

Concordia University Libraries Special Collections

Finding Aid - Herb Johnson fonds (P088)

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Concordia University Libraries Special Collections

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Herb Johnson fonds

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Summary information

Repository: Concordia University Libraries Special Collections

Title: Herb Johnson fonds

ID: P088

Date: 1898-1987 (date of creation)

Physical description: 10 m of textual records

357 photographs

ca. 60 postcards

15 posters

4 drawings

1 watercolor

ca. 335 sound recordings

16 objects

Language: English

Language: French

**Dates of creation,
revision and deletion:**

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

Herbert William (Herbie, Herb) Johnson was born November 3, 1902 in Hartford, Connecticut. His mother, Parmelia (1888-1962), was a Québécoise from St. Hyacinthe, and his father, Thomas Matthew Johnson, was an Afro-American. Thomas Johnson worked as a landscape gardener, and sang bass in a quartet and played drums in an 8-piece orchestra that rehearsed in the Johnson home.

Herb Johnson married Ethel Carroll in 1923; they had two children, William and Eugene. They separated in 1927. He and his common-law wife Helen (they were together ca. 1938 to ca. 1967) had a child, Coleman. From ca. 1968 Herb Johnson was with Laura Roger, whom he married in 1972. In 1993 Herb Johnson, by then a widower, moved from his residence in Rosemere, Quebec to a care facility. He died in 199? .

Herb Johnson played in bands as a child, and became a professional musician in his teens. At that time his main interest was drumming. He began his professional career in dance bands in Hartford during the 1920s. At this time he began to play the baritone saxophone, then switched to tenor saxophone, which would be his main instrument, although he also played clarinet. He moved to New York in 1928 and worked in bands led by such musicians as Jelly Roll Morton, Benny Carter, Noble Sissle, and Kaiser Marshall.

As the Depression and Prohibition affected employment for musicians in New York City, he went on the road and performed in Albany and other cities in New York State. In 1935 he was recruited by Jimmy

Jones to play in his Harlem Dukes of Rhythm Orchestra in Montreal. Herb Johnson took up residence in Montreal and stayed in the area for the rest of his life. He played with various bands and led bands that played in Café St. Michel, Rockhead's Paradise, Roseland, and Chinese Paradise Grill, among others. He toured in Quebec, Ontario, and New York.

From 1946 to 1949 he played tenor saxophone with the Louis (or Louie) Metcalf International Band at the Café St. Michel. The Louis Metcalf International Band introduced the then-revolutionary emerging bebop style of music to the Montreal nightclub scene in 1946. Herb Johnson brought valuable arranging skills to the Metcalf band, and between 1946 and 1949 he arranged many of the band's songs in the complex bebop style.

In 1950 Herb Johnson recorded Wilk's Bop with Wilkie Wilkinson and His Boptet. It was the first bebop recording in Canada.

In the 1940s he wrote a regular column on the Montreal music scene for The Music Dial, a Black-owned and operated monthly magazine published in New York which covered music, theatre, and the arts.

A musicians' union member since 1922, in Montreal in the late 1930s Herb Johnson was vice-president of the Canadian Coloured Clef Club, the local association of Black musicians. It was absorbed in the period 1939-1943 by the Musicians' Guild of Montreal, which was Local 406 [Montreal] of the American Federation of Musicians; Herb Johnson was apparently the Guild's first black member. He worked with the Guild's Brotherhood Committee, which provided assistance for musicians with medical and other problems, and he worked with the union's Election Committee.

He led the founding of the Senior Musicians Association of the Guild in Montreal in the mid-1970s, and served as its senior director. In 1976 he founded the Senior Musicians Orchestra. It was active, under his administrative and artistic leadership, until at least 1987. Herb Johnson was active in securing grants and engagements for the Senior Musicians Orchestra and he actively promoted it.

Custodial history

The fonds was transferred from Concordia University's Records Management and Archives Department to Concordia University Libraries' Special Collections March 15-16, 2016, April 6, 2016, April 14, 2016, April 20, 2016, April 28, 2016, May 3, 2016, May 10, 2016, and May 17-18, 2016.

Scope and content

The fonds consists of materials assembled by Herb Johnson. It reflects his career as a musical performer, combo and dance band/orchestra leader, and musicians' union member and executive, as well as his personal interests and personal life.

The fonds documents the dance band and jazz music scene from the 1930s through the 1980s, primarily in Montreal. It is a valuable source of documentation on the bebop style of jazz that emerged in the 1940s, and of documentation related to the Senior Musicians' Association and Orchestra.

The fonds consists of manuscript and print music, including arrangements by Herb Johnson; personal correspondence; saxophone and clarinet technique books and articles; books and articles on arranging, harmonizing, and other facets of music; photographs; notebooks; personal financial records; programs, clippings, and other memorabilia; and magazines. The fonds includes sound recordings as well as objects including music portfolios, pocket handkerchiefs, and a record carrying case. There are also union-related correspondence, financial documents, contracts and other documents related to musicians' pay and

benefits, founding documents, constitutions and by-laws, questionnaires, ballot papers, agendas, minutes, and address books.

The fonds is arranged in the following series and sub-series:

P088/1 Correspondents

P088/1A Family and friends

P088/1B Music colleagues

P088/1C Personal business correspondents

P088/2 Personal files

P088/2A Personal interests and personal affairs

P088/2B Music industry

P088/2C Music technique

P088/2D Photographs

P088/3 Union activity

P088/3A Musicians' Guild of Montreal

P088/3B Senior Musicians' Association

P088/4 Print and manuscript music

P088/5 Technique books, manuals, tutors, methods

P088/6 Magazines and promotional literature

P088/7 Collection of sound recordings

P088/7A Privately recorded sound recordings

P088/7B Commercial sound recordings.

Notes

Title notes

- **Source of title proper:** Title based on the content of the fonds.

Immediate source of acquisition

The documents were donated to the Concordia University Archives by Herb Johnson's son Coleman Johnson in 1993.

Alternative form available

Some sound recordings have been transferred to DAT cassettes.

Restrictions on access

Some restrictions.

Finding aids

Box listing available.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published
 - **Level of detail:** Minimal
 - **Status description:** Final
 - **Rights:** Copyright belongs to the creator(s).
-

Access points

- Textual record (documentary form)
 - Graphic material (documentary form)
 - Sound recording (documentary form)
 - Object (documentary form)
 - Jazz (subject)
-

Series descriptions

Series P088/1: Correspondents

Date: 1935-1987 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The series reflects Herb Johnson's relationships with his extended family, friends, and fellow musicians.

The series contains letters and other correspondence received, and in a few cases sent, by Herb Johnson. It is arranged in the following sub-series:

P088/1A Family and friends.

P088/1B Music colleagues.

P088/1C Personal business correspondents.

Physical description: 70 cm of textual records

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)
-

File / item list

Subseries P088/1A: Family and Friends

Date: 1948-1987 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains letters, cards, and other items received from (and some copies of his correspondence to) Herb Johnson's family and friends.

Physical description: 43 cm of textual records

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)

Finding aids:

Contains a box listing

File / item list

Subseries P088/1B: Music Colleagues

Date: 1953-1979 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains correspondence received from friends and acquaintances in the music business.

Physical description: 8 cm of textual records.

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)

File / item list

Subseries P088/1C: Personal business correspondents

Date: 1935-1986 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains 8 folders, chronologically arranged, of correspondence received by Herb Johnson. The documents reflect his interests, his personal and family affairs, his music business, and his involvement in musicians' union affairs.

Physical description: 19 cm of textual records

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)

File / item list

Series P088/2: Personal files

Date: 1907-1987 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The series consists of materials related to Herb Johnson's ongoing professional development as a musician and his work in the music industry, as well as his other personal interests and his personal affairs.

The series includes articles on music and musicians and clippings of music scores and technical exercises clipped from Down Beat magazine and other sources, photographs, correspondence, price lists, concert and souvenir programs, notebooks, advertising sheets, contracts, lists of musicians, pamphlets, business and visiting cards, and publicity materials, as well as financial, tax, legal and other documents.

The series is arranged in the following sub-series:

P088/2A Personal affairs and interests.

P088/2B Music industry.

P088/2C Music theory and technique.

P088/2D Photographs.

Physical description: 1.00 m of textual records

357 photographs

graphic materials

5 objects

Access points:

- Multiple media (documentary form)

File / item list**Subseries P088/2A: Personal affairs and interests**

Date: [1930s]-1986 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains letters, newspaper, and other textual items concerning the personal affairs and interests of Herb Johnson.

Physical description: 45 cm of textual records**Access points:**

- Textual record (documentary form)

File / item list**Subseries P088/2B: Music industry**

Date: 1935-1982 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains cards, articles, press clippings, graphic promotional material, photographs and other textual items concerning the career in the music industry of Herb Johnson.

Physical description: 23 cm of textual records

graphic materials (ca. 335 photographs, posters, artwork, other documents)

5 objects

Access points:

- Multiple media (documentary form)

File / item list

Subseries P088/2C: Music theory and technique

Date: 1907-1981 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains music scores, note book exercises and other textual items concerning music theory and technique relating to Herb Johnson.

Physical description: 32 cm of textual records

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)

File / item list

Subseries P088/2D: Photographs

Date: 1922-[198-] (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains photographs related to Herb Johnson's career and family. Included are various bands and combos in which he played and some which he led, including Gurley Brothers Orchestra, Roseland Orchestra, Herb Johnson and his Orchestra, Jimmy Jones Band, Marlboro (Connecticut) Jazz Quartet, and the Earl Howard Orchestra. Featured also are such nightclubs as the Café St. Michel, Club Belmar, and the Chinese Paradise Grill. The sub-series includes autographed photographs of performers and personal photographs of Herb Johnson's family and friends. There are photographs of the Seniors Musicians Orchestra at various sites.

Physical description: 357 photographs: 345 b&w and col. ; 12 slides ; 30 postcards

Access points:

- Graphic material (documentary form)

File / item list

Ref code	Title	Dates	Access status	Container
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P088-2-03	Item - Louis Metcalfe's International Band at Café St-MichelPhotographed by Louis Jaques	[19--]
P088-2-05	Item - Herb Johnson doing his solo with the Louis Metcalfe Band at Café St-Michel	[19--]
P088-2-12	Item - The Herb Johnson Band at Club Matane	[19--]
P088-2-21	Item - Herbert Johnson and the Roseland Orchestra, Roseland BallroomPhotographed by La Photo Modèle	[19--]
P088-2-34	Item - Herb Johnson with a trombone	[between 1914 and 1920]
P088-2-60	Item - Autographed photo of singer/ dancers Dick Saunders and Ella Mae Waters	[1954]
P088-2-62	Item - The Four Notes	[1947]

Series P088/3: Union activity

Date: 1939; 1955; [197-]-1987 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The Musicians' Guild of Montreal was Local 406 of the American Federation of Musicians (A.F. of M.). The Senior Musicians' Association of the Montreal Guild was officially formed in 1975.

Physical description: 1.06 m of textual records

4 sketches

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)
- Graphic material (documentary form)

File / item list

Subseries P088/3A: Musicians' Guild of Montreal

Date: 1939-1982 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains textual items concerning the Musicians' Guild of Montreal.

Physical description: 16 cm of textual records

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)

Restrictions on access:

Box HA1000 contains personal data. Access is restricted.

File / item list**Subseries P088/3B: Senior Musicians' Association**

Date: 1974-1987 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The Senior Musicians' Association was registered with the Department of National Revenue in August 1974 to qualify as a charitable organization, and obtained its certification in January 1975. Its purpose, according to the documents: "to provide an opportunity for retired musicians to get together socially, form an orchestra and give free concerts to golden age residences, hospitals, etc." Its funding came from government grants and the musicians union through its Music Performance Trust Funds, as well as private sponsors and donors. Led by Herb Johnson, the Senior Musicians Orchestra played from 1975 through 1987.

The documents in the sub-series are primarily administrative records reflecting the formation and activity of the Association.

Physical description: 90 cm of textual records

4 sketches

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)
- Graphic material (documentary form)

Accompanying material:

There are photographs of the Senior Musicians' Association in P088/2D

File / item list**Series P088/4: Published and manuscript music**

Date: [190-]-[198-] (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The series consists of the print and manuscript music library accumulated from various sources by Herb Johnson, as well as the hundreds of pieces of music he arranged and transcribed. The series documents Herb Johnson's professional activity as an instrumentalist; as a leader of quartets, nonettes, and other combos, as well as orchestras including the Herb Johnson Orchestra and the Senior Musicians' Orchestra; as an arranger and transcriber; and as a teacher.

The series includes lead sheets, chord charts, scores, sheet music, song books, song collections, and music folios, as well as play lists and notes. In addition to published music, the series includes manuscript music transcribed by Herb Johnson for the Louis Metcalfe International Band and other orchestras and combos, including his bebop arrangements. There are also signed manuscript arrangements by other arrangers.

Physical description: 6.6 m of textual records

11 objects

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)
- Object (documentary form)

Arrangement:

The series consists of the print and manuscript music library accumulated from various sources by Herb Johnson, as well as the hundreds of pieces of music he arranged and transcribed. The series documents Herb Johnson's professional activity as an instrumentalist; as a leader of quartets, nonettes, and other combos, as well as orchestras including the Herb Johnson Orchestra and the Senior Musicians' Orchestra; as an arranger and transcriber; and as a teacher.

The series includes lead sheets, chord charts, scores, sheet music, song books, song collections, and music folios, as well as play lists and notes. In addition to published music, the series includes manuscript music transcribed by Herb Johnson for the Louis Metcalfe International Band and other orchestras and combos, including his bebop arrangements. There are also signed manuscript arrangements by other arrangers.

File / item list

Series P088/5: Technique books, manuals, tutors, methods

Date: 1898-1976 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

In this series are music technique books, tutors, methods, and manuals. Topics covered include saxophone and clarinet performance, as well as arranging, harmony, chords, scoring, ad-libbing and improvising, sight-reading, ear training, conducting, recording and mixing, and performance of various genres such as blues and rock and roll, and others.

Physical description: 48 cm of textual records

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)

File / item list

Series P088/6: Magazines and promotional literature

Date: [193-]-1983 (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The series includes a variety of publications assembled by Herb Johnson.

Physical description: 14 cm of textual records

Access points:

- Textual record (documentary form)

File / item list**Series P088/7: Collection of sound recordings**

Date: [193?]-[198-] (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The series consists of sound recordings that were collected or made by Herb Johnson. Most are commercial recordings. There is a small number of privately maderecordings. There is a record carrying case that he used for carrying 78 rpm audio discs.

The series is arranged in two sub-series:

P088/7A Privately recorded sound recordings

P088/7B Commercial sound recordings.

Physical description: ca. 335 sound recordings (ca. 300 audio discs, 19 audio reels, 13 audio-cassettes)
1 object

Access points:

- Sound recording (documentary form)
- Object (documentary form)

File / item list**Subseries P088/7A: Privately recorded sound recordings**

Date: [196-]-[198-] (date of creation)

Scope and content:

Included (according to the handwritten notes) are recordings of jazz radio programs, copies of recorded music, and recordings made of the Senior Musicians Orchestra in performance.

There appear, in addition, to be copies of recordings by performers such as the Glen Miller Band, Art Morrow, Thad Jones, Oliver Nelson, and others. Some tapes include comedy routines by Redd Foxx and others.

Some of the privately recorded audio reels and audio cassettes are accompanied by notes and lists that were made by Herb Johnson. Many of these are inserted in the sound recording enclosure, but others are stored in a file folder and it may be possible to relate these to specific recordings. Most of the notes include the date of creation of the reproduction and playing times, and some include the date of the original recording session.

Physical description: sound recordings (19 audio reels, 11 audio cassettes)

Access points:

- Sound recording (documentary form)

Accompanying material:

Included (according to the handwritten notes) are recordings of jazz radio programs, copies of recorded music, and recordings made of the Senior Musicians Orchestra in performance. There appear, in addition, to be copies of recordings by performers such as the Glen Miller Band, Art Morrow, Thad Jones, Oliver Nelson, and others. Some tapes include comedy routines by Redd Foxx and others. Some of the privately recorded audio reels and audio cassettes are accompanied by notes and lists that were made by Herb Johnson. Many of these are inserted in the sound recording enclosure, but others are stored in a file folder and it may be possible to relate these to specific recordings. Most of the notes include the date of creation of the reproduction and playing times, and some include the date of the original recording session.

File / item list

Subseries P088/7B: Commercial sound recordings

Date: [193-]-[197-] (date of creation)

Scope and content:

The sub-series contains audiocassettes and audio discs, including 78 rpm, 45 rpm, and 33 1/3 rpm phonograph recordings collected by Herb Johnson. The majority are 78 rpm recordings of jazz and big band performances.

Some of the 10-inch 78 rpm audio discs are in files, organized by Herb Johnson. Many of the audio discs are undated. A good number were pressed in Montreal.

Physical description: sound recordings (ca. 300 audio discs, 2 audio-cassettes)

1 object (record carrying case)

Access points:

- Sound recording (documentary form)
- Object (documentary form)

Physical condition:

The sub-series contains audiocassettes and audio discs, including 78 rpm, 45 rpm, and 33 1/3 rpm phonograph recordings collected by Herb Johnson. The majority are 78 rpm recordings of jazz and big band performances.

Some of the 10-inch 78 rpm audio discs are in files, organized by Herb Johnson. Many of the audio discs are undated. A good number were pressed in Montreal.

Alternative form available:

The sub-series contains audiocassettes and audio discs, including 78 rpm, 45 rpm, and 33 1/3 rpm phonograph recordings collected by Herb Johnson. The majority are 78 rpm recordings of jazz and big band performances.

Some of the 10-inch 78 rpm audio discs are in files, organized by Herb Johnson. Many of the audio discs are undated. A good number were pressed in Montreal.

File / item list