

ARCHIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC AND CULTURE

liner notes

NO. 18 / 2013-2014

From Soul
Syndicate to
Super Scholar:
**Portia K.
Maultsby**



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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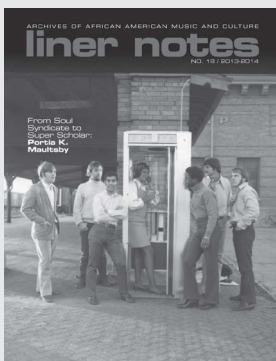
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Portia & the Soul Syndicate, ca. 1969
Photographer unknown

From the Desk of the Director



Portia Maultsby and Mellonee Burnim. Photo by Chris Meyer, courtesy of Indiana University.

Today I write my last director's column for *Liner Notes* as I prepare to retire after a forty-two-year career at Indiana University. One of my most rewarding activities during this long residency has been my work as founding director of the Archives of African American Music and Culture. From the outset, my goal was to establish an archives with a focus on black musical and cultural traditions, including popular and religious music, personality radio of the post-World War II era, and the musical legacy of Indiana, that largely had been excluded (jazz being the exception) from the collection efforts of established archives, libraries, and research centers.

Actively pursuing this mission since 1991, the AAAMC has evolved into a nationally recognized institution. Our collections are used by scholars, journalists, students, and the general public throughout the US and Europe, and our public programs (lectures, symposia and conferences, etc.), which are often organized in conjunction with the exhibition of these materials, attract the same groups who fill the venue to capacity. We have begun to develop podcasts and finding aids to promote these unique collections online. The archives would not have achieved its current standing without the unique cadre of donors who entrusted the AAAMC as custodians of their life's work. For this support, I express my gratitude.

My work at the archives has been facilitated by members of the National

Advisory Board, who have donated materials and promoted the work of the archives, assisted in identifying and acquiring collections, offered ideas for programs and development projects, and provided general counsel. I take this opportunity to publicly thank them for their unwavering support over the years.

I also acknowledge the archives' superb and dedicated full-time and student staff, who offered many creative ideas for collection development, public programs, and marketing activities over the past twenty-two years. I give a special "shout out" to Brenda Nelson-Strauss (head of collections) and Ronda Sewald (administrator/project coordinator), whose advanced archival and technological skills have propelled the AAAMC into the new millennium with regard to the preservation, accessibility, and dissemination of its collections.

I conclude by welcoming the AAAMC's next director, Dr. Mellonee Burnim, who has been a contributor to the mission of the archives since 1995 as a research associate. A scholar of black religious music with a specialization in gospel, she brings a wealth of knowledge that will advance our work in this area (see inside story). Meanwhile, I will remain affiliated with the AAAMC as a research associate and will continue my work documenting the legacy of African Americans in the music industry and the history of choirs specializing in black gospel music in the Netherlands (see inside story).

Portia K. Maultsby

In the Vault: Recent Donations

Angela Brown Collection:

Additional programs and press clippings from 2012-2013.

Gertrude Rivers Robinson Collection:

Additional recordings and personal papers related to her compositions and research on Balinese music.

Logan H. Westbrooks Collection:

Additional awards and memorabilia, recordings, videos, and clippings documenting Westbrooks's career at CBS and Source Records as well as his activities with the Church of God in Christ.

Portia K. Maulsby Collection:

Additional personal papers as well as research materials related to black gospel choirs in the Netherlands.

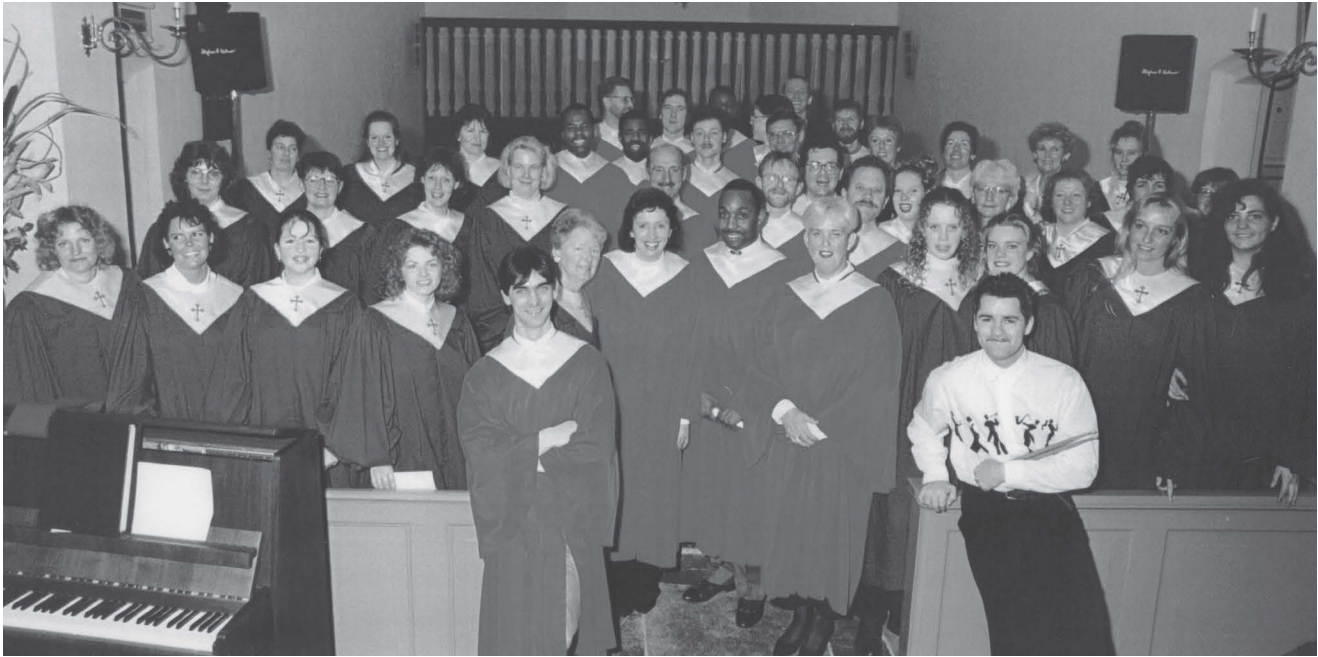
Netherlands Gospel Choirs Collection:

Includes the personal papers of Edith Casteleyn, founder and director of Dutch community gospel choirs in the Netherlands, as well as scrapbooks, recordings, clippings, programs, publicity materials, and photographs documenting the Friendship Gospel Choir, Lifeline Gospel Choir, Alive Choir, and the Rainbow Gospel Singers.

CD/DVD/Book/Music Donors:

IK7 Records	Dust-to-Digital	Kevin Sylvester	Press Junkie
6.8.2. Records	Eagle Rock Entertainment	Labtekwon	Real Gone Music
819 Entertainment	EMI	Legacy Recordings	Red Distribution
AFM Entertainment	EMI Gospel	Louisiana Red Hot Records	Reggae Archive Records
Angel Records	Entertainment One	Mack Avenue	Rock Army
Ari Folman-Cohen	Fantastic Voyage	Manhattan Records	Rock Paper Scissors
Ark Recordings	Fat Beats	Martez Music	Rounder Records
Audible Treats	Fire Monkey	Mayimba Music	Secret Stash
Audio Preservation Fund	First Run Features	Megan Holmes	Shanachie Entertainment
Ballin' Entertainment	FlipSwitch PR	Mello Music Group	Shore Fire Media
Basin Street Records	Flying Buddha	Mello Sound Press	Six Degrees
BB Gun Press	Forced Exposure	Michael McGill	SLG
Bear Family	Funky Town Grooves	Michael Woods	Snapper Music
Bellamy Group	Gico Music	Miles High Productions	Sony Music Entertainment
Blind Pig	Girlie Action	Modern Classic Recordings	'Stache Media
Blind Raccoon	Gold City Records	Morris + King Company	Sterns Music
Blue Note	GoMedia PR	Motéma Music	Stones Throw Records
Blues Images	Harmonia Mundi	Mr. Bongo	Stony Plain Records
Breath of Life	Higgins Music Group	Mr. Wonderful Productions	Stooz Records
Broke & Hungry Records	High Note	MVD	Storyville Records
Brookes Company	Hozac Records	Nancy Hirsch Group	Sugar Shack
Bucklesweet Media	In The Red	Naxos of America	Telarc Records
Capital Entertainment	Interscope Records	New World Records	Tramp Records
Capitol Records	IPG	Ninja Tune	Tyscot Records
Cherry Red Records	JAG Entertainment	Nonesuch Records	UMG
Concord Music Group	James Cornolo	Not Now Music	University of Auckland
Conqueroo	Jamie Record Co.	Nu Revolution	University of Chicago Press
Cumbancha	Janlyn PR	Numero Group	Vampisoul
Cuneiform Records	Jared Nickerson	Omni Group	VP Records
Dana Hemphill Music	Jasmine Records	Origin Records	Walking the Spirit Tours
Daptone Records	Jazz Promo Services	Otá Records	Wide Hive Records
Delmark Records	Jenn Christy	Outer Circle Music	Worldisc
Dialtone Records	K.W. Brown Int'l. Ministries	Parallel Thought	Wounded Bird Records
Divine Pocket Bouncers	Kamara Thomas	PIAS	Yellow Dog Records
DL Media	Kathy Beatty	Plug Research Music	

The AAAMC welcomes donations of photographs, film, video, sound recordings, music, and research materials on all aspects of African American music.



The Friendship Gospel Choir, 1994.

Featured Collection

Black Gospel Music in the Netherlands: A Case Study

While teaching at Utrecht University in the Netherlands during the spring of 1998, I made an amazing discovery—four Dutch choirs that specialized in “Black American gospel music.” Edith Casteleyn, the Euro-Dutch director of the choirs, uses this term to distinguish the repertoire and style of her choirs from those of groups self-identifying as “gospel choirs.” Although some Dutch choirs call themselves gospel choirs, she emphatically states that they “don’t sing the ‘real thing.’ They sing Christian music, and that is *not* the same as Black American gospel music.”

Casteleyn, a classically trained pianist, is very clear on the distinction between Christian music and gospel music, the latter being synonymous with the music performed by black gospel choirs in the United States. After all, she spent fourteen years learning gospel from the source—the black church and African American gospel greats. Her training began in 1980 in the chapel on the American side of the Royal Netherlands Air Force Base in Soesterberg, where the black gospel service was held every Sunday afternoon. Casteleyn joined the congregation and remained an active member until the American side of the base closed in 1994. During those years, she immersed herself in the black gospel tradition by singing and serving as a pianist, as the director of the youth choir, and finally as the official director of the Soesterberg gospel choir on a contract awarded by the United States Air Force Base. In the latter capacity, Casteleyn attended religious music workshops offered through the military in Germany, where she studied gospel piano styles, choral directing, arranging, and black religious music history under renowned gospel music performers such as Richard Smallwood.

At the request of Dutch community members, Casteleyn, along with members of the Soesterberg gospel choir, began conducting workshops on African American gospel music in local communities in 1990. From these workshops evolved Dutch community gospel choirs in the four regions of the Netherlands. The first one, the Friendship Gospel Choir, was organized in 1991 near the Air Force base in Soest. This was followed by the Lifeline Gospel Choir in 1997 in Katwijk and several others. The most recent choir, Alive, was formed in 2008 in Nieuwegein. In addition, Casteleyn directs her own choir, the Rainbow Gospel Singers. These choirs perform throughout the Netherlands and Europe, and have also toured the United States on two occasions. Casteleyn has conducted workshops on black gospel music in the States, all over Europe, and in various African countries.

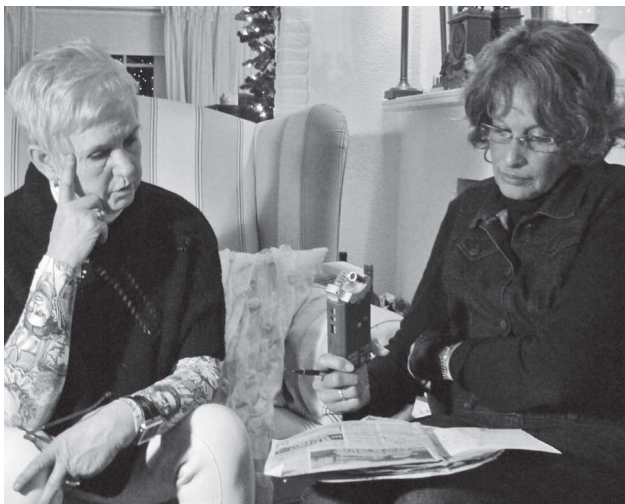
With these groups, Casteleyn has successfully transplanted the entire black gospel music matrix into Dutch social and cultural spaces. During weekly rehearsals, she transforms these spaces into a black religious setting by replicating the ritualized components



Edith Casteleyn.



Edith performing with the first Soesterberg gospel choir at an airbase in Sembach, Germany, ca. 1981.



Maultsby interviewing Casteleyn about her personal papers, 2012.

of this tradition. For example, she begins rehearsals with a prayer followed by a medley of praise songs and then a rigorous 2.5-hour rehearsal taught through traditional oral methods instead of using notated music, which concludes with a prayer. The last rehearsal of the season is preceded by a potluck dinner, an unknown concept in mainstream Dutch society.

I concluded my study of Casteleyn and the choirs during summer 2013. By spreading the research over fifteen years, I was able to follow developments and changes related to the choirs' missions, memberships, organizational structures, rehearsals, performances, reception, etc. From a cultural perspective, I wanted to understand how Casteleyn negotiated differences in the religious and cultural values between African American and Dutch societies and the way these differences impact the teaching, performance, and reception of gospel music in this new context. For instance, reportedly less than 50 percent of the Euro-Dutch population

professes to be Christians or believers, and the majority of these believers do not affiliate with any religious institution. Casteleyn's choirs are similarly diverse in their religious views. Nevertheless, they are influenced by the social norms sanctioned by the Dutch Reformed Church, which discourages the public display of emotion.

In contrast, black gospel choirs in the United States are made up almost exclusively of believers and church-goers, and the expression of emotions is encouraged rather than suppressed. Through perseverance, Casteleyn has managed to negotiate many of these and other challenges, including language barriers, in ways that preserve the fundamental integrity of the black gospel music tradition. Through a series of interviews with Casteleyn and choir members, I explored these and other issues, including the musical backgrounds of the members, their interest in and experiences learning and performing black gospel music, the meaning of this music and its impact on their lives, their views on religion, the music's reception by Dutch and European audiences, and the choirs' reception in churches with predominately black or white membership during tours in the States.

An unexpected find during my research was archival collections chronicling Casteleyn's fourteen-year participation in the African American gospel choir on the military base as well as the complete history of three of the choirs: Friendship, Lifeline, and Alive. These materials are extensive and include photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, publicity materials such as posters and flyers, correspondence, video recordings of workshops and performances, CD recordings, awards, and business records. Casteleyn and the choirs have donated these materials to the Archives of African American Music and Culture. Many of the print documents have already been translated into English. These collections—combined with my many hours of videotaped rehearsals, performances, and one-on-one interviews—provide a comprehensive examination of black gospel music in a global context.

— Portia K. Maultsby



IU Embarks on 5-Year Media Digitization and Preservation Initiative

I have witnessed collections deteriorating in hot attics and damp or flooded basements. I also have seen the life's work of individuals discarded from storage units. Therefore, it is essential to consider depositing your collections now, so that we can document and preserve your contributions in the area of African American music and culture.

—Portia K. Maultsby

During his 2013 State of the University address, Indiana University President Michael A. McRobbie unveiled a five-year Media Digitization and Preservation Initiative (MDPI) with the two-fold mission of preserving IU's vast compendium of time-based media and making these gems easily accessible for future generations. The initiative is the first of its kind for an American university, with a goal of digitizing the historically and culturally significant portion of approximately 650,000 analog audio and video recordings and films on the Bloomington and regional campuses prior to the University's bicentenary in 2020. As stated by McRobbie, "donors who have entrusted vital and irreplaceable collections to IU" will be pleased to learn that "the digitization of these legacy collections ensures that all of this material will be made available to the broadest possible audience and that it is preserved in perpetuity."

Though the current holdings of the AAAMC have already been surveyed by the MDPI team, there is still an opportunity to add additional media collections to the project. Due to the finite timeframe of the initiative and funding for digitization, however, we're urging potential donors to step forward as soon as possible, especially those with unique and irreplaceable collections of endangered media including instantaneous discs, audiocassettes, open reel tapes, videos on any format, and born digital media including DATs. These increasingly fragile materials must be stabilized and digitized as soon as possible, before obsolescence and deterioration render them unplayable. For example, Dr. Maultsby recalls her discovery that radio aircheck tapes of Jack "The Rapper" Gibson from the 1960s were beginning to degrade: "During the transfer, the tapes broke every few minutes, which prolonged the process from a week to nearly three months. Nevertheless, we were able to restore them, and the

airchecks have been used in radio documentaries, museums exhibitions, and referenced in publications on black radio and music. I have witnessed collections deteriorating in hot attics and damp or flooded basements. I also have seen the life's work of individuals discarded from storage units. Therefore, it is essential to consider depositing your collections now, so that we can document and preserve your contributions in the area of African American music and culture. We can't promise that collections donated to the AAAMC several years from now will receive the same level of priority for preservation and digitization once the MDPI project has concluded."

To further this goal, Maultsby is currently working with several trailblazers in the fields of journalism, broadcasting, and the music industry who have unique collections of audiovisual materials on obsolete formats that the AAAMC hopes to preserve.

The recent Library of Congress study *The State of Recorded Sound Preservation in the United States: A National Legacy at Risk in the Digital Age* (2010) acknowledged Indiana University's "strong record of commitment to audio preservation" as well as IU's "recognition as a national leader in research and development of best practices in the field." The study cited the university-wide media survey that preceded MDPI, as well as other media preservation initiatives on campus over the last decade, primarily implemented by the staff of IU's Archives of Traditional Music, Jacobs School of Music, and AAAMC. We are extremely fortunate to have such a broad range of media preservation expertise at IU, in addition to faculty and administrators at the highest level of the University with an appreciation for and dedication to preserving music and culture embodied within these legacy media collections.

— Brenda Nelson-Strauss



Dr. Portia Maultsby, Soul Revue's founding director, in 1981.

From Soul Syndicate to Super Scholar: **Portia K. Maultsby**

December 2013 marked the end of an era for the AAAMC. After nearly twenty-five years as our founding director, Portia K. Maultsby has entered a much deserved retirement. She leaves behind a rich legacy that includes landmark publications on African American music, special events such as the Reclaiming the Right To Rock conference, her archival collection of interviews with black music industry executives and performers of black gospel music in the Netherlands, scores of mentees, and the AAAMC itself.

The following excerpts document Maultsby's early years at IU and as a pioneering ethnomusicologist. They were recorded on September 25, 2013, and come from a multi-part interview conducted by incoming AAAMC director, Mellonee Burnim (MB). Ever the scholar and ethnographer, halfway through the interview Maultsby (PKM) turns the tables on Burnim and has her relate the story about her decision to come to IU.

We wish Maultsby all the best during her retirement and look forward to working with her in the future not only as a research associate, but also as a patron, thereby enabling her to reap the benefits of the hard work she invested in establishing and developing the AAAMC.

MB: Dr. Maultsby, you finished your coursework and your exams at the University of Wisconsin. How did you get to Indiana?

PKM: The Black Music Research Center at Indiana University was sponsoring a symposium on black music, the first one I think that was offered.

MB: That would have been De Lerma, correct?

PKM: Drs. Robert Klotman and Dominique De Lerma. De Lerma was a music librarian, and Bob Klotman was a professor of Music Education. They had a real interest in African American music along with David Baker, who was chair of Jazz Studies. They organized a symposium on African American music that covered a range of genres from classical to jazz and popular music. One of the first music industry executives to contract African American artists, John Hammond at Columbia Records, participated in the symposium. The symposium was really broad, and it was good.

MB: What year was this?

PKM: June 18-21, 1969. I was really, really impressed. Eileen Southern, who published the seminal history, *The Music of Black Americans* (1971), attended the conference, and that's when I met her for the first time. And that's when people became familiar with me and my work. I think I was the first person they'd met who was studying ethnomusicology with a focus on African American music. In 1972, they [De Lerma, Baker and Klotman in conjunction with the Black Music Research Center] organized another symposium and asked me to participate on a panel looking at the curriculum and study of African American music in high schools, colleges, and universities; I provided a student's perspective. The panel participants were mainly composers. There were very few scholars: Eileen Southern, Geneva Southall, and Pearl Williams-Jones. David Baker was serving in the role of a scholar, and so was Dominique De Lerma. David Baker was expanding his offerings in Jazz Studies and more broadly in African American music. Herman Hudson was Chair of Linguistics at the time and also Vice Chancellor for African American Affairs; one of his roles was to assist departments and schools with recruiting African American faculty. He developed the plan and convinced deans and department chairs that they needed to think about recruiting faculty while we were still in graduate school rather than waiting until we completed our degrees and were on the market, when all of the schools were looking at the same people. So his strategy was: Why not develop a relationship with these promising black scholars while they're in graduate school, and maybe they will commit to Indiana upon or before graduation?

In spring 1970, Herman began calling me on behalf of the School of Music, and he was determined. Given my interests, he thought Indiana would be a good fit. I said,



Herman Hudson, June 15, 1976. Photo by Anita Sperber, courtesy IU Archives (P0021181).

“Well, I’m not really interested in a job at this point,” because I really wanted to finish my degree first [I had not completed my coursework for the Ph.D.], but he was so persuasive. He continued calling and calling. Then later, he was calling about having meetings with other what he called “promising young black scholars” that he was also trying to recruit. He wanted us to meet in Chicago. I think most of us were from Big Ten universities. I had a band called Portia & the Soul Syndicate, and I said, “I’m going to be in Indiana [that weekend].” I had never been to Indiana. He said, “What are you going to be doing in Indiana?” I said, “I have a band. We’re going to be performing in Terre Haute at St. Mary-of-the-Woods [College] and Indiana State.” He said, “Oh! Well, tell me about this band.” I told him what we did, specializing in black popular music. He asked about the composition of the group, and I explained. He said, “Oh! I think I would like to come down and meet you there.” He ended up postponing the meeting in Chicago so he could come over and meet me in Terre Haute. I remember being surprised when he showed up. He was a big guy and legally blind, and he was accompanied by his assistant.

He was observing me. I didn’t pay that much attention as I was busy trying to get the group together, sound-checking. Every now and then, he called me over, “Now what are you doing?” He stayed through the sound check and then returned to Bloomington. After that, he started calling every night, every day, every morning at 8 a.m. He became very serious about recruiting me to IU.

MB: Now, was this still for the Music School?

PKM: Yes.

MB: Did African American Studies exist?

PKM: Yes. Dr. Hudson developed African American Studies as a program in 1969. A year later it became a department. When he was recruiting me, he called for at least a year. Dr. Hudson had an interest in the arts. After attending many talent shows organized and staged solely by students, he realized the range of talent that he wanted to develop further. Given the climate at the time, how [could] he make Indiana University feel like home or become more relevant to students of color? He thought that an arts and humanities-centered curriculum would serve to develop the talents of these students and help solidify the legitimacy of what students were doing in the creative areas of dance, music, art, and poetry/literature. He decided to establish a curriculum around the arts and humanities. And that’s how it all began. Dr. Hudson wanted me to develop an ensemble here at IU similar to the one I had at the University of Wisconsin, but composed predominately of black students. He arranged to introduce me to Indiana University, although I didn’t know this at the time. His strategy was a concert in the IU Auditorium featuring Portia & the Soul Syndicate. We played the concert, and then I met people afterwards. At that point Dr. Hudson



Portia & the Soul Syndicate, ca. 1969.

began negotiating with the School of Music about my having a joint appointment. He said, “Wow, I think you would be a good fit for Afro-American Studies.”

And that’s how it all evolved. Again, I emphasized to him that I really didn’t want to come until I had my degree in hand. He was very persuasive. “Well, we can make it work for you. Why don’t we start with your coming on the weekends to begin recruiting and getting the ensemble together?”

MB: That’s an eight-hour drive!

PKM: No, he flew me here.

MB: Every weekend?

PKM: Every weekend, yes. That was ’71. I arrived on Thursday [sometimes Wednesday], and I left on Sunday. We rehearsed Friday and Saturday. That’s how we began.

MB: So where did you get your students from?

PKM: Oh, I recruited them. That was very easy at that time. There were a lot of black student groups that had been in existence for maybe two or three years. And the black students congregated in two places—on the southwest side

of the Indiana Memorial Student Union near the bowling alley where they played bid whist, and on Wednesday nights they had some kind of party at the Kiva [a social space the Union], so I went to Kiva. Then the next year, he brought me in as an assistant, and I was still writing my Ph.D. dissertation, but nearly finished with a first draft.

MB: As an assistant what?

PKM: Visiting assistant professor. But during that time, Herman wanted me to develop the ensemble. We called [the course] “Soul Music Performance and Culture.” It was a three-credit course with a lecture component.

MB: So you joined Afro-American Studies in what year?

PKM: From the very beginning in 1971 as a visiting assistant professor, then as a lecturer for two years. I was converted to an assistant professor upon completion of the degree in 1974. By that time, I had established the IU Soul Revue. In fact, *you* visited me on one of our very first performances here. What year was that?

MB: When I came here, I was teaching. I graduated from undergraduate in ’71, and I was at Wisconsin from ’73-’75. I taught public school between ’71 and ’73, so I would have come here during that time.



The first IU Soul Revue rehearsing in the music building with Dr. Portia Maulsby directing, 1971.

PKM: Herman was very strategic in the way he introduced me to Indiana University, because I think some people thought he should be focusing more on a political science-oriented [curriculum] rather than arts and humanities. “You’re bringing in this woman who is going to start a band?” They didn’t understand his concept. My idea of a band was like a show—a kaleidoscope of the arts. That’s why I named it the IU Soul Revue. I was very much influenced by James Brown, his show with the dancers, the costumes, the horns, the whole works. We had poets, an MC/comedian, and we had dancers, so it was a revue of the black arts expression. That’s how the Soul Revue began.



IU Soul Revue Dancers, 1971 or 1972.

MB: But at the time you were exclusively doing Soul Revue? You were not teaching additional courses?

PKM: The first *full* year I was here at Indiana University, I was developing other courses. After the first year, I started teaching three courses plus the Soul Revue and doing the booking, the arranging, just everything with Lillian [Dunlap]. Later we also had dancers. See, the dance company didn’t exist; the choral ensemble didn’t exist. We included five to seven dancers as a part of the Soul Revue initially. Then more and more dancers kept showing up, and I said, “We can’t accommodate all of these dancers. I think we need to think about a dance company.” That’s how the other ensembles evolved. Iris Rosa was a graduate student in the Soul Revue, and she worked with the choreography.

MB: I didn’t know she was in the Soul Revue.

PKM: Iris Rosa was one of the original Soul Revue dancers.

MB: What were the other courses that you were developing?

PKM: They were already developed through the School of Music, so I was teaching School of Music courses and assisting David Baker. David Baker [had been] teaching all of them. That was one of the reasons they wanted to expand the faculty, so that David could focus more on



Mixing session for the IU Soul Revue's album *Music Is Just a Party*, ca. 1977.

jazz. I can't remember whether I actually developed black popular music or whether it existed, because David taught a course on jazz and soul. There were two others courses that I taught regularly: "Survey of African American Music" and "Black Popular Music." I also taught "Art Music of Black Composers."

MB: So how long did you direct the IU Soul Revue?

PKM: For ten years from 1971 to 1981.

MB: I think the Soul Revue has been going now for almost forty-five years. So you were at the forefront. First, Herman Hudson brought you in, so that was his vision. Then you recommended Iris Rosa to him. The African American Arts Institute also included a third ensemble.

PKM: Right. The third ensemble was the Afro-American Choral Ensemble. And that, similar to the dance company, evolved from the Soul Revue in that the turnover was so infrequent. For an audition we might have had thirty singers for one position. At that point I said, "Dr. Hudson, we must start a choral ensemble. There's too much talent, and we cannot accommodate it." He said, "Okay. Now do you have someone in mind?" I said, "Well, there is this young woman I met in Florida, who is now at the University of Wisconsin completing her master's in ethnomusicology. She has a choral music background, and she plays gospel

and classical piano, and she does a full range of choral repertoire. I think she'd be great." And he said, "Who is she, and how can I find her?" I said, "Well, her name is Mellonee Burnim. In fact, she saw the Soul Revue perform, so she has some idea of what the ensembles are about. She's also specializing in African music, and she could contribute to the curriculum. It was at that point he started calling you. So tell us, what was your experience with him?"

MB: My master's degree is in African music under the same person that you studied with at Wisconsin, Lois Anderson. One day, Lois Anderson came looking for me saying that I had a phone call in her office from Indiana University. I started to think, "Who would be calling me from Indiana University?" So I rushed down to her office and answered the phone, and it was this man named Dr. Herman Hudson, who I didn't know. He proceeded to ask me what my plans were after I finished the master's degree, and I told him that I was planning to go and pursue the doctorate. He wanted to know if I planned to stay there at Wisconsin, and that was my intent at the time. Then he told me he was in the process of considering or developing a choral ensemble at Indiana University, and he talked about the group that you were doing and the African American Dance Company and basically asked me if I was interested in leading such a group. I explained to him that I was at the University of Wisconsin on a fellowship and all of my schooling was being paid for, and there was really no

reason for me to leave a fellowship to come to a job where I would have to work in order to earn money. So I thanked him, but I said, “No thanks.” We hung up. My brother was at the University of Wisconsin at the same time, and when I told him about this phone call that I had gotten from Indiana—my brother has a doctorate in economics—he started to ask me some very basic questions. “Well, did you ask him if you could keep your fellowship if you came there?” I said, “No,” and I realized I really had not pursued the possibilities in a way that a scholar should have.

I ended up calling Dr. Hudson back and asking him more questions. He was the most interesting man, because at the time the money I had was the National Fellowships Fund, and it was funded by the Ford Foundation. He knew Samuel Narbit was the person in charge of the fund, and Narbit was someone that he knew. He called the man up to find out if I were to come to IU and start the African American Choral Ensemble if I could keep this fellowship. He was able to arrange that. Then it became a whole different ballgame. So that’s how I ended up completing my master’s degree at the University of Wisconsin and then coming to IU to start a doctorate in 1975. It made a lot of sense, because you were the person who introduced me to ethnomusicology and opened up my eyes to the possibility of pursuing music in an area other than Western music. I realized I could do African American music here at Indiana because it had the strong African American Studies Department and because of what Dr. Hudson was trying to do at the African American Arts Institute. For me it was just an opportune moment to make that segue, so I came trailing behind you in 1975 and never left.

I completed my degree in 1980, and Herman Hudson was still right there at the forefront and offered me a tenure-track position in African American Studies where I continued to direct the African American Choral Ensemble and began to develop courses that I still teach today. So they were originally conceived of through his vision of developing and expanding a curriculum in African American Studies. He really was an exceptional leader.

The conversation turns back to Maultsby’s career and research in ethnomusicology.

MB: You went on to become chair of the Department of African American Studies.

PKM: Yes, Afro-American at the time.

MB: Herman Hudson really cultivated the category of performer-scholar. I think you were just a superb representative of that. You edited a special issue of the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) journal that dealt with African American music. Can you tell us about that? What was the year, and how did that come about?

PKM: Well, that was in 1975. It was a culmination of my

expressing dismay over the marginalization of African American music within the Society for Ethnomusicology. The first meeting I attended, I realized that the conference was organized around sessions of scholarly papers and panels. At that time the sessions tended to divide along area studies lines; there were sessions on African music, sessions on Asian music, etc., but when it came to African American music, the format was a rap session. A panel with maybe two performers and two aficionados constituted the session on African American music. It was nothing but a rap session; I mean a true, free-flowing, improvised rap session. I was somewhat disturbed by that, after witnessing how it could be done right with a real intellectual component and intellectual content. I think it was during a business meeting when I expressed my concern and frustration, so the membership heard me. This was probably around 1973, because shortly afterwards Norma McLeod, who was editor of the society’s journal, approached me about editing a special issue on black music. She said, “After hearing your concerns, I decided to take inventory of the articles published on black music since the beginning of the journal.” I think there might have been *one*. It was something appalling. And she said, “I really want to devote an issue to black music to bring it more into the center of the discipline. I will provide you with assistance.” Now, I’m just a lecturer, a year before converting to an assistant professor. This is ’73 and the issue was published in 1975. That did jumpstart my tenure-track portfolio, but it was a lot of work, editing a journal.

MB: So what kind of reception did that special issue get?

PKM: Oh! The reception was fantastic! And professors began to use that volume as a text because there was no text other than Eileen Southern’s book. You have to understand, when I came through as a graduate student, I had limited scholarly research on which to build. I was reading primary resource materials to figure out the chronology of the development of black music. There were a few books on black music, but most were written by sociologists, linguists, philosophers, literary scholars, and a few musicologists; they were contradictory in interpretation, didn’t make sense, were racist in perspective, you name it! I’m trying to figure out how do I start to pull together something that makes sense in terms of an evolutionary pattern of tradition? We’re in the ’70s and ’80s. There was really little of anything [on black music], and most of the research produced during those years came out of Indiana University, Black Music Center, which was a research-oriented center. That was it. By organizing symposia, the Center brought together composers and artists who were pioneers in the development of the various musical genres including gospel music pioneer Thomas Dorsey and so many others. In 1973 Eileen Southern began publishing the journal, *The Black Perspective in Music*. So that was the beginning. It was like scratching on wood, looking for something to peel up, to work with. We had to generate the early research. Then Dr. Burnim came along. She’s the second person to write a dissertation on gospel music, and

Panel to Trace Black Influence on Popular Music

By JON PARELES

THOSE oldies but goodies now have a new audience — historians and musicologists who are retracing the history of American music. “We know that rhythm and blues gave rise to a new kind of American popular music,” Dr. Portia K. Maultsby said. “But blacks have never gotten credit for what they created. Ask most Americans, and they can tell you about Elvis Presley as the king of rock-and-roll, but not about the people who created his style.”

As a sign that things are beginning to change, Dr. Maultsby, a musicologist and chairman of the Afro-American Studies Department at Indiana University, has organized an academic symposium to be held next weekend at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The conference, “Rhythm and Blues, 1945-55,” will take place Friday and Saturday as part of the museum’s American History Program in Black American Culture.

Its panels, which are free and open to the public, will include “Black-Owned and Black-Oriented Radio,” “Inside the Studio: Rhythm-and-Blues Record Production” and “Record Companies and the Promotion of Rhythm and Blues”; Dr. Maultsby will lecture on “Rhythm and Blues: Overview of Music Styles.” There will be performances by the Orioles and the Spaniels vocal groups and the saxophonist Paul (Hucklebuck) Williams and his band, as well as a photographic exhibition. It is recommended for the information call (202) 357-4176.



The New York Times / Jeff Atteberry

Rhythm and blues in Washington: Dr. Portia K. Maultsby, musicologist and chairman of Afro-American Studies at Indiana University, organized the symposium to be held next weekend at Smithsonian Institution.

Jimmie Lunceford record in hand, he told the disk jockey he was the station owner’s chauffeur, and that the owner wanted to hear the record before he got home. It was on the air within minutes.

“We want to capture the story from the people who were involved in it,” Dr. Maultsby said. “And we have to start doing that now; most of the people speaking on the symposium are 65 to 80 years old.”

Rural Roots Met Urban Life

Dr. Maultsby is finishing up a book-length study, “Popular Music of Black America,” for the University of Kansas Press. She considers classic rhythm and blues an explosion of regional styles following World War II. “The black population was dispersed, and it was a time of comparative prosperity for blacks,” she said. “There were so many musical innovations because blacks were adjusting to urban life in various places while bringing their rural styles, their roots, with them.”

“Because the music had a lack of national exposure, there were no national trends. Different parts of the country didn’t know what the others were doing, so there were many regional styles.”

“The music met with resistance back then,” she said, “because there was a generational conflict and a conflict over economics and esthetics. The old Tin Pan Alley controlled the music business, and didn’t want to give up that power. In addition, those pop songs were tied to Western musical forms and white, middle-class values; black music was more realistic and more direct, and the rhythm was much more important. That music took over because it appealed to more people. It better expressed their feelings.”

New York Times piece on the Smithsonian Institution event “Rhythm and Blues, 1945-1955,” February 2, 1986.

the first ethnomusicologist [to write one on the topic], so you’re talking about pioneering. We didn’t have the luxury of volumes around us from which we could draw. We had to generate the research and work along with others, like Bernice Johnson Reagon at the Smithsonian Institution [Program in Black American Culture, Museum of American History]. Now she did a lot to help promote the study of black music, but we were all in the same circle. There was also Samuel Floyd, who established the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College in Chicago in 1983. There were so few of us.

MB: Absolutely. So, you’re evolving as a scholar, your career is firmly established as an artist, but there was also a need for you in terms of your administrative leadership in the department. So it was after you had completed your ten years as Soul Revue director that you became the chair of Afro-American Studies?

PKM: Yes, that was not my intention, but that was Herman’s design.

MB: That was his plan, as well?

PKM: I guess, because after ten years of Soul Revue I was tired, you know? I was working seven days a week, literally, because we played Friday, often Saturday. When I had two ensembles for three or four years, when one wasn’t

performing, the other one was. So I finally was able to go on leave, because I had a sabbatical, but I hadn’t been able to take it.

MB: Because there’s nobody to substitute for you.

PKM: Yes. So I went on sabbatical, and conducted research on black popular music. The IU Soul Revue served as a lab for me to explore some of my ideas about musical aesthetics and to identify those components of performance that generated various forms of audience participation and overall response to the shows.

MB: Your dissertation dealt with religious music, spirituals specifically. So after working with the Soul Revue, that’s what prompted your shift to popular music studies?

PKM: No. What prompted my shift to popular music studies was your hiring. It was a combination of both. I was really interested in popular music from the view that most people, scholars, whoever, viewed this tradition as an industry product, not as a part of a creative process that evolved out of lived experience. There are two ways of looking at the music: as a commodity and as a lived experience within culture. I wanted to bring more legitimacy to the intellectual study of popular music. You came along, and I said, “Oh great!” because your focus was religious music. But popular music sat on the margins, as did gospel music.

I wanted to do more with that, and I was afforded the opportunity. I was inspired to move along on this path because of my work with the Smithsonian Institution.

MB: Now you keep referencing the Smithsonian. Would you clarify what kind of work you were doing with the Smithsonian?

PKM: Well, when Bernice Reagon became director of the program in Black American Culture at the Museum of American History in the Smithsonian Institution, she began organizing a series of symposiums to document black musical traditions in depth. She started with her personal interest and dissertation research on the music of the Civil Rights Movement. Then she shifted to religious music, looking more at the gospel tradition, because there was little research on this topic. Her interest also was to look at the music more broadly, at the intersections between secular and sacred. I was the only one at the time researching or interested in popular music. Each time Dr. Reagon hosted a symposium on religious music, she always included a popular music component, so I had lots of opportunities. Every symposium, there I was. She organized one on the Roberta Martin Singers and others on gospel quartets because you see there were so many popular singers that came out of those types of ensembles. Dinah Washington [came] out of the Roberta Martin Singers. Sam Cooke, Bobby Womock, Wilson Pickett, Lou Rawles, Curtis Mayfield, the Isley Brothers, and many other rhythm and blues singers began their careers singing in gospel quartets. Ultimately, my participation led to Reagon thinking, "You know we really need to host a symposium on popular music." At the time, most traditional cultural and educational institutions viewed popular music as an industry product and didn't connect it to the culture of a people and their related values, etc. They also reacted somewhat negatively to "contemporary" music. Do you study music while it's going on, in vogue? That's when Reagon said, "What do you recommend? How can we bring this tradition into the Smithsonian?" I said, "Well, let's start with the early years and limit the scope: 1945 through 1955, the ten-year period after World War II. That makes it old. People can look back, it's fixed, it's not going to change, it's over" Prior to that time, I had difficulty securing funding for my popular music studies. During my first sabbatical, I used all of my savings, because I didn't want to take only a semester leave. I took a year, which means I only had a half-salary of university support.

After my sabbatical, I organized the symposium at the Smithsonian [Museum of American History]. And guess what? Smithsonian legitimizes everything. *The New York Times* covered it. The story appeared before the symposium and included my photograph. Then the press came from all over, including Europe. After that, hey, black popular music became a legitimate topic for study and funding. Another interesting outcome was that the Smithsonian had never seen so many local black people in attendance at each event

over those two days. People came out of the woodwork and from Europe for that conference, because it centered on the pioneers of that period: radio personalities, performers, promoters, managers, and booking agents, etc.

MB: [1945 through 1955] is still in the heart of segregation, because desegregation really didn't start in earnest until Brown. It was very slow to evolve even after Brown in 1954, so in '45 if you had black people in any kind of positions of power, that was significant.

PKM: We represented every area. We included one of the first women managers, Evelyn Johnson from Houston, a black woman who ran a management firm and booking agency. There weren't that many [women]. Singer Ruth Brown was on a panel.

MB: So while you're having these successes as an academic, you also had some rather significant successes leading the department. Herman Hudson was always in a leadership role in terms of African American identity on the campus. He became dean for African American Affairs, so you became chair, and some very important things took place under your leadership in the department.

PKM: We had come a long way, and I learned a lot from being around him [Dr. Herman Hudson]. Since I was starting early and was a part of building the department, particularly the infrastructure for the ensembles, I attended many administrative meetings. I saw how he dealt with administrators, how he had vision, how he planned his strategy and had everything in line. So as chair then, I'm looking at where we are, our reputation. We, the department of Afro-American Studies, had a very good reputation, and during my first term as chair, we were invited to submit a proposal for funding through the Ford Foundation. We were invited because of the department's ranking as number one in the area of the arts and the humanities. The funding enabled me as chair to further advance the work of the faculty, since much of the Ford Foundation money supported faculty research, and it supported the establishment of the Archives of African American Music and Culture.

MB: So the Ford Foundation Grant was \$100,000 a year for three years? That was major. Do you remember what year that was?

PKM: It would have been '90 or '91. By then, we had built up a really nice departmental profile, and we were a very strong unit. We had a very strong undergraduate program, and we offered a Ph.D. minor. We had a lot of graduate students combining Afro-American Studies with their [major] department. They became specialists in African American Studies, through minors in Afro-American Studies. We were really thriving as a department.

— Transcript edited by Portia K. Maultsby, Brenda Nelson-Strauss, and Ronda L. Sewald

The AAAMC Welcomes Incoming Director, **Mellonee Burnim**

With the departure of Dr. Portia Maulsby as the founding director of the Archives of African American Music and Culture, we are joined by the equally accomplished Dr. Mellonee Burnim. As an educator and researcher with over three decades of experience and an ethnomusicologist specializing in African American sacred music and the musics of the African diaspora, Burnim brings a diverse background and wealth of knowledge to the AAAMC. A professor in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and adjunct professor of African and African American Diaspora Studies at Indiana University, Burnim has been a longtime faculty research associate of the AAAMC. In this capacity, her work has been instrumental in increasing the archives' holdings of gospel music materials. These holdings include not only her own collection—which features recordings of rehearsals, performances, and interviews with gospel choirs in Indiana, Michigan, and Texas, and with participants in the Gospel Music Workshop of America—but also conference panels and one-on-one interviews from *Why We Sing: Indianapolis Gospel Music in Church, Community and Industry* [See *Liner Notes*, no. 16]. The finding aid for Burnim's collection is available online at: <http://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/findingaids/aaamc/VAC2439>.

Burnim's love for music began at an early age in her hometown of Teague, Texas, where she began singing gospel music. By the age of twelve, she served as pianist for three choirs in three local churches. She further pursued the study of music at North Texas State University, where she earned her B.M. in Music Education with an emphasis on choral music. After a few years of teaching middle school choirs, Burnim chose to further her education by pursuing a M.M. in Ethnomusicology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As part of her master's research, Burnim studied Liberian folktales, thereby expanding her academic engagement to the musics of the African diaspora. Upon completing her master's degree, she went on to earn a Ph.D. in Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University, writing her dissertation on black gospel music as a symbol of ethnicity. While furthering her own education, she also made Indiana University history as founding director of the African American Choral Ensemble in 1975 under the auspices of IU's African American Arts Institute.

Burnim's indispensable work with African American sacred music has garnered her national recognition, and her involvement in educational projects has had a local, national, and international impact. She has been a consultant for the Smithsonian American Folklife Festival, which draws approximately one million visitors each year. Her contributions as a researcher and educator have been recognized by prestigious institutions such as Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music, where she served as the first Distinguished



Faculty Fellow in Ethnomusicology and Ritual Studies in 2004. She has also conducted workshops on African American sacred music in Cuba, Malawi, and Liberia.

Her written works have become essential reading for those studying African American music. Her numerous articles can be found in journals and reference works including *Ethnomusicology*, *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, and *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. Most recently, she and Maulsby co-edited the second edition of their seminal work *African American Music: An Introduction* (forthcoming through Routledge), which has been used as a key text on the subject in classrooms across the nation.

Throughout her career, Burnim has remained an active musician. She has served as the Minister of Music for the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and Fairview United Methodist churches in Bloomington. She also leads community choruses in the Bloomington area for special events. Burnim's passion for African American music is evident in her lifelong commitment to studying and teaching the subject. We are excited to see the ways in which her vision will shape the AAAMC's future and its work in preserving and disseminating African American culture.

— Raynetta Wiggins



L to R: Rev. Billy Kyle, Al Bell, Logan Westbrooks, Isaac Hayes (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection). Photo by Ernest C. Withers.

Among the prize collections at the AAAMC is that of our own director, Portia K. Maultsby. From 1981-1986, Maultsby conducted in-person interviews with musicians, composers, producers, deejays, and record company executives involved in the rise of the black music industry.

In 2010, Maultsby once again turned her attention toward gathering personal narratives documenting the rise of black music divisions and the promotion of black artists by major record labels. What follows are three interviews from Maultsby's collection exploring the histories of Stax, Motown, and Spring Records, including a 1983 interview with Al Bell and interviews with Shelly Berger and Roy Rifkind from March 2011. Maultsby and the staff at the AAAMC are particularly grateful to promotion, marketing, and public relations specialist Ed Hines, who generously helped to arrange the 2011 interviews with Berger and Rifkind and provided several of the key photographs used below.

The complete interviews are available through the AAAMC. Additional information about Maultsby's 1981-1986 interviews is available in Liner Notes, no. 13. For more information on the post-2009 interviews and other materials in the Maultsby Collection, contact the AAAMC staff for details.

Al Bell

Al Bell (AB) is the former executive vice president and owner of Stax Records. Since the closing of Stax in 1975, Bell has served as president of the Motown Records Group, released a number of hit singles through his Bellmark Records label, and currently hosts the online radio program Al Bell Presents: The American Soul Music. The following excerpts from Maultsby's interview with Bell were recorded on May 26, 1983, in Los Angeles, California, and follow the political and philosophical influences shaping Bell's vision and direction for the company.

PKM: You had a real working knowledge of the industry and what it was about.

AB: I did. I take a great deal of pride in it. Back in my early radio days in Arkansas, I'd have guys that owned companies in Chicago, like [Ewart] Abner with Vee-Jay Records and Phil and Leonard Chess with Chess Records, coming all the way to Little Rock, Arkansas, to bring me their records. I could not understand at that time why someone would come from Chicago to Little Rock to bring me a record to play. I wanted to find out how they were making money with this, because there had to be some money involved. This was right after high school. As a result, I started sending myself to school. By the time I had made it to Washington D.C., I was dealing with Safice Records, but it really was my *second* record label. I had already produced product for Decca Records at that time through Milt Gabler, the A&R chief at Decca, who had taught me publishing....

PKM: How did you become involved with Decca?

AB: Through Joe Medlin. He was quite close with Milt Gabler, who was on Champion Music and had discovered Billie Holiday and Louis Jordan. Joe knew of my interest in production, and he introduced me to Milt Gabler. I produced Grover Mitchell for Decca under the direction of Gabler, who sat in the studio with me through about thirty musicians spending Decca's money. I learned on a crash course how to produce.

Joe Medlin was one of the largest influences in my life as far as the record business is concerned. The first time I went on the road to "promote records," I went with Joe. He took me around the country from city to city and station to station introducing me to people and showing me the ins and outs of the business. What makes him unique is his honesty, specifically about black product and blacks in the business. At that time, Joe was very forceful and outspoken with respect to his sincere attitude and thoughts about the music, the people involved in the music, radio announcers, and what have you. He was always the guy that was willing to help anybody that was trying to do something. He's one of the most learned men in the record industry. I mean all facets of the industry, too. He understands it.

PKM: When I was talking to Joe about the innovations he brought into promotion, he emphasized a commitment to giving back to the community.

AB: He's always been that way and still is today: taking whatever steps he can to cause money and services to be given back to the black community. His pet projects have always been the United Negro College Fund and the black colleges. He carried that same kind of message to the black disc jockeys, which caused them to be more sensitive and more concerned about that. When Joe would go into a radio station, probably the last thing he would talk about, *if* he talked about it at all, was his records. He would sit with disc jockeys half of the day and half of the night in restaurants and hotel rooms and he would be talking about programming at the station, the kinds of things that the stations should be doing. When he would go into a city, not only did he go to radio stations, record shops, and places like that, he would go by the colleges and throughout the community. He knew the ministers. He knew the city organizations and was closely involved with them and was always busy trying to get the record companies involved in doing things for those community organizations. That's what Joe was really all about.

PKM: What kinds of ideas did he have in terms of record company involvement?



Joe Medlin, ca. 1970s (Jack Gibson Collection).

AB: Joe Medlin was out getting the record companies and radio stations to come up with baskets of food and clothing and stuff like that for Christmas and Thanksgiving. I always called him the preacher. That's really what makes Joe Medlin tick. The other thing that he did was become the employment agency and the unemployment agency for all of the radio announcers. When a guy was out of a job and looking for something to do just to survive, there was one person who was always Johnny-on-the-spot, and that was Joe Medlin. When guys were looking for jobs or station managers had job openings, the first person they would call would be Joe Medlin. And of course Joe knew who had work and who didn't, and he was busy getting folks jobs. The same applied to talent. If he saw an artist or a young person who had potential, he was busy trying to get them with a company whether it was with Atlantic or some other company. As far as Stax is concerned, he knew as much about Stax as I did. He was the one at Atlantic and in the industry that had the belief, *real* belief, in Stax. As a matter of fact, it was Joe Medlin who told me that Stax Records was going to become *the* sound in the record business, and that was prior to my going to Stax. He knew about what was happening at Stax and the people at Stax, because Joe had been there. He knew what they were cutting, who was cutting, and who all was there, and made it his business to do that. He had a good working relationship with Jim. I think that Jim Stewart probably talked to Joe as much as, if not more than, he talked with anyone else at Atlantic Records.

After discussing some of the better known details of Stax's history, Bell went on to discuss his own political involvement and its influence on his vision for the company.

AB: From a social and cultural standpoint, the strongest influence on my life was what happened in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas. We had the "School integration crisis at Central High School." I'm sure you remember Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine. Well, as a youngster in high school, I was state president of the National Honor Society, Student Council president, you name it. I became very closely associated with Daisy Bates and more or less worked behind the scenes at Central High School. I had an open line to Governor Orval Faubus. When the confrontation took place, I was also working part-time at radio station KOKR. When President Eisenhower sent the 101st Airborne Division into Arkansas, I organized a group of youngsters on the street, and we were prepared to do whatever we had to do if the 101st created problems or harmed black people. We were armed with twelve-gauge shotguns, and we were moving around very quietly in the community.... As a result, I developed a relationship with a schoolteacher there who recognized my social consciousness. She put me in touch with a young man who had just opened up workshops in Midway, Georgia. His name was Martin Luther King. I left Little Rock and went to Midway [where] I studied and taught in the SCLC workshops with Dr. Martin Luther King.

PKM: So you were studying with him and teaching?

AB: Yes. This was long before "We Shall Overcome." As a matter of fact, the freedom song was more or less a chant, and I'd like to share the lyrics:

*Don't listen to Mister Charlie.
Don't listen to his lies.
'Cause black folks we ain't got a chance,
Unless we organize.*

I felt philosophically what that meant was that we needed to organize our minds individually and, after having done that, we wouldn't have too much of a problem organizing collectively. I taught that, but the Doc and I had some philosophical differences. His philosophy was passive resistance. Mine was economic stability. My belief was that if as a people we were stable economically and we had an economy that we could call our own and that we had control of, then we would not have a problem preserving and perpetuating our culture. I believed in turning the other cheek, but I also believed in self-defense. In my studies of theology, I adopted the position of Simon Peter, who was the disciple that had the most faith in Jesus, but he carried a sword. If Christ had Peter with him, and Peter was carrying a sword, then it was essential that we give some attention to self-defense. I

remember the last couple of evenings that I was there in Midway, Dr. King told me that we had a problem. He said to me—which I appreciate to this very day—that he would not disagree with me, and perhaps I was right, but what he was doing had to be done first. It was essential that the world could see black people being bitten by dogs, beaten over the head, and absolutely trampled on by white America so that the rest of the world would know what was happening to black people in America. He said that after that took place, then perhaps we could start talking about economic stability. Well, I didn't disagree with that either, but it was on that note that we parted

I left and went to work at radio station WLOK in Memphis, then to WUST in Washington, D.C., and then back to Memphis and Stax. Now during that period, Dr. King and I had not talked for quite some time. Just before his assassination, we had started communicating again. Maybe a month or so prior to his coming into Memphis to deal with that Sanitation Workers Strike, Booker T., Eddie Floyd, and I sat down and wrote a song called "Send Peace and Harmony Home." There was a young lady, Shirley Walton, who I was going to record it on. We went in and recorded the rhythm tracks, and I was in the studio trying to get her to sing the song. I couldn't get her to feel the lyrics like I was feeling them, or like I understood them, because of my closeness with Dr. King. It never mentioned his name or anything like that, but it was for him. And while we were in the studio with the machine running, Homer Banks, one of the writers, walked into the studio and said just before the intro of the song, "Dr. King was just killed." The song started, and Shirley started crying and singing the song. It really blew me away, the performance that she did on that. We manufactured a few copies, and I sent one or two to Mrs. King and a few to the delegates from the state of Tennessee. As a result, the lyrics were read into the congressional record.

It was that kind of thinking, and Joe Medlin doing what he was doing, that caused me to appreciate that perhaps through the record industry I could aid in the development of economic stability in the black community. My intent at Stax, which I've never expressed before, was to cause Stax to become an economic generator for the black community and to foster a corporation where it would be in a position to bridge the gap between black America and white America by using economics as a cornerstone.

During the merger of Warner, Elektra, and Atlantic, Bell urged a split from Atlantic and eventually established Stax as an independent label following a brief stint as an autonomous subsidiary of Gulf and Western. In his new role as executive vice president, Bell began to expand the company and its mission in new directions.

AB: It was also during that period of time with Gulf and Western where we first started developing Isaac Hayes as an artist. Then we started to add the Emotions and The Staple Singers and the list started moving. We started getting into spoken word material: Richard Pryor, Bill Cosby, and Moms Mabley. I developed the Respect label with John KaSandra [“the Funky Philosopher”] and speakers like Jesse Jackson and what have you. Really, the company just started mushrooming then, not only with music, but just about anything else that could be recorded, whether it was literature, editorials, commentary, or poetry. I was finding a way to get that recorded because it was a way of documenting and making the information and material available to blacks and the public in general.

PKM: So this ties in with your original philosophy of black awareness and reaching back into the community in a nontraditional way. Would you say that Stax was the first to do this kind of thing?

AB: I would say so as a record company. No question about it. I don’t think those who generally get involved with record companies are even thinking like that, because they don’t have that kind of sensitivity. It’s really not about that, and I’m not talking down with respect to the industry, but they’re only concerned about making a buck. It’s like manufacturing automobiles or sardines or cornflakes or whatever. It’s a commodity or product of a sale, and that’s all they are concerned about. No more than that.



The Staple Singers, ca. 1970s (Jack Gibson Collection).

I’ve always known what our music represented to us. It has been our only uncensored way of communicating. Dating back to when we first hit the shores of this country, our form of communication was through our songs. We were not allowed to congregate as slaves, but we could sing and get our messages across. That’s where you find our literature. That’s where you find our poetry. That’s where our culture is housed. It’s in our music. That’s where our philosophers are, our social commentary, and our spiritual awareness and consciousness. Our music has been the vehicle for us to communicate whatever it was we had to communicate as a people. I’m sure you’ve heard the expression that white people say, “Niggas can’t do anything but sing and dance.” Well, my philosophy was, if that’s the case and they give us singing and dancing as an asset, then let us take and use that asset to build an economy for us in our community, because singing and dancing is a multibillion dollar business. Within the framework of singing and dancing, you can couch or camouflage anything else you want to do.

With that thought, I got involved with people like Jesse Jackson. You could get them played on the air and use that as a vehicle to promote and build them. Also, I knew that you could take a record and create a “superstar” overnight. I was set on making records, whether there was singing or spoken word, and building the giants. With Jesse, we did it. It also created revenue for Jesse and others like him, because the royalties he would get from the sale of the record was money that he could put back into whatever his crusade or cause might be. After getting involved at that level, I realized that I had my hands on the handle of a tool that could be utilized: the record industry combined with our singing and dancing to aid in building an economy for our community. So then we started underwriting various programs and things as a company. Obviously we dealt with our black banks, our black insurance companies, black entrepreneurs. They all knew that if they were trying to get into business and had something that was worthwhile and that made sense, there was one place that they could go and get some money, and that was Stax.

PKM: Given your location in the South, becoming so politically involved was a big risk that generally nobody was willing to take. I’m sure that you made a lot of white Southerners and probably even some major record companies nervous.

AB: In the South, yes, there were some problems from day one. There were problems even on a small scale with a black guy like myself doing what I was doing. I was highly visible, but I tried to restrict that visibility to records—singing and dancing.

You know? “I’m not about nothing serious. I’m just singing and dancing and finger-popping.” And it worked for a while, until some smart fellows with the Internal Revenue Service found out that I owned Stax Records. That’s when Satan and all of his evil forces came after me. ... In 1972, the Criminal Intelligence Division of the IRS came into Stax and subpoenaed six-thousand cubic feet of our books, records, inner office memorandum, scratch paper, wastepaper, and wastepaper baskets. It occupied a floor at the Federal Building in Memphis, Tennessee. ... They had more people on me than on Al Capone. At the end of five years, I got a letter from the Justice Department that stated, and I’m paraphrasing here, “Dear Mr. Alvertis Isbell: After investigating you for five years with our Criminal Intelligence Division, we find no fault in you.” No charges were ever brought, but during all of that they had my books and records, and they started intimidating people that we were doing business with, intimidating people that we were helping. I recognized what that ploy was. I couldn’t do anything about it, but I recognized what it was. I bought Jim Stewart out in 1972. He stayed on as president of the company, but I bought his stock position in the company. Once it was learned that that was the case, well that created a problem for outsiders, particularly for some whites that didn’t appreciate that. As long as it appeared as though this white man was doing all of this, it was all right, but when it was realized that this black man was doing it, it was a problem.

After discussing the unfortunate series of events that led to Stax closing in 1975, Bell describes some of the aspects that made Stax’s recordings unique.

PKM: Stax was the repository for black music. How would you describe the lyrical content?

AB: Well, I think that the best way to describe the lyrics of any song that came out of Stax was that they were true to life. You don’t find that much fantasy in any of the lyrics. It’s all true to life. It’s something you want to hear that you can relate to, or drive down the street or look on television and see it whether it’s on the evening news or whatever the case might be. ... Maybe geography had something to do with it, I’m not sure, but I do know that it was a philosophy that permeated the place. Really I don’t think anyone could put their finger on how that got started, but from a personal standpoint I subscribed to it and I related to it. I think other people coming on board just sort of fell into the groove. If you were going to write, you had to write about something that people could understand and relate to. You would find, I’m pretty sure, that during those days a Stax artist would resist

doing a song that was not true to life. The closest thing to fantasy that we had was probably one of the greatest writers of this kind of material that the industry has ever seen and that was Rufus Thomas. But even his [songs were] true to life if you consider what he was writing about. All of his songs had to deal with dancing whether it was “Walking the Dog,” “Do the Funky Chicken,” or “Doing the Push and Pull at PJs.” He was great with the nursery rhymes and adding fantasy into the lyric, but generally speaking everything was just true to life. “I’ve got to love somebody’s baby, ’cause somebody’s been loving mine.” That’s true to life. “Who’s making love to your lady while you’re off making love?” That’s true to life. “If loving you is wrong, I don’t want to be right.” That’s true to life, and I think you will find that with just about everything that came out of Stax. “Soul Man”—very true to life. “Soul Sister Brown Sugar”—true to life. I suppose you might say true to *black* lifestyle if you want to really qualify it.

PKM: How would you describe the music’s style?

AB: I would say that it was true to black lifestyle, also, even though you had white musicians involved and Jim, who was a white guy. But they were all attempting to come up with something that was black rather than something that was white. Even though they may have come from different environments, different backgrounds, or whatever, they still were trying to record black music.

PKM: Given the location of Stax studios in Memphis right there in the black area, how did the white musicians wander into Stax?

AB: Well, you know musicians are an unusual bunch. You know it really doesn’t matter where you are. If you just traced music back, period, you’ll find musicians crossing a lot of barriers, especially white musicians. You’ll find white musicians coming into black communities without too much reservation because they’re generally gigging in clubs together, so it becomes just a way of life and another world for them. We had problems after Dr. King’s death. Of course those problems were not with the musicians, but with the blacks who had a problem with whites coming into the area. Given the segregation prior to Dr. King’s death, we had a problem with police in that area, who had a problem with blacks and whites standing on sidewalks together. So we kind of knew at Stax, even though we didn’t talk about it, that the best thing for all of us to do was to come to work and come inside the building, which was our own little world, and then leave there and go back to our individual worlds.



Shelly Berger and Berry Gordy. Photo by and courtesy of Ed Hines.

Shelly Berger

Shelly Berger (SB) is currently president of Star Direction, Inc. During the early part of his career, Berger joined Motown Records and managed Berry Gordy's star-studded roster, which included such greats as the Supremes, Diana Ross, Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson, the Four Tops, and the Jackson 5. In the following excerpts from an interview that took place on March 15, 2011, Berger talks about his early days with Motown and negotiating television appearances for the artists.

PKM: It can be definitely stated that you are one of the most influential personal managers in the twentieth century, particularly with regard to black music. We saw what Colonel Tom Parker did with Elvis Presley, but you took the Supremes, the Temptations, and the Jackson 5, and crossed the music over into the mainstream, ultimately building Michael Jackson's solo career into one of the biggest careers of all time. I am very, very curious about *you*. I want to know more about you and your background.

SB: I was born in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn on Amboy Street. Same street, actually, that Mike Tyson was born on. It was a racially mixed neighborhood, and it was at a time when the racial divide wasn't what it became in various places in the world. That's where I started, so I was always involved with people of other races and religions because of my upbringing. From a very early age I was very, very interested in the entertainment business and seemed to have a penchant for black artists, especially in the vocal business. Of course when I was growing up, it

was much more difficult for black actors to get any kind of a chance to further their careers outside of ethnic areas the same way it was at one point in time for black entertainers.

PKM: There must have been something in your upbringing that allowed you to have a more open view about embracing diversity, which clearly played out in your career. Can you tell me about your upbringing within your family, your exposure to these diverse musical traditions, and your own education?

SB: Well, my family was always into multicultural situations. My family was in the ladies garment business, which at that time in New York City was responsible for about 75% of all ladies garments in America. Being in that melting pot, you were exposed to different cultures, and it was a very open thing within the family. Plus the family was always interested in entertainment, and Pearl Bailey was a dear friend of the family, [as was] Billy Daniels. So I grew up with those kinds of influences, and there was something about the music for me personally. I was always very, very interested in gospel music. Being a Jewish person, I wasn't interested from the religious standpoint of what the lyrics said, but there was a soulfulness in the singing which was a turn-on to me. Early in the '50s, I started searching the stations because it was very, very hard at that point in time to get black music stations. You could get them in the middle of the night if you got a clear channel, so you could get the gospel. Then in the early '50s, I heard a

song called “Earth Angel” by the Penguins which was incredibly moving to me and different from all of the music that my family listened to. I mean my family was into Nat Cole and Frank Sinatra and people like that. I loved that music and loved Broadway music, but when I heard this song, it was like a whole new experience for me. Then I heard a young singer by the name of Jackie Wilson, and I fell mad about his songs and would listen to them with great rapture not knowing that the man who wrote the songs would many years later become my best friend—that man being Berry Gordy.

PKM: Chronicle your career in L.A., which will take us up to your affiliation with Motown.

SB: It was a series of management jobs and clients that I had from, let’s say, 1961 to 1965. I was going to a meeting at an agency one day for an artist that I was representing, and as I was walking through the door, the agent said, “No, I’m not interested, but you know who would really be great for this is Shelly Berger.” He hung up the telephone, and I went into the office and sat down. I said, “What was that all about?” He said, “Did you ever hear of this company called Motown?” I said, “Are you kidding? They’re fantastic! They’re incredible!” He said, “Yeah, well they’re looking to open a Los Angeles office, and they called me and asked if I would be interested so, as you heard, I gave them your name.” And that’s how it started for me. It took almost a year for us to finally get together and make a deal, so I didn’t join Motown until June of 1966.



The Penguins, ca. 1955 (George Nelson Collection). Photo by Schaeffer, Hollywood.

PKM: What did you do?

SB: Artists would come into town, and I would look after them. I went to Detroit for my first meeting in July. Up to that point, I had never met Berry Gordy. I was saying to people that I thought he was some kind of a religious myth. People just said, “Oh yes, Mr. Gordy would love that,” and there was no such person. When I first went to Detroit, it was like getting involved in a cult. This was not a company. This was a religious experience. These were people who loved each other, who fought with each other on a competitive basis, and who would work 24/7. It was unbelievable.

Finally, on July 4th, I met Berry Gordy. He said, “Hello. I would like to see you in my office on Monday.” And I said, “Fine.” I’m a very, very passionate person, but of course he didn’t know that having met me for the first time. When I sat down in his office, he said to me, “What have you done? You’re the head of my Los Angeles office, but what is your background?” I ran down my background and that I had managed this artist and that artist. He said to me, “Do you think you can get our artists on television?” You have to understand that television is not an entertainment medium; television’s an advertising medium. It was a racially exclusive medium, so it was very, very difficult for black artists to appear on television. For young, contemporary artists, you were also fighting the quota that they had set up. That quota included Ella Fitzgerald, Nat Cole, Sammy Davis, and Louis Armstrong, so there were even fewer spots. I said to Mr. Gordy at that meeting, “Mr. Gordy, not only can we get our artists on television, but we will produce our own television specials, and one day we will produce our own movies. One day they will do a documentary about Motown.” He excused himself, telephoned the man who hired me, and said, “Fire him.” And the man said, “Why?” Gordy said, “Because either he is on drugs or he’s full of crap and thinks I’m an idiot.” But I had come up with a daytime television show called *Where the Action Is*. The producers were buddies of mine, and I had talked them into doing a full hour on nothing but Motown.

PKM: When did this happen?

SB: I had the show prior to meeting with Mr. Gordy. It was just a series of songs. It was produced by the Dick Clark Corporation, and it was like *American Bandstand*—just the artists coming on and singing or lip synching to their hits. It was 1966, and when I was hired by Motown, one of the first things I did was to set up this show. It was a [weekday] music show for contemporary music.

PKM: What artists did you include?



Boyz II Men and Motown President, Jheryl Busby, receiving an award at the Hard Rock Café, 1990s (Jack Gibson Collection).

SB: The Temptations, the Four Tops, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Martha & the Vandellas.

PKM: Was it through you that your [producer] friends brought it to fruition?

SB: Yeah. They just said, "Let's go ahead and tape on this particular day. Make sure all the artists are there." I sent word to Detroit. The problem was they didn't want to do a Motown show because then they were afraid that all the other record labels would be calling them and saying, "Well, you did a Motown show. Why don't you do an RCA show or a Columbia show or an Atlantic show?" So I said, "Don't call it the *Motown Show*. Call it *Songs from the Motor City*."

PKM: What was the lifespan of that show?

SB: I think it was on for about five or six years. We had a white singer that Mr. Gordy was very interested in breaking called Chris Clark, and I got this telephone call, "Could we get Chris Clark on the show?" I called my friends, and they said, "No. The show's booked. We can't." I said, "Well, we've got this new white artist who's a protégé of Mr. Gordy's. Maybe it would look good for the show?" And they said, "Fine, we'll put her on." While they were rehearsing, I saw that Mr. Gordy seemed agitated, and I walked over to him, not knowing that he was planning to

fire me. I said to him, "You seem agitated, Mr. Gordy. Is there something wrong?" He said, "Well, I don't know how they're shooting her." And I said, "Do you want to talk to the director and tell the director what it is that you'd like?" And he looked at me again like, "What are you talking about?" Berry Gordy at that point in time didn't get the opportunity to talk to directors. He was told, "This is what we're doing. You're a record guy and we're television guys, so that's the way it is." So he said, "Why? Can you do that?" So I went to the producer, who's a buddy of mine, and I said, "This is a very important artist for us because we're trying to cross over." And he said, "Why don't you bring [Mr. Gordy] into the booth, and he can sit with the director and tell the director exactly what he wants." So he did that.

Then a few months later, the Supremes were appearing in Las Vegas, and I was called in for one day to have a meeting with Gordy. As I came in for the meeting, he was talking to someone on the phone. Someone was pushing him for an answer on the Supremes, and he put the person on hold and said, "Look, so-and-so is calling me, and I have to give him an answer right now on a date for the Supremes." I said, "Well, if you have to give him an answer right now, tell him the answer is 'No.' If you have to be pushed, then they don't want the Supremes. They want somebody else." He looked



The Temptations, ca. 1984
(Karen Shearer Collection).



The original Supremes, 1960s
(George Nelson Collection).

at me like, "What is this guy talking about?" But he got on the telephone and said, "No." The guy said, "Could you tell me when you could give me an answer?" All of a sudden another light went off. I was supposed to be there for one day, but we spent two weeks together. We realized that we have basically the same sense of humor. By the end of the two weeks, Gordy said to me, "Look, I manage the Supremes; my sister manages the Temptations. Now you manage the Supremes and the Temptations." And that's how it started.

PKM: As the new manager for the Temptations and the Supremes, what was your vision for them and what were the challenges in carrying out that vision?

SB: Well, the Supremes were well on the way. They were very much accepted in the pop field and by

the general market audience. The Temptations were much more difficult because they were an R&B group. ... Because of Berry Gordy and Motown, we had hits coming every ninety seconds. So we started to build the power, and then we could go to television and start making deals. We had made great deals with *The Ed Sullivan Show*, which was probably the most popular variety television show at that time. We had a multiple deal for the Supremes and the Temptations with Ed Sullivan where we had three or four shots a year, which immediately starts to cross you over into a general market audience. There was a philosophy that Mr. Gordy had; we had to do two songs on a show: one song would be our hit, and the next song would be a standard. And what that did was it made the general market audience appreciate the artists not as these young rock and rollers but as just terrific

artists. And that's what we started to do. Then there were clubs that would not buy the Temptations, so there was one theatre where I had the Temptations open for the Supremes. The Temptations were not thrilled with that because the Supremes were the Primettes and the Temptations were the Primes. This was the sister group who was now bigger than the male group at that point in time. I tried to explain to the Temptations, "Look, you're co-starring this year. By next year you will be the star at this theatre and other theatres like it." So grumblingly, they went along with it.

PKM: Was this a white audience?

SB: I would say maybe 70/30 white to black. In a normal Temptations concert you would get 90/10 black to white. So they went out there, and they just destroyed the audience. I mean standing ovation at the end. And they came running up the aisles, and Eddie Kendrick saw me standing at the top of the aisle and said, "Let's see them follow that!" There was an intermission, and the houselights go down, and the Supremes' overture starts. All of the Temptations are standing next to me, you know? The Supremes start coming down the aisle and the entire audience stands. I turned to the Temps, and I said, "It took you guys an hour to get them to stand. They haven't even hit the stage yet, and they're already standing. That's what you're working towards." And they understood it. Of course the next year, they were the headliners at that theatre and other theatres like it.

PKM: What was your strategy that allowed you to be so successful in breaking down the racial barriers?

SB: The hammer that I had was Motown. It had a hit coming out every nine or ten weeks. There were just constant hits. The hits made them so big that you could not turn them down. Radio stations had to play the music because if you didn't play Motown music, you would lose about 60% of your audience because that's where the hits were. So I had a vision, but if Berry Gordy and Motown hadn't backed it up with constant hit records, I don't know that my vision would have taken fruition. Then once these people were on the shows, the ratings went up, and the shows were very comfortable with the artists because they were totally professional and weren't just rock and rollers. They sang the standards, so everybody at that point in time felt very, very comfortable.

PKM: Was it the pop songs that endeared the Supremes with the audience? I grew up in the South, and we were slow to adjust to the Motown sound. We were accustomed to the Stax sound, but Motown did become a part of our repertoire. We looked at it as not necessarily being pop, but as being R&B. How

did you negotiate how the black audience thought about Motown?

SB: The Supremes' audiences in general would probably be, whether it was the South or not, 70% white to black. A Temptations' audience would be 90/10 black to white. That evolved over the years, but the South has always been a gigantic area for Motown. We would always sell out shows. We were the first ones to drop ropes and barriers in audiences that were segregated. We put in our contracts in the '60s: "We will not play in a segregated audience. If we show up and there is a segregated audience, then we're not playing, and you have to pay us." We had that in our contracts until the '80s.

PKM: That's interesting. And did any of them balk initially, particularly some of the deep Southern towns?

SB: No, because they knew they were going to sell out.

After discussing some of the strategies he used when breaking new black artists on television, Berger concludes with Motown's contribution to American culture.

PKM: We speak of the term "crossover," and I've looked at the assumption for many years that in some way the artists have diluted their sound to be accepted rather than that the white audience's aesthetic appreciation has expanded to include the black sound.

SB: We never ever produced a song or sang a song and said, "White people will like this." We sang what we sang. The writers wrote what they felt, they produced what they felt, and the audience bought into that because it was great.

PKM: How would you describe Motown's major contribution to mainstream society or to American culture?

SB: I could draw it up to Barack Obama, you know? I could take it all the way to there. The difference in cultures, the difference in race became okay. I don't want to negate things that people suffered and died for, but the huge amount of success that we had made it easier. Jackie Robinson is responsible for all of the black ballplayers who are playing now. That was ground zero: 1947, Brooklyn. Motown [did that] for the pop world. ... Two weeks ago, the White House did a tribute to Motown, and we were all invited to be with the President as guests for the show. I walked up to Mr. Gordy afterwards and held his face in my hands, and I said, "Remember that day in July when I told you what we were going to accomplish at Motown? Even I didn't think about this one, that we would be honored at the White House." So we've travelled a very, very wonderful, wonderful road.



Roy Rifkind and Joe Simon, ca. 1970. Photo courtesy of Roy Rifkind and Ed Hines.

Roy Rifkind

Along with his brother, Jules (“Julie”) and Bill Spitalsky, Roy Rifkind (RR) owned and operated Spring Records under the PolyGram label. Spring Records featured numerous black artists, including the Fatback Band, Millie Jackson, Busta Jones, Joe Simon, and Little Eva. In a phone interview with Maultsby on March 2, 2011, Rifkind discusses his activities in the music industry, including the formation of Spring and the artists he represented through his management company, Guardian Productions.

PKM: Could you give me a chronology of your entry into the music business?

RR: I was in the Coast Guard, and I came out in May 7, 1946. I knew I wanted to get into show business. My father at that time had a dancehall ballroom for 25 and over, and I was working [as] a hat check boy. I married in 1950, and I knew that there was no career in being a hat check boy. Somebody recommended I go to school in radio and television technique, so I went to school in 1947 for a year to learn how to become a director of television—learning the cameras, the lenses, and things like that. We would come up with a script and produce it and direct it. That was part of the curriculum of the school. I graduated there, and now I needed a job. My father had opened a very big dancehall called the Cascade Gardens. That was in Brooklyn, New York. Then he opened up a very big place where it had 1500 people. He had big bands at that time—Tommy Dorsey, Art Mooney, Xavier Cugat, things like that—and I was working the checkroom. I was doing nicely, but

it wasn’t my thing. I became friendly with Tommy Dorsey’s manager, and I told him what I wanted to do. He told me he could help me, and that’s how he got me started as a card boy for James Melton.

My brother, [Julie], had just graduated college at that time, and he was looking for a job. We knew a friend that was in the record business. He had a label called O-Town Records. He said, “There’s a disc jockey in New York by the name of Tommy Smalls—Dr. Jive at WWRL. He has a nightclub up in Harlem called Smalls Paradise. He’s handling an act called the Wanderers, and he’s looking for somebody to go partners with him.” So we went up to see Tommy, and we became very friendly with him. He says, “Listen, I’ve got this act called the Wanderers. You manage them, and we’ll become partners.” We opened up an office, and we started to manage the Wanderers. They were a very good vocal group. They were like the Mills Brothers, but young. We started to promote them, and they got a record on MGM. MGM at that time wasn’t into the black business. There was a producer by the name of Leroy Holmes, and Leroy produced a black record but he couldn’t get it exposed, so he hired my brother out of his own pocket to get on the telephone and call the R&B stations. My brother became very successful with that. MGM at that time started to think about black music, so they hired my brother as the national promotion man for black product. In the meantime, I was managing the act. We were partners, but I did all the footwork with the act. I worked out a deal with an agent called Charlie Rapp, who booked a lot of the acts in the Catskill Mountains, and he gave me the shot with the Wanderers. They became a very important act in the Catskill Mountains, and I was about to make some money with them. My brother was doing very well with MGM. Before you know it, my name got out there that I was doing very well with this black act, and other acts were starting to come to me to see if I would manage them. In the meantime, I met a guy by the name of Luther Dixon, who was a producer for Scepter Records at the time, and he really loved the Wanderers. He introduced me to Florence Greenberg, who was the owner of Scepter Records, and she had a girl group called the Shirelles that became very successful with her. She needed a manager and, because of Luther, she let me manage not only that act but Chuck Jackson, Tommy Hunt, and whoever she had on the label at the time. I was starting to build a management company, and things were going very nicely for me. I was doing very well with the Shirelles; they had a lot of hits. I also signed an act called Little Eva produced by Don Kirschener, who was a big publisher at the time. Most of the songs that the Shirelles had hits with were Donny Kirschener’s material. I became friendly with Donny because of all this, and he gave me Little Eva to manage. He had the Cookies and a label called



Tommy Smalls, ca. 1940s (Jack Gibson Collection).



Flip Wilson and Rick Roberts, 1972 (Rick Roberts Collection).

Dimension, and he needed somebody to handle his acts.

I booked Chuck Jackson down in Tampa. He was appearing at a club, and there was an emcee he thought was a terrific talent. He called me up and says, "Roy, there's a comic down here. I think you gotta sign him. I'd like to have him on my show at the Apollo Theater." He used to have his own show as the headliner at the Apollo Theater. He says, "Come on down and see the act!" I say, "Chuck, if you like the act so much, bring him up with you, and I'll get him a shot on the show with you. I'll call Bobby Schiffman." I told Bobby, who was the owner of the Apollo Theater, "I got this comic I'd like to put on the show with Chuck Jackson." He said, "Okay. No problem." So I put him on the show, and the kid turned out to be Flip Wilson. He was doing very nicely, because Flip's comedy at that time was basically into the black market. All his material was black and very hip. It had to be 1952.

PKM: What was the name of the management company?

RR: It was called Guardian Productions.

PKM: What were the challenges of having a firm with a roster of African American artists given the segregated nature of the music industry at that time?

RR: Motown started to come about, and Berry Gordy had his first record with MGM. Black music just

started to develop, and I was totally into black [artists]; I had no white acts. The Apollo opened up, and I was doing a lot of bookings out of the Apollo, the Howard, and the [Regal] in Chicago. I was able to keep the acts going, and a lot of black clubs opened where there were venues for me to book these acts. Then what had happened was we realized the record companies weren't really totally involved in black music. The only ones that were truly into black music were Motown, Florence Greenberg, and Atlantic. So Julie and I at that time decided we were going to try and form our own label, and we started with a production company in 1958.

We found two producers that came up with a couple of acts, who we weren't very successful with. Then we met John Richbourg—J.R.—who at that time had an act by the name of Joe Simon on Sound Stage 7, but John Richbourg wasn't very happy with the situation up there. We made a meeting with him, and he gave us Joe Simon to manage. So we started Spring Records with Joe Simon. We couldn't give him an advance, so we said, "Joe, how would you like to become a partner in the label?" He said "Yeah, why not?" Not only that, we gave him the right to produce acts for us because he was a talent that way.

PKM: During that time, of course, many record labels were not paying royalties to the artists. You seem to have taken a different approach.

RR: We paid our royalties to the artists when they made money, but a lot of them couldn't recoup, so they never had any money.

PKM: I remember when I first became familiar with Spring Records through Millie Jackson, who I absolutely loved. I thought she was very different. I saw her live several times, and her show was fantastic. What led to your signing Millie Jackson to your label?

RR: Millie was produced by two young guys that didn't know what was going on, and they came up to us at that time to see if we would sign Millie Jackson, and we did. We loved what they were doing, but they really weren't very good producers. We said, "Millie, it's not working out with these guys. What are we going to do?" She said, "Let me produce myself." So we said, "Fine, do it." In the meantime, she got a hold of a guy who was a producer named Brad Shapiro who worked with her. She came up with her own concept, and we loved it. It was a hard thing to promote at the time, but her reputation started to build, and her performance was great, so that's how Millie started. We never had very big records with her. It took us a long while until it happened, but we were making money with her.



Millie Jackson and Roy Rifkind, ca. 1970s. Photo courtesy of Roy Rifkind and Ed Hines.

Rifkind discusses his experiences working with white performers, including performances by Barbra Streisand and Elvis Presley at the International Hotel in Las Vegas, and releasing albums by the Fatback Band before turning to James Brown and his signing with Polydor.

PKM: I'd like to move to Spring Records' relationship with Polydor.

RR: This is how that happened. We became very friendly with Kirk Kerkorian, who had just bought MGM Records, and he gave us a deal. We were independent at that time. He hired a guy by the

name of Jim Aubrey to be president of MGM, and we worked out a deal that they were going to give us a label. It was a Friday. I think it was 1966 or '67. We were walking on 57th Street heading towards Park Avenue; his office was 445 Park Avenue. As we're walking on the street, we meet Jerry Schoenbaum, who we knew from MGM days. At that time he was a producer for them, and he became president of Polydor Records. We get to talking to him, telling him we were on our way to make a deal with MGM. He says, "Fellas, do me a favor. I know who you got. Come with me, and I'll give you a better deal than you'll get with MGM." I say, "Jerry, we're on our way to sign a deal." He says, "I don't care. You come up to my office right now on 57th St. I guarantee you I'll make you a better deal than you could have with MGM." And we liked Jerry. He was a very good guy. We said, "Okay." We went up to his office, and that's how we developed the relationship with Polydor. He signed us.

PKM: Another historical feat that you did in relation to Polydor Records was to sign James Brown. I want to know how that happened. He was a major influence in my life; I loved his music.

RR: James Brown was represented by this Larry Meyers who gave us the Fatback Band, and James was having a hard time with King Records. Larry calls me up and says, "Roy, would you be interested in signing James Brown?" I say, "God, I would love it! What would it take?" He says, "Well, we would have to work something out." So I go to Jerry Schoenbaum, and I say, "Jerry, we could get James Brown." He said, "Let's get him! Whatever he wants, let's do it." So I said to Larry, "I think we could make a deal." He says, "It's going to be a heavy deal." I say, "Let's see if James is willing to come along." He says, "Well, James is appearing in Boston. Why don't you come up, and we'll sit down and talk to him." So we fly up to Boston, Jerry Schoenbaum, Julie, and myself, and James had us waiting about two hours. We finally get to see him. He knew of us, you know, and we started to talk about Polydor. He says, "Well, I don't know. I don't know if you guys know the black business." You know he's giving his rap. So I say, "James, we know what it's all about. If you're not happy, we'll give you a release, because if you can't make money, we can't make money. So what are you worried about?" He says, "Well, let me think about it, and we'll get back to you." A week passes by. Larry calls, and he says, "I think I got the deal going for you with James Brown." I say, "Great, what do we have to do?" He says, "For one thing he wants an airplane." "An airplane!?" "Yeah, he wants his own private plane to take him to his gigs." So I went back to Jerry. Jerry says, "Oh, we'll rent an airplane for him. It's no big deal." So anyway, we worked out the deal for James. It turned out that when the contract was made, it was made



James Brown running past fans at the Sam Houston Coliseum, ca. 1964 (George Nelson Collection).

out to Polydor. James says, “What is this, Polydor? I thought I was signing with Spring.” I say, “Spring is going to be part of it, but you’re signing with Polydor because Jerry said to me, ‘I can’t put him on Spring because I’m paying a lot of money, and I’m looking to build Polydor as a label. You’ve got to give me James Brown on Polydor.’ He says, ‘I’ll give you a big override.’” And that’s how we got him, but at that point James thought he was signing with Spring all along.

PKM: But at this time Spring is a part of Polydor?

RR: Right, it was. And we were doing very nicely with Polydor. We had Joe. I think we had Millie. We had a couple of good acts going. James realized what Spring was at that time, and he thought he was signing with Spring all along. For many years afterwards, when I used to see him he would say, “You son of a gun! I thought I was signing with you!” I said, “Did you get hurt with Polydor?”

Rifkind shares some of his reminiscences about Al Sharpton, and then explains the sale of Spring Records before going on to discuss his legacy.

PKM: How did you dissolve Spring Records and move out of the business of recording and producing?

RR: Well, I had Spring Records till the very end, 1990-something. My brother and I, we split up. I maintained Spring Records, and I bought Joe Simon out, I bought my brother out, and I controlled Spring

Records. And what I was doing with Spring Records was just selling catalog. I started to get into the rap, and I hired a couple of young producers. I was doing very nicely with it. I had Run DMC, Russell Simmons, Jimmy Spicer. That was my rap. Russell Simmons was just starting.

PKM: So in a sense you helped launch him.

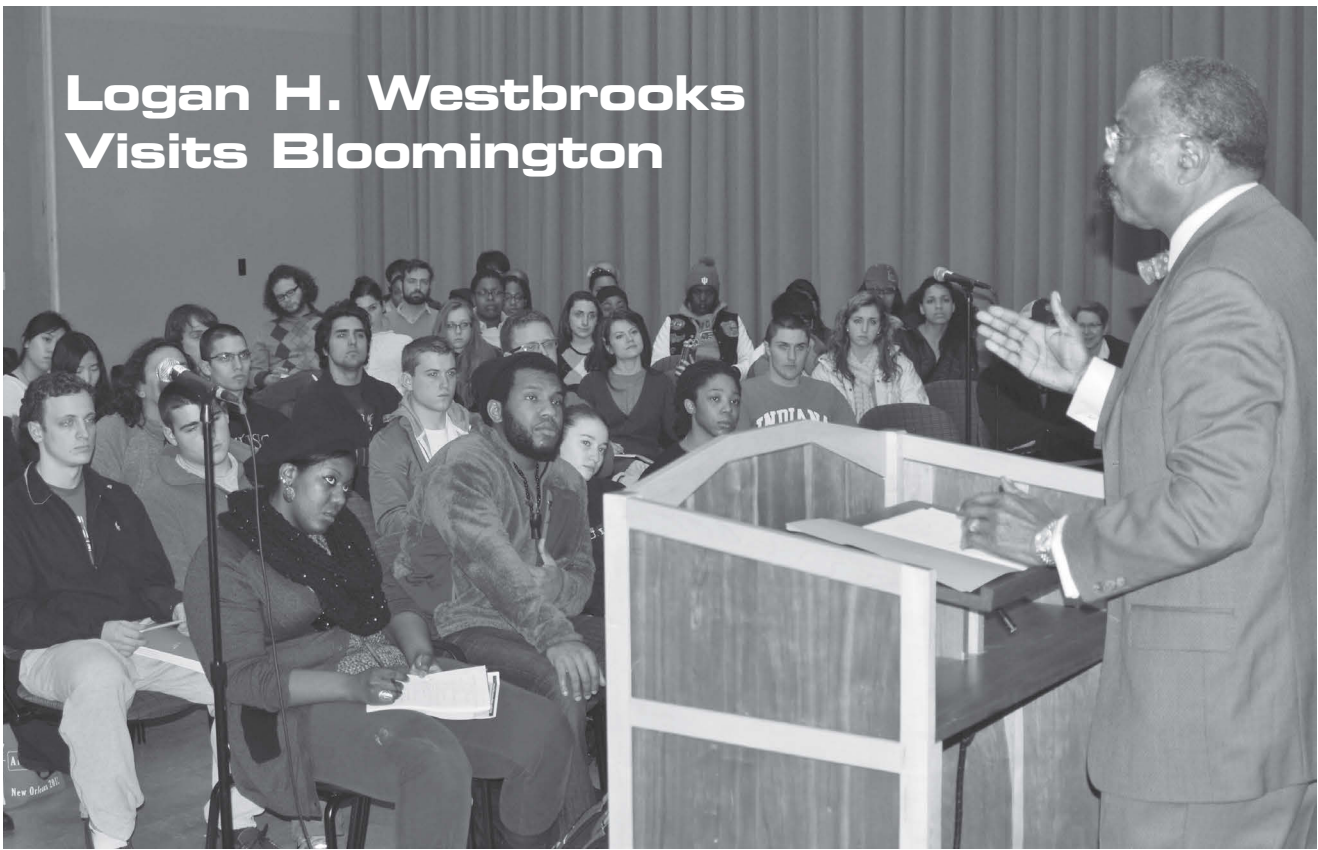
RR: Right. Jimmy Spicer.

PKM: Clearly you’ve had a tremendous and a rich musical legacy; you’ve done some of everything. I’m curious about how, given your musical legacy and you coming from a family of entertainers, how has this passed down to others?

RR: Well, I’ll tell you. I’ve got a nephew. His name is Steve Rifkind, and he’s into heavy rap and is doing extremely well. He has Akon. He has a lot of good acts, and he’s being distributed through Universal. He used to work for us, and he was lazy when he worked for us. He didn’t do anything, so I fired him, and he went out to California and became a big success with his own label called Loud Records. Then I have my son, who is an entertainment attorney, and he handles the New Kids on the Block and has a lot of major people that he represents. Now my grandson, who goes to Syracuse University, he produces all the music [and shows] up there. So that’s the legacy I left behind.

— Transcripts edited by Christina Harrison, Ronda L. Sewald, and Brenda Nelson-Strauss

Logan H. Westbrooks Visits Bloomington



Logan H. Westbrooks speaks to a packed house in the NMBCC Grand Hall, Feb. 4, 2013. Photo by Juan Rojas.



Lecture audience, Feb. 4, 2013. Photo by Juan Rojas.



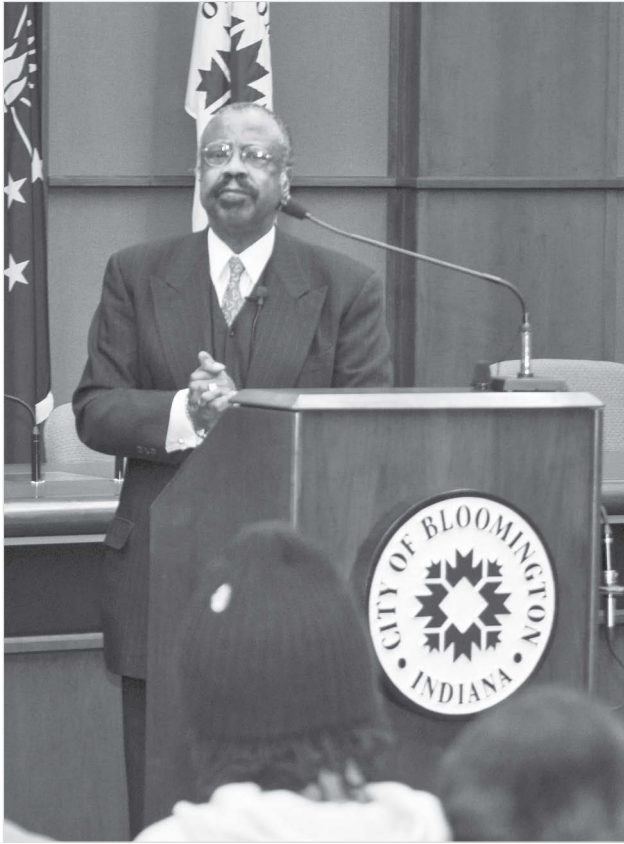
Westbrooks speaking with students at luncheon in the NMBCC Kappa Room, Feb. 6, 2013. Photo by Fareed Mahluli.

On the evening of February 4, 2013, music executive and entrepreneur, Logan H. Westbrooks, spoke before a packed house in the Grand Hall of Indiana University's Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center. During his lecture titled "Bustin' Loose: Breaking Racial Barriers in the Music Industry," Westbrooks unfolded his journey from his beginnings as a trainee in the RCA Victor Distribution Corporation to his rise as the first Director of Special Markets at CBS Records and on to founding and running his own record company, Source Records.

Westbrooks's cordial nature, eloquence, and charisma quickly made him a favorite with the local media and IU students and were matched only by those of his wife, Geri. In addition to lectures at the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center and Bloomington City Hall, Westbrooks was featured on the January 28, 2013 episode of WFHB's *Bring It On!*, on IU Student TV, and in several local papers and newsletters. Despite a packed two-day itinerary that included public lectures, meetings with student groups at the African American Arts Institute, two classroom lectures, and luncheons and dinners with various groups across campus, the Westbrookses never failed to greet students with a warmth and enthusiasm that left them energized and inspired.

Additional coverage of Logan Westbrooks and his collection is available in the previous issue of *Liner Notes* and the AAAMC's podcast "Logan H. Westbrooks: The Personal Collection of a Music Industry Executive and Entrepreneur" at <http://youtu.be/WnWKjBxfbWU>.

— Ronda L. Sewald



Westbrooks lecture at Showers City Hall, Feb. 5, 2013. Photo by Fareed Mahluli.



Guest lecture by Westbrooks for Fred McElroy's course "Survey of the Culture of Black Americans," Feb. 6, 2013. Photo by Christina Harrison.



L to R: Portia K. Maultsby, Logan H. Westbrooks, and Geri Westbrooks, 2013. Photo by Juan Rojas.

Westbrooks Events

Monday, January 28th

- Radio program featuring Westbrooks and AAAMC director, Portia Maultsby, as part 2 of WFHB's *Bring It On!* episode covering "Black History Month – Bloomington Style: Lessons in Leadership" <http://archive.wfhb.org/news/bring-it-january-28-2013>

Black History Month Exhibits, January 28th-February 28th

- "Logan Westbrooks: Music Industry Executive, Entrepreneur, Teacher, Philanthropist" Neal-Marshall BCC, Bridgwaters Lounge
- "The Evolution of the Black Music Industry" Showers City Hall

Monday, February 4th

- Public lecture: "Bustin' Loose: Breaking Racial Barriers in the Music Industry" Neal-Marshall BCC, Grand Hall

Tuesday, February 5th

- Public lecture: "Black Leadership in the Music Industry" Showers City Hall
- Guest observation of the IU Soul Revue

Wednesday, February 6th

- Guest lecture for Monika Herzig's "Music Industry II" course
- Guest lecture for Fred McElroy's "Survey of the Culture of Black Americans" course
- Dinner and discussion with Hutton and Hudson-Holland Honors Students at the Hutton Honors College

Wednesday, April 3rd

- "City of Bloomington Celebrates Black History Month, Part 3" Radio broadcast of Westbrooks's City Hall lecture on WFHB's *Standing Room Only* <http://archive.wfhb.org/news/city-bloomington-celebrates-black-history-month-part-3-0>

May 2013

- AAAMC Podcast: "Logan H. Westbrooks: The Personal Collection of a Music Industry Executive and Entrepreneur" <http://youtu.be/WnWKjBxfbWU>

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- Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology
- Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center

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