

The E. Azalia Hackley Collection of African Americans in the Performing Arts (HC) is a research archive of international significance. Its holdings include original scores, plays, recordings, photographs, and other materials that document the contributions of the Black performing artist to the world. From its inception in 1943, its mission has been to collect and preserve materials on African American artists and other Blacks throughout the African Diaspora.

Background

In 1943, the Detroit Musician's Association, a local chapter of the National Association of Negro Musicians, presented materials to the Detroit Public Library. This donation established a special music collection, devoted exclusively to the Black performer. The collection was the first of its kind. Over time, the scope of the collection has expanded to include all performing arts genres.



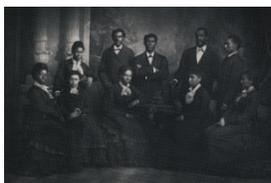
Named in honor of Madame Emma Azalia Smith Hackley (1867 - 1922), a music educator, concert singer, choral director, and humanitarian, the collection takes its mission from the example of her life. Born in 1867, she was the first Black to receive a degree from the University of Denver Music School. Madame Hackley devoted herself to the musical education of her people. She traveled the United States and abroad, presenting concerts, raising funds to support Black musicians in their study, and reviving interest in genuine Negro folk music.

Madame Hackley is credited with mentoring and supporting the careers of Marian Anderson, Carl Diton, Clarence Cameron White, Kemper Harreld, and R. Nathaniel Dett.

Madame Hackley died in Detroit, Michigan in 1922. She is remembered for her musical genius, her strong racial identity, her leadership and support of Black musicians, and her tireless efforts to promote Black music everywhere.

Photographs

The photograph and print collection contains items dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. With representation from all genres of the performing arts, the HC holds portrait photographs of performers, still shots from Black film and stage productions, and events of performing arts organizations.



The HC houses over 4,500 images. Among the rare items is an original photograph of the first Fisk Golden Jubilee Singers. The HC includes photographs of notable Black performers taken by renowned photographers Carl Van Vechten and Barbara Morgan. The photograph collections of jazz musicians Leroy Smith and Theodore Buckner feature Detroit-based jazz musicians from the 1920s through the present day.

Archives



Manuscripts of Black performers are available for research. An established niche of the HC is that of documenting the careers of Black classical singers. The HC houses the personal papers of tenor Roland Hayes whose vocal artistry and career achievements paved the way for future generations of Black operatic and concert performers. Materials on the careers of contralto Marian Anderson, mezzo-soprano Betty Allen, sopranos Mattiwilda Dobbs and Shirley Verrett, baritone William Warfield, and tenor George Shirley are in the HC.

Other notable collections include three scrapbooks chronicling the first world concert tour of the Fisk Jubilee Singers and original manuscripts of ragtime composer John William “Blind” Boone. The African American Film Collection covers over 260 domestic and foreign films from 1921 to 1980, the approximate end of the Blaxploitation era, and includes photographs, lobby cards, posters, and press books.

The HC also includes books, periodicals, musical scores, and a vertical file collection of nearly 275,000 items. The vertical file provides both current and historical information through newspapers and magazine articles, pamphlets, programs, playbills, and other ephemeral materials. Primarily focused on music, the vertical file also includes materials on Blacks in dance, theatre, film, radio, and television.

Music



Recorded sound, performed or composed by Black musicians, is available in the HC. The scope of the record collection documents the development of Black music, including African chant, Negro spirituals, ragtime, jazz, opera, orchestral music, soul, rhythm & blues, and rap. Of special interest is a collection of 45 rpm recordings made by the Motown Record Company in Detroit.

The HC’s sheet music collection, of vaudeville and minstrel songs popular in the mid to late nineteenth century, documents Negro themes. The collection includes contemporary “popular” music composed and performed by Black musicians and music published by the W.C. Handy Publishing Company and Jobete, Inc., the publishing arm of Motown Records. More than 600 songs from the sheet music collection have been digitized and may be viewed at www.thehackley.org.

DEMA

In establishing the Detroit Electronic Music Archive (DEMA), the HC celebrates the contributions of the creators of the genre – Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunderson. These young African American musicians, often referred to as the “Belleville Three,” laid the Techno foundation for what has become an exciting world music phenomenon begun in Detroit: Electronic Music. The HC accepts donations of DEMA related recordings, posters, media clippings, and other ephemera.



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Access

All materials in the HC are designated "Reference" and cannot be checked out of the library. However, much of the book and record collection is duplicated in the Music, Art, & Literature Department and may be checked out. Materials in the HC are cited in the library's online catalog as well as through the use of traditional card catalogs, card indexes, and finding aids. Photocopying is subject to approval: many items are fragile, oversized or subject to other restrictions and cannot be placed on a copier. Use of a patron's digital camera may be permitted for items not approved for photocopying. In some cases, researchers must make advance arrangements with the Hackley Specialist for access to certain materials. Please call (313) 481-1401 or email bhc@detroitpubliclibrary.org for details.

Friends of The E. Azalia Hackley Collection

Founded in 2004, the Friends of the E. Azalia Hackley Collection (FAH) formed to support the work the HC. FAH is committed to increasing awareness of the HC and its financial resources. FAH supports the HC through membership and advocacy. [JOIN FAH TODAY!](#) Members of FAH form a network of supporters that contributes to the growth of the HC in areas of acquisitions and program development.

Since 1943, the HC has been a leader in documenting the contributions of Blacks to the performing arts. To continue its mission, the HC requires the necessary support and resources. Thankfully, the HC can count on its Friends!

FAH's affordable giving levels offer a diversity of supporters the privilege of membership. The benefits of membership include invitations to previews of the Detroit Public Library (DPL) Friends Foundation book sales, pre-exhibit opening events, private receptions with performing artists, reserved seating for Hackley concerts, and more. For further information, please the DPL Friends Foundation at 313.481.1357.

Contact Information

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