liner notes

ARCHIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC AND CULTURE

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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From the Desk of the Director

photo by Fernando Orejuela

L-R: Brenda Nelson-Strauss, Stephanie Shonekan, Tangera Sharp, Portia K. Maultsby, and Daniel Smith.

The AAAMC continues to move forward toward achieving its mission of collecting, preserving, and making materials on African American Music and Culture available to students, scholars, performers, and the general public. Over the past nine months, we focused on advancing our educational mission by presenting selected collections of the Archives in public lectures and performances. We co-sponsored renowned music educator and ethnomusicologist Dr. Luvenia George's workshop on the Duke Ellington Project for the Smithsonian Institution, which includes a multi-disciplinary education kit housed in the AAAMC's Educational Resource Collection. We also co-sponsored a performance by legendary opera singer Camilla Williams (with accompaniment by Borislav Bazala) in conjunction with a class on "Black Women in Music" taught by Assistant Director Dr. Stephanie Shonekan and organized around the Archive's general collection (see stories inside). The question and answer sessions that followed each event provided first-hand accounts of the lives and careers of George and Williams, and they inspired members of the audience to inquire about archival materials for further study. Given the success of these and similar events held earlier, we will continue to sponsor programs that bring life to the legends and collections housed in the Archives.

The AAAMC's collections are valuable resources for scholarly endeavors as well as for various forms of creative activity. Our general collection of popular music, for example, provides our featured research associate Tyron Cooper, director of the Indiana University Soul Revue, with recordings of rhythm and blues, soul, and funk music used in the development of the "Old School" component of the ensemble's repertoire. IU Soul Revue's performances expose audiences across the country to the sources of today's neo-soul and rhythm & blues musical styles, as well as hip-hop samples and various genres that comprise classic soul and R&B.

The research and educational mission of the Archives continues to generate interest for collaborative projects with established national and international cultural institutions. This spring AAAMC hosted Jaap Van Beusekom, director of the Dutch Rock & Pop Institute in Amsterdam, who expressed interest in collaborating on video productions that would feature Dutch musicians involved in the performance of black music (see story inside). Van Beusekom was our second visitor from the Netherlands in the last two years (see Liner Notes #6/7 for more details).

Each year, the AAAMC invests a major portion of its resources in processing collections and developing finding aids. The staff completed the latter for the Smithsonian Black Radio Collection (see story inside). The oral histories and air-check tapes included in this and related collections allow patrons to travel back in time to the 1950s and 1960s to experience the music, stories, and "jive" talk of the pioneering personality DJs that influenced the style of contemporary deejays such as Tom Joyner, host of the syndicated Tom Joyner Show. A valuable companion resource to the black radio collection is the Johnny Otis Collection, which includes radio programs featuring on-air conversations and performances with rhythm and blues artists from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s (see Liner Notes #1 for a description of this collection).

The AAAMC depends on the expertise and talents of its full-time staff and its part-time staff of graduate and undergraduate students to fulfill its mission. Students assist patrons, process collections, work on special projects, and cover events sponsored by or relevant to the collections and research of the Archives. Most of them are interested in careers related to archives, museums, and other cultural institutions as well as those that involve music research, production, and marketing. The Archives provides opportunities for students to obtain valuable experience, meet legendary figures in black music and culture, and interact with individuals of similar interests. Two of these students, Daniel Smith and Tangera Sharp, graduated in spring 2003. On behalf of the AAAMC's staff, I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for their valuable contributions and commitment. Both contributed to Liner Notes and served the Archives with distinction. We will miss them and we wish them much success in all future endeavors.

In closing, I am pleased to announce the appointment of Brenda Nelson-Strauss as archivist/head of collections. She brings seventeen years of valuable experience that will be an asset to our daily operations. Her presence will help launch us into a new era of archiving and collection development (see story inside).

Portia K. Maultsby

Portia K. Maultsby
Director

In the Vault
Recent Donations

Blackberry Records
Gospel compact discs and audio cassettes for the Bobby L. Jones Collection

Bobby L. Jones
Additions to collection

Carnegie Hall Education Department
Educational kits, Global Encounters: Sounds Along the Silk Road; Global Encounters: South African Sounds

Gotee Records
Compact discs for the Bobby L. Jones Collection

Kate Greer
Photographs and publicity material on legendary jazz singer Adelaide Hall

EMI Christian Music Group
Compact discs for the Bobby L. Jones Collection

Indiana University Press
CD-Rom Music and Culture of West Africa: The Straus Expedition

Debbie May
Videos related to gospel music

Malcolm Shaw
Material on Arizona Dranes; Jazz and Ragtime Records (1897–1942) compiled by Brian Rust and edited by Malcolm Shaw

Rachel Hughes Slansky
Correspondence for the Jack Gibson Collection

Smithsonian Institution
Educational kit, Jazz Age in Paris

Uprok Records
Compact discs for the Bobby L. Jones Collection

Michael Woods
Additions to the Michael Woods Collection of original compositions

photo by Stephanie Shonekan

Events

Camilla Williams in Concert

As a young child Camilla Williams loved to perform and sing. She was one of the leading members of the generation of African American singers who broke down racial barriers in opera. Williams studied voice and piano and graduated from Virginia State College in 1941. She then moved to Philadelphia for advanced voice study and won scholarship awards from the pioneering black soprano Marian Anderson. At one solo recital, Williams was heard by the distinguished opera singer Geraldine Farrar, who became her mentor. Through Farrar's influence, an audition was arranged for Williams at the New York City Center Opera (now the New York City Opera). The company's artistic director cast Williams in Puccini's Madama Butterfly, and she made her operatic debut as Cio-Cio San in May 1946. She performed many leading roles in major operas over the years, including Puccini's La Boheme, Bizet's Carmen, Gounod's Faust, and Verdi's Aida. She has sung for several American presidents and other world leaders. She also sang for the March on Washington in 1963. Williams retired from opera in 1971.

History repeated itself on November 6, 2002, when, at the age of 82, Ms. Williams took the stage in the Grand Hall at Indiana University's Neal- Marshall Black Culture Center, with 93-year old Borislav Bazala accompanying, and dazzled the audience with an electrifying performance. Many who had only heard or read about Ms. Williams were amazed to see her perform. "I've never met anyone like her before and to have her grace us with her presence and God-given talent was a blessing to me and many others," said Crystal Barry, a junior at IU. Seeing Ms. Williams perform again was also quite a thrill for audience members who have known her for years. Dr. James Mumford, Director of the African American Choral Ensemble, was elated after the event: "It was an astonishing evening to hear and see the great talent of one of our finest divas. It was so important for my students to observe that this great opera star chose to sing black spirituals for her recital. It gave more importance to the need to preserve and respect them as one of the greatest examples of the history of our people in song than anything I could say in a lecture. They were moved and convicted."

After the performance Ms. Williams answered questions from the audience and paused to speak to many close friends and students. She gave us a historical perspective of the struggles and triumphs many still face in accomplishing their goals and dreams. She told of how she had traveled and performed all over the world. She spoke of her undaunted faith in God and advised the crowd that by keeping Him first, they can reach the unreachable and tell the untold.

Currently, Ms. Williams is working on her autobiography with Dr. Stephanie Shonekan, who organized the concert as part of her class on Black Women in Music. According to Shonekan, "Ms. Williams' performance surpassed my highest expectations. This was a treat for me as the co-writer of her autobiography and for my class because her performance really brought to life our readings and discussions. The fact that Borislav Bazala was her accompanist for the evening was an added bonus. I am so grateful to Collins Living Learning Center, the Archives of African American Music and Culture, and the African American Arts Institute for supporting this event; to my students for helping with arrangements; and most of all to Ms. Williams for so graciously sharing her story, her song, and the source of her strength."

--Tangera Sharp

Sharp recently graduated from Indiana University with a bachelor's degree in history.

Collection Highlight:

Black Radio:
Keep on Tellin' It

Radio is perhaps the most ephemeral of all media. Newspapers are preserved on microfilm and many television programs are offered on videocassette. Radio, however, is a passive medium that provides background music while we perform other activities. Those of us who taped songs off the radio in the past rarely thought to preserve the shows of the personality deejays of the 1950s and 1960s, much less the commercials, news reports, and call letter jingles. Most of this broadcasting history is lost forever, but the AAAMC fortunately has preserved some important material related to black radio.

Founded in 1991, the AAAMC houses both audio and visual materials chronicling the history of black radio. Much of this material was compiled for the groundbreaking radio program, "Black Radio: Telling It Like It Was." Produced by Radio Smithsonian, the program chronicles the intriguing history of black radio from its beginnings through the 1990s. The AAAMC holds copies of much of the raw audio material used in creating the program.

The collection features rare and insightful interviews with pioneers of black radio such as Jack Cooper, acknowledged as the first black radio announcer; Al Benson, Chicago radio's "Old Swingmaster," whose blues-laden playlists revolutionized black radio; and Georgie Woods, who used his popularity as a disc jockey to rally his audience to the cause of civil rights. Some stories are truly bizarre, such as the experience of announcer Vernon Winslow. Winslow created a jive-talking radio character known as "Poppa Stoppa" for a New Orleans radio station, but he could not perform as Poppa Stoppa himself because he was black. Winslow was hired to train white announcers to "sound black" so that they could accurately portray the hipster character. One evening, when the regular white announcer failed to show up for work, Winslow went on in his place and was promptly fired.

In addition to audio materials, the AAAMC holds a multitude of visual materials, much of it donated by radio personalities from their private collections. This material enables scholars to see the faces belonging to these familiar voices and to experience a period when radio announcers were very important figures in the black community.

This collection attracts music and cultural scholars of all disciplines from around the world. By listening to the vast collection of radio airchecks, broadcast historians and other enthusiasts are instantly transported back in time as they become reacquainted with, or introduced to, the music and voices of the past. Even the commercials, which may have seemed like such a hindrance back in the day, bring a smile of recognition.

-Jason Housley

Housley is completing a masters degree in African American Studies, focusing on black film.

For more on AAAMC black radio collections, see feature on the William Barlow Collection in AAAMC Liner Notes #3, Spring 2002.

Dutch Rock & Pop Institute Director Visits Indiana University

In March 2003, Jaap Van Beusekom, director of the Dutch Rock & Pop Institute in Amsterdam, Holland, visited the Indiana University campus to explore with AAAMC director Portia Maultsby possible collaborative general market media projects that profile Dutch musicians involved in the performance of Black American music in the Netherlands. Maultsby first met Van Beusekom at a 1993 conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music in Stockton, California, where she presented the keynote address. A year later, Van Beusekom helped arrange a lecture tour for Maultsby in the Netherlands. She has since visited the Netherlands many times to conduct field research on the production of Black music in Dutch popular culture, a project that grew out of her teaching and a conference she organized with Lutgard Mutsaers at the University of Utrecht in Spring 1998. Van Beusekom has contributed to this research by donating to the AAAMC many CD compilations and books on Dutch musicians that are produced annually by the Dutch Rock & Pop Institute .He has also provided space at the Dutch Rock & Pop Institute for Maultsby to interview musicians based in Amsterdam.

While visiting Indiana University, Van Beusekom met with Lee Williams, founder of Bloomington's Lotus World Music &

Events

Dr. Luvenia George Lectures at IU

"Be flexible. If you know your material, you can adapt it to any situation." These words of wisdom, offered to an eager audience of ethnomusicology and folklore undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty, meant a great deal coming from Dr. Luvenia George. This inspiring woman is a master of flexibility. She started out as a public school general music teacher in the 1970s and has adapted her own expertise to countless situations during her long career in ethnomusicology, music education, public media, and museums. On January 26–27, 2003, George braved a snowy Bloomington to share her experiences and insights with the IU community. Over the course of the weekend, she led a Sunday afternoon workshop and presented a Monday evening lecture.

This series of special events was the brainchild of Portia Maultsby, who has known George since they both attended a Society for Ethnomusicology meeting in the early 1980s. With the help and sponsorship of the AAAMC, the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and the Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies, Maultsby organized this visit to launch the "Public Sector" track, a new option for folklore and ethnomusicology students. "I wanted to find a way to introduce students to career options beyond the academy," Maultsby reflected, "and to demonstrate how their formal training, research, and technical skills can be utilized in public sector institutions." Luvenia George was the perfect choice as exemplar. A music educator and ethnomusicologist whose primary interests include the history behind the music of the African American church, George has made huge strides in the public sector as a researcher, consulting scholar, curricula developer, and teacher trainer. She is nationally renowned for her pioneering work in public sector institutions such as the Smithsonian Institution and the American Jazz Museum in Kansas City, and she founded the hugely successful Duke Ellington Youth Project, an educational outreach collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and the Washington, D.C. Public School system.

The Duke Ellington Project was the focus of the Sunday afternoon workshop. Patterning her presentation after those she conducts for public school teachers, George walked the audience through this multi-disciplinary K–12 curriculum based on the Duke Ellington Archives at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. She offered practical advice about curriculum development, interspersed with musical examples, and tips on how to break down a musical topic in order to keep students of all ages engaged and focused. Audio and video examples of student work inspired by the Ellington Project included visual art projects and a dramatic reading of Othello that was inspired by Ellington's Shakespearean Suite. A video presented students reading their own original poetry, written in response to Ellington's life and music.

> ***"Dr. George's workshops were truly two of the best, if not the best, workshops I have attended here at IU... I found Dr. George's workshops to be not only informative, but inspiring as well."***

The Monday evening lecture, "The Involvement of Ethnomusicologists and Humanities Scholars in Public Sector Institutions," took a slightly different approach. Mini-lectures on topics such as Lucie Campbell, gospel music styles, and the ragtime styles of Scott Joplin and Eubie Blake illustrated the different ways scholars must present material to "sell" it for inclusion in public sector projects such as school curricula, museum exhibitions, and documentary media productions. "Never assume that the general public has heard of the person or subject you are interested in," she advised. "Your job is to bring to light who started what, first." In the wrap up question-and-answer session, it was clear that George had sparked interests and opened doors.

Although this was George's second visit to IU, it was the first time she had presented for an audience composed entirely of budding ethnomusicologists. She expressed enthusiastic approval for the new Public Sector track, calling it "overdue," and she also emphasized the post-9/11 need for people who can relate to, have respect for, and really care about other cultures. In her mind, IU students fit the bill— she enjoyed meeting and working with the students here, and she called them "bright" and "interested." She also made a special point of commenting how much IU students seem "to care, almost spiritually, about their subjects."

Faculty and students who attended the events had nothing but praise and appreciation for George's visit. "I found Dr. George's workshop to be exciting and innovative," said Katie Strang, an M.A. student in Ethnomusicology. "It really made me think about opportunities to turn ethnomusicology into something that can touch a lot of lives. Seeing the students interact with the Duke Ellington curriculum really emphasized the amazing things that can be created when an ethnomusicological perspective is used in conjunction with education." Maultsby found the event to be a great success. "In addition to exposing our students to career options outside the academy, Dr. George demonstrated the value of their training as scholars in institutions devoted to the preservation and presentation of cultures," she said. "A highlight for me was the way Dr. George used her research skills to challenge the misrepresentation and/or omission of minority cultures from exhibitions on 'American' topics and to negotiate institutional politics."

Even students outside of a music discipline found value in the presentations. Jill Stein, an M.A. student in folklore, commented that "even though the specific curriculum Dr. George spoke about was focused on music, I found that the general models and methods she used could easily be transferred to other topics in traditional arts and culture. The workshop expanded my vision of job possibilities in the field of folklore and offered practical tools for actually creating positions and getting funding for these types of public programs." Stephanie Knox, Ph.D. candidate in Ethnomusicology, summed it up best: "Dr. George's workshops were truly two of the best, if not the best, workshops I have attended here at IU. Dr. George has a wealth of knowledge that she generously shared with her audience. I found Dr. George's workshops to be not only informative, but inspiring as well."

The Duke Ellington educational kit developed by George for the Smithsonian Institution (see Liner Notes #4 for a review), as well as the production and education materials from her visit, are housed in the AAAMC, including videos of both presentations. These resources are available to IU faculty and students, and to the general public.

--Sunni Fass

Fass is a research assistant at the AAAMC and a graduate student in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology specializing in applied ethnomusicology (museums) and the study of world music commodification and consumption.

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photo by Stephanie Shonekan

Arts Festival. (The Dutch jazz group, Fra Fra, consisting primarily of members of Surinam heritage, performed during the 2002 Lotus Festival.) He also visited a class taught by Fernando Orejuela on "Hip-Hop Music and Culture," which includes the topic "Hip-Hop in Dutch Culture."

In 1977, Van Beusekom was appointed director of the fledgling National Pop Institute, which was founded in 1975 with funding from the Dutch Ministry of Culture to promote Dutch music at home and abroad. Now called the Dutch Rock and Pop Institute and steered by a seven-member board of professionals and scholars, the organization has expanded to include three main departments—The Media Center is the institute's archival arm and is charged with collecting educational and academic multimedia resources for the study of popular music; Support and Subsidy conducts outreach and performance activities and promotes Dutch music in the Netherlands and across the globe; and Promotions and Projects focuses on the production of special book and CD projects and coordinates publications and recording projects of emerging Dutch talent. In 2002, the institute published a book on Dutch popular music titled Van Brooklyn Naar Breukelen, written by Saul Van Stapele.

The son of a Dutch Reform Church minister, Van Beusekom and his siblings were raised listening to church hymns, but American popular culture also seeped into the household because Reverend Van Beusekom collected as many American LPs as he could find, from the blues of Bessie Smith to the jazz of Louis Armstrong. By the age of 14, Jaap van Beusekom had become engrossed in American folk traditions. He bought LP compilations that included recordings of Pete Seeger and Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly). Drawn to the folk and blues elements of the music he heard, Van Beusekom purchased a five-string banjo and taught himself to play.

The ethnic landscape of the Netherlands gradually changed beginning with the influx of Indonesians from the 1940s to the 1970s, followed by the arrival of immigrants from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s, and from the Dutch colony Surinam in the 1970s (before and after its independence in 1975). The flavor of Dutch music and culture also began to evolve into a mixture of the different immigrant cultures. Although Van Beusekom enjoyed Dutch music, he favored American folk music and joined a folk band, CCC Inc., as a vocalist and instrumentalist playing the banjo, steel guitar, and dobro guitar. Founded in 1967, CCC Inc. performed covers of American folk tunes, including the works of Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly. After recording seven albums, the group disbanded in 1974 and Van Beusekom joined another group called Electric Tear.

-- Stephanie Shonekan

Shonekan holds a doctoral degree in Folklore and Ethnomusicology. She specializes in the autobiographical representations of black performers throughout the African Diaspora.

Events

Michael Eric Dyson and the African American Imprint on Popular Culture.

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson has emerged as one of the foremost luminaries of the current generation of black intellectuals, proving that rigorous investigation of African American popular culture, which the AAAMC is dedicated to collecting and preserving, should be included in our canon of cultural criticism and humanities literature. Most of his books have had crossover mainstream appeal while still maintaining scholarly depth and a dedication to the eminence of the academy.

Dyson's scholarly publications provide the foundation for a public career that is not extended to many university intellectuals. As a culture critic and public intellectual, Dyson has made the rounds on television news programs, National Public Radio, and the university lecture circuit. On February 26, 2003, Dyson delivered the keynote address at Indiana University's event in honor of Black History Month, which was sponsored by the Union Board. Discussing the influence of African American aesthetics on popular culture, he attempted to re-direct the debate over black cultural production in its relation to race-relations, class, gender, and the market. To his captive audience, Dyson posed an important question: How does society give such close attention to black style in art, cinema, music, and sport, yet still deny the political dimension from which these artistic expressions sprung?

Of course Dyson's question fascinated me as it is one that I ask myself often, especially with regards to my own experience teaching a course on hip hop music and culture to a predominantly (and sometimes exclusively) white student body. In an age when the media celebrates a white rapper as king of the genre and rap audiences are predominantly white, it stands to reason that my white students identify with it—even claim it—as it is the music and culture that pervades their upbringing. As a result, they are uncomfortable with the notion that the objective of the class is to focus on hip hop as a black musical and cultural art form within the continuum of black aesthetics and creativity. They would rather see things as they should be; that is, color-blind: "It's not black music; it's just music." "Music belongs to everyone." "Why do we have to stress the racial differences and make it exclusive?"

"When it comes to hip-hop, people think they are qualified to talk about something they haven't studied," he said. "You have to listen to it to understand the complexities."

"That's one of the undeniable disadvantages to a wonderful and edifying universality being promulgated on all black aesthetics," Dr. Dyson explained. "In that attempt to reach out to as broad and wide an audience as possible, what does not carry across, does not get translated or gets lost in the translation, is the specific history of suffering and oppression and brutality and violence from which the art form emerges. Even when the lyrics themselves concentrate on certain facets of that suffering and brutality—police brutality, economic suffering, poverty, racial apartheid—even as the specific manifestation of racial oppression is articulated at the level of lyrics, the larger philosophical and ideological arguments sometimes get lost on students, white students. "What it says to me as well is that it is an attempt sometimes by majority mainstream students, white students, to deny the particularity of the suffering in relationship to their generation. In other words, that stuff was in the past. It happened. It occurred. We are over it now. The unification we generate as a result of being a part of the hip hop community and culture has distanced us from the past horrors. So there is a kind of dis-identification with the racist past and an over-identification with the so-called multi-racial future. What you end up losing is the specific history and politics of race and suffering that provide so much of its power.

"What I think is going on is what happens with whiteness in general—that things get universalized and, therefore, erased. We don't think about whiteness as a specific racial-ethnic formation. As a result of that, 'white' equals 'universality.' The rupture of race interrupts that process. When you appropriate hip hop from a majority white-cultural perspective and the attempt is to underplay the particular resonances that emerge from that community, whether that community is black or brown or poor people 'doin' their thing,' what's interesting is that the appropriation of these art forms by predominantly white students often means the erasure of the tensions that give hip hop such heft, such immediate social relevance.

"But finally, I think it is part of the larger American project of amnesia. I mean we live in the United States of Amnesia. As a result we tend to downplay the specific memories that are dangerous, that are troubling, about the racial past and especially how that troubling racial past relates to the present. So a cultural art form is seized upon as evidence of a political victory: 'This art form and my embrace of it as a white person becomes a signifier for the overcoming of political inequalities and social inequities that continue to prevail. Because I love Biggie there is no apartheid. Because I like Tupac there is no more serious tension between the people who love the Confederate flag and those who are trying to talk about it as a symbol of vicious bigotry.' Therefore, a cultural aesthetic articulation is seen as a political negotiation of a specific sort and that can be problematic."

Dr. Dyson's candid response not only supports the study of African American popular music in the academy and for the public, but also inherently supports the AAAMC and its mission. "When it comes to hip-hop, people think they are qualified to talk about something they haven't studied," he said. "You have to listen to it to understand the complexities." Without the attempt to study the art form and a facility that preserves and disseminates such materials for research and instructional purposes, one is likely to miss the most important part of the African American legacy – creativity that emerges from an environment of oppression. "We need to intervene intellectually by studying it, aesthetically by listening to it and critiquing and critically analyzing its components," Dyson concluded. Having a warehouse of black musical productions, an institution dedicated to its conservation and public use, serves as reminder that our collective American musical creation was borne from a specific culture and particular American experience.

-- Fernando Orejuela

Orejuela is a doctoral candidate and visiting faculty in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. He is a research associate for the AAAMC.

People

New AAAMC Head of Collections

After living and working in Chicago for 13 years, Brenda Nelson-Strauss returned to Bloomington, Indiana, last August to assume the position of AAAMC's Head of Collections. In her new position, she has spent countless hours during the past year sorting through and reorganizing the archive's holdings. Nelson-Strauss brings significant experience in performing arts archives to this position. She began to formalize her interest in music early in her academic pursuits by focusing on flute performance and music education during her undergraduate years at Western Washington University. After graduating she decided she did not want to teach music in the public schools, so she began to focus instead on her performance skills by moving to Bloomington, where she studied privately with professors at Indiana University and with a member of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. After a couple of years, she realized that she would probably not have a "great career as a flutist" and decided to pursue a Masters of Library Science with a music specialization, receiving her degree in 1985 from Indiana University.

Nelson-Strauss branched into a focus on archives when the position of librarian/cataloger opened up at IU's Archives of Traditional Music (ATM). During her four years at the ATM, she gained valuable skills in the areas of cataloging, audio preservation, and archival processing. She also completed coursework for a masters in Folklore/Ethnomusicology, and conducted extensive research into the life of Natalie Curtis Burlin, one of the first to make field recordings on wax cylinders of African American musicians.

In 1989, continuing her archival career, Nelson-Strauss moved to Chicago to establish an archive for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In her role as director, she was responsible for documenting the activities of the orchestra as well as the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Civic Orchestra, and Symphony Center, through the collection and preservation of materials of historical and legal value. Apart from managing and supervising the day-to-day activities of the Archives, Nelson-Strauss also served as production manager of the "From the Archives" CD series. Independent research conducted during this period included an extensive investigation of African American classical music performances in Chicago during the first half of the 20th century, with a particular focus on groups appearing at Orchestra Hall.

Nelson-Strauss enjoys archival work for several reasons: "First, I enjoy the challenge of working with a variety of different formats—sound recordings, moving images, music, photographs, manuscripts, business records, press clippings, scrapbooks, and other historical materials. Each format has its own set of preservation issues as well as options for arrangement and description. Second, I think there is often more flexibility in archival work. I have had an opportunity to do just about everything—cataloging, reference, records management, conservation, oral histories, exhibits, CD reissues, media projects, and publicity. Third, I like the challenge of working with unpublished, primary source materials, which usually require a fair amount of historical research, and often demand creative approaches to the arrangement and description of the collections."

Her new position as Head of Collections at the AAAMC brings new challenges. Pondering the distinguishing elements of the AAAMC as a repository for black popular music she explains, "In dealing with black popular music, it's more difficult to define the boundaries of the collection development policy. Do we collect forms of black popular music such as rap from Africa or France because it is related to African American rap? Do we only collect the work of American artists? Though one must leave room for flexibility, it is important to establish boundaries, so that we can build upon our strengths and not collect in too many different directions. Another problem is that popular music in general is more ephemeral in nature, so it can be difficult to locate significant collections of primary source materials. But this also means we must actively engage in outreach activities, and perhaps become more proactive in developing documentation strategies for certain groups or genres of music."

Though her immediate priority is to select and implement an appropriate library database system for its holdings, Nelson-Strauss also intends to help promote the visibility of the AAAMC by "increasing awareness in the archival community, through my affiliations and activities in the Music Library Association, the Society of American Archivists, and the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, and also by reaching out to collectors."

-- Stephanie Shonekan

Shonekan holds a doctoral degree in Folklore and Ethnomusicology. She specializes in the autobiographical representations of black performers throughout the African Diaspora.

Research Associate Highlight:

the soul of tyron cooper

photo by Tyagan Miller

photos by Stephanie Shonekan

The Archives of African American Music and Culture maintains a group of Resident Research Associates from various disciplines who act as resource consultants to the staff and the patrons of the archives. This issue features musician and teacher Tyron Cooper. He is the Director of Indiana University's Soul Revue. Cooper's relationship with the AAAMC is symbiotic in the sense that he is able to use the AAAMC audio recordings as resources for his group's performances while also providing consultation to the AAAMC, particularly in the area of its music educational programs.

Tyron Cooper and the musical ensemble he directs in Bloomington, Indiana, are the same age— both were born in 1971. Cooper is now in his third year as the director of the Indiana University Soul Revue, a 30-year-old performing ensemble that specializes in African American popular music. When Cooper first took on the mantle of the directorship, he brought a fresh, new look and sound to the ensemble. Audiences were first curious and then fascinated with his new approach. Unlike some past Soul Revue directors who assumed a relatively demure role by directing the instrumentalists in a subdued manner and coming to the forefront perhaps only at the end of the show, Cooper places himself in the center of the performance stage. He directs not only the band but the singers, cuing them in and out throughout their performances. Cooper's style does not overshadow the performers; instead it showcases them. Cooper has helped the student group to evolve into an exciting, revitalized ensemble, taking on old and new songs with vigor and finesse.

A southern boy by birth and at heart, Cooper is far from home. Soon after he was born in Florence, South Carolina, his family moved to Lake Worth, Florida. Cooper, his sister, and four brothers all loved music from an early age. Their home was warm and focused on education, church, and music. Both parents performed in the Church of God in Christ Church where the family worshipped. Their father played guitar and their mother sang in the choir. Cooper remembers his mother singing the blues at home as she was doing her chores. So the children were introduced to music from an early age. Their enthusiasm was taken to a whole new level in 1976, when they found a new set of instruments under the Christmas tree, a long- anticipated gift from their father. Before dusk of that same day, all the instruments were dead—beaten on, strummed, banged on, played thoroughly. "We tore those things up," Cooper remembers fondly.

The Coopers' neighborhood was saturated with musical sounds as well. Folks would play instruments, buckets, anything they could lay their hands on in their yards, sharing rhythms with their neighbors. Cooper remembers a talented drummer named Darryll Deal who played his drum set in his backyard.

Although Cooper loved every instrument, he was particularly drawn to the drums and the bass guitar because of their percussive nature. It was no surprise that the very first song he learned was the funk anthem "Fire" by the Ohio Players, which gave him ample opportunity to practice his bass line.

One afternoon about a year after the receipt and demise of the Christmas instruments, young Tyron wandered into his father's bedroom and headed straight for the closet. As he approached the taboo area, he recalled his father's stern voice as he had left for work that morning: "Tyron, do not go near my guitar." The warning did not make an impact. Tyron loved to stand in front of a mirror and pretend he was playing guitar to a stadium full of adoring fans. He could always imagine the sounds that came out of his instrument and the band behind him. He could hear the audience asking for encores. Now, he could do the role playing with a real guitar. Gingerly, he lifted it out of its case and slipped the strap over his head. As he got into the imaginary show, he became more enthusiastic and turned to give his invisible band members a cue to change key. He heard a fearful crunch as the stem of his father's treasured Gibson guitar hit the side of the dresser and broke. Sensing that this was a potentially serious crime, Tyron quietly ended his show, carefully placed the dead instrument in its new coffin, and put it back in the closet.

Hours later, when his father returned from a hard, hot day on a construction site, Tyron was summoned to explain how the guitar had met such a sudden and complete end. Realizing that this could get him into serious trouble, Tyron answered, "What guitar?" Then something unexpected happened. His father decided that since Tyron was so desperate to play guitar, he would buy him his own. So what could have been a bad experience turned out to be a blessing for the budding musician.

Music lessons were expensive, so Cooper was only able to take one drum lesson when he was about 6 years old—but it was enough. That sole lesson on live notes versus dead notes has remained with Tyron all these years. "I could feel the live notes as the teacher demonstrated them and understood the concept." The family, including his parents, formed a singing group known as the Cooper Singers. Throughout the year, they performed at churches, auditoriums, and other venues all over Lake Worth. At the same time, Cooper was musically active in junior high and high school, singing first tenor in the school choir and playing drums and trombone in the jazz and marching bands. The character Devon in the 2003 movie Drumline provides a striking similarity to Cooper's exceptional musical competence yet surprising inability to read musical scores until he was a senior in high school. Cooper remembers, "I couldn't read a lick but I would just hear something and be able to play it." In spite of this, he was the leader in all instruments and singing roles he took on in high school.

Towards the end of 12th grade, his choir director advised him that he was not cut out for college. With graduation approaching, and resigned to finding a job after high school, Tyron was summoned by the school guidance counselor, Debbie Range. She told the young senior of a performance by the choir of Bethune Cookman College at a venue downtown. Range instructed Cooper to wear a shirt and tie, and attend the function. Taught always to obey grown-ups, Cooper got to the show in the prescribed shirt and tie. He was impressed by what he heard, but even more by the guitar player who strummed away on a double-neck guitar. He thought he owned the only double-necked guitar in Florida.

After the show, Cooper bravely approached the guitar player and struck up a conversation. "Hey man, nice guitar… I got one," he said to the guitar player who also thought he had the only one in Florida. "Can you play?" "Yeah I can play." Overhearing this banter, the director of the choir, Dr. Rebecca Walker Steele, told the band to start up a tune and instructed Cooper to go ahead and play along on the guitar. Doing what he did best, Cooper took the guitar and impressed the director and the band. She told him to make his way down to Bethune Cookman College in August where he would be awarded a full scholarship.

The day his parents drove him down to Daytona Beach to start school at Bethune Cookman will always be remembered. It was his first time away from home by himself, and as his parents left, a fight broke out on campus. Just as Cooper was beginning to despair, sophomore Eric Carter, the guitarist he had met when the choir had visited Lake Worth, found him and took

-continued on back

Cooper continued...

photo by Stephanie Shonekan

"Prof. Cooper's teaching style is such that he's able to elicit maximum effort and consistent preparation from his students by insisting on nothing less than excellent musicianship at all times..."

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