



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Patti Bown papers

1940-2007

Sc MG 785

Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2014

Summary

Creator: Bown, Patti

Title: Patti Bown papers

Date: 1940-2007

Size: 5.29 linear feet (13 boxes)

Source: Donated by the estate of Patti Bown.

Abstract: Patti Bown was an American jazz pianist, singer, and composer. The Patti Bown papers (1940-2006) document her career and, to a lesser extent, her personal life. The bulk of the material concerns her work as a performer and composer from the 1960s through the 1990s, represented primarily by printed material such as fliers, clippings, and programs. The collection contains scores for songs that Bown performed, recorded, and composed, including manuscript scores in Bown's hand. Other material in the collection includes contracts, resumes, personal and professional letters to Bown, and photographs. There are also scripts from television and theater productions that Bown worked on as a musical director, musician, or actor.

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Preferred citation: [Item], Patti Bown papers, Sc MG 785, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

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Creator History

Patti Bown (1931-2008) was an American jazz pianist, singer, and composer. Born in Seattle, Washington, Bown studied classical piano from a young age. As a teenager, she began performing in Seattle's Jackson Street jazz scene. She attended the University of Seattle on a music scholarship.

Bown moved to New York City in 1956, joining her sister, concert pianist Edith Mary Bown Valentine.

Bown's son, Anthony Christopher Gallagher, was born the same year.

During 1958, she recorded an album, *Patti Bown Plays Big Piano*. In 1959, Quincy Jones invited her to join a big band he was assembling for a European tour of Harold Arlen's musical, *Free and Easy*. The show toured from December 1959 until February 1960, after which the band toured Europe for eight months. Bown recorded with Quincy Jones several times from 1959 to 1961.

Bown also recorded with artists such as Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughan, and Benny Golson. Many of the artists Bown recorded with also recorded some of her compositions. She collaborated with lyricists such as Maya Angelou and Buddy Bernier. From 1962 to 1964, she was Dinah Washington's musical director.

In 1972, Bown was musical director for Joseph Papp's production, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, which debuted Off-Broadway. She was also active in the theater in other capacities, playing piano and acting in productions such as Woodie King, Jr.'s *Christchild* (1992).

Bown continued to perform up to the 1990s. In 1996, she received a lifetime achievement award from International Women in Jazz, and in 2006 she received the Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Award. She lived in New York City until shortly before her death. She died in Media, Pennsylvania.

Scope and Content Note

The Patti Bown papers (1940-2007) document her career in the performing arts, primarily as a jazz pianist and a composer. The bulk of the material concerns her work as a performer and composer from the 1960s to the 1990s. There is also a small amount of material related to her personal life. The collection contains clippings, programs, fliers, posters, scores, scripts, contracts, resumes, correspondence, photographs, and Bown's writings and notes.

Personal papers include Bown's passports; Edith Mary Bown's 1940 yearbook from the Immaculate High School in Seattle; materials about Westbeth Artist Housing, where Bown began living in 1973; and letters from friends and family, including Bown's sister, Millie Russell. A small number of drafts of Bown's own letters are also present.

Professional papers span the 1960s to the 2000s, though they date primarily to the 1980s and 1990s. The materials include resumes, biographies, and press sheets, which give overviews of Bown's career. Bown's performing career is primarily documented through printed material, such as programs, fliers, posters, and clippings. There are also contracts, letters of reference, and letters regarding bookings. Shows and performances documented in the professional papers include *Free and Easy* and the subsequent European tour of Quincy Jones' band; festivals such as the 1988 North Sea Jazz Festival and the 1992 Spoleto Festival USA; the film *Older Women and Love* (1987); and plays such as *And I Ain't Finished Yet* (1981) and *Christchild*.

Bown's other professional activities, such as teaching and public speaking, are also documented in the professional papers through printed material, correspondence, contracts, and writings. These include materials concerning the Bennington Jazz Lab, where Bown taught in 1976. Writings related to Bown's professional activities include copies of her paper, "Black Music as a Force for Social Change," presented in 1989. Other materials include a proposal and certificate of incorporation for the Universal Arts and Folklore Organization, which Bown cofounded in 1983 with writer and musician Japhet Ongati Okari. Bown's notes from workshops she attended on fundraising and non-profit management are also present.

Scores consist mostly of lead sheets and piano scores. There are also chord charts and parts for some compositions. The collection contains manuscript scores and published sheet music for many of Bown's own works, including "Back in Seattle With You," "Come and Be My Baby," "Devil's Dance," "Dimity," "Freedom Freakdom," "Goin' Home," "Glasnost: Song of Peace," "G'Wan Train," "Hopscotch," "I Love Afrika," "I'd Rather Have a Little Bit of Something," "Nacupenda," "Nirvana," "Nothin' But the Truth," "Pickin' 'Em Up and Layin' 'Em Down," "The Silver Sand," and "The World Is a Toy Shop." There are also sketches and unidentified pieces composed, arranged, or copied by Bown. Music by other composers includes songs from the television special "Monsanto Night Presents Lena Horne," conductor's scores for "God Bless the Child" as sung by Dinah Washington and for "I Can Do That" as sung by Sammy Davis, Jr., and lead sheets for songs from the musicals *Hair*, *Little Me*, and *Promises, Promises*. Some of the scores have Bown's annotations. Scores also include a set of parts for "Voice It!", composed by Thomas Göller. Lyrics, by Bown and others, are filed with the scores.

Scripts in the collection are from theatrical productions that Bown worked on as musical director, musician, or actor. The script for the Lena Horne television special is also present.

Photographs date from about the 1940s to 2002. The majority of the photographs are publicity shots of Bown from the 1960s to the 1980s. There are also photographs of friends, family, and colleagues, and two drawings of Bown.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged in six categories: Personal Papers, Professional Papers, Scores and Lyrics by Patti Bown, Scores and Lyrics by Other Composers, Scripts, and Photographs and Drawings.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American musicians
Jazz musicians
Pianists
Piano music (Jazz)
Women jazz musicians

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Scores

Names

Bown, Patti
Universal Arts and Folklore

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-7 **Personal Papers 1940-2007**
- Professional Papers**
- b. 1 f. 8-9 **Resumes and Press Packets** circa 1980-1995
- b. 2 f. 1 **Awards and Honors** 1989-1997
- Printed Material, Contracts, Letters, and Writings**
- Free and Easy and Quincy Jones Band*
- b. 2 f. 2-3 1959-1960
- b. 10 f. 1 *Les Beaux-Arts* 1959
Belgian newspaper. In French.
- b. 10 f. 2 *Free and Easy Poster--France* 1960
- b. 10 f. 3 *Quincy Jones Band Poster--Sweden* 1960
- b. 2 f. 4-14 **1959-1979**
Includes Bennington Jazz Lab material.
- b. 3 f. 1-8 **1978-1987**
Includes Universal Arts & Folklore and Japhet Ongati Okari material, and non-profit workshop notes.
- b. 4 f. 1-10 **1986-1992**
Includes Bown's paper, "Black Music as a Force of Social Change."
- b. 10 f. 4-5 **1988**
Rutgers University concert poster and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* with article on Bown.
- b. 5 f. 1-8 **1992-2007, undated**
Includes *Christchild* programs and clippings and undated notes.
- Scores and Lyrics by Patti Bown**
Original compositions, sketches, and arrangements, and some manuscript copies of works by other composers.
- b. 5 f. 9-14 circa 1950s-1990s
- b. 6 f. 1-12 circa 1950s-1990s
Includes *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, songs for "Westbeth Works," and songs written with Maya Angelou.
- Scores and Lyrics by Other Composers**
- b. 7 f. 1-9 circa 1950s-1980s
- b. 8 f. 1-5 1962-1969, 1989
"Voice It!" by Thomas Göller, "Monsanto Night Presents Lena Horne" (television special), *Hair*, *Poor Little Me*, and *Promises, Promises*.
- b. 10 f. 6 "God Bless the Child," Dinah Washington--Conductor's Score 1960s
- Published Sheet Music**
A small number have minor annotations.
- b. 11 f. 1-6 circa 1940s-1980s
- b. 12 f. 1-7 circa 1940s-1993
- b. 13 f. 1-6 circa 1940s-1980s
- Scripts**
- b. 8 f. 6 *I Ain't Finished Yet* by Eve Merriam 1981
- b. 8 f. 7-8 *Christchild* by J.E. Franklin 1992
- b. 8 f. 9 *Jesus Singin Woman* by Peggy Ann Brock 1990

Scripts (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 10 "Monsanto Night Presents Lena Horne" 1969
Includes letters regarding Bown's salary.
- b. 9 f. 1 *Madame C.J. Walker by Walter Jones* 1980
- b. 9 f. 2 *Smilin' Through by Elise La Pallo* 1981
- b. 9 f. 3 *Untold Lies... As Love Tales by Tom Mitchelson* 1992
- b. 9 f. 4-9 Photographs and Drawings circa 1940s-2002
Includes two drawings of Patti Bown.
- b. 10 f. 7 Photographs 1970s-1980s