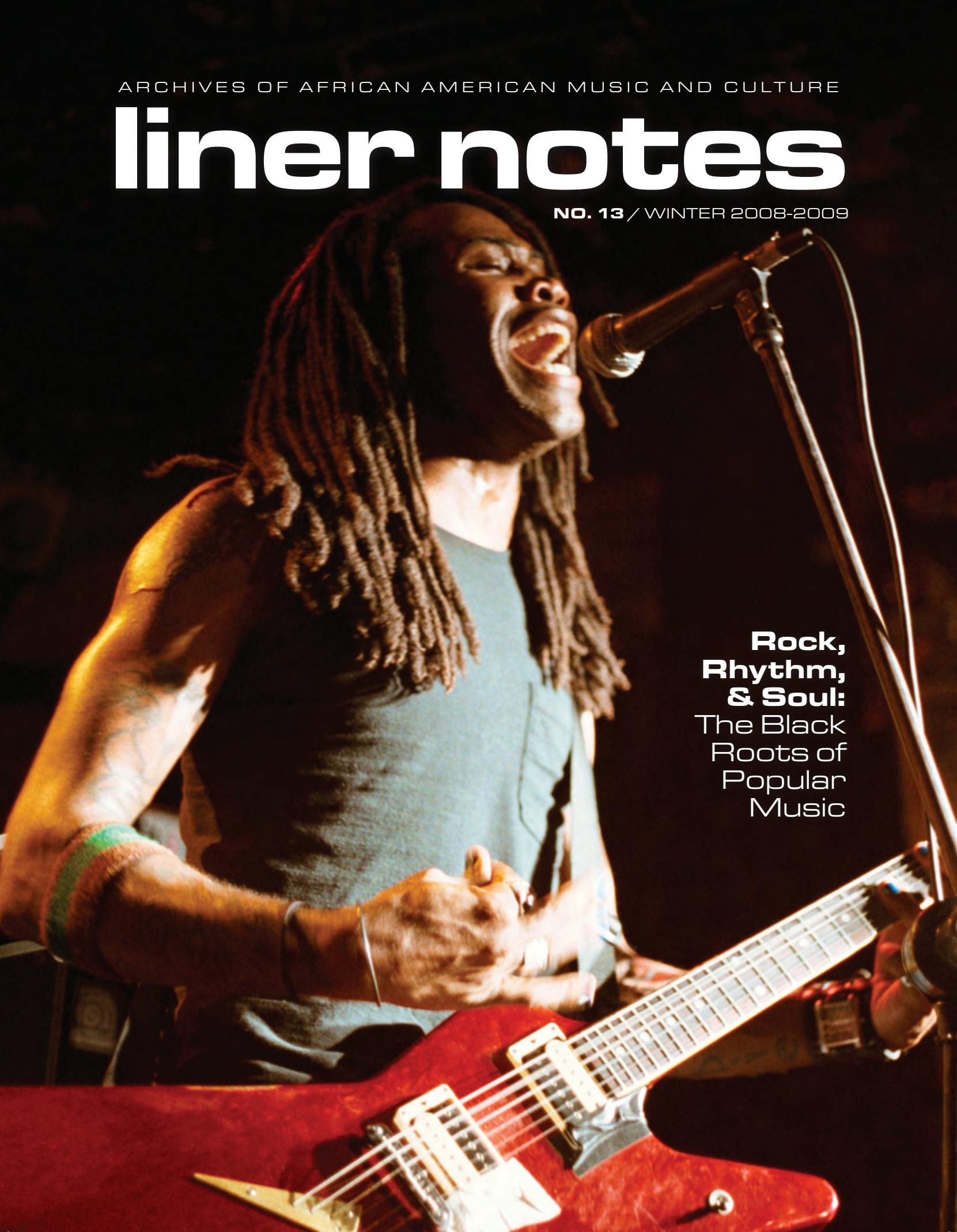


ARCHIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC AND CULTURE

liner notes

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**Rock,
Rhythm,
& Soul:**
The Black
Roots of
Popular
Music

From the Desk of the Director

aaamc mission

The AAAMC is devoted to the collection, preservation, and dissemination of materials for the purpose of research and study of African American music and culture.

www.indiana.edu/~aaamc

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On the Cover:

Image of the lead banner for *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul*

I write this column on January 20, 2009, the day our country and the world witnessed history being made with the swearing-in of the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, the first African American elected to the nation's highest office. The slogan "Yes We Can" that ushered in a new vision for America also fulfills part of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream for a different America—one that embraces all of its people and judges them by the content of their character rather than the color or their skin. The broadcast of Dr. King's entire "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on August 28, 1963 from the steps of Lincoln Memorial as part of the inaugural activities, was both timely and fitting, as was the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. the day before this momentous event.

Against the excitement of today, I recount the activities of the AAAMC over the past twelve months. We focused our energies on three major projects: developing a traveling exhibit, securing a grant to digitize selected collections, and planning a conference on black rock music. The exhibit *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul: The Black Roots of Popular Music*, which showcases materials from AAAMC's collections, opened in Bloomington at City Hall on January 3, 2009 and will travel to various venues in Indiana and as far away as San Diego (see inside story). Our second major project, *Pioneers of Rhythm & Blues*, involves the digitization of recorded interviews from two of our collections and is supported by a grant from the GRAMMY Foundation® (see inside story).

The AAAMC's third project is a conference on black rock—entitled *Reclaiming the Right to Rock: Black Experiences in Rock Music*—and is designed to initiate archival collections and facilitate scholarly research on this genre. Scheduled for November 13-14, 2009 at Indiana University, this conference will bring together black rock musicians from different generations and regions along with

music critics and scholars to discuss the socio-political history, musical developments, and the future of black rock musicians and their music. The AAAMC will host one panel followed by a light reception on the Friday afternoon of the conference and two panels on Saturday. The tentative titles and order of the three panels are "What Is Rock: Conceptualization and Cultural Origins of Black Rock," "The Politics of Rock: Race, Class, Gender, Generation," and "The Face of Rock in the 21st Century." In conjunction with the conference we are planning concerts, film screenings, workshops, and an exhibit. For an update of details as they develop, please visit our website (www.indiana.edu/~aaamc). This project is partially funded by Indiana University's New Frontiers in the Arts and Humanities through the Lilly Endowment and is administered by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research.

The AAAMC's collections continue to attract the attention of scholars and journalists. In August 2008, Scot Brown, Associate Professor of History and African American Studies at UCLA, returned to the AAAMC to perform research for an article on Roger Troutman and a chapter for a book on SOLAR Records. To support his research, Brown revisited the Dayton Funk Collection, but much of his time was devoted to exploring the Karen Shearer Collection, which contains transcripts for over 500 separate interviews with performers and other music industry personnel. Additionally, Brown's expertise in funk enabled him to give the AAAMC staff some valuable feedback on the funk banners during the production phase of our *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* exhibit.

RJ Smith, the senior editor for *Los Angeles* magazine and the author of *The Great Black Way: L.A. in the 1940s and the Lost African-American Renaissance* (PublicAffairs 2006), also visited the AAAMC. Smith's latest project, a biography of James Brown, brought him to the Archives in November to explore related holdings, including an interview with Brown in the



AAAMC staff, left to right: Tyron Cooper, Ann Shaffer, Heather O'Sullivan, Ronda L. Sewald, Brenda Nelson-Strauss, Portia K. Maultsby, Shilan Douglas, Rich Walter, Langston Wilkins. PHOTO: Ronda L. Sewald

Smithsonian Black Radio Collection and an extensive interview with Bobby Byrd, former vocalist and keyboardist with James Brown's Famous Flames, from the Portia Maultsby Collection.

I am pleased to introduce Linda Tillery as the newest member of the AAAMC National Advisory Board (see inside story). Tillery, founder of the Cultural Heritage Choir, is a consultant for the upcoming conference along with Maureen Mahon, currently a Visiting Associate Professor of Music at New York University. Tillery has been an award-winning vocalist for four decades, performing a repertoire that draws from folk spirituals, work songs, blues, jazz, R&B, soul, funk, and rock. She shares her vast knowledge of these traditions through performing, conducting, workshops, and serving as artist-in-residence at various universities. I look forward to her continued participation in the activities of the AAAMC and to benefitting from her knowledge.

Maureen Mahon's book, *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (2004), reminded me of how black rockers remain on the margins of scholarly study. Even I had to acknowledge that I contributed to their marginalization by inadvertently excluding them from the collection development and programming activities of the Archives. Through many discussions with Mahon about the struggle of black rockers to claim their rightful place in the rock genre, I decided that the AAAMC needed to organize a conference to bring greater exposure to this group and the obstacles they face as they reclaim the right to rock. Mahon's research on this tradition has been invaluable in defining the content for the upcoming conference on this topic.

In closing, I announce the departure of the AAAMC's Administrative Assistant, Dr. Sunni Fass, who accepted a position as Assistant Curator of Musical

Instruments at the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix last spring. Sunni brought a wealth of knowledge and many skills to the position, and she curated the first two banners of the *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* exhibit. I express my appreciation to Sunni for her many contributions to the AAAMC and my best wishes to her for success in her new position. I also am pleased to announce the appointment of Ronda L. Sewald as the new Archives Administrator and Project Manager. She brings valuable experience as a librarian and sound archivist with a background in ethnomusicology, the field in which she will soon defend her Ph.D. dissertation. Ronda's past work with digitalization projects and programming will be an asset to our daily operation (see inside story).

Portia K. Maultsby

Featured Collection



Sheet music covers from the Patricia Turner Collection

Preserving the Black Voice of Music: The Patricia Turner Collection

Indiana native Patricia Turner was a professional librarian with a passion for collecting and cataloging. She developed a love of music at an early age, studying piano and voice while attending Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis. After receiving her B.A. in History, Political Science, and French from Butler University and an M.A. in Library Science from Indiana University, she spent the majority of her career at the University of Minnesota, ultimately earning the rank of Associate Professor while serving as the subject bibliographer for Political Science and African & Afro-American Studies. Much of her spare time, however, was devoted to music.

Turner enjoyed most music genres, but was particularly interested in vocal music, including Negro spirituals as well as opera and choral music performed by African American singers. She became an avid record

collector, ultimately amassing a collection of over one thousand 78 rpm records and several thousand LPs. Using her collection as the basis for further research, she went on to compile two groundbreaking discographies: *Afro-American Singers: An Index and Preliminary Discography of Long-Playing Recordings of Opera, Choral Music, and Song* (1977) and the *Dictionary of Afro-American Performers: 78 rpm and Cylinder Recordings of Opera, Choral Music, and Songs, c. 1900–1949* (1990). An addendum to the former was published in *The Black Perspective in Music* (Spring 1981). Turner also authored articles on famous African American singers, including Florence Cole-Talbert and Indianapolis native Todd Duncan. She was active in many organizations, including the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, the Indianapolis Music Promoters, and the National Association of Negro Musicians, the latter of which honored Turner with a Distinguished Contributor Award in 1992.

Upon her retirement in 1994, Turner returned to Indianapolis where she remained active as a collector and researcher until her death in April

2005. Through the generosity of Turner's sister, Marie Turner-Wright, a large portion of Turner's collection was recently donated to the AAAMC, including 78 rpm records, sheet music, cylinder recordings, CDs, DVDs, and assorted books and research materials. Because the majority of her LPs documenting African American classical musicians and singers are duplicated within the holdings of the Cook Music Library at IU's Jacobs School of Music, they were not included in the donation.

The 78 rpm records in the Turner Collection are quite a treasure trove, shedding light on a wide variety of composers, artists, and genres. They also reveal that Turner was interested not only in African American performers, but also interpretations of black music by white artists ranging from vaudeville performers and minstrel singers to concert artists such as Alma Gluck and Rosa Ponselle. Of particular interest, though, are the recordings documenting the works of early black composers, including Gussie L. Davis (1863-1899), a songwriter from Cincinnati; Indiana native Noble Sissle (1889-1975); Henry Creamer (1879-1930) and J.

Turner Layton (1894-1978), notable vaudeville performers who together wrote over 65 songs between 1917-1922; and James Bland (1854-1911), the composer of “Carry Me Back to Old Virginy” and “Oh! Dem Golden Slippers.” In the case of Bland, also known as “The World’s Greatest Minstrel Man,” Turner collected approximately sixty different renditions of his most famous songs. Music by more well-known African American composers—such as H.T. Burleigh, Will Marion Cook, J. Rosamond Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, R. Nathaniel Dett, Maceo Pinkard, William Grant Still, and Clarence Cameron White—are also well represented and, in many instances, the recorded works are supplemented by sheet music.

The sound recordings in the collection can be roughly classified into three categories. Representing the core of Turner’s discographic research are 78 rpm recordings of classical vocal music and musical theater discs by performers such as Josephine Baker, Una Mae Carlisle, Florence Cole-Talbert, Carrol C. Clark, and Jules Bledsoe. The collection also contains a sizable number of performances by jubilee and gospel quartet groups, including those by the Bethel Jubilee Quartet, Cleveland Colored Quartet, Delta Rhythm Boys, Eva Jessye Choir, Spirit of Memphis Quartet, and over thirty other groups. Additionally, Turner collected blues, rhythm and blues, and jazz recordings, which feature artists such as Bessie Smith and her Blue Boys, Big Joe Turner, Big Maybelle, Roosevelt Sykes, Clarence Williams’ Washboard Five, Kid Ory’s Creole Jazz Band, Noble Sissle & James Reese Europe’s Singing Serenaders, Joe Higgins & the Honeydrippers, Cab Calloway, and Duke Ellington.

The AAAMC has completed preliminary indexes for the 78 rpm recordings and sheet music, and work is currently underway to process the research files, which contain biographies for many of the featured performers and composers. Additional materials may be added in the near future as the Turner family continues to sort through the estate.

- Brenda Nelson-Strauss

In the Vault:

Recent Donations

Special Collections:

Maureen Mahon:

Photographs, publicity materials, ephemera, videos, and CDs documenting black rock artists and the Black Rock Coalition.

Gayle Wald:

Rosetta Tharpe photographs.

Craig Seymour:

Interviews and research materials regarding Luther Vandross and various R&B artists, plus a large assortment of promotional CDs.

Michael Lydon:

Bo Diddley interview from September 1970.

Paul Middlebrook:

Selection of DVDs documenting the Indianapolis television show “Hit Makers Showcase” from 1983-1989; DVD with a performance by the PHDs; CD “Old School Songs of Love” by Middlebrook.

Marie Turner:

Donation of the Patricia Turner Collection (see article on previous page).

Carl MaultsBy:

Several new compositions and accompanying publicity materials.

CDs/DVD/Book Donors:

Allegro	Hill Country	Reach Records
Anti	Hip-O	Reel Music
Babygrande	Image Entertainment	Rizzoli
Banfield, Bill	Integrity Solution	Rounder
Bear Family	Katalyst Entertainment	Ryko
Blind Raccoon	Keyes, Cheryl	Sh-K-Boom
Blue Note	Koch	Shanachie
Blues Images	Jazz Promo	Schurk, Bill
Bridge Records	Lawrence Hill Books	Smithsonian Folkways
Carpenter, Bill	Legacy	Taseis Media
Cinema Libre Studio	Lewis, Ron	Telarc
Cornerstone R.A.S.	Light in the Attic	Thuglife Army
Daptone	Light Records	Tuscot
Delmark	Live Root	Verity
Earwig	Malaco	Verve
Dust to Digital	McGraw-Hill	Viper
Faber and Faber	Miz T	Waterbug
Forced Exposure	MVD	Williams, Butch
Fresh, Freddie	NARAS	Wooten, Bobby
Gate, James	Northernblues Music	
Gold Dust	ObiqSound	
Heads Up	Publish America LLP	

AMGP Book Series

Ramblin' on My Mind and Follow Your Heart

The *African American Music in Global Perspective* (AMGP) series released two new volumes in 2008. *Ramblin' on My Mind: New Perspectives on the Blues* is the second book in the series and consists of an anthology edited by David Evans. Evans writes that:

the purpose of the present collection of essays is to offer new perspectives on the blues by exploring previously neglected aspects, reinterpreting familiar material, conducting broad and more scientific surveys, and exploring specific blues performances in great depth and detail (p. 3).

Although four of the essays in this collection were originally published in the journal *American Music*, Evans has also gathered new blues research from scholars representing a wide range of international and disciplinary backgrounds.

Ramblin' on My Mind opens with Gerhard Kubik's essay "Bourdon, Blue Notes, and Pentatonism in the Blues: An Africanist Perspective." This essay draws upon Kubik's field experience in seventeen African countries and more than forty years of research on African music to trace the origins of an African-derived basis for "blue notes" and the blues scale. The remaining pieces focus more specifically on blues music in the United States and include essays by Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, Elliot S. Hurwitz, Andrew M. Cohen, David Evans, Luigi Monge, James Bennighof, Katharine Cartwright, Bob Groom, and John Minton. A more complete discussion of each



essay has been published in the February 2008 issue of the AAAMC's music review site *Black Grooves* at www.blackgrooves.org.

Follow Your Heart: Moving with the Giants of Jazz, Swing, and Rhythm and Blues is the third book in the AMGP series and is also reviewed in greater detail in the March 2008 issue of *Black Grooves*. *Follow Your Heart* is the autobiography of saxophonist and music executive Joe Evans. Following forwards by Tavis Smiley and Bill McFarlin and a preface by Christopher Brooks, the core of the book draws upon a series of interviews between Evans and Brooks to tell the stories of major icons in jazz, swing, and R&B. Among these icons are Billie Holiday, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Johnny Hodges, Nat "King" Cole, Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Charlie Parker, Lionel Hampton, and "Ma" Rainey Evans.

The main text of *Follow Your Heart* is divided into three parts. In Part One, Evans chronicles his journey

from the time the music bug bit him as a child in Pensacola, Florida, to his first professional stint in Ray Shep's band. Part Two begins with Evans' trek to the proving ground of New York City and then traces his tenure in various big bands both in the States and on the international circuit. Part Three begins with Evans returning to New York City right around the time the Savoy closed in 1958, follows his debut on the R&B scene with performances for Motown and the establishment of his own label, Carnival Records, and ends with his pursuit of a college education around the age of sixty. A bonus section at the end of the book provides an abridged discography of songs arranged and produced by Evans for Carnival Records.

The *African American Music in Global Perspective* series is co-edited by Portia K. Maultsby and Mellonnee V. Burnim and published by the University of Illinois Press.

- Anthony Guest-Scott and Ronda L. Sewald

Ronda L. Sewald Joins AAAMC Staff

Ronda L. Sewald recently joined the AAAMC staff as the new Archives Administrator and Project Manager. A specialist in audiovisual archives, Sewald brings with her a vast amount of experience gained through previous work at IU's Archives of Traditional Music, where she served as a workflow and quality control manager for the internationally acclaimed *Sound Directions: Digital Preservation and Access for Global Audio Heritage* project, a joint effort with Harvard University. Sewald was also actively involved in another ground breaking project, the EVIA Digital Archive developed by IU and the University of Michigan, where she was responsible for creating a controlled vocabulary for ethnomusicological videos and for cataloging various analog and digital moving image formats.

A native of Minnesota, Sewald's interests in music developed early on, as both a performer and record collector. She earned dual B.A. degrees in oboe performance and English from Minnesota State University-Mankato, while also getting her first real experience in a library. That job, which involved training students to use many types of audiovisual equipment, turned out to be quite fortuitous. In 2000 she matriculated at Indiana University, working simultaneously on an MLS in Library and Information Science and an M.A. in Folklore/Ethnomusicology, completing both degrees in 2004. Her M.A. thesis, "Back to the Armchair: Sound Recordings as Information Sources in Ethnomusicological Research," ingeniously wove together elements from both disciplines and garnered the Esther L. Kinsley Award for Best Master's Thesis at IU. A shorter presentation on the same

topic won the Charles Seeger award for best student paper given at the 2005 Society for Ethnomusicology conference.

More recently, Sewald has been working to complete her Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at IU and expects to defend her dissertation this spring. The topic, "The Darker Side of Sound: Social Conflicts Over the Use of Soundscapes for Musical Performances," examines historical debates over the appropriate time and place for various types of musical performance, including street music, amateur music-making in the home, musical advertising, and music used for religious proselytizing and political campaigning. Focusing on the 1850s through the 1950s, Sewald explores the popular discourse and the development of legal ordinances in response to noise complaints about a number of musical sources including, but not limited to, barrel-organ grinders, Salvation Army parades and revivals, piano-playing by middle class women, storefront radios, and sound trucks.



Sewald's wide-ranging interests also include macro photography and Middle Eastern music. While a student at IU she performed with Women of Mass Percussion, a Brazilian drumming group, and she is now learning to play the zurna, a Turkish double reed instrument. Sewald is active in the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, serves as discographer for the Society for Ethnomusicology, and also maintains memberships in the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives and the International Council for Traditional Music.

With all of her many talents, Sewald has already become a very valued colleague. Her first task, to write and design the "Funk Music" banners for the *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* exhibit, was handled with aplomb, and her assistance with the GRAMMY Foundation® audio digitization project has been invaluable. We very much look forward to her collaboration on the various projects the AAAMC has planned for the near future.

AAAMC Receives Award from the GRAMMY Foundation® Grant Program to Preserve Interviews with Pioneers of Rhythm & Blues

In March 2008, the AAAMC was awarded \$39,230 through the 2008 GRAMMY Foundation® Grant Program for a preservation implementation project designed to digitally preserve and make accessible nearly 300 hours of interviews with rhythm and blues pioneers. The 201 audiocassettes selected for the *Pioneers of Rhythm & Blues* project provide aural documentation of the history and development of R&B music through the personal narratives of prominent musicians, composers, producers, and record company executives—many of whom are now deceased. At present, there is a dearth of primary source material in libraries and archives pertaining to the history of black popular music, which until recently existed on the margins of academic scholarship. By digitizing the original masters and preparing access copies, the AAAMC seeks to preserve these unique interviews with seminal figures in the music industry, while promoting research into the rich legacy of African American musical traditions and, more generally, the black experience in America.

Drawing heavily on the best practices and preservation methods established by IU's Archives of Traditional Music during its NEH-funded *Sound Directions* project, *Pioneers of Rhythm & Blues* will support the preservation of two of the AAAMC's collections. The Portia Maultsby Collection includes in-depth interviews conducted from 1981–1986. Maultsby's interviews trace the emergence of black music divisions and the promotion of black artists by major record labels—topics that have not yet been adequately explored. Maultsby recorded interviews with one



Above: Photograph of Ahmet Ertegun, Ruth Brown, and Al Hibbler. AAAMC General Photo Collection
Below: Photograph of Ray Charles, 1930. SC 93: Jock Hickman Collection



“Of course, producing Ray Charles was a figure of speech. What you did was you witnessed the happening.”

—Comment by Jerry Wexler regarding his role as Ray Charles' co-producer during an interview with Michael Lydon

hundred record company executives, producers, promoters, composers, musicians, and deejays involved with recording, marketing, and performing R&B music. Some of the highlights of the collection include interviews with Bobby Byrd of James Brown's Famous Flames, Rufus Thomas—performer of “Walking the Dog” and “The Funky Chicken”—and Albert “Diz” Russell of the Orioles. In addition to performers, Maultsby interviewed record company

personnel at Stax, Motown, and Philadelphia International Records (PIR). The collection also includes a number of interviews with African American female record company executives, offering an alternative behind-the-scenes perspective on the heavily male-dominated record industry.

The Michael Lydon Collection consists of interviews conducted by Lydon, a veteran music journalist and founding editor of *Rolling Stone*, during his research for *Ray Charles: Man and Music* (1998). Lydon's definitive biography documents the significant contributions to American music by Charles, whose gospel-inflected rhythm and blues gave birth to soul. The interviews also shed light on Charles' business practices, from his unprecedented control of his master tapes to the founding of his music publishing company and record label. In addition to taped interviews with Charles himself, the collection contains conversations with a multitude of musicians and record company personnel whose careers spanned the decades from 1940 to 1980. Among these prominent figures are bandleader Hank Crawford, saxophonists David “Fathead” Newman and Leroy “Hog” Cooper, and vocalists Ruth Brown and Little Jimmy Scott. Lydon also interviewed Ahmet Ertegun, Sid Feller, and Jerry Wexler, all three of whom have been recognized as among the most significant figures in the modern music industry.¹



Photograph of Rufus Thomas doing the Funky Chicken as part of the KYOK “We Love You” program, ca. 1972. SC 89: Black Radio Collection

“She was slimmed down, with a leather dress on. She had a long waistline. Her hips were low-slung... We had a little riff going on ‘Ooh Poo Pah Doo,’ and this girl got in front of the bandstand and started doing the Dog. I just started jiving at her—‘Do the Dog, Baby’—and she was really getting down.

“I just started singing, because what we were playing [was] what we call 12-bar blues changes, and I set the pattern... It fitted right in, and I couldn’t think of but three dogs, and I just started singing, ‘Do the Dog’... If you ever listen to that song, you will find that there’s nothing suggestive in that song at all... That’s the way it came out, and it hit.”

—Rufus Thomas tells about the origins of his hit song “Walking the Dog” in his interview with Portia Maultsby

Both collections capture historic evidence of the role of black artists and institutions in the rise and development of the popular music industry. For instance, in his interview with Maultsby, Ewart Abner, former president of Vee-Jay and Motown records, discussed the role of major record labels and radio stations in undermining the work of black artists. According to Abner, in the 1950s when a black artist cut a disc that promised to be a hit, mainstream radio stations often refused to promote the artist in fear of alienating their predominantly white listening audiences. Instead, major labels would bring in a white artist to cover a potentially popular song discovered by the smaller independent label. If the song became a hit, the credit almost inevitably went to the cover artist, leaving both the

original performer and independent record label out in the cold.

Other topics include black artists’ exclusion from mainstream institutions and venues, the creative process, their struggle for control of their own productions, and the efforts of recording labels such as Stax, Motown, PIR, and Atlantic to prevent major labels from buying off their star performers or forcibly taking control of their companies.

Digital preservation represents the cutting edge in archiving for storing and preserving audio content. As part of the project, each of the tapes will be individually inspected and digitized on high quality playback equipment by a trained audio engineer to ensure the most pristine transfer possible. The cassettes will be digitized at a depth and resolution of 24bit/96kHz and saved as

broadcast wav files—widely recognized by audio archivists worldwide as the standard for preservation quality audio files. Once digitized, the files will be stored on the University’s Massive Digital Storage System (MDSS), where the data will be monitored, backed-up, and periodically migrated by trained technicians to ensure the integrity and longevity of the data. The AAAMC will continue to preserve the original cassettes, but the digital files will serve as the new means of accessing their content.

By funding *Pioneers of Rhythm and Blues*, the GRAMMY Foundation® has not only recognized the importance of these collections to future researchers, it has also provided the assistance necessary for this valuable content to make its journey from cassettes—a fragile medium threatened by degradation and obsolescence—into the robust realm of digital preservation.

The GRAMMY Foundation’s® Grants Program is generously funded by The Recording Academy. Now in its 21st year, the GRAMMY Foundation® Grant Program has awarded \$5.3 million to more than 250 noteworthy projects. The Grant Program provides funding annually to organizations and individuals to support efforts that advance the archiving and preservation of the recorded sound heritage of the Americas for future generations, as well as research projects related to the impact of music on the human condition. Recognizing the richness of collections held by individuals and organizations that may not have access to the expertise needed to create a preservation plan, in 2007 the Grant Program expanded its granting categories to include planning grants for individuals and small- to mid-sized organizations. The planning process, which may include inventorying and stabilizing a collection, articulates the steps to be taken to ultimately archive recorded sound materials for future generations.

- Ronda L. Sewald

¹ Articles containing additional information on Michael Lydon and his collection appeared in the Fall 2001/Spring 2002 and Fall 2004 issues of *Liner Notes* (no. 6/7 and 9, respectively).

The Bishop of the Airwaves: An Interview with Al Hobbs

Since its founding in 1967 by gospel pioneer James Cleveland, the Gospel Music Workshop of America (GMWA) has played an integral role in creating a place for gospel music in the pantheon of American popular music. Local Indianapolis gospel radio announcer and promoter Al “The Bishop” Hobbs became involved with GMWA in its fledging years and also established the Gospel Announcers’ Guild (GAG). Over his forty years with GMWA, Hobbs has served as producer for GMWA’s Women of Worship Series, helped establish the careers of up and coming gospel artists, and still serves as Executive Vice Chair of GAG and as Chair of several divisions of the GMWA. Throughout his career Hobbs has remained a fixture in the Indianapolis gospel music community through his record labels, radio career on WTLC, and involvement with the Indianapolis Mass Choir.

On June 8, 2007, Keith McCutchen, Director of the IU African American Choral Ensemble and AAAMC Research Associate, with assistance from former AAAMC graduate assistant Fredara Hadley, had the opportunity to talk with Al Hobbs in Hobbs’ Indianapolis area home about his illustrious career in the gospel music industry. Amidst the household hum of preparing for his daughter’s high school graduation, Hobbs, with warmth and charisma, reflected on his involvement with gospel music’s current success and provided insights about its future. The following excerpts are adapted from that interview.

McCutchen: Obviously we want to get to the roots of the history of gospel music in the Indianapolis area. But let’s just start with the word “gospel” music. When you hear the word, what comes to mind?

Hobbs: I think “good news” and for me I think the good news is about Christ. I think it is historic. It is saving power disseminated through music and words. It’s the music that leaps forth into the spirit of man. If the word can leap off the pages of the Holy Writ, then obviously that word set to music can explode into the lives and become life changing for the people that hear it.

So gospel for me is synonymous, really, with salvation, because that’s what I certainly got from it myself. It was a leading force that got me into the church and got me interested in what Christ could do for me. So for me it represented a saving influence. Aside from that, of all the music on the face of the planet, gospel seems to really reach me and others in a place where other things can’t reach. I really do believe that all music has healing properties for the savage beast in us, but gospel seems to speak to most situations better than any other music on the planet.

McCutchen: A Balm in Gilead.

Hobbs: Yes.

McCutchen: Give us the journey.



Hobbs: The journey for me really started as a young boy in the heart of the ghetto in Louisville, Kentucky. I was born into a family that had gospel music in it. So it was a real interesting journey. But for me, I had fallen in love with the music. The chitlin’ circuit in gospel was in force then and those troubadours who were out there—like the Davis Sisters and the Swan Silvertones and, my very favorites, The Caravans—they had come to town one evening and I went to the concert.

Our circumstances were meager. As a matter of fact, the front of our house was facing an alley. I got home and I sat down on the steps. It was a clear summer night and I was looking up at the heavens and I was just asking of myself and the Lord what the future held for me. I kind of made an affirmation in my spirit that I wanted to be a singer. I wanted to get in the car and travel from city to city. Get in not just a car but a Cadillac like the Caravans did and then go sing and then get in the car again and go sing in the next town. I looked at that and made it an aspiration. A little later on it got to be, “Well, you ain’t the world’s greatest singer, kid, so you’re going to have to do something else.” I just kind of acquiesced in my spirit that I wanted to be professionally connected with gospel music in some kind of way.

Later, I did have one occasion to really stand up for church and religion. After I got back from the army, there was a longing for the fellowship of the saints in my heart. I asked my boss if I could be off on Sundays to do church. He told me “no.” So for the next three years I lived with that. But in the process, I did get my own store when I came back from the army. From ’67 to ’70, I was the general manager of the 7-Eleven markets at 28th and Capital and at 29th and Northwestern—those two stores.

I just happened to be promoting a Shirley Caesar concert, because I had emerged as a little bit of a promoter as well. When I went to the radio station, I didn't like who they had on the air, so I asked them if I could voice the spot myself. Shortly thereafter, the manager of the radio station—a guy by the name of Tom Mathis who had been one of the good guys at the great WTLC, which was the biggest station in town at that time—invited me to do a gospel show. I went to my boss and asked him if I could do the gospel show and guess what his answer was? “No.” The gospel show was on Sunday morning.

I consulted with my mom and prayed about it and my mom gave me one great gem of wisdom that I have used really up to now and hopefully for the balance of my life. She said, “Do you know what you're doing in the supermarket industry?”

And I said, “Of course. Why did you ask me that?”

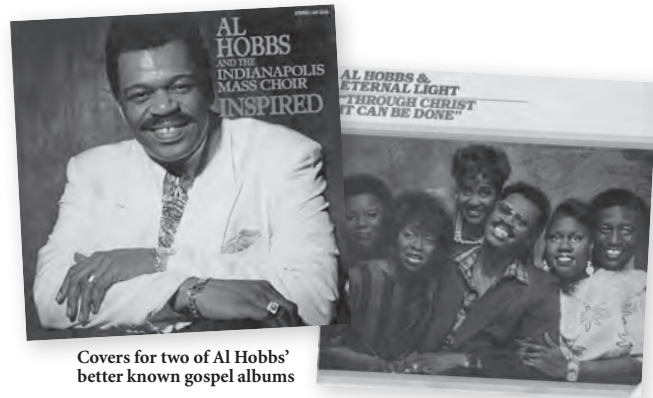
She said, “Well, there's a corner right here. You don't know what's around that corner, but you do know what's back here on this side of the street, right?”

I said, “Yes, Mom.”

She said, “Fool, why don't you turn the corner?”

So life for me has become a series of corner turnings. As I looked at all of that, I agree quite honestly [that there was] some exciting stuff around those corners. Challenges, yes, but thank goodness I always knew what was back on this side of the street if I ever needed to come back.

But the show went on and by the third week I was there doing four hours a day. Four hours on every Sunday. I never got paid for it. It was my labor of love. But I did get a benefit and that benefit was that I got the right to sell all religion programming at WTLC. If I'm on the air and I'm a salesman and you hear my name, guess who you call? You call me. So that really was a blessing for me. It was a real early example to me that everything the Lord permits to happen is for your good. You may not see it at that time, but when he was redressing me and going up one side and coming down the other, I thought differently about that. That was reinforced by Robert Schuler when he came on television. I listened to him one day and he spoke another piece into my life, another gem that simply said, “The Lord does not allow anything to happen to you that's not loaded with possibility. What you've got to do is immediately start looking for the possibilities.” I began to live in that sense, as well. If it happened, it has happened. There's not very much I can do about it. But instead of gloating over it and being mad and angry and sad, I can start to look for either what the lesson is or for what opportunities rest around the corner. So that's kind of how I began, and then things just really started happening. The Bishop was born as the bishop of the airwaves, not as the bishop of the local church. So that's why it's Al “The Bishop” Hobbs.



Covers for two of Al Hobbs' better known gospel albums

McCutchen: So within the earlier years there in Indy when you're doing this program, was it airing around the country?

Hobbs: No, only here in Indy. WTLC was an FM station, so just within the reach of WTLC. But reputation-wise, it was 1970 [when] the avocational side [of gospel began to develop]. In 1970, I had gone to my first GMWA convention, which was in St. Louis. I had had the invitation to come from Rev. [James] Cleveland in the year 1968—the first convention. I was like, “I don't want to be bothered with that mess.” So I said no. I was involved with a small convention called When Singers Meet that had a very high standard of spiritual commitment and excellence. I knew James was organizing a musicians' convention, not necessarily a lifestyle convention. So when I looked at that I said, “No, there are just too many elements that I don't think I want to trouble myself with.” But I went in '70 and I said, “I was wrong.” I said, “Everything that I love about gospel music is embodied in this organization.” That's when I joined—in 1970 in Dallas at the Adolphus Hotel. It was actually the same year that I hosted the organizational meeting of the Gospel Announcer's Guild and we were born in '71. That was our first real convention, when we became an auxiliary of Gospel Music Workshop.

James' bent was to expose the gifts and talents of artists and to give everybody a shot at: 1) developing your craft and 2) presenting your craft in settings that could get you exposure and then hopefully, if you really had it, you would rise. Obviously cream did rise to the top. So from that point, a part of the goals and objectives of GMWA has been to provide those kind of arenas—massive arenas where gospel art can be put on stage—and to open up new areas of the country where gospel can happen, to win new fans and aficionados to gospel music, and to launch the careers of gifted artists who had superlative ministries.

We called it ministries back then. It wasn't a buzzword like it is today. James recognized that the lifeblood of anything is its newness and certainly for gospel music it was that. He really kind of ushered in the choir era, if you will recall. If you don't know that, we're talking 1950 and on the west coast Thurston Frazier introduced the Voices of Hope. James [formed] the next major choir out there with the Voices of Tabernacle out of Detroit. I remember

it just like it was yesterday. That was when the choir era was ushered in and gospel music moved away from the spectator arena in which I had fallen in love with gospel music—back where the troubadours were bouncing the country.

McCutchen: We've talked about your beginning as an entrepreneur, but as we see the evolution of the ministry, we also see the evolution of a business, and we see a corporation—both recording and sheet music. Take me from there. Let's talk about the industry.

Hobbs: Let's flip back maybe eighteen to twenty years. Gospel was never a very large seller. As I shared with you, the real powers-that-be in the music industry looked upon gospel as a stepchild. One, it wasn't produced as well as the other music. It had this whole proclamation or religious content. Those who were enjoying the rewards of secular lifestyles, they wouldn't get all that. Within our community, as we struggled for an increase in the quality of life for African Americans across the country, I think gospel started to speak to more situations. We were in the Civil Rights struggle and we were in all kinds of struggles towards a better quality [of life]. I think gospel began to serve that. We, as the Gospel Announcer's Guild, began to preach and promulgate gospel and had people across the country saying the same things. But we were only like thirty-two or thirty-three strong at that time.

Gospel, like I said, sold constantly, but it didn't sell massive numbers. So about eighteen years ago, I think, the Gospel Announcer's Guild really got its head on and got committed and we started to explode in membership. Pretty soon we had all of the known gospel announcers that were on the air in cities and towns across America. We were banding together to primarily provide them with education—not so much to control anything, but to lift gospel. I won't credit us with that explosive growth but, at the same time, the music started to get better, because we challenged record companies to do it better.

McCutchen: So then, was it just a one-on-one and you call up somebody...?

Hobbs: No, because quite honestly all of the companies that were involved in gospel music started to get memberships in the Gospel Announcer's Guild. Even today every major, secondary, tertiary manufacturer of gospel music is in the Gospel Announcer's Guild. There is no company worth its salt that would kiss off 700 announcers. How do you do that when radio is still the primary door by which gospel is really sent to the world?

Later in the interview, Al Hobbs also commented on the local Indianapolis gospel community, including the roles of Indianapolis-based gospel artists like Rodney Bryant and Lamar Campbell:

Hobbs: Most of the local cadre in Indianapolis that we see matriculating today and within the last ten years are kids

that came up when I was really in the leadership role—on air, with the Workshop choir—and many of them matriculated through those units. Rodney was a part of that unit and decided that he was going to birth his own thing. He gathered together a bunch of young kids and started doing their thing—did it his way. And today I think he stands as one of, if not the greatest, persons of notoriety in Indy in gospel.

It's the same way with guys like Lamar Campbell. Lamar was nurtured through the same kind of system. He was in the choir, became the chapter rep, had his own stuff working at the same time, too. But it introduced him to a world of other people. He started to go out with me recording different projects, worked with my GRAMMY® award-winning producer on his first record. But they were people that he would never have met if we hadn't moved through those circles. I don't take credit for any of them, believe me, because the Lord orchestrates all of those. The Lord tells you that you're going to be sitting here today. I didn't tell you that. So He will fix what He wants to happen. Without taking any credit, I honestly champion the cause. There's one thing that I don't see happening that I wish would happen. I wish that complete ministry would be taught to today's singers.

Hadley: I have one last question. We kind of talked around it, because I know time is of the essence, but if you could just talk a little bit about what the Indianapolis Mass Choir means to this community and locally.

Hobbs: I can tell you what they did mean and I can tell you what they want to mean if they are embracing the same things that I tried to put in place. The Workshop's mission, I would think, in cities and towns overall, is to champion excellence in the presentation of gospel music inside the African American worship experience wherever that takes them, whether it's in churches, concert halls, here, or there. The Workshop should always demonstrate excellence in the presentation of this music. That's excellence in vocal technique, in musicianship. They ain't got to do the house, but there's never an excuse for a workshop not singing well from a technical perspective. Again, the spiritual is a whole other kind of thing. But excellence in the presentation is what the mission is.

During the time that the Indy Mass Choir was born, since it was my investment and had to stay my investment, I basically partnered. It was my dice roll as far as the dollars were concerned. So I partnered with the Mass Choir and I presented "Al Hobbs and the Indy Mass Choir" or the "Indianapolis Mass Choir," which was basically the chapter. At the same time, I stood for a lot of things in the chapter. So if that's the mission, you should always do that. Allow the music to happen. Allow this God spirit music to explode in the lives of these viewers and you won't have to worry.

- Interview by Keith McCutchen and Fredara M. Hadley
- Introduction and transcript adaptation by Fredara M. Hadley



Reception for *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* at the Bloomington City Hall Atrium on Jan. 15, 2009. PHOTO: Stan Gerbig

Rock, Rhythm, & Soul:

A New Exhibit Traces and Shares the Influence of Black Musicians on Popular Music

In August 2007, the AAAMC received a grant from Indiana University's Moveable Feast of the Arts initiative to design a modular traveling exhibit on African American popular music. Created through a generous gift from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., the Moveable Feast of the Arts program was initiated by the IU Office of the President in 2004 with administrative and financial oversight provided by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research. The program's mission is to showcase and extend IU's cultural resources to Hoosier communities and IU campuses across the state.

The result of this grant is *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul: The Black Roots of*

Popular Music, a display consisting of nine double-sided banner stands, each highlighting specific genres and issues related to the history of African American popular music. Drawing on materials from the AAAMC's collection, each banner presents viewers with stunning images, a narrative highlighting central issues and personalities, and a concise timeline of key historic events.

The title banner provides an overview of the exhibit on one side and an introduction to the AAAMC on the other, while the remaining eight banner stands focus on specific topics including soul, funk, hip hop, gospel, rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll,

black radio, and the freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement. In most cases, one side of the banner stand addresses the early origins of the genre, while the verso showcases more recent developments. The entire staff worked on the project throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 2008, while the final execution of the banners was left in the capable hands of the AAAMC's longtime graphic designer Dennis Laffoon.

The Moveable Feast of the Arts grant allows the *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* exhibit to be displayed not only on the IU campus, but also at other non-profit institutions in Indiana at no additional cost through August 2009.



Rock, Rhythm, & Soul staff, left to right: Langston Wilkins, Fredara Hadley, Ann Shaffer, Aditi Deo, Portia K. Maultsby, Brenda Nelson-Strauss, Ronda L. Sewald, Tyrone Cooper; **left inset:** former administrator/coordinator Sunni Fass; **right inset:** graphic designer Dennis Laffoon
PHOTO: Stan Gerbig

Additionally, the AAAMC has made the exhibit available for display by other institutions outside of Indiana for a fee. Because of the modular design of the banners, all or part of the exhibit may be displayed, which makes it highly adaptable to different themes and space requirements.

Two banner stands from *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* debuted last spring as part of Bloomington's ArtsWeek 2008, a celebration of artistic and creative activity sponsored by IU and the City of Bloomington that centered on the theme of politics and the arts. The AAAMC's contribution was the exhibition *A Change is Gonna Come: Black Music and Political Activism*, which illustrated the role of music in African American communities during the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent Black Power Movement. The "Soul" and "Civil Rights Movement" banners from *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* stood at the core of the

exhibit, while additional wall panels and artifacts from the AAAMC, the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, and several private collections added depth to the story told by the banners. *A Change is Gonna Come* was hosted by the Mathers Museum of World Cultures from February 22 to April 27, 2008, and was curated by Sunni Fass, the AAAMC's former Administrator and Project Coordinator.

A Change is Gonna Come had its second campus showing at the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center's Bridgwaters Lounge in October 2008, this time in a joint exhibition with IU's Black Film Center/Archive (BFC/A). Subtitled "Black Music and Film from the Civil Rights and Black Power Eras," the banners were augmented by five display cases featuring artifacts from the collections of the AAAMC and BFC/A. Curatorial assistance was provided by AAAMC intern Langston Collin Wilkins and BFC/A archivist

Mary Huelsbeck. The exhibition formed part of *Politics and Presidents*, a month-long celebration of archives and special collections sponsored by the Indiana University Libraries. Occurring just a month before the historic 2008 presidential election, the exhibit, along with those from other IU archives and special collections, provided a timely reminder of the role that archives play in preserving artifacts that shape and exemplify American political history.

The off-campus debut of *Rock, Rhythm, & Soul* also occurred in October when the Brightwood Branch of the Marion County Public Library in Indianapolis displayed the "Black Radio" banners. Emphasizing the role of black radio stations and deejays in supporting and disseminating black popular music, as well as communicating with and rallying African American communities, the "Black Radio" exhibit proved to be one of the highlights of the Brightwood



Linda Tillery in concert. PHOTO: Michael Dressler

Getting to Know Linda Tillery

On October 30th, 2008, AAAMC Graduate Assistant Tyron Cooper interviewed Linda Tillery, the newest member of the Archives' National Advisory Board. Tillery is also one of the AAAMC's primary consultants for the upcoming conference Reclaiming the Right to Rock: Black Experiences in Rock Music, which will be hosted by the AAAMC on the Indiana University Bloomington campus from November 13 to 14, 2009. Born and raised in San Francisco, Tillery has a presence in both the performance and academic arenas of African American music and culture and her career reflects the shifting trends in the post-WWII black secular music scene and the music industry. What follows are excerpts from the interview transcript.

Cooper: Reading your bio, it's very clear that you are someone who wears many hats. For instance, you are an artist, producer, lecturer, workshop leader, ensemble director, etc. I would like to know how you arrived at this point in your life, starting at the beginning.

Tillery: Well, when I was a really young child, two or three years old, I was really drawn to music, drawn to the sounds. I guess I was like a passerby—when I would hear a song, I'd remember it. And there were a few artists back then that stuck in my mind. I was a big fan of Count Basie. My father had a Basie recording of "April in Paris." I would listen to that record until I had memorized the arrangement. So, he'd get to the end and the band would stop. It would be like the false ending, and Basie would say, "Let's do it one more one," and they'd kick into it again, and I just found that really intriguing. At the same time, via the radio, I would listen to a steady stream of '50s R&B. So I heard artists like Louis Jordan, Ruth Brown, Laverne Baker, Roy Hamilton, and I would mimic them. So I guess you could say that I started out as a mimicker. I didn't have any

formal training when I was really young, except by way of the radio and recorded music. Those were my teachers. And I continued to develop my ear for music throughout my childhood.

When I went to middle school, I joined my school orchestra. It wasn't my plan to do so, but I ended up in the string bass section. . . That's not what I wanted, but my teacher told me that my hands were right for [the bass], so he stuck me in there. We played primarily European classical music. Even though I was resentful of it at the time, I came to see how beneficial that had been to me in later years because it truly broadened my musical scope. So I played the string bass through middle school and high school, and then when I graduated I made the decision not to be a career bassist, but rather a singer.

At that time in the '60s, there still weren't that many women who were making a living at being an instrumentalist. So I was going to go the route that I felt had the least resistance, which was to be a vocalist. And so not knowing how you became a vocalist, I sort of waited for my opportunity, and my opportunity came in 1969 through a newspaper ad in our local paper in San Francisco. There was a rock band, or an R&B/rock band, called the Loading Zone, looking for a singer. I went over for an audition, and they hired me. This was kind of a hippie band, but they were into R&B. They were into all of the stuff that I had listened to throughout my life, and especially the music that was coming out of Stax—Southern soul music like Sam & Dave, Rufus Thomas, [Carla] Thomas, and especially Otis Redding and James Brown. So I fell right in there, and it was musically very comfortable for me because I didn't have to go learn a whole new repertoire or a whole new idiom of music.



Tillery on the drums. PHOTO: Lynda Gordon

I stayed for a few years, and actually learned how to be a professional musician because I literally stepped out of my mother's living room onto the stage with these guys and I didn't know anything about being a professional singer. Nothing! I didn't know what you wore. I didn't know what you said, anything like that. So I got on the job training. During that period I had the opportunity of seeing and hearing many people whom I had admired during my life. It was a very exciting time for me because I was only nineteen years old and here I was opening for B. B. King and Albert King.

In addition to Tillery's early formal and informal music education, she discussed how her experience with the Loading Zone introduced her to the music industry and broadened her awareness of artistic performance:

Tillery: [The Loading Zone] was definitely my entry into the music industry. The band was already signed to what then was RCA Victor Records. So I basically stepped into a situation that was ready-made. I joined the band and down we went to Los Angeles to do a record. Like I said, I was green behind the ears. I didn't know anything about making records and being on the road. Most of the guys in the band, they were a few years older than me so they had experience already. I wasn't even twenty-one. I wasn't old enough to vote.

Cooper: What did you learn in that band, in the Loading Zone?

Tillery: I learned how to listen to music with more of a critical ear and I learned more about what was good and what was not. I learned a lot about jazz while I was in that band. We had a horn section and the trombonist kind of made it his mission in life to bring me around to an understanding of some of the earlier artists who were not rock 'n' roll players but were real serious hardcore beboppers. So I used to

spend hours with my friend Patrick O'Hara listening to Art Tatum and Charlie Parker and people like Roy Haynes and Max Roach. Also Wayne Shorter, who has become one of my all-time favorite musicians. I love his voice on the tenor.

As a consultant for the upcoming AAAMC conference, Tillery shared her notions of the definition and origin of black rock in relation to those of rock in general. In addition, she sheds some light on the shifting music industry and her involvement in it as a black female artist.

Cooper: Black rock, what is it?

Tillery: I don't know that I'm really prepared to give a definition, but I could talk in terms of my experience. Rock 'n' roll, a term that was coined during the '50s, is an idiom of music that evolved out of black musical expression. People like Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Louis Jordan were around, and they created what came to be rock 'n' roll. Now, because of racism in this country—and I'll speak frankly—there are a lot of musicians who could have, should have, gone further in their careers, but were not able to. Because most of white America was not willing to embrace these black musicians yet, the music got appropriated by white artists such as Pat Boone, who covered "Tutti-Frutti," which was Little Richard's tune. Then it became a hit. Sam Phillips, who used to own [Sun Records], initially recorded black artists down in the south, but folks weren't buying the records. The minute that he signed Elvis Presley and some other southern white male singers, he started selling records by the buckets full. So it really has been a situation where black rock has had to wait for its day in the sunshine. It took a long time, I think, for black musicians to be recognized.

During the '60s, just around the time I joined Loading Zone, there was this term that started to be thrown around, "rock music." What it referred to were white men with long hair who played [in] a quartet consisting of electric guitars, electric bass, and drums. That really was the standard for a long time. That's what people meant when they said rock. It was the Rolling Stones, Beatles, the whole invasion from England, Herman's Hermits; I could go on and on. Then, the English guys started to gain an interest in black blues musicians. So this kind of caused a counter-revolution. The British artists started recording songs written by Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters, and Howlin' Wolf. This provided income for black people by way of their songwriting royalties, but it didn't do a whole lot to increase their visibility as artists. We're still talking about a moment that is waiting to come.

Simultaneously, there were young black musicians who were starting to pick up the guitar and play in the same style. What's interesting to me is that one of the most revered musicians in rock music seems to be an African American male, Jimi Hendrix. He said, okay, I'm going to play the guitar and I'm going to play the guitar better than anybody out there, which is exactly what he did. He just blew everybody away. So for the first time we had people paying attention to a black musician who was playing in



Tillery with the Cultural Heritage Choir

the style that came to be known as rock music: electric guitar, a lot of note-bending, high volume, even pyrotechnics. He laid the groundwork for other black musicians to enter into that arena. Then came Buddy Miles, and people like Ben Harper, [who represents] a whole new generation of musicians. They're all kind of walking in Jimi's shoes. So I think black rock is an extension of what you would call rock 'n' roll, and it has incorporated lots of different influences.

Cooper: How did you get involved in what we now know as black rock?

Tillery: I never really wanted to go into show business, into what I called at the time "square show business," where you go and put on the evening dress, you go to Las Vegas, and you sing standards. That's mostly what it was until about the mid '60s. Then, all of a sudden, you've got the bell-bottom pants and the velour, and everybody's growing their hair longer, and things are loosening up a lot. People are looking way different than they used to. I think that is another aspect of what rock music became. It was also a way they could take control of their image and their music. Prior to that you got signed to a label and they would assign you to an A&R man, who would then hire a producer. The producer would either write or get someone to write arrangements for you. You'd get stuck in a studio and record what they wanted you to. Now, all of a sudden, people want to write their own music with their own lyrics and poetry, and they want to present themselves in the way that they feel most comfortable. I think that revolutionized the entertainment industry. Before that, black artists used to go out and the guys would have on the same suits. Now there's a tidal wave of people saying we don't want to do it that way anymore, we want to do it our way. So then what developed were groups like Parliament-Funkadelic. They seized the opportunity to become a lot more experimental, to stretch out more with the music, and to get more into the straight funk. In a way, they kind of wrote the book. It's

hard to top that.

Cooper: What was it like to be a black female in the music industry?

Tillery: Well, I consider myself a role model to young women, black, white, whatever. I know this because I'm often told this. When I started out as a singer and a musician, there weren't that many women doing what I did or what I wanted to do. We were really considered kind of freaks: "You want to be a drummer? Oh come on!" But, I could never let go of my vision or my dream. It's like this is what I want to do; this is what I'm feeling in my spirit and in my soul. I'm feeling the voice and I'm feeling the drums. I was so glad when Sheila E. stepped out in the forefront as a female drummer and was kicking some major bootie. People had to acknowledge that women could really play.

As African Americans gained more access into the mainstream music industry, the nature of black music shifted as a result. Tillery elucidated this change and one of its primary causes:

Cooper: You have defined black rock through your experiences. I think the term black rock has various implications. A major one, to me, is the existence of "white rock." Now, you talked about the historical differences between black and white folk performing rock music. In today's time, how does black rock differ from white rock music?

Tillery: I think a lot of the younger musicians have stepped away from the roots. At least, that's what I hear. We've got Afro-punk and Afro-psychedelic. It's more mainstream. That generation of musicians that I mentioned, Buddy Miles, Jimi Hendrix, and Marlo Henderson, were still like the white boys, still quoting Chuck Berry, Albert Collins, and B.B. King. They still had elements of blues in their music. I think some of the young musicians are stepping away from that because they find it too confining. They don't want to be restrained and just relegated to regurgitating something that's already been played.

Cooper: That brings me to the idea of assessing the evolution of black music. Has African American music evolved or has it simply collapsed into the mainstream standards and values of creativity?

Tillery: I think that on the commercial level, yes, it has fallen into a state of collapse. I really haven't heard much that's new in a long time. I think that music can become so sanitized that you take its originality right out of it. For example, the African American spiritual, which is one of our folk music forms, was born in the field. But it has also become a part of the repertoire of a number of operatic singers. So what they've done is apply European classical techniques to this very simple art form. It has become something different. I know there is beauty in it, but my preference is to hear it performed as it was at its inception, because that's where I get the emotional impact of what was meant by the song. The same thing is true today. If you go back and listen to Sam & Dave, "When Something Is

Wrong with My Baby,” and then you listen to a similar kind of ballad sung by an artist today, there are two things that I’m sure have happened. One, the vocals are out of tune in the older recording. Everything is going to be in tune on the new recording. With Sam & Dave you might hear some flipage, which is a part of the character of the performance. The other thing you won’t hear is a lot of over-singing. With Sam & Dave it’s more from the heart and you still get a sense of what the song is as opposed to the song being at the service of the singer’s chops. The chops should always be at the service of the song you’re singing, and not the other way around.

Tillery has also been an educator for almost two decades and continues to have an extensive performance career. Here she discusses her primary educational focus and the formation of the Cultural Heritage Choir:

Cooper: How did you get into teaching?

Tillery: It was the strangest thing. Right about the time that I turned forty, I had a conversation with myself that went kind of like this: “Okay, you’re forty, you’re no longer a young woman, you’re not an old woman but you’re not young. So where do you see yourself at this point in your life.” It took about half a year of asking myself that question

over and over again. So one evening, I’m sitting at home watching Jessye Norman and Kathleen Battle singing spirituals on TV. It hit me over the head like a sledge hammer and I said, “Oh yeah, this is what I’m talking about.” In that moment, the realization came to me that it was going to be about roots music. I was going to go back to the source, not just the spiritual, but also the work songs and the ring shouts, and the children’s play songs, moans and field hollers. That was where I wanted to live and that’s where I’ve been living for the past seventeen years [with the Cultural Heritage Choir]—with that music, with those musical forms.

Cooper: What is the Cultural Heritage Choir?

Tillery: Well, Cultural Heritage Choir is my home base now. It’s my brainchild and it’s been the source of more miraculous experiences than anything that I’ve ever participated in before. We’re mainly a performance ensemble but we also do workshops and residencies. I always try to introduce audiences to facts about the way in which black music came to be, especially in this country.

- Interview and transcript adaptation by Tyron Cooper, AAAMC Graduate Assistant



Index for Black Grooves

Black Grooves is dedicated to providing our readers with monthly updates on new releases and quality reissues of music, movies, and books. Any and all works by African American artists and musicians are eligible for review and Black Grooves covers a variety of genres. Featured

themes from this past year have included black history, hip hop in film, and holy hip hop with a continuing focus on rock music as part of the preparation for the AAAMC’s upcoming conference.

The following is a complete index of reviews posted at www.blackgrooves.org from Nov. 2007 through Oct. 2008:

Books and Articles			
Author	Title	Publisher	Issue
Benjaminson, Peter	The Lost Supreme: The Life of Dreamgirl Florence Ballard	Lawrence Hill Books	9-2008
Evans, David (Ed.)	Ramblin’ on My Mind: New Perspectives on the Blues	University of Illinois Press	2-2008
Evans, Joe; Brooks, Christopher	Follow Your Heart: Moving with the Giants of Jazz, Swing, and Rhythm and Blues	University of Illinois Press	3-2008
George, Nelson; Leeds, Alan (Eds.)	The James Brown Reader: 50 Years of Writing About the Godfather of Soul	Plume	7-2008
Kugelberg, Johan (Ed.)	Born in the Bronx: A Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop	Rizzoli	12-2007
Masouri, John	Wailing Blues: The Story of Bob Marley’s Wailers	Omnibus Press	6-2008
Reeves, Marcus	Somebody Scream!: Rap Music’s Rise to Prominence in the Aftershock of Black Power	Faber & Faber	6-2008
Saunders, Jesse; Cummins, James	House Music...The Real Story	Publish America	6-2008
Schmid, Fredrick	Freddy Fresh Presents The Rap Records (2nd Rev. Ed.)	Nerby Publishing	6-2008

CDs			
Artist	Title	Label/Catalog No.	Issue
Classical Music			
Anderson, Marian	Singers to Remember: Oratorio and Lieder	Dutton/Vocalion: CDBP 9774	1-2008
Brewer, Christine; Vignoles, Robert	Songs by Wagner, Wolf, Britten and John Carter	Wigmore Hall Live: 22	7-2008
Brueggergosman, Measha	Surprise	Deutsche Grammophon: B0009386-02	1-2008
Hailstork, Adolphus	Symphonies Nos. 2 & 3	Naxos: 8559295	1-2008
Kay, Ulysses	Orchestral Works	Albany: TROY961	1-2008
León, Tania	Singin' Sepia	Bridge Records: 9231	9-2008
Nash Ensemble	Coleridge-Taylor: Piano Quintet; Clarinet Quintet	Hyperion, UK: CDA67590	1-2008
Singleton, Alvin	Sing to the Sun	Albany: TROY902	1-2008
Club/Dance/Techno			
Amp Fiddler	Afro Strut	Play It Again Sam: 32	12-2007
Craig, Carl	Sessions	K7 Records: !K7224CD	4-2008
Felix da Housecat	Virgo Blaktro & the Movie Disco	Netzwerk: 0 6700 30746 2 9	11-2007
Folk, Country			
Various Artists	Art of Field Recording Volume I	Dust-to-Digital: DTD-08	11-2007
Various Artists	Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia	Smithsonian Folkways: 40079	3-2008
Gospel Music			
City of Refuge Sanctuary Choir	Welcome to the City	Tyscot: TYSD-984149-2	2-2008
Disciples	Change	Priesthood Rec. Co.	1-2008
Gay, Donald; Gay, Geraldine	Soulful Sounds	Sirens: CDBY 151923	1-2008
Georgia Mass Choir	Tell It	Savoy: SCD7130	4-2008
Hawkins, Tramaine	I Never Lost My Praise	Gospocentric: 82876-85332-2	1-2008
Jones, Brent & The T.P. Mobb	The Ultimate Weekend	Tyscot: TYS 984163 2	10-2008
McClurkin Project	We Praise You	Zomba Gospel: 82876-69697-2	1-2008
Moss, J.	V2	Zomba: 82876-87214-2	1-2008
Paschall Brothers	On the Right Road Now	Smithsonian Folkways: 40176	2-2008
Rosario, Joann	Joyous Salvation	Verity: 88697080652	1-2008
Staples, Mavis	We'll Never Turn Back	Anti: 86830-2	1-2008
Various Artists	Classic African American Gospel	Smithsonian Folkways: 40194	4-2008
Various Artists	WOW Gospel 2007	Zomba: 88697024992	1-2008
Winans, BeBe	Cherch	TMG: 099923503521	1-2008
Winans, Marvin	Alone But Not Alone	Pure Springs Gospel: 86278	1-2008
Jazz, Blues			
Allen, Carl; Whitaker, Rodney	Get Ready	Mack Avenue: MAC 1034	11-2007
Batiste, Alvin	Marsalis Music Honors Alvin Batiste	Rounder: 74946-0007-2	3-2008
Blanchard, Terence	A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)	Blue Note: 915322	1-2008
Blythe, Jimmy	Messin' Around Blues	Delmark: DE 792	12-2007
Bridgewater, Dee Dee	Red Earth: A Malian Journey	Emarcy: B0009091-02	1-2008
Cephas and Wiggins	Richmond Blues	Smithsonian Folkways: 40179	7-2008
Charles Mingus Sextet	Cornell 1964	Blue Note: 0946 3 92210 2 8 (2 CD set)	1-2008
Chris Barber Band	The Blues Legacy: 'Lost and Found' Series	Blues Legacy: 5067X-5069X (3 CD set)	6-2008
Davis, Rev. Gary	Manchester Free Trade Hall 1964	Document: DOCD 32-20-14	5-2008
Davis, Miles	Beautiful Ballads & Love Songs	Legacy: 88697216242	2-2008
Davis, Miles	The Complete On the Corner Sessions	Legacy: 88697062392 (6 CD set)	5-2008

Edwards, Honeyboy	Roamin' and Ramblin'	Earwig: CD 4953	4-2008
Gales, Eric	The Story of My Life	Blues Bureau: BB-2060 2	9-2008
Glasper, Robert	In My Element	Blue Note: 0946 3 78111 2 2	1-2008
Guy, Buddy	Skin Deep	Zomba: 8869731629	10-2008
Hancock, Herbie	River: The Joni Letters	Verve: B0009791-02	1-2008
Holiday, Billie	Beautiful Ballads & Love Songs	Columbia/Legacy: 88697 21625 2	2-2008
Holiday, Billie	Lady Day: The Master Takes and Singles	Columbia/Legacy: 88697 10955 2 (4 CD set)	1-2008
Loueke, Lionel	Karibu	Blue Note: 12791	4-2008
Silver, Horace	Live at Newport '58	Blue Note: 0946 3 98070 2 4	3-2008
Smith, Willie; Ewell, Don	Stride Piano Duets Live in Toronto, 1966	Delmark: 249	9-2008
Stafford, Mary; Wilson, Edith	Ain't Gonna Settle Down	Archeophone: ARCH 6006	9-2008
Taj Mahal	Maestro	Heads Up: HUCD3164	10-2008
Taylor, Billy; Mulligan, Gerry	Billy Taylor & Gerry Mulligan Live at MCG	Manchester Craftmen's Guild: CD 2852	2-2008
Taylor, Otis	Recapturing the Banjo	Telarc: 83667	3-2008
Turner, Ike; Turner, Tina	The Ike & Tina Turner Story 1960-1975	Time Life/WEA (3 CD set)	1-2008
Ulmer, James Blood	Bad Blood in the City: The Piety Street Sessions	Hyena: HYN 9355	1-2008
Various Artists	Atlantic Blues (1949-1970)	Rhino: RHM2 7737 (4 CD set)	1-2008
Various Artists	The Blues Roots of the Rolling Stones	Snapper: SBLUECD047	7-2008
Various Artists	Classic Piano Blues	Smithsonian Folkways: 40196	7-2008
Various Artists	John Work, III: Recording Black Culture	Spring Fed: SFR 104	5-2008
Wells, Junior; Guy, Buddy	Junior Wells: Live at Nightstage	Image Ent.: ID3630JXDVD	2-2008
Wilson, Cassandra	Loverly	Blue Note: 50999 5 2169	10-2008
Popular, Rock, Misc.			
Berry, Chuck	Johnny B. Goode: His Complete '50s Chess Recordings	Hip-O Select/Geffen: B0009473-02	4-2008
Harper, Ben; Innocent Criminals	Lifeline	Virgin: 09463 93385 28	3-2008
Jackson, Michael	Thriller 25	Legacy: 88697 22096 2	3-2008
Kravitz, Lenny	It Is Time for a Love Revolution	Virgin: 724386378620	3-2008
Lightspeed Champion	Falling Off the Lavender Bridge	Domino: DNO 154	9-2008
Various Artists	Passing Strange: Original Broadway Cast Recording	Ghostlight: 84429	9-2008
Prince	Planet Earth	Artist: 88697 12970 2	1-2008
Santogold	Santogold	Downtown: 70034	7-2008
Various Artists	City of Dreams: A Collection of New Orleans Music	Rounder: 11661-2196-2 (4 CD set)	1-2008
Various Artists	Great Debaters: Music From & Recorded for the Motion Picture	Atlantic: 396860	5-2008
Various Artists	Up Jumped the Devil: American "Devil" Songs, 1920s-1950s	Viper (UK): CD047	10-2008
Various Artists	Vee-Jay: The Definitive Collection	Shout: 826663-10485	1-2008
Wooten, Victor	Palmystery	Heads Up: HUCD3135	5-2008
R&B, Soul, Funk			
Amnesty	Free-Your-Mind: The 700 West Sessions	Stonethrow: NWG 005027	1-2008
Ashford & Simpson	The Warner Bros. Years: Hits, Remixes, and Rarities	Rhino/WEA: R2 347964	6-2008
Badu, Erykah	New Amerykah, Pt. 1 (4th World War)	Universal: B0010800-02	4-2008
Blige, Mary J.	Growing Pains	Geffen: B0010313-02	1-2008
Franklin, Aretha	Beautiful Ballads & Love Songs	Columbia/Legacy: 88697 21627 2	2-2008
Franklin, Aretha	Oh Me Oh My: Aretha Live In Philly, 1972	Rhino Handmade: RHM2 07757	1-2008
Franklin, Aretha	Rare and Unreleased Recordings	Rhino: R2 272188 (2 CD set)	1-2008

Funkadelic	By Way of the Drum	Hip-O Select: B0007399-02	1-2008
Gaye, Marvin	Here, My Dear (Expanded Ed.)	Hip-O Select: B0010315-02	1-2008
Gaye, Marvin	In Our Lifetime? (Expanded Love Man Ed.)	Hip-O Select: B0008082-02	1-2008
Green, Al	Lay It Down	Blue Note: 13719	7-2008
Hezekiah	I Predict a Riot	Rawkus: RKS014	11-2007
James, Rick	Deeper Still	Stone City: 015	1-2008
Jennings, Lyfe	Lyfe Change	Sony Urban: 88097 07966 2	9-2008
Jones, Sharon & the Dap-Kings	100 Days, 100 Nights	Daptone: DAP-012	1-2008
Jordan, Lonnie	War Stories	Fantasy: FCD-30266; Concord: 1027	9-2008
Khan, Chaka	Funk This	Burgundy: 88697 09022 2	11-2007
LaBelle, Patti	Patti LaBelle Live in Washington, D.C.	Philadelphia/Legacy: 88697 29486 2	10-2008
Michael, Kevin	Kevin Michael	Downtown/Atlantic: 243580-2	3-2008
Michele, Chrisette	I Am	Def Jam: B0008774-02	1-2008
Parker, Maceo	Roots & Grooves	Heads Up: CD 2912	2-2008
Scott, Jill	The Real Thing: Words and Sounds Vol. 3	Hidden Beach: HBRCD00050	1-2008
Stone, Angie	The Art of Love and War	Stax: 30146	12-2007
T-Pain	Epiphany	Jive: 88697-08719-2	1-2008
Thomas, Rufus	Rufus Thomas: His R&B Recordings, 1949-1956	Bear Family: BCD 16695AH	9-2008
Various Artists	The 3 Tenors of Soul: All the Way From Philadelphia	Shanachie: 5768	4-2008
Vandross, Luther	Love, Luther	Epic/J Records/Legacy: 88697 11856 2	11-2007
Various Artists	Atlantic Soul (1959-1975)	Rhino Handmade: RHM2 7739 (4 CD set)	1-2008
Various Artists	Conquer the World: The Lost Soul of Philadelphia International Records	Philadelphia/Legacy: 88697 27338 2	5-2008
Various Artists	Florida Funk: Funk 45's from the Alligator State	Now-Again/Stonethrow: NA5029	1-2008
Various Artists	Soulsville Sings Hitsville: Stax Sings Songs of Motown Records	Stax/Concord: STXCD-30391	6-2008
Various Artists	The Sound of Philadelphia: Gamble & Huff's Greatest Hits	Philadelphia/Legacy: 88697 21087 2	5-2008
Various Artists	Stax Does the Beatles	Stax/Concord: STXCD-30390	6-2008
Various Artists	Wattstax '72: Music from the Festival and Film	Concord: STX3-30315	11-2007
Was (Not Was)	Boo!	Ryko: RCD 10943	10-2008
Wright, Charles & the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band	Live at the Haunted House	Rhino Handmade: Rhino 7771	10-2008
Rap, Hip Hop			
Aesop Rock	None Shall Pass	Def Jux: DJX144	1-2008
Atmosphere	When Life Gives You Lemons	Rhymesayers: RSE-0095	7-2008
Black Milk	Popular Demand	Fat Beats: 65912351212	1-2008
Blu & Exile	Below the Heavens	Sound In Color: SIC014	1-2008
Common	Finding Forever	Geffen: 000938202	11-2007
Del the Funky Homosapien	Eleventh Hour	Definitive Jux: 881562	4-2008
Devin the Dude	Waiting to Inhale	Rap-A-Lot: 68563	1-2008
FLAME	Our World Redeemed	Cross Movement: 30030	5-2008
Ice Cube	Ice Cube: In the Movies	Priority: 09463 97253 28	3-2008
Ice Cube	Raw Footage	Lench Mob: 509992 34635 23	10-2008
Killah Priest	The Offering	Good Hands: 00829357243720	1-2008
Kweli, Talib	Eardrum	Warner Bros.: 277244	11-2007
Lil Wayne	Tha Carter III	Cash Money: B0011033-02 IN02	7-2008
Nas	Untitled	Def Jam: B0011505-02	9-2008
Phanatik	Crimes & Consequences	Cross Movement: CRIME-23912	5-2008

Price, Sean	Jesus Price Supastar	Duck Down: DDM-CD-2045	1-2008
Roots	Rising Down	Def Jam: B0011138-02	5-2008
shai linne	The Atonement	Lamp Mode: 0775020844827	6-2008
Sho Baraka	Turn Up My Life	Reach: 8 29569 80442 9	5-2008
SoulStice	Dead Letter Perfect	Wandering Soul: WNSOUL009	4-2008
Turf Talk	West Coast Vaccine: The Cure	Sick Wid It: SWR-2010	1-2008
U.G.K.	Underground Kingz	Jive: 88697-02631-2R	1-2008
West, Kanye	Graduation	Rock-A-Fella: B0009541-02	1-2008
will.i.am	Songs About Girls	Interscope: 602517468245 (UPC)	12-2007
Young Bleed	Once Upon a Time in Amedica	West Coast Mafia: WCF-2031	1-2008
Reggae			
Culture	Two Sevens Clash	Shanachie: 45065	1-2008
Earth, Roots, and Water	Innocent Youths	Light in the Attic: LITA032	7-2008
Franti, Michael; Spearhead	All Rebel Rockers	Anti/Boo Boo Wax: ANTI 86906/89-2	10-2008
Various Artists	When Rhythm Was King	Rounder: CDHBEA 330/01161783027	2-2008
World Music			
Afrissippi	Alliance	Hill Country: 8095	10-2008
Antibalas	Security	Anti: 86848-2	1-2008
Mtukudzi, Oliver	Tsimba Itsoka	Heads Up: CD 2855	3-2008
Touré, Daby	Stereo Spirit	Real World: CDRW146	2-2008
Various Artists	Cult Cargo: Grand Bahama Goombay	Numero: N014	1-2008
Wild Magnolias	They Call Us Wild	Sunnyside/Ryko: SSC 3068	1-2008

DVDs			
Artist	Title	Label/Catalog No.	Issue
Bell, Carey	Gettin' Up: Live at Buddy Guy's Legends, Rosa's, and Lurrie's Home	Delmark: DVD1791	12-2007
Blackwell, Marshall; Whiteburn, Norman (Dirs.)	Stepping: The Documentary	CTG Films; dist. by MVD Visual	6-2008
Brown, Oscar Jr.	Music is My Life, Politics My Mistress: The Story of Oscar Brown, Jr.	No Credits Production	12-2007
Burke, Solomon	The King Live at Avo Session Basel	MVD Visual: MVDV4608	2-2008
Jimi Hendrix Experience	Live at Monterey	Experience Hendrix: 602517455177	11-2007
Mayfield, Curtis & the Impressions	Movin' On Up: The Music and Message of Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions	Hip-O: B0010887-09	7-2008
Redding, Otis	Dreams to Remember: The Legacy of Otis Redding	Stax/Reelin' in the Years: DVD 7031	1-2008
Sayles, John (Dir.)	Honeydripper	Screen Media Films: 68104699	12-2007
Various Artists	Atlantic Records: The House That Ahmet Built	Rhino/Wea: R2 128892	1-2008
Various Artists	cELLABration: A Tribute to Ella Jenkins Live!	Smithsonian Folkways: SFW DV 48007	12-2007
Various Artists	Chasin' Gus' Ghost	Ezzie Films	12-2007
Various Artists	Coping With Babylon: The Proper Rastology	MVD Visual: MVD4617	4-2008
Various Artists	Jazz Icons, Vol. 2	Reelin' in the Years: 2.108001; 2.119001-2.119007	1-2008
Various Artists	Reggae Nashville: Deep Roots Music, Vol. 1-3	MVD Visual: MVD 49-51 [3 DVD set]	6-2008
Various Artists	Stax/Volt Revue Live In Norway 1967	Stax/Reelin' in the Years: DVD 7030	1-2008

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