

Collection #
M 0529
OM 0260

**MCARTHUR CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC, INC.
(INDIANAPOLIS, IND.)
RECORDS, 1946–1988**

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box, 7 oversized manuscript folders, 1 photograph box, 1 color photograph folder, 1 OVB photograph folder

COLLECTION DATES: 1946-1988

PROVENANCE: Ruth McArthur, Detroit, MI, 6 September 1991

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: None

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1988.0842

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

During the 1940s, Ruth McArthur was a music supervisor for the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). Her office was located at Crispus Attucks High School. She supervised the instrumental music program at 13 elementary schools including #'s 4, 17, 19, 23, 24, 37, 40, 42, 56, 63, 64, 83, and 87. Seizing an opportunity to make additional instrumental music training available to her students, as well as adults, McArthur began offering private lessons in a home studio. The McArthur Conservatory of Music, Inc. was an outgrowth of the studio. Incorporated in 1946, the School was located at 808-10 Indiana Avenue in Indianapolis.

The Conservatory was divided into two major divisions. The Band/Orchestra Division included a Jazz Department and marching and symphonic bands. The School was the first institution in Indiana to offer a formal jazz program. The Preparatory Lesson Division catered to children and adults. Children received private and group instruction with their practice periods at the School generally monitored by teachers. Adults enrolled in the Preparatory Lesson Division often received training in the Church Music Department and basic instrumental training on the piano and guitar. Student placement ranged from beginners attending classes for basic training and recreation to individuals preparing for professional careers.

The school encompassed 13 departments. Many of the departments offered a two or three-year program, culminating with a McArthur diploma. The departments included voice, choral workshop, Choraliers, piano, guitar, supplementary studies, drama, instrumental studies, dance, orchestra-band ensemble, church music, applied band-orchestra directing, and private music. The school's faculty pool included teachers from the Indianapolis Public Schools system, members of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and local musicians. Several McArthur students became school teachers and professional musicians. The curriculum of the school was extensive. A 1948 faculty roster included: Clara Reese Kirk, piano and organ; Emma Igelman, voice; Ruth McArthur, strings; Mildred Lynn, violin; Carmen Newsome and Gene Franzman, woodwinds; Lancaster Price, brass; Arthur Taylor, English; Joseph Zinman, theory and composition; and Jerry Daniels (one of the original Four Inkspots), guitar. Later faculty included Jon Lei, a former Katherine Dunham dancer; Merrill Laswell; Russell Brown; Norm Merrifield; Jack Scott; and Helen Baker. Other classes included harmony, music literature, music appreciation, ensemble, methods, choral technique, theory, baton twirling, and several dance forms.

The school was active within the community. Groups composed of McArthur Conservatory students and instructors presented programs for various community functions. The Choraliers, a group of male singers, often accompanied by the McArthur Orchestra, regularly performed at teas, banquets, conventions, garden parties and churches. The National Association of Negro Musicians, Inc., the State Medical Association and the Indiana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were a few of the organizations that utilized groups from the school. The Conservatory presented festivals at schools, including an annual gala affair at Crispus Attucks High School. Local

programs were presented at Holcomb Gardens, the World War Memorial, the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, churches, sororities, and community organizations. The school also presented programs in other cities throughout Indiana. The McArthur Band performed at the Sunset, the Cotton Club, and other local nightspots. The McArthur Military Band, directed by Merrill Laswell, participated in several parades. In 1953, the Conservatory produced *Bongo-Lya*, its first full-length stage show. The show, presented at the State Fairgrounds, was a cooperative effort between the Choraliers, the band, and dancers. Choreographed by Jon Lei, the presentation blended drums, dance, and song portraying rhythmic sketches of Haitian, African, and African-American movement.

The McArthur Conservatory occupied a 20-room, three-story, brick building located on Indiana Avenue, across from Lockefield Gardens. A lounge and an auditorium were located on the second floor; a practice room for brass instruments on the third floor, and a band/orchestra room and bookstore in the basement. A record shop, developed primarily to induce revenue, operated on the first floor of the building. As a business, the McArthur Conservatory took several initiatives to increase enrollment and revenue. During the 1950s, the concept of branch schools was introduced. These outreach centers, located at schools, community centers, and churches, offered recreational music and dance.

The school closed in 1963. The property was sold to Indiana University in 1967.

Sources:

1. Materials in the collection
2. Wilma L. Dulin, "McArthur Conservatory," *Black History News and Notes*, #38, p.1

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains records (1946-1988) of the McArthur Conservatory of Music, Inc., (1946-1963) an Indianapolis institution that provided recreational and commercial musical training for children and adults. It also includes a few of the business records of the Hotel Men's Club, a social organization begun in 1927. According to the articles of incorporation of the club, its purpose was "a friendly and sociable intercourse among the members thereof and to protect and to help each other in literary and scientific attainment." The organization continues to operate in Indianapolis. Club records can be found in Folder 38, and in OM 0260, Folder 1.

The materials pertaining to the McArthur Conservatory are contained in one box. Box 1, folders 1-11 contain the general correspondence of the school including the 1946 articles of incorporation, Board of Trustee and committee minutes, business and teacher contracts, and financial aid records. A bulk of the correspondence is from the school administration to parents and students. Student fees and course progress are the topic of most of these letters. School records are contained in folders 12-22. Office records, programs, certificates, and publicity materials are included. Information about the community outreach branches is contained in folder 16. There are numerous photographs in the collection. Most of them (folders 23-37) relate to the conservatory. There are photographs of students and faculty. They include bands, choirs, dancers, and children's musical groups. Also, there are several identified and unidentified individuals and groups.

Ruth McArthur's father, Rutherford McArthur graduated from Bennett College in 1904. His diploma is contained in OM 0260, Folder 2. Other documents pertaining to Rutherford McArthur including a 33rd degree Mason, Omega Psi Phi, and National Medical Association certificates are contained in OM 0260, folders 3-7. A photograph of his 1912 graduating class from Meharry Medical College is in folder 46. There are also photographs that depict outdoor baseball scenes in folder 47.

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