



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

Guide to the

**Don Redman papers**

1906-1980

Sc MG 360

## Summary

**Creator:** Redman, Don

**Title:** Don Redman papers

**Date:** 1906-1980

**Size:** 3.04 linear feet (14 boxes)

**Source:** Gift, Ilona Henderson, 04/--/1989

**Revision History:** Updated by Barrye Brown

**Abstract:** The Don Redman Papers consist principally of holograph and printed music of this jazz composer and arranger, as well as some personal and professional papers. Redman's music contains orchestral and vocal scores and parts for various instruments. There is also music and lyrics by other composers most notably Tadd Dameron's "For Europeans Only." A ledger (1931-1932) lists members of the Don Redman Orchestra a.k.a. Don Redman and His Orchestra, for that period together with salaries, scheduled appearances and copyright information. Two scrapbooks document the activities of the Orchestra and other groups which Redman assembled for European tours during the 1940's. The collection also includes biographical information, programs, newsclippings, and an autograph book signed by celebrities. Of interest are two letters written by Louis Armstrong (1939, 1945), one mentioning two songs for which he wants Redman to make dance arrangements.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Don Redman papers, Sc MG 360, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

## Creator History

Don Redman, jazz composer, arranger and bandleader, was a leading contributor to the development of big band sound of the 1920's and 1930's along with Fletcher Henderson.

Redman was born in West Virginia in 1900 and died in 1964 in New York. He came from a musical family, and was a child prodigy, playing the trumpet at age three. He joined a band at six and spent

much of his childhood studying every instrument in the band as well as harmony, theory and composition. He completed his studies at the Boston and Detroit Conservatories, and was a member of Fletcher Henderson's band between 1924-1927. He also recorded and arranged for Henderson and did arrangements for Louis Armstrong.

From 1927-1931, Redman served as musical director of McKinney's Cotton Pickers, and had his own band from 1931-1940. His band was one of the top black orchestras at the time. They appeared in films, and in 1932 they were the first black orchestra to play for a sponsored radio series ("Chipso"). In 1940 he began working as a freelance arranger, although he formed a group for special occasions or to tour Europe several times in the 1940's. Those for whom he arranged included Paul Whiteman (for thirty-five years), Count Basie, Jimmy Dorsey and Harry James. In 1949 Redman had his own series on CBS television, and throughout the 1950's he was the musical director for Pearl Bailey.

## **Scope and Content Note**

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## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American entertainers  
African American musicians  
Entertainers -- United States

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Scores

### **Names**

Armstrong, Louis, 1901-1971  
Dameron, Tadd, 1917-1965  
Redman, Don  
Don Redman and his Orchestra

## Container List

### Biographical and Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical
- b. 1 f. 2 Personal correspondence 1936, 1957
- b. 1 f. 3 Louis Armstrong 1939, 1945
- b. 1 f. 4 Miscellaneous correspondence 1964-1980
- b. 1 f. 5 Ledger (Don Redman Orchestra) 1931-1932
- b. 1 f. 6 Howard School Anniversary Book (Piedmont, West Virginia)
- b. 1 f. 7 Printed Material 1946-1964

### Scrapbooks

- b. 2 Scrapbooks 1932-1964
- b. 3 Scrapbook 1932-1964
- b. 4 Certificates 1906-1945
- b. 5 Autograph book circa 1940s

### Music

The Music series is arranged alphabetically.

- b. 6 A-B
- b. 7 C-D
- b. 8 E-F
- b. 9 G-K
- b. 10 L-M
- b. 11 N-P
- b. 12 R-S
- b. 13 T-Y
- b. 14 Music and Lyrics by Other Composers