

Ma Rainey Collection (MC 362)

Biographical Note

"Ma" Rainey (born Gertrude Malissa Nix Pridgett, 1882/1886 - 1939) was one of the earliest African American professional blues singers and one of the first generation of blues singers to record. She is considered the Mother of the Blues.

She began performing as a young teenager and became known as Ma Rainey after her marriage to Will Rainey, in 1904. They toured with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels and later formed their own group, Rainey and Rainey, Assassins of the Blues. Her first recording was made in 1923. In the next five years, she made over 100 recordings, including "Bo-Weevil Blues" (1923), "Moonshine Blues" (1923), "See See Rider Blues" (1924), "Black Bottom" (1927), and "Soon This Morning" (1927).

Rainey was known for her powerful vocal abilities, energetic disposition, majestic phrasing, and a "moaning" style of singing. Her powerful voice was never adequately captured on her records, because she recorded exclusively for Paramount, which was known for its below-average recording techniques and poor shellac quality. However, her other qualities are present and most evident in her early recordings "Bo-Weevil Blues" and "Moonshine Blues". Rainey recorded with Louis Armstrong, and she toured and recorded with the Georgia Jazz Band. She continued to tour until 1935, when she retired and went to live in her hometown.

In 1935, Rainey returned to her hometown, Columbus, Georgia, where she ran two theatres, the Lyric and the Airdrome until her death. She died of a heart attack in 1939 in Columbus, Georgia.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of audio recordings by Ma Rainey (remastered on 33 rpm records and CDs), as well as VHS tapes of programs about Ma Rainey.

boxes (1 linear foot).

5 CDs3 VHS4 LP

Permission to Publish

Permission to publish material from the **Ma Rainey Collection (MC 362)** must be obtained from the Columbus State University Archives at Columbus State University. Use of the following credit line for publication or exhibit is required:

Ma Rainey Audio Collection (MC 362) Columbus State University Archives Columbus, Georgia

Note to Researchers

See also:

[Kenneth Crooks, Jr. Collection \(MC 151\)](#), especially Box 1, Folders 7-8

Box and Folder List

Box 1 - Textual

Folder 1 - Ma Rainey biographical

Folder 2 - "The Significance of the Ma Rainey House, Columbus, GA" by Kenneth H. Thomas, Jr. (1992)

Folder 3 - Ma Rainey House, history of ownership

Folder 4 - Presentation of Historical Marker at Ma Rainey's House (1986)

Folder 5 - Correspondence re: Historical Marker (1986)

Folder 5b - Donors to Historical Marker Fund (1986)

Folder 6 - Historic Property Nomination Form (1986)

Folder 7 - Correspondence re: National Register of Historic Places Nomination of House (1991-1993)

Folder 8 - Ma Rainey House National Register Nomination Form (incomplete)

Folder 9 - Ma Rainey House Dedication (1992)

Folder 10 - Restoration of Ma Rainey House in 1995

Folder 11 - Friends of the Ma Rainey Museum of the Blues, Inc., Board of Directors (1996)

Folder 12 - Ma Rainey Blues Museum Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, Columbus Consolidated Government and The Friends of Ma Rainey (2006)

Folder 13 - Ma Rainey House Miscellaneous

Folder 14 - Black Heritage Tourism article (n.d.)

Folder 15 - Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, play by Wilson, Encore Performance at The Springer Opera House by Troy State University (1993)

Folder 16 - A Tribute to "Ma" Rainey, by the William H. Spencer Golden Owlettes, African American Heritage Preservation Society, and Liberty Theatre Cultural Center Board

Folder 17 - Two postcards with images of Ma Rainey

Box 2- Audio/Visual

Video

WLTZ (NBC 38) Coffee Break "Tribute to Ma Rainey." VHS tape. 19 August 1996. Obiora Anekwe's (Clark Atlanta University) interview with Jean Nix Rutledge (great niece of Ma Rainey).

City of Columbus Dedication of "Ma Rainey" Home Historical Marker. Presented by William J. Monroe to Mayor Pro Tem A.J. McClung. Featuring: Blues Singer Precious Bryant, Music Historian Dr. Katherine H. Mahan.

Who is "Ma" Rainey. Narrated by Mr. Alphonso Biggs. 29 September 1999.

Audio

Ma Rainey Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order, Volumes 1-4. CD. Austria: Document Records, 1997.

Ma Rainey: The Complete 1928 Sessions in Chronological Order. CD. Austria: Document Records, 1993.

Oh My Babe Blues, 2 volumes. Ma Rainey and Her Georgia Jazz Band. 33 rpm. United Kingdom: The Magnum Music Group, 1987. (two copies of volume 1)

Ma Rainey, volume 2. Ma Rainey. 33 rpm. Milestone, 1974.