

Records of the Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble, 1981-2023



Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble, 1990

Overview of the Collection

Title: Records of the Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble, 1981-2023

Creator: Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble

Accession(s): PPL-2022-025
PPL-2023-017

Size: Approximately 6.5 linear feet of records, comprised of:
One (1) records storage box
One (1) oversize box*
One (1) map drawer*
*Note that items in the oversize box and map drawer share space with material from other collections.

Repository: Plainfield Public Library, Local History Department, 800 Park Avenue, Plainfield, NJ 07060

Abstract: The Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble, formed by Richard L. Bowles and Charles E. Evans in August 1980, was a non-profit arts organization composed of dedicated professionals that offered audiences a diverse range of music, grounded in the African American choral tradition. Although the group's last performance was a reunion concert in 2010, they officially disbanded in 2022. The collection includes

programs, flyers, postcards, brochures, letters, newspaper clippings, rosters, by-laws, necrology resolutions, cassette tapes and compact disc, posters, and photographs.

Language: The records are in English.

Historical Information

The Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble was formed in August 1980 by Richard L. Bowles, a music consultant, instructor, and professional accompanist and Charles E. Evans, an accomplished vocalist and choir director. The two co-founders envisioned a chorus with a diverse repertoire, grounded in the African American choral tradition. The non-profit arts organization, composed of dedicated professionals from varied backgrounds, offered audiences a wide range of music, from classical to spirituals, gospels, jazz, and contemporary works.

The Ensemble always performed locally in Plainfield, usually at the Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church, but also held concerts throughout New Jersey and in numerous locations along the East Coast, as well as Illinois and Texas. In addition to the group's annual spring, summer, and Christmas concerts, they participated in the inaugural activities for New Jersey governors and Plainfield mayors and performed for the National Association of Negro Musicians, Harlem Week Festival, New Jersey's Statue of Liberty Celebration, and Westminster Choir College. They made appearances with world-renowned singers, spiritual leaders, and poets and promoted concerts by other artists. In 1988, the Ensemble hosted a three-day conference at Seton Hall University that addressed the preservation of Black America's ethnic musical heritage.

In May 1990, shortly after the Ensemble's 10th anniversary concert, Charles E. Evans passed away at the age of 39. A series of artistic directors followed his passing, including Jo-Ann Richardson Joubert and Donavon Soumas, the founder of the Soumas Heritage School of Music in Plainfield. Robert E. Winder Jr., a gifted educator, vocalist, composer, arranger, and director worked closely with the Ensemble for 19 years as a music consultant and associate director. He passed away in 2001, the same year as the group's last concert. They reunited nine years later in 2010, dedicating this special performance to the memory and legacy of Charles "Chuck" Evans.

The Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble embarked on a plan to hold a second reunion concert in 2020. However, due to the COVID pandemic and the deaths and health status of many of their members, they were forced to cancel. The RCCE Executive Board met several times in the following years to determine the feasibility of holding a reunion concert as well as the status of the organization. In 2022, they came to the difficult decision to not go ahead with a reunion and disband the Ensemble altogether. Supporters who contributed to the concert fund were willing to donate their contributions to be used as scholarships to Hampton University, in memory of former graduates Charles E. Evans and Robert E. Winder Jr.

[Source: materials from the collection]

Scope and Contents

The Records of the Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble document its long and successful career as one of the Northeast's most versatile and accomplished choral music groups. The collection, which consists of a variety of material dating from 1981 to 2023, includes event programs, flyers and postcards, brochures, letters, newspaper clippings, rosters and directory, by-laws, tax exemption paperwork, necrology resolutions, cassette tapes and compact disc, posters, and photographs.

Arrangement

The Records of the Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble are arranged into three series:

Series 1: Organizational Materials

Series 2: Promotional Materials

Series 3: Audiovisual Materials

Index Terms

People:

Bowles, Richard L.

Evans, Charles Edward (1951-1990)

Soumas, Donavon P.

Winder, Robert Edward, Jr. (1953-2001)

Organizations:

Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble (Plainfield, N.J.)

Places:

Plainfield (N.J.)

Subjects:

African Americans singers--New Jersey--Plainfield

Choral societies--New Jersey--Plainfield

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

This collection mostly consists of paper documents that do not require any additional technology for access. The cassette tapes and compact disc have been digitized, but due to the music's copyright status, can only be accessed on site.

Series Description

Series 1: Organizational Materials [1984-2023, undated]

Series Description

Series 1 contains materials related to the organization and its members and includes a history, by-laws, meeting minutes, tax exemption documents, business cards and branded folders, letters written to supporters and in regards to scholarships and performances, rosters and directory, necrology resolutions, and memorial service programs.

Arrangement

Series 1 is arranged chronologically by material type and fills nine folders.

Series 2: Promotional Materials [1981-2018, undated]**Series Description**

Series 2 contains materials promoting and publicizing the Ensemble and includes concert and event programs, flyers and postcards, posters, solicitations for members and supporters, and newspaper clippings.

Arrangement

Series 2 is arranged chronologically by material type and fills 16 folders. The posters are housed in a separate oversize box.

Series 3: Audiovisual Materials [1997-2010, undated]**Series Description**

Series 3 contains audiovisual materials and includes two cassette tapes and a compact disc of the Christmas and spring annual concerts, photographs of the Ensemble and other performers, and a memorial poster with photographs of Robert E. Winder Jr. This poster may have been created in 2001, when Winder passed away or in 2004, when the Ensemble held a tribute concert in his honor.

Arrangement

Series 3 is arranged by material type and fills three folders. The memorial poster is housed in a map drawer.

Administrative Information**Access & Restrictions**

The Records of the Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble are available for research.

Access is restricted to materials prepared by the Local History department staff. All materials must be viewed in the Plainfield Room and may not be removed to another area of the library without permission of the Library Director or designee. Materials must be handled carefully and kept in order. Materials must not be leaned upon, altered, folded, ripped, or traced upon. Marks may not be added or erased from materials. Materials must be returned directly to Local History department staff and inspected before the researcher leaves the Plainfield Room.

One photocopy may be made (by Plainfield Public Library staff) of each document for the purpose of research; official Local History departmental reproduction fees may apply. Permission to publish must be obtained by the Plainfield Public Library Board of Trustees as delegated to the Library Director. Permission to publish does not constitute a copyright clearance. The researcher is responsible for further copyright restrictions. The Plainfield Public Library is not responsible for the misuse of copyrighted material.

Preferred Citation

Identification of item; Date (if noted); "Records of the Ric-Charles Choral Ensemble", Box and Folder Number, Local History Department, Plainfield Public Library, Plainfield, New Jersey.

Acquisition Information

The majority of this collection was donated in August 2023 by four members of the ensemble, on its behalf: Belinda Smiley, President; Deborah Burke, Secretary; Raven Walthour, Treasurer; and Carol Howell, a founding member and alto. A smaller portion was donated before 2008, and a letter was donated by Joseph Da Rold in 2022.

Processing Information

The majority of the collection was inventoried by Sally Weiner in September 2023, and the finding aid was written by Sally Weiner in December 2025. Finding aid content follows the guidelines suggested by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

Collection Inventory

Series 1: Organizational Materials [1984-2023, undated]

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date(s)
1	1	History	1995
	2	By-laws	undated
	3	Meeting minutes	1987
	4	Tax exemption documents	1984, 2018-2019
	5	Business cards and folders	undated
	6	Letters	1997, 2021-2022
	7	Rosters and directory	1986, 1989, undated
	8	Necrology resolutions and memorial service programs	1990-2023
	9	Birthday resolution for Sarah Barnhardt	undated

Series 2: Promotional Materials [1981-2018, undated]

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date(s)
1	10	Concert programs	1981-1985
	11	Concert programs	1986-1988
	12	Concert programs	1988
	13	Concert programs	1989
	14	Concert program (10 th Anniversary)	1990
	15	Concert programs	1991-1996
	16	Concert programs	1997-2000
	17	Concert programs (includes 20 th Anniversary Spring Concert)	2001, 2004
	18	Concert program (Reunion Concert)	2010
	19	Concert programs	2018, undated
	20	Event programs	1983-1995, undated
	21	Concert flyers and postcards	1986-2018
	22	Promotional material for cancelled reunion concert	2020
	23	Program and registration form for music conference	1988

24	Solicitation material for members and supporters	2000, undated
25	Newspaper clippings	1984-2001
*	Posters (*Clubs & Organizations Oversize Box 1)	1981-1997

Series 3: Audiovisual Materials [1997-2010, undated]

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date(s)
1	26	Photographs	1997, undated
	27	Photograph (Reunion Concert)	2010
	28	Cassette tapes (17 th Annual Spring Concert, 18 th Annual Christmas Concert) and compact disc (19 th Annual Spring Concert)	1997-1999
*		Memorial poster with photographs, "We Remember Robert" (*Map Drawer C3)	c. 2001-2004