From the Desk of the Director

The AAAMC continues to move forward toward achieving its mission of collecting, preserving, and making accessible 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 Shoeneck and organized around the Archive’s general collection (see stories inside). The questions 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 collections and legacies housed in the Archives. The AAAMC’s collections are valuable resources for scholars and educators as well as for various forms of creative activity. Our general collection of popular music, for example, provides our featured research associate Tyron Williams (with accompaniment by Borislav Bazala) in conjunction with a class on “Black Women in Music” taught by Assistant Director Dr. Stephanie Shoeneck and organized around the Archive’s general collection (see stories inside). The questions 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.

Gartner 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

Indian University Press
CD-Rom Music and Culture of West Africa: The Strass Expedition

Debbie May
Videos related to gospel music

Malcolm Shaw
Material on Arizona Dranes, Jazz and Ragtime Records (1907-1947), compiled by Brian Post 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
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 1960s. 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 the airwaves; and George Woods, who used his popularity as a disc jockey to rally his audience to the cause of civil rights. Some of these are truly bizarre, such as the experience of announcer Vernon Winslow. Winslow created a five-talking radio character known as “Poppy Stoppa” in his 1940s black radio station, but he could not perform as Poppy 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 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.

- Joanne Hesley

Dedication is completing a master’s degree in African American Studies, focusing on black radio.

For more on AAAMC ‘Black radio collection,’ see feature in the Williams-Bartlett Collection in AAAMC Liner Notes #3, Spring 2002.

**Collection Highlight: Black Radio: Keep on Tellin’ It**

**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 Bohème, Bizet’s Carmen, Grand’Duc 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 electrically compelling performance. Many who had only heard or read about Ms. Williams were amazed to see her perform.

“I’ve never seen anyone like her before and to have her grace with her presence and God-given talent was a blessing to me and many others,” said Crystal Barry, a junior at IU. Sparing no Ms. Williams perform again was also quite a thrill for audience members who have known her for years. Dr. James Mumbled, Director of the African American Choral Ensemble, was elated after the event: “It was an astounding evening to hear and see the great talent of one of our 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.

The fact that Borislav Bazala was her accompanist for the evening surpassed my highest expectations. This was a treat for me as the co-curator of her autobiography and for my class because her performance really brought to life our readings and discussions. The fact that Broislav Bazala was her accompanist for the evening was an added bonus. I am so grateful to Collins Living Learning Community, the African American Cultural Institute, 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.

— Tengye Shaye

Shaye recently graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelor’s degree in history.

**Radio Smithsonian**

Dedication is completing a master’s degree in African American Studies, focusing on black radio.

**For more on AAAMC ‘Black radio collection,’ see feature in the Williams-Bartlett Collection in AAAMC Liner Notes #3, Spring 2002.**

**Collection Highlight: Black Radio: Keep on Tellin’ It**

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inspired by the Ellington Project included visual to keep students of all ages engaged and focused. The Monday evening lecture, “The Involvement of Ethnomusicologists and Humanists 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 Erskine Blake illustrated the different ways scholars could use the materials to “sell” it for inclusion in public sector projects such as school curricula, museum exhibits, and documentary media productions. “Never assume that the general public has heard of the person you subject are interested in,” she advised. “Your job is to bring light to what started, 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 “unusual,” 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 ethnomus- 

"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."
Dr. Michael Eric Dyson has emerged as one of the foremost scholars of the current generation of African-American cultural producers in popular culture, which the AACM is dedicated to collecting and preserving, should be included in our cannon of cultural criticism and humanities literature. Much of his books have had crossover mainstream appeal while still maintaining scholarly depth and a dedication to the legacy of the AACM.

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, 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 look at black style to 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 have been obsessed with from the early years of my own experience teaching a course on hip hop music and culture and a predominantly (and sometimes exclusively) white student body. In age when the media celebrates a white rapper as king of the genre and rap audiences are predominantly white, it stands to reason that the white students identify with it—even claim it—as if it is the music and culture that provides 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 with the continuum of black and white 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?”

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

Dr. Dyson’s candid response not only supports the study of African American popular music in the academic and for the public, but also inherently supports the AACM and its mission to study and preserve hip hop. They think they are qualified to talk about something they haven’t seen, they say. ‘We come to listen to it and understand the complexities.” Without an attempt to study the art form and the music, the AACM would be unable to preserve and disseminate such materials for research and institutional purposes. Therefore, a cultural aesthetic articulation is as important in documenting the Afro-American legacy – creativity that emerges from an environment of political oppression. “We need to introduce it intellectually, by analyzing it, aesthetically by listening to it and critically analyzing its components,” Dyson concluded. Having a warehouse of black music performances, an institution dedicated to its conservation and public use, serves as reminder that our collective musical creativity was born from a specific culture and particular American experience.

-- Stephanie Shonekan

Shonekan holds a doctoral degree in Folklore and Ethnomusicology. She specializes in the anthropology of music and, particularly, the study of African American music as it relates to the African Diaspora.

-- Fernando Orejuela

Orejuela is a doctoral candidate and visiting faculty in the Department of Ethnic Studies. He is a research associate for the AACM.

People
New Head of Archives

After living and working in Chicago for 13 years, Brenda Nelson-Strauss returned to Bloomington, Indiana, last September to assume the position of AACM’s Head of Collections: In her new position, she has spent quantities of time during the past months sorting through and reorganizing the archives held by the AACM. 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 declined the opportunity to teach music in the public schools, so she completed a degree instead on her performance skills by moving to Chicago to establish an archive for African American musicians. In 1987, 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 NU’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 a dual coursework as masters in Folklore/Ethnomusicology, and continued her active research into the life of Natalie Curtis Burtles, one of the first to make field recordings on wax cylinders of African American music. In 1989, continuing her archival career, Nelson-Strauss moved to Chicago and was appointed as assistant director at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In this capacity, 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 material of historical and legal value. Apart from managing and supervising the day-to-day activities of the Archives, Nelson-Strauss also serves as an education and public relations director of the “From the Archives” CD series. As part of her research conducted during this period, she included an extensive study of the Archives’ collection 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, it’s an opportunity to do research about everything cataloging, reference, records management, conservation, and historical exhibits. CD reissues, media projects, and publicity. Third, I like the challenge of working with unpublished, primary source materials. This work requires a fair amount of historical research, and often demand creative approaches to the arrangements and description of the collections.”

Her new position as Head of Collections at the AACM brings new challenges. Focusing on the guiding elements of the AACM 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 rock as well as popular music such as rap from Africa or France and hip hop? Do we collect only American rap? Do we only collect the work of American artists? Though popular music is more ephemeral in nature, we can’t 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.”

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.’ This is a rupture that interupts that process. When you appropriate hip hop from a majority-white-culture to an African America, the attempt is to underplay the particular resonances that emerge from that community, that community is Black or brown or poor people ‘do 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 power, such immediate social relevance.

But, I think it is part of the larger American project of assimilation. Since we live in the United States of America. 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 set up upon as a evidence of a political victory: This art form and my embrace of it as a white person becomes a signifier for the overcoming of the political inequalities and social inequities that continue to prevail. Because I love Biggie I’m no apartheid. Because I like Tupac there is no more serious tension between the people who love the Confederate flag and those who love the Union flag. Therefore, a cultural aesthetic articulation is as important as a political negotiation of a social sort and can be problematic.”

What that one of the undeniable disadvantages to a wonderful and edifying universality being promulgated on all black aesthetics,” Dr. Dyson explained, “is that it tends to wash out so much of our validity as a black 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. In the lyrics these confronts us with a certain facets of that suffering and brutality—police brutality, economic suffering, poverty, racial apartheid—such as the specific manifestation of racial oppression articulated at the level of joy, the larger philosophical and ideological arguments sometimes get lost on students, white students. "What it says to me as well as it is an attempt sometimes by majority mainsteam 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 simplification 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.”
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 as the Church of God in Christ Church where Cooper was inspired to go ahead and play along on the guitar. Doing what he called "the taboo area, he recalled his father’s stern voice as he had left Walker Steele, told the band to start up a tune and instructed the performers to change key. He heard a fearful show, he became more enthusiastic and turned to give his voice. 'Can you play?' "Yeah I can play." Cooper to go ahead and play along on the guitar. Doing what he called "the taboo area, he recalled his father’s stern voice as he had left Walker Steele, told the band to start up a tune and instructed the performers to change key. He heard a fearful show, he became more enthusiastic and turned to give his voice. 'Can you play?' "Yeah I can play." Cooper to go ahead and play along on the guitar. Doing what he called "the taboo area, he recalled his father’s stern voice as he had left Walker.
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“Prof. Cooper’s teaching style is such that he is able to elicit maximum effort and consistent preparation from his students by insisting on nothing less than excellent musicianship at all times…”

The Archives of African American Music and Culture maintains a group of Indiana University’s Research Associates who set no measure of commitment to the staff and the purpose of the Archives. One of the current Research Associates is Tyron Cooper. He is the Director of Indiana University 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 cachet to the AAAMC, particularly in the area of its music educational programs.

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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 taboos 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 a cue to change key. He heard a fearful crunch as the stem of his father’s cherished 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 band, 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?” Tyron tried to make the unexpected happen. His father decided that since Tyron was so desperate to play guitar, he would buy

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