Register of the Paul Desmond Papers

Processed by Shan Sutton
Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections
University of the Pacific Library
3601 Pacific Ave.
Stockton, CA 95211
Phone: (209) 946-2404
Fax: (209) 946-2942
URL: http://www.pacific.edu/Library/Find/Holt-Atherton-Special-Collections.html
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Register of the Paul Desmond Papers

Collection number: MSS 309

Holt-Atherton Department of Special Collections
University of the Pacific Library
Stockton, California

Processed by:
Shan Sutton

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Paul Desmond Papers

Dates: 1890-1991

Bulk Dates: (bulk, 1940-1970)

Collection number: MSS 309

Creator: Desmond, Paul, 1924-

Collection Size: 1 linear foot

Repository: University of the Pacific Library. Holt-Atherton Dept. of Special Collections

Stockton, California 95211

Abstract: The collection consists of the papers of jazz saxophonist Paul Desmond. Includes 36 pages of diaries (memos to myself) from 1947-1955, over 300 letters to and from Desmond throughout his childhood and adult life, nearly 400 photographs, and a variety of other documents.

Physical location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the library’s online catalog.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

Collection open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

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Biography / Administrative History

Paul Desmond is widely considered one of the great alto saxophonists in jazz history. He was an essential member of the Dave Brubeck Quartet in the 1950s and 1960s. As a member of the Quartet, Desmond wrote "Take Five," the best selling jazz single in history. Desmond was born Paul Emil Breitenfeld in San Francisco on November 25, 1924. He played piano, clarinet, and saxophone while growing up, but focused on alto saxophone during his professional career.

Desmond and Brubeck formed the core of the Brubeck Quartet in 1951. Over the next sixteen years the group was one of the most popular acts in jazz, touring the world and releasing several best-selling albums. Desmond also recorded and performed with his own groups, usually as a quartet. He died in New York City on May 30, 1977.

A comprehensive treatment of Desmond's life can be found in Take Five: The Public and Private Lives of Paul Desmond by Doug Ramsey (Parkside Publications, 2005). Many of the diaries, letters, and other documents in the Paul Desmond Collection are reproduced in this biography.

Scope and Content of Collection
The collection consists of the papers of jazz saxophonist Paul Desmond. Includes 36 pages of diaries (memos to myself) from 1947-1955, over 300 letters to and from Desmond throughout his childhood and adult life, nearly 400 photographs, and a variety of other documents. The diaries and letters offer vivid insights into Desmond's psyche and outlook on life, as well as his musical career. These include extensive personal correspondence between Desmond and his father Emil Breitenfeld, as well as letters from Dave and Lola Brubeck in 1951 that signify the beginning of the Brubeck Quartet.

**Arrangement**

Collection is arranged by material type. Most of the letters written by Desmond are undated, but have been arranged in an approximate chronological order. It is imperative that researchers only use one file at a time and maintain the order of the letters.

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

- Breitenfeld, Paul, 1924-
- Brubeck, Dave
- Breitenfeld, Emil
- Dave Brubeck Quartet
- Jazz musicians - United States
- Saxophonists - United States

**Related Material**

The Brubeck Collection (MSS 4) contains a significant amount of information on Desmond and his partnership with Brubeck.

### Box 1

1.1: “Memos to myself” and other diary-like documents, 1947-1955 (some undated)
1.2: Correspondence: Paul to his parents Emil and Shirley Breitenfeld (includes one from Paul to his grandmother Hermine Breitenfeld), 1935-1937 (some undated)
1.3: Correspondence: Paul to his father, undated (circa. 1940s-1960s)
1.4: Correspondence: Paul to his father, undated (circa. 1940s-1960s)
1.5: Correspondence: Paul to his father, 1941, 1951
1.6: Correspondence: Father to Paul, 1934-1943
1.7: Correspondence: Father to Paul, 1949-1959
1.8: Correspondence: Father to Paul, 1960-1961
1.9: Correspondence: Father to Paul, 1962-1965
1.10: Correspondence: Paul’s father Emil to his parents Sigmund and Hermine Breitenfeld, and his uncle Max Lewy, 1918-1937
1.11: Correspondence: Paul to his mother, 1964, and undated
1.12: Correspondence: Mother to Paul, 1965, 1966, and undated
1.13: Correspondence: Paul to his wife Duane, undated
1.14: Correspondence: Duane to Paul, undated
1.15: Correspondence: Dave and Lola Brubeck to Paul, 1951-1953 (some undated)
1.16: Correspondence: Unidentified woman to Paul, 1944 (most undated)
1.17: Correspondence: Max Weiss (Fantasy Records) to Paul, 1954-1957 (most undated)
1.18: Correspondence: Paul to various people, 1954-1964 (some undated)
1.19: Correspondence: Various people to Paul, 1942-1972 (some undated)
1.20: Correspondence: Down Beat, Playboy, and Melody Maker re: awards, 1953-1971

### Box 2

2.1: Photographs: Young Paul and Breitenfeld family, circa. 1890-1940s (most undated)
2.2: Photographs: Adult Paul, Part 1, circa. 1940s-1960s (most undated)
2.3: Photographs: Adult Paul, Part 2, circa 1950s-1970s (most undated)
2.4: Breitenfeld family history documents, undated
2.5: Documents from presidential performances (Johnson, Nixon), 1965-1970
2.6: Musical scores: “Take Five” (published in Germany) 1959, “Embarcadero” (lead sheet) 1963
2.7: Published musical scores and article by Paul’s father Emil Breitenfeld, 1917-1937 (some undated)
2.8: Paul’s school documents (includes graduation speech “What is Democracy?”), 1940-1941
2.9: Clippings, 1950s-1960s
2.10: Clippings, 1970s-1991
2.11: Clippings, undated
2.12: Paul’s obituaries, 1977
2.13: Drawings and letters by Arnold Roth, 1955, and undated
2.14: Miscellaneous documents (contracts, receipts, ID cards, tour schedule), 1943-1976
2.15: 78 rpm record: “Paul B. Strikes Back, Part One” (Paul and his father), circa. 1940

Box 3
3.1: Four Downbeat awards, 1954 - 1957
3.2: Four Playboy All Star Jazz Poll awards to Dave Brubeck Quartet, 1957 - 1961
3.3: Six Playboy All Star Jazz Poll awards to Paul Desmond, 1957 - 1961