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Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**Eddie Bonnemère papers**

1930-1987 [bulk 1966-1987]

Sc MG 356

Compiled by Heather Lember, 2017.

## Summary

**Creator:** Bonnemere, Eddie, 1921-1996

**Title:** Eddie Bonnemère papers

**Date:** 1930-1987 [bulk 1966-1987]

**Size:** 11.08 linear feet (28 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Laurence Bonnemère, 2013.

**Abstract:** Eddie Bonnemère was an African American composer, church musician, jazz pianist, and New York City public school teacher. Bonnemère's papers comprise correspondence, music compositions, and promotional materials that detail his musical pursuits and performances, educational achievements, and his thirty-three year tenure as a public school music teacher.

**Access:** Advance notice required.

**Conditions Governing Use:** Information on copyright available from repository.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Eddie Bonnemère papers, Sc MG 356, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Processing note:** Compiled by Heather Lember, 2017.

## Creator History

Edward "Eddie" Valentine Bonnemère (1921-1996) was an African American jazz pianist, church musician, composer, arranger, and music instructor. Born and raised in New York City, he attended Saint Mark's Roman Catholic School in Harlem and DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, then went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree (1949) and Master's degree (1950) in music education from New York University.

Upon earning his Master's degree, Bonnemère began working as a music teacher in New York City public schools, teaching at a number of schools in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn over a thirty-three year career. His longest tenure was eleven years at Intermediate School 55 (Oceanhill-

Brownsville) in Brooklyn, where he taught vocals and instrumental music, eventually being promoted to head of the music department. Additionally, he directed the Brooklyn Public School choir and was an instructor at the Community School at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Harlem.

Bonnemère also had an active music career outside of the public schools. He was conductor, arranger, composer, and performer in his own band, the Edward V. Bonnemère Quartet, which began performing in 1950. They played at such New York City venues as Saint Peter's Church, the Embers, Riverboat, and the Apollo Theater. From 1950 to 1955, Bonnemère was also the band leader at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, performing with such musicians as Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Lucky Millinder, and Erskine Hawkins.

In 1966, Bonnemère earned a second master's degree in theory and composition from Hunter College, and a professional diploma in music theory from Teachers College at Columbia University. That same year he took on the role of conductor, arranger, and composer for the Jesu Choir and Ensemble at Saint Peter's Church, introducing jazz into Catholic mass with "Miss Hodierna," a composition that also served as his Hunter College master's thesis.

Between 1965 and 1973, Bonnemère released three jazz albums, *Jazz Orient-ed* (1965), *Missa Laetare (Mass Of Joy)* (1969), and *O Happy the People* (1973). He garnered acclaim for his incorporation of jazz music into church services, and in 1970 was named the director of liturgical music at Saint Thomas the Apostle Roman Catholic Church in New York City. In a subsequent performance at Saint Peter's Church in 1971, Bonnemère melded jazz with Latin American rhythms to the Lutheran liturgy with his composition, "Missa A Nuestro Dios."

Between the years 1970 and 1974, Bonnemère received the Jazz/Folk/Ethnic Composition Fellowship Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. During this period, in 1973, the United States Army invited the Eddie Bonnemère Quartet to tour West Germany in order to help promote race relations. The following year, he returned to Germany with his quartet, where they premiered the "Mass for Every Season" at the Stiftskirche in Neustadt.

Education remained important to Bonnemère, and he went back to school to attend Union Graduate School in Yellow Springs, Ohio. In 1977, he earned a Ph.D. in Music and Education, writing a dissertation entitled, "*Composition – Journey in the Spirit" – Baptismal Liturgy for the Lutheran Church.*

In 1983, Bonnemère retired from teaching, but continued to compose and perform music throughout the 1980s. He died in 1996, survived by his wife, Cleo, and his sons Garry and Laurence.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Eddie Bonnemère papers date from 1930 to 1987 (bulk dates 1966-1987) and chronicle Bonnemère's career as a music teacher, composer, and performer. The collection consists of biographical information, correspondence, education files, fellowship and grant materials, music compositions, teaching files, and scrapbooks.

The Biographical files include various versions of Bonnemère's resume, short biographical sketches, and summaries of his career. There is also a small selection of handwritten personal reminiscences and reflections penned by Bonnemère.

Correspondence files are arranged chronologically, and primarily contain letters discussing musical performances, church events, and professional engagements. While nearly all letters address

Bonnemère's music or teaching career, there is a very small assortment of personal notes which generally commemorate holidays or special events.

The Education files comprise transcripts, evaluations, and records of Bonnemère's schooling. Most abundant are materials concerning his doctoral studies at Union Graduate School, which includes his application for admissions, correspondence, notes, program summaries, research, and reports. Also present are files from Bonnemère's time at New York University, Hunter College, Columbia Teachers College, Juilliard School of Music, and his honorary degree from Susquehanna University. Education files are arranged chronologically by institution.

Throughout his career Bonnemère often applied for fellowships and grant funding. Records of these requests and subsequent awards are found in the Fellowships and Grants files. Among these materials are records from the National Endowment for the Arts, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and the American Music Center composer assistance program.

Music and lyrics written by Bonnemère are held in the Music Compositions files, which feature published sheet music, handwritten scores, and song lyrics. Compositions are arranged alphabetically by title when one is present, and untitled works are arranged chronologically. Additionally, there are legal papers regarding copyright information, and financial files detailing royalties and sales information.

The Performance files contain clippings, flyers, programs, press releases, and reviews from concerts, tours, and church services that span Bonnemère's entire professional career. The earliest program is for a 1930 concert in which Bonnemère performed at St. Marks Hall in Harlem as part of a group called The Little Bonnemere Bros. Additionally, Bonnemère kept handwritten logs of his performances, appearances, and reviews. The logs are located in box 13.

Bonnemère created three scrapbooks, all of which document his early New York City jazz career. The scrapbooks hold programs, clippings, flyers, and photographs. Some pages include Bonnemère's handwritten captions.

Items from Bonnemère's tenure as a New York City public school music teacher are held in the Teaching and Instruction files. Among these files are programs, yearbooks, notes from students, and memoranda from school administrators. These files also contain materials from conferences Bonnemère attended, workshops he taught, and summer camps where he was a music instructor. Most prevalent are files from Bonnemère's employment at Intermediate School 55 (Oceanhill-Brownsville) in Brooklyn and Intermediate School 44 (William J. O'Shea) in Manhattan.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged alphabetically by topic, and chronologically within each topic.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American composers -- United States  
African American musicians -- United States  
Church music  
Jazz musicians -- New York (N.Y.)  
Music teachers -- New York (N.Y.)

**Geographic Names**

Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings

Correspondence

Scores

Scrapbooks

Sound recordings

**Occupations**

Composers

Musicians

Teachers

**Names**

Eddie Bonnemere Quartet

## Container List

### Biographical

- b. 1 f. 1-4 1970-1986
- b. 25 f. 1 1982

### Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 5-8 1952-1959
- b. 2 f. 1-9 1960-1974
- b. 3 f. 1-7 1974-1980
- b. 4 f. 1-4 1981-1984
- b. 5 f. 1-4 1984-1985
- b. 6 f. 1-3 1986-1987

### Education

- b. 6 f. 4 1949-1977
- b. 6 f. 5 DeWitt Clinton High School 1939
- b. 6 f. 6 University of Minnesota 1945
- b. 6 f. 7 New York University 1948-1960
- b. 6 f. 8 Columbia Teachers College 1961-1986
- b. 6 f. 9 Juilliard School of Music 1962
- b. 6 f. 10 Manhattan School of Music 1970

### Union Graduate School

- b. 6 f. 11 1972
- b. 7 f. 1-6 1975-1982
- b. 8 f. 1-5 1976-1985
- b. 9 f. 1 Westminster Choir College 1975
- b. 9 f. 2 Susquehanna University 1976-1986
- b. 9 f. 3 Hunter College 1986
- b. 9 f. 4-11 Fellowships and Grants 1975-1985

### Music Compositions

- b. 9 f. 12-16 1961-1986
- b. 10 f. 1-4 Financial 1971-1984
- b. 10 f. 5-6 Legal 1967-1985

### Lyrics

- b. 10 f. 7-11 1961-1986
- b. 25 f. 2 1961-1986
- b. 10 f. 12 "Advent Mass" 1980s
- b. 11 f. 1 "America! Quo Vadis?" 1976
- b. 11 f. 2 "Given a Choice" 1980s
- b. 11 f. 3 "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" 1981
- b. 25 f. 3 "Isn't It Odd? There is a God" 1984  
English Braille Transcription.

Music Compositions (cont.)

Lyrics (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 4 "Journey in the Spirit" 1977
- b. 11 f. 5 "A Journey of Joy" 1970s
- b. 11 f. 6 "Mary, Cause of Our Joy" 1985
- b. 11 f. 7 "Quo Vadis" 1976

Scores

- b. 11 f. 8-10 1961-1986
- b. 25 f. 4 1971
- b. 26 f. 1 "America! Quo Vadis?" 1976
- b. 11 f. 11 "Baby in a Box" 1978
- b. 26 f. 2 "Baptismal Liturgy" 1977
- b. 11 f. 12 "Bread for our Journey" 1985
- b. 11 f. 13 "Christmas Mass" 1975
- b. 11 f. 14 "Help Me, Jesus" 1968
- b. 11 f. 15 "Isn't it Odd" 1984
- b. 12 f. 1 "I Know Jesus" 1983
- b. 26 f. 3 "Journey in the Spirit" 1977
- b. 12 f. 2 "Joy for You and Me" 1970s
- b. 12 f. 3-4 "Mass for Every Season" 1968-1969
- b. 25 f. 5-6 "Miss Hodierna 1967
- b. 12 f. 5 *Originals for Piano* 1961
- b. 12 f. 6 "The Rainbow Trail" 1983
- b. 12 f. 7 "Rules of Life" 1979

UMOJA

- b. 12 f. 8 1973
- b. 25 f. 7-8 1973

Performances

- b. 12 f. 9-16 1930-1966
- b. 13 f. 1-5 1966-1987
- b. 14 f. 1-7 1966-1987
- b. 15 f. 1-4 1969-1971
- b. 16 f. 1-5 1972-1975
- b. 17 f. 1-6 1976-1979
- b. 18 f. 1-5 1979-1982
- b. 19 f. 1-4 1982-1984
- b. 20 f. 1-4 1984-1986
- b. 21 f. 1-5 1986-1987

Scrapbooks

- b. 27 f. 1-2 1937-1943
- b. 28 1954

Teaching and Instruction

- b. 22 f. 1 1950-1985

Teaching and Instruction (cont.)

- b. 22 f. 2      Conferences 1970-1986  
                    New York City Public Schools
- b. 22 f. 3-12    1949-1985
- b. 23 f. 1-11    1974-1986
- b. 24 f. 1-5     1983-1987
- b. 24 f. 6-9     Summer Camps 1965-1987
- b. 24 f. 10-11   Workshops 1973-1986