7 series:

- **Series 1. Correspondence and biographical materials, 1975-1997, undated, 0.25 linear feet**
  - Overview: Correspondence from friends, family, students, and colleagues. Personal correspondence includes letters, postcards, and greeting cards. Professional correspondence includes contracts, agreements, resumes, and awards pertaining to Johnson’s theatrical career. A transcript of a biographical interview proofread by Johnson is included.

- **Series 2. Photographic materials, 1978-1979, 1993-1995 and undated, 0.5 linear feet**
  - Physical Description: Photographs, negatives, and reproductions of artwork.

- **Series 3. Original artworks, 1984, 1993 and undated, 3.3 linear feet**
  - Materials include original designs and sketches.

- **Series 4. Video recordings, 1990-1995, undated, 0.1 linear feet**
  - Materials include video recordings of Johnson’s work.

- **Series 5. Clippings, 1957-1993 and undated, 2.1 linear feet**
  - Clippings include reviews, articles, and interviews.

- **Series 6. Theatrical printed ephemera, 1973-1996, undated, 0.8 linear feet**
  - Materials include programs, brochures, and flyers.

- **Series 7. UC Irvine, 1991-1995, undated, 0.25 linear feet**
  - Materials include documents related to Johnson’s tenure at UC Irvine.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

- Johnson, Bernard -- Archives
- University of California, Irvine. -- Faculty -- Archives
- Costume design drawings.
- Costume designers
- Ephemera -- 20th century
- Theater -- 20th century -- Archives

Correspondence and biographical materials Series 1. 1975-1997, undated

- Physical Description: 0.25 Linear feet
- Series Scope and Content Summary
  - This series is primarily comprised of personal and professional correspondence from Johnson’s friends, family, students, and colleagues. Personal correspondence includes letters, postcards, and greeting cards. Professional correspondence includes contracts, agreements, resumes, and awards pertaining to Johnson’s theatrical career.

- Series Arrangement
  - This series is arranged alphabetically.

Box 1, Folder 1: Curriculum vita and letterheads 1992 and 1996
Box 1, Folder 2: Interview transcript, obituaries, and reproductions of artwork 1995 and 1996
Box 1, Folder 3-4: Personal letters, postcards, and greeting cards 1980-1989 and undated
Box 1, Folder 5: Professional letters, contracts, and resumes 1975-1983 and undated

Guide to the Bernard Johnson Papers MS.P.053

Physical Description: 0.5 Linear feet

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series consists of original and reproduction photographs, negatives, slides, record cover sleeves, and oversize posters. While the bulk of the materials document theatrical productions for which Johnson designed, select photographs depict family members and events from Johnon's personal life. Productions include Bingo Long, Enbrie, Eubie, The Copa Girls, and other performances. Select posters are signed by Johnson.

Series Arrangement

This series is arranged alphabetically.

Box 1, Folder 6
Negatives and slides of Crazy Horse entertainment event and unidentified productions undated

Box 1, Folder 7-8, Box 8, Folder 1
Photographs of family, Bingo Long, The Copa Girls, Enbrie, and Eubie undated

Box 8, Folder 1
Photographs of family, professional headshots, The Copa Girls, and other unidentified productions 1978-1979 and undated

Folder XOS 1

Box 8, Folder 2
Record covers of Don't Knock My Love, Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death, and The Temptations undated

Box 8, Folder 3
Reproductions of photographs of Melba and other unidentified productions undated

Original artworks Series 3. 1984, 1993 and undated

Physical Description: 3.3 Linear feet

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series contains original artworks created by Bernard Johnson in the course of his career as a designer for theatre and fashion. While the bulk of the materials are original 16 x 20'' works of art on paper created for theatrical productions, select items are high-resolution reproductions printed on 8 1/2 x 11'' paper. Color swatches, fabric swatches, pattern cutout drafts, and photographs are also included.

Johnson worked in a variety of artistic media, including pencil, marker, pastel, pen and ink, and paint. Many artworks contain inscriptions identifying the name and origin of the theatrical production for which the design was created, though it is unclear if all of these were the theatrical titles. A small selection of works are signed by Johnson's costume design assistant George R. Bergeron, with whom Johnson coauthored a manuscript entitled "Costume Design for Dancers: A Basic Guide," also included in this series. The manuscript contains copies of handwritten notes with accompanying reproductions of artwork. A number of Johnson's drawings were inspired by celebrities, including Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Gladys Knight, Josephine Baker, Louis Armstrong, Nat Cole, Stevie Wonder,The Pirs, The Supremes, and The Temptations. While works are identified by celebrity names, there is no indication that Johnson was commissioned to design for each individual.

Series Arrangement

This series is arranged in three subseries:

Subseries 3.1 Reproductions, 1984 and undated, 1.1 linear feet
Subseries 3.2 Sketchbooks, undated, 1.1 linear feet
Subseries 3.3 Unbound artworks, 1979, 1993 and undated, 1.1 linear feet
Reproductions Subseries 3.1 1984 and undated

Physical Description: 1.1 Linear feet

Subseries Scope and Content Summary

This subseries contains reproductions of original artworks and manuals on 8 1/2 x 11'' paper. Select reproductions have accompanying photographs depicting the live performances for which the costumes were designed.

Subseries Arrangement

This subseries is arranged alphabetically.

Box 1, Folder 11 Carmina Burana undated
Box 1, Folder 11 A Chance to Sit Down undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Cheries undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Daughter of the Garden undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Escuela Bolera undated
Box 1, Folder 11 It was just like magic undated
Box 1, Folder 11 The Long Goodbye undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Negro Spirituals undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Rainbow Etude undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Rex Cabaret & Casino undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Secret Combinations undated
Box 1, Folder 11 Soaring 1984
Box 1, Folder 9-11 Unidentified productions undated

Sketchbooks Subseries 3.2 undated

Physical Description: 1.1 Linear feet

Subseries Scope and Content Summary

This series contains 16 x 20'' original artworks assembled in sketchbooks. Select artworks include accompanying color swatches or notes.

Subseries Arrangement

This subseries is arranged alphabetically.

Box 3, Folder 5 The Apollo undated
Box 2, Folder 1 Carribean undated
Box 2, Folder 2 Circus Metamorphosis undated
Box 2, Folder 3 The Copa Girls undated
Box 2, Folder 4 Eubie undated
Box 2, Folder 1-4, Box 3, Folder 1-5 Unidentified productions undated

Unbound artworks Subseries 3.3 1993 and undated

Physical Description: 1.1 Linear feet

Subseries Scope and Content Summary

This subseries contains 16 x 20'' original and reproduced artworks of Bernard Johnson and George R. Beregeron. Artworks include metamorphic, gothic, and ballet themes with accompanying fabric swatches and notes.

Subseries Arrangement

This subseries is arranged alphabetically.

Box 5, Folder 5 Eubie undated
Box 5, Folder 3 Folies Bergere undated
Box 5, Folder 3 Le Jaz Hot - All that Jazz undated
Box 4, Folder 1 Puerto Rico undated
Box 5, Folder 1-5, Box 4, Folder 1-6 Unidentified productions 1993 and undated
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 6, Folder 1-5</th>
<th><strong>Video recordings</strong> Series 4. 1990-1995, undated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Physical Description: 0.1 Linear feet</td>
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<td>Access to original video recordings is restricted; researchers may request use copies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Series Scope and Content Summary</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This series consists of video recordings documenting select performances and educational events in which Johnson participated, primarily at the American Dance Festival.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 8, Folder 4-8, Box 6, Folder 6-10</th>
<th><strong>Clippings</strong> Series 5. 1957-1993 and undated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 2.1 Linear feet</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Series Scope and Content Summary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This series contains clippings from newspapers and magazines documenting Johnson’s professional and personal life. Clippings include critic reviews, fashion and entertainment news, students’ achievements, biographies, and obituaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The bulk of the series is comprised of critical reviews of Johnson’s theatrical work as a dancer, costume designer, or director. Reviews of <em>American Dance Festival</em>, <em>Ballet Hispanico</em>, <em>Bubbling Brown Sugar</em>, <em>The Copa Girls</em>, <em>Daddy Goodman</em>, <em>Eubie</em>, <em>Negro Ballet</em>, <em>New Jack City</em>, <em>Sophisticated Ladies</em>, and other productions are included. Select clippings have accompanying photographs and resumes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clippings were taken from a number of regional, national, and international publications, including <em>Ebony</em>, <em>Los Angeles Times</em>, <em>New York Times</em>, <em>Variety</em>, <em>The Irvine World News</em>, and others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 6, Folder 11</th>
<th><strong>Theatrical printed ephemera</strong> Series 6. 1973-1996, undated</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Description: 0.8 Linear feet</td>
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<td><strong>Series Scope and Content Summary</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This series contains periodicals, playbills, fliers, and programs documenting theatrical productions, academic programs, and events that Johnson was involved with throughout his career as a costume designer, director, and teacher. Ephemera from <em>After &amp; Hours</em>, <em>The Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame 1977</em>, <em>The Copa Girls</em>, * Harold &amp; Nicholas*, <em>Helen</em>, <em>Raisins</em>, and other productions is included. Performances were produced by the American Dance Festival (ADF), the UCI Dance Department, Moorpark College, California State University Los Angeles, California State University Long Beach, First Union Methodist Church, and the Palm Springs Desert Museum. Select ephemera contains interfiled correspondence or reproductions of Johnson's artistic works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Series Arrangement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This series is arranged alphabetically.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 6, Folder 12-15</th>
<th><strong>Periodicals of Black Stars, Footlights, Focus</strong>, and other publications 1974-1982, 1996 and undated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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UC Irvine Series 7. 1991-1995, undated

Physical Description: 0.25 Linear feet

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series contains ephemera and event planning records dating from Johnson's tenure as the assistant professor of costume design at UC Irvine from 1991-1997. Records include musical compositions, blueprints, memos, schedules, correspondence, contracts, evaluation forms, fliers, receipts, and other material. Productions documented include *Fiesta Fantastica*, *New Slate*, *Strutin*, *Metamorphis*, *Caribe*, *Carribean*, *Down in Honkey Tonk Town*, and *Juke Joint*. Materials also document the organization of dance symposia and other events with which Johnson was involved.

Series Arrangement

This series is arranged alphabetically.

Ephemera

Box 7, Folder 3

Playbills, receipts, correspondence, clippings, and other material 1991-1994 and undated

Event planning records

Box 7, Folder 4

Contracts, schedules, correspondence, and other material regarding a dance symposium 1992-1995

Box 7, Folder 5

Musical composition, contact sheet, and correspondence relating to the *Juke Joint* production 1993

Box 8, Folder 9

Reproductions of blueprints and memos undated