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URBAN ARTS CORPS
RECORDS

The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research
in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, New York 10030

PREFACE

This inventory was prepared as part of an archival preservation project to arrange, describe and catalog resources essential for the study of the African-American theater history. The necessary staff and supplies for the *Blacks on Stage: African-American Theater Arts Collection Project* were made available through a combination of funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the City of New York.

Table of Contents

Preface.....	i
History	1
Biography.....	3
Scope.....	4
Container List.....	5
Separation Record.....	10

URBAN ARTS CORPS, (1967- n.d.). RECORDS, 1955-1983.
6 archival boxes. (1.5 lin. ft).

History

Urban Arts Corps (UAC) was founded in 1967 by Vinnette Carroll, who served as the company's premiere artistic director. It emerged as a pilot project of The Ghetto Arts Program, a program funded by the New York State Council on the Arts. Carroll established the UAC in response to a request from John B. Hightower, the executive director of the Council.

The initial members of the UAC were black and Puerto Rican students aged 17 through 22, from New York City public schools and youth agencies. The objectives set forth by those creating the UAC were to: share their professional training; provide youth in ghetto areas with direct collaborative experiences with performing artists who shared their social and or cultural heritage; aid in the development of work techniques; introduce ghetto youth to materials, organizations, and artists that would enhance and improve their self image; stimulate and aid in the development of young artists in disadvantaged areas; and stimulate interest in professional and educational opportunities in the arts. These objectives were identified as being critical for addressing the cultural needs of the Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant communities of New York City as assessed in an earlier study conducted by Carroll.

One of UAC's long term goals was to provide accessible art in black, Puerto Rican and culturally under-served urban communities that demonstrated or gave life to the slogan "Black is beautiful." According to Carroll this art needed to be available in the streets, in parks, in playgrounds, parking lots, prisons, churches, libraries as well as in theaters and art galleries. She clarified the vision and ambition of UAC in the following statement "It cannot be gainsaid that the fight for meaningful employment, decent housing and freedom from hunger must preempt the fight for "Arts" in our list of priorities. It is, however, vitally important to utilize art and the artist as valuable tools in the struggle, as lubricants in communicating the struggle and as forces for creating a more sane, more cultivated, more peaceful life style."

Another goal of the Corps was to develop a major repertory company that produced new plays by black playwrights and relevant plays by major playwrights that were within the mission of the company. Classical plays of enduring value, as well as plays which could be used to develop the talents of the members of the Corps and enrich the lives of the black community were also sought out to be included in the repertoire.

By its third season UAC had become multiracial in its membership, focus and productions. The Corps performed before integrated

black and Puerto Rican communities. During the 1969-1970 season the Corps' activities included performances of: *But Never Jam Today* (Vinnette Carroll's musical adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*) as part of the Black Expo series at the City Center of Music and Drama in New York City. This busy season included a tour of seven upstate New York cities - Albany, Buffalo, Geneva, Kingston, Newburgh, Rochester and Syracuse, which involved traveling 1700 miles and performing for a total of 60,000 persons as well as school lecture demonstrations and open rehearsals for public school audiences. During the seven cities tour, the members of UAC lived with residents of the communities where they performed. UAC also put on performances at the Hudson Guild Theater in New York of *Old Judge Moses is Dead* and *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*. In their practical attempt to bring art to the people, they invited community members to become involved with and participate in their performances.

During the 1972-1973 season UAC premiered its most successful (on and off Broadway) and enduring musical *Don't Bother me, I Can't Cope*, for which Micki Grant wrote the music. This production was Vinnette Carroll's first Broadway production, making her one of the first women to direct a Broadway show. During this season *Cope* was performed in Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, Baltimore, San Francisco and Toronto, Canada. Other works presented by UAC during this season included: *Croesus*, *Step Lively Boy*, *Defiant Island*, and *The Files*.

In the 1975-1976 season, UAC introduced *Your Arms are too Short to Box with God* which it performed at the 1975 Spoleto Festival, held in Spoleto Village in Italy. UAC's other production during this season was *Theo*. The 1978-1979 season was filled with the introduction of new works like *Alice* and *When Hell Freezes Over I'll Skate*.

Cope and *Arms* have proven to be UAC's most popular plays. They continue to be performed 20 plus years since they were first introduced to the New York stage. *Don't Bother me, I Can't Cope*, was most recently performed in 1997 by the Crossroads Theater Company of New Brunswick, New Jersey. *Your Arms are too Short to Box with God*, counts among its performers Patti Labelle and Teddy Pendagrass.

The formal closure of the UAC is not documented in the collection, though its current status is unknown.

Biography

Vinnette Carroll was born in New York City, on March 11, 1922, but spent most of her childhood in Falmoth, Jamaica. During the 1930s, after Carroll and her sister had rejoined their parents in New York City, the family moved to Sugar Hill, Harlem. In 1944 she earned a B.A. from Long Island University, where she had enrolled after graduating from Wadleigh High School in Harlem. She then went on to earn an M.A. from New York University. From 1948-1950, Carroll was a student in Columbia University's doctoral psychology program, where she completed the required course work. At the same time, she was studying acting with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio. This experience prompted Carroll's decision to change careers and she went full time into the performing arts. She also studied acting with Edwin Piscator at the New School of Social Research and from 1954 to 1955 she studied with Stella Adler.

Ending her career as a clinical psychologist at the New York City Bureau of Child Guidance in the early 1950's, Carroll choose to join the faculty of the High School of Performing Arts, a school in the New York City public school system, where she taught drama from 1955 through 1966. She also acted as a consultant for the New York State Council of the Arts and was a key person on the Council's Ghetto Arts Program, out of which the Urban Arts Corps emerged. She was also a working actor during the same period, 1955-1966.

As an actor Carroll appeared on Broadway in *Small War on Murray Hill*, *Jolly's Progress* and as Fatateeta in *Caesar and Cleopatra* with the Group 20 Players at Wellesley, Mass. In films she can be seen as the grandmother in *One Potato, Two Potato* and a mother in *Up the Down Staircase*, in *Alice's Restaurant* and *The Reeves*. In London she starred in *Member of the Wedding* for Grenada T.V., and directed and acted in several specials for Associated Redifussion. She also starred in the 1959 London stage production of *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*, and won an Obie Award for Distinguished Performance in the New York production of *Beyond the Blues* on CBS' Stage program, as well as a Ford Foundation grant for directors. Some of her early productions included dances choreographed by Alvin Ailey.

Carroll is currently the producing artistic director of the Vinnette Carroll Repertory Company, a church affiliated theater, located in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and built in Carroll's honor. In 1994 she directed her own version of *Eden* by Steve Carter.

Bibliography

Mapp, Edward. 1978. *Directory of Blacks in the Performing Arts*. Metuchen, N.J. The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
Current Biography (1983).

Scope and Content

The Urban Arts Corps Records consists of the production records for plays produced by UAC from 1967-1983 (bulk dates 1972-1979), and a separate body of material relating to Vinette Carroll. The materials have been divided into two series: the PRODUCTION FILES and VINNETTE CARROLL.

PRODUCTION FILES, 1968-1983, (2.5 lin. ft.).

These files contain an assortment of material, however there is not every kind of material for each production. The following is a sample of the types of records contained in the collection: cast lists, contracts, correspondence, director's notes, news releases, programs, reviews and scripts. There are also musical manuscripts composed and written by Nicki Grant for the play *Step Lively Boy*. Both locally produced plays and tours are represented. The productions are arranged chronologically, then alphabetically, within the year.

VINNETTE CARROLL, 1955-1979, (2.5 ln. inches).

This series documents Carroll's professional activities in the theater prior to her becoming the founding director of the Urban Arts Corps. Included are materials referencing her career as an actor and a director.

Provenance

Gift of Urban Arts Corps, 1984.
SCM84-3

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
1		Production Files
		<i>Slow Dance</i>
	1	Reviews, 1968 - Inner City, Los Angles
	2	Public Relations, 1969-1979
		<i>But Never Jam Today</i>
	3	Budget, 1969 - City Center, NYC
	4	Publicity, 1969 - City Center, NYC
		<i>Moon on a Rainbow Shawl</i>
	5	Publicity, 1969 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	6	Publicity, 1970
		<i>Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope</i>
	7	Publicity, 1970 - Lincoln Center, NYC
	8	News Releases, 1970 - Lincoln Center, NYC
	9	Reviews, 1970 - Lincoln Center, NYC
		<i>Moon on a Rainbow Shawl</i>
	10	Reviews, 1970 - N.Y.
	11	Publicity, 1970 - N.Y.
		<i>Black Nativity</i>
	12	News Releases, 1971 - N.Y.
	13	Programs, 1971 - N.Y.
	14	Publicity, 1971 - N.Y.
		<i>Croesus</i>
	15	News Releases, 1971 - N.Y. City Parks
	16	Press Clippings, 1971 - N.Y. City Parks
	17	Programs, 1971 - N.Y. City Parks
	18	Reviews, 1971 - N.Y. City Parks
		<i>Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope</i>
	19	Ads, News Releases, 1971
	20	Master Script, 1971
	21	Programs, 1971 Tour
	22	Publicity, 1971 Tour
	23	Reviews, 1971 Tour
	24	Ads, News Releases, 1971 - Ford Theater
	25	Programs, 1971 - Ford Theater
	26	Publicity, 1971 - Ford Theater
	27	Reviews, 1971 - Ford Theater
2	1	Publicity - Vinnette Carroll and Nicki Grant, 1972
	2	Programs, 1972 - Chicago
	3	Publicity, 1972 - Chicago
	4	Reviews, 1972 - Chicago
	5	Ads, News Releases, 1972 - Playhouse, NYC
	6	Programs, 1972 - Playhouse, NYC
	7	Publicity, 1972 - Playhouse, NYC
	8	Reviews, 1972 - Playhouse, NYC

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
2	9	Ads, News releases, 1972-1973 - Los Angeles
	10	Publicity, 1972-1973 - Los Angeles
	11	Reviews, 1972 - Los Angeles
		<i>Croesus</i>
	12	Audience List, 1973
	13	Programs, 1973 - NYC
	14	Reviews, 1973 - NYC
		<i>Defiant Island</i>
	15	Correspondence, 1973
	16	Ads, News Releases, 1973 - Edison Theater, NYC
	17	Programs, 1973 - Edison Theater, NYC
	18	Publicity, 1973 - Edison Theater, NYC
	19	Publicity, 1973 - Morgan State College
	20	Ads, News Releases, 1973 - San Francisco
	21	Lawsuit, 1973 - San Francisco
	22	Programs, 1973 - San Francisco
	23	Publicity, 1973 - San Francisco
	24	Reviews, 1973 - San Francisco
	25	Publicity, 1973 - Toronto, Canada
	26	Reviews, 1973 -Toronto, Canada
		<i>Step Lively Boy</i>
3		Musical Manuscripts
	1	Welcome Home - Opening of Show - 3 copies
	2	It Takes a Soldier - 4 parts: 1. Guitar, 2. Drums, 3. Bass, 4. Piano
	3	I Love the Army - 3 parts: 1. Guitar, 2. Bass, 3. Drum
	4	Body Count - 3 parts: 1. Guitar, 2. Bass, 3. Drum
	5	Haven't I Got Enough on My Mind - 2 parts: 1. Drums, 2. Guitar
	6	War is Made for Generals - 2 parts: 1. Guitar, 2. Bass
	7	Hey General - 3 parts: 1. Guitar 2. Bass, 3. Guitar
	8	Whore's Song #1: 1. Guitar
	9	Step Lively Boy: 1. Guitar, 2. Bass, 3. Drums
	10	Correspondent's Correspondence: 1. Guitar
	11	I Ain't Had My Fill: 1. Bass, 2. Drums
	12	Whore's Song #2: Guitar (only)
	13	Women: 1. Guitar, 2. Drums
	14	My Dear: Piano (only)

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
3	15	Our Cause is Righteous, That's What the Bible Say: 1. Guitar, 2. Bass
	16	When Everyman is Everyman: 1. Bass
	17	Walking the Dog: 1. Bass, 2. Guitar
	18	Call Me Ursula: 1. Drums, 2. Bass
	19	So Little Time - Words and Music
	20	Have a Drink - Vocals only
4	1	News Releases, 1973 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	2	Publicity, 1973 - UAC Theatre, NYC
		<i>The Files</i>
	3	Box Office Reports, 1973 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	4	Correspondence, 1973/74 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	5	Production Budget, 1973 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	6	Publicity, 1973 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	7	Reviews, 1973 - UAC Theatre, NYC
		<i>Theo</i>
	8	News Releases/Publicity, 1973
		<i>All the Kings Men</i>
	9	Budget, 1974 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	10	Programs - UAC Theatre, NYC
	11	Public Relations, 1974 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	12	Publicity, 1974 - UAC Theatre, NYC
		<i>Desire</i>
	13	Reviews, 1974 - Academy Festival Theatre, Lake Forest, Ill.
		<i>Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope</i>
	14	Programs, 1974 - Ford's Theater, Washington, DC
	15	Publicity, 1974 - Ford's Theater, Washington, DC
	16	Reviews, 1974 - Ford's Theater, Washington, DC
		<i>Theo</i>
	17	Copyright, 1975 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	18	Programs, 1975 - UAC Theatre, NYC
	19	Reviews, 1975 - UAC Theatre, NYC
		<i>Your Arms are too Short...</i>
	20	Contracts, 1975 - Italy
	21	Correspondence, 1975 - Italy
	22	Programs, 1975 - Italy
	23	Publicity, 1975 - Italy
	24	Reviews, 1975 - Italy
	25	Programs, 1975
	26	Reviews, 1975-1976, Tour
		<i>Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope</i>
	27	Miscellaneous, 1975-1976, Tour

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
4	28	Publicity, 1976
	29	<i>I'm laughin'; But I ain't tickled</i> Script, 1976
5		Theo
	1	Reviews, 1976 <i>Your Arms are too Short...</i>
	2	Director's Notes, 1976 <i>Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope</i>
	3	Miscellaneous, 1977-1978
		Alice
	4	Legal, 1978 - Forrest Theatre
	5	Press/Media Releases, 1978 - Forrest Theatre
	6	Production Info, 1978 - Forrest Theatre
	7	Program, 1978 - Forrest Theatre
	8	Reviews, 1978 - Forrest Theatre
	9	Telegrams, 1978 - Forrest Theatre
	10	<i>What You gonna Name that Pretty Little Baby</i> News Releases, 1978 <i>But Never Jam Today</i>
	11	Contracts, 1978 - Longacre Theatre, N.Y.
	12	Press Release, 1978 - Longacre Theatre, N.Y.
	13	Reviews, 1979 - Longacre Theatre, N.Y.
	14	Script, 1979 - Longacre Theatre, N.Y.
		<i>When Hell Freezes over I'll Skate</i>
	15	Business and Schedule Info, 1979 - PBS
	16	Contracts, 1979 - PBS
	17	Equity Contracts, 1979 - Lincoln Center <i>Your Arms are too Short...</i>
	18	Programs, 1979 Tour
	19	Reviews and News Releases, 1979 Tour
	20	Reviews And Public Relation, 1979 Tour
	21	<i>An evening with Linda Michele Baran, 1980</i> <i>Your Arms are too Short...</i>
	22	Reviews and Publicity, 1980 - Tour
	23	Miscellaneous, 1983
		<i>Croesus and the Witch</i>
	24	Script, n.d.
		<i>Mrs. Morgan</i>
	25	Script, n.d.
		<i>The Prodigal Son</i>
	26	Script, n.d.
		<i>Your Arms are too Short...</i>
	27	Script and Cast List, n.d.
		<i>Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope</i>
	28	Script, n.d.
	29	Review Index

Container List

Box	Folder	
6		Vinnette Carroll/Actor
	1	<i>Caesar & Cleopatra</i> , 1955
	2	<i>Moon on a Rainbow Shawl</i> , 1958
	3	<i>The Crucible</i> , 1958
	4	<i>Jolly's Progress</i> , 1959
	5	<i>The Member of the Wedding</i> , 1960
		Vinnette Carroll/Director
	6	<i>Dark of the Moon</i> , 1958, 1960
	7	<i>Ondine</i> , 1961
	8	<i>Black Nativity</i> , 1962
	9	<i>Disenchanter</i> , 1962
	10	<i>That Great Gittin Up Morning</i> , 1963
	11	<i>Beyond the Blues (TV)</i> , 1964
	12	<i>The Prodigal Son</i> , 1965
		<i>The Files</i>
	13	1966
	14	1967

SEPARATION RECORD

The following items were removed from:

Name of Collection/Papers Urban Arts Corps Records

Accession Number SCM84-3

Donor: Anita McShane & Vinnette Carroll

Gift X **Purchase** _____

Date received: 3/1/84

Date transferred: 1984

The item(s) listed below have been sent to the division indicated, either to be retained or disposed of there. Any items that should receive special disposition are clearly marked.

Schomburg Art and Artifacts Division:

POSTERS: Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope: Edison Theater; Mafunch Institute, Walnut St. Theatre, Philadelphia; Center Theater Group;

Your Arms Too Short To Box with God: Lyceum Theater, Alvin Theater Black Theater Festival, USA (1979); But Never Jam Today;

Schomburg Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division:

see attached list of audio tapes and cassettes

Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:

Oversize panels - 4 (unknown) production shots; 1 group shot of Actors.

One box of photographic stills: Boogie Rumble of a Dream Deferred,
Your Arms too Short to Box with God, When Hell Freezes over I'll
Skate, But Never Jam Today, Don't Bother Me, I can't Cope, The Wiz,
All the Kings Men, Portraits of Vinnette Carroll, Moon on a Rainbow
Shawl, The Flies, Croesus & the Witch, The Ups & Downs of
Theophilus Maitland

Accessioned by: D.Lachatanere

Date: 1984