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Spotlight on Mississippi Archives

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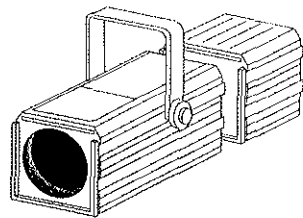
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Spotlight on Mississippi Archives



BLUES ARCHIVE
UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

The Blues Archive is a branch in the University Library System and is academically affiliated with the Center for the Study of Southern Culture (CSSC). It is the repository for archival and media materials related to the Blues and folklore of the south in general and of Mississippi in particular. The Archive is open Monday-Friday, 8:00-5:00. All materials are non-circulating, but may be checked out for in-house use at Room 340 Farley Hall.

The Blues Archive was established at the present location to house the record collection donated by Riley (B. B.) King to the University of Mississippi in the early eighties. The Jim and Amy O'Neal Collection which had been acquired by the CSSC and the Kenneth Goldstein Folklore Collections at the Special Collections division of the J. D. Williams Library would be relocated to Farley Hall to form the three major named collections of the Blues Archive which opened to the public on September 13, 1984.

The Archive contains twenty-seven named collections ranging in size from as few as ten items to as many as ten thousand. Several record collections of 78s, 45s LPs, cassettes and CDs; reel to reel tapes, video cassettes; several photograph collections, a song book collection, a poster collection and extensive subject files are maintained at the Blues Archive. The Blues Archive Collection itself is the only developing collection.

Most of the blues, gospel and jazz recordings have been acquired by purchase but a few have been donated by individual artists, performers and record labels. The collection continues to expand in scope and depth as many classics are being re-released on CD and as new artists are discovered. The Blues Archive Collection also contains books, scores, videos, manuscripts, taped interviews, periodical literature and memorabilia. Three examples of the scope and diversity of the collection deserve mention. The first recorded blues song " Crazy Blues", by Mamie Smith is one of the collector's items housed at the Blues Archive. The recording was made in New York, 1920 by Okeh Records. Notable collections about blues in Mississippi are the Trumpet Records papers and the Red Top Band papers. Trumpet Records of Jackson recorded Sonny Boy Williamson and Elmore James from the early 1950s. The Red Tops Band originated in Vicksburg and enjoyed regional popularity during the forties, fifties and sixties. A Red Tops commemorative CD was produced by CSSC in 1998.

The largest and probably richest sound collection in the archive is the B. B. King Collection. Nearly 10,000 recordings comprise the many musical styles and genre from the thirties through the eighties. In addition to the musical treasures, there is a large group of recordings on language instruction from Arabic to Swahili. It contains 78, 45 and 33 r.p.m. record formats plus a poster collection, memorabilia including T-shirts, jackets, and umbrellas commemorating various B. B. King tours at the peak of his career. The 78 r.p.m. recordings span the forties through sixties and include every genre from that period. Big bands from Count Basie to Benny Goodman, R & B groups, Gospel groups and individual artists. Many country and urban blues styles are represented. The big names of fifties and sixties pop singers are well represented in this collection. There are barrel house, boogie woogie and jazz pianists; and all the major jazz vocalists from as far back as the late thirties. His favorites seem to be Louis Armstrong, Earl Bostic, Charles Brown, Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby, Floyd Dixon, Ella Fitzgerald, Lightnin' Hopkins, Ivory Joe Hunter, Louis Jordan, Bessie Smith, T-Bone Walker and Dinah Washington. The 78 collection also includes three Theremin (the first synthesizer) recordings. There are 2,900 recordings in the B.B. King 78s collection. The essential flavor of the 78 collection continues in the 4,000 LPs donated by B. B. King. The appetite for the new genres and styles of soul music, black rock, funk and reggae are apparent in the number of Stax and Motown artists. Still, there are long lists of recordings for Nat King Cole, Count Basie and Dinah Washington. Also among his favorites is French guitarist, Django Reinhardt. Some of the Mississippi artists that he collected are John Lee Hooker, Elmore James, Charlie Patton, Pinetop Perkins, Jimmy Reed, Otis Spann, Ike Turner, Muddy Waters, and a 1970 recording of Leontyne Price performing with the Rust College Choir.

The performers of gospel ensemble are represented by the Five Blind Boys of Alabama, Dixie Hummingbirds, Mighty Clouds of Joy, Soul Stirrers, the Spirit of Memphis, the Staple Singers and the Swan Silvertones. An assortment of classical jazz styles from stride to bebop feature the best known performers of their times on piano, organ, saxophone, trumpet, and guitar. This collection is truly comprehensive in scope and dimension for the period of years that it covers and permits a glimpse into the personal musical tastes of the King of the Blues.

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