

## Felix E. Grant Jazz Archives at the Univ. of the District of Columbia

by Michael Fitzgerald, University of the District of Columbia Library

IN JUST OVER TWO DECADES, the Felix E. Grant Jazz Archives at the University of the District of Columbia has had a substantial impact on the jazz research world. It offers a unique perspective, because of both its institutional history and its close affiliation with an active jazz performance program.

The seeds of the Archives were sown in 1988. After meeting with UDC music department faculty member Robert Felder, veteran radio personality and local jazz expert Felix E. Grant began donating materials accumulated over his nearly fifty-year career in Washington-area radio. Grant died in 1993, but other important collections have been added as the result of the reputation of the Archives and its founders. The most recent large acquisition is the Herb & Will Friedwald collection of more than 10,000 LPs.

UDC's library has acknowledged the significance of the Archives' holdings and has given the Felix E. Grant Jazz Archives a prominent location, with state-of-the-art facilities. Curator Judith Korey, a long-time UDC music professor, stepped in as a temporary administrator in 1993 when the Jazz Studies program, under Calvin Jones, was designated to guide the development and organization of the Archives, and her involvement has only grown. She says, "A jazz archive really should reflect jazz's culture, which I think really embraces a multidisciplinary approach to the study and also the appreciation of it. Something like jazz is so intertwined with 'our-story' and I think that's the approach that you have to take. Music is, of course, the centerpiece, but it reaches out even farther and an archive is a reflection of that."

With a strong sense of local history, the Jazz Archives focuses on important people, places, and events that might never be known outside of the area. The Archives also works to document the history of UDC's jazz studies program and co-sponsors many events, including the annual area big band festival. By making students aware



of its holdings while they are enrolled and by demonstrating that libraries and archives collect materials created not only by world-famous figures, but also by students, the Jazz Archives engenders an appreciation for such institutions as a whole.

Setting the Archives apart from most other jazz collections is its website ([www.lrdudc.wrlc.org/jazz/home.html](http://www.lrdudc.wrlc.org/jazz/home.html)), which allows researchers not only to learn about its collections, policies, and history, but actually to access digitized materials remotely. Although but a small portion of the holdings, what is available is by no means insubstantial. The Internet has introduced these collections to a wider international community and this has also affected how the Archives can market itself to donors. In terms of how a relatively tiny archive can compete with better known ones, Korey says that instead of being swallowed up, individual collections at UDC are allowed to shine. With online presentation, collections showcased in a smaller institution can have a world-wide impact.

A new monthly lecture series is already attracting further attention for the Archives from beyond the DC area and is another example of the strong commitment to preserving the past and making it accessible to current and future patrons, whether in-person or online.