

University of Chicago Library

Guide to the Velvet Lounge Collection 1980-2010



© 2023 University of Chicago Library

Table of Contents

Descriptive Summary	3
Information on Use	3
Access	3
Citation	3
Historical Note	3
Scope Note	4
Related Resources	4
Subject Headings	5
INVENTORY	5

Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.VELVETLOUNGE
Title	Velvet Lounge. Collection
Date	1980-2010
Size	13.5 linear feet (7 boxes)
Repository	Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract The Velvet Lounge Collection of the Chicago Jazz Archive conserves a range of materials pertaining to the history of one of Chicago's last Black jazz clubs on the South Side. Established in 1982, the Velvet Lounge operated as a jazz club until 2010. Covering that 30-year span, the collection consists of artifacts, event ephemera, newspaper articles, and photographs of musicians, including the club's founder, saxophonist Fred Anderson.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Velvet Lounge Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Historical Note

Saxophonist Fred Anderson (1929-2010) established the Velvet Lounge in 1982. For several years prior, Anderson had operated the Birdhouse, a bar in Chicago's Near North, but decided to take over the South Side tavern where he had been working as a bartender. The historically Black neighborhoods of the South Side had been home to vibrant jazz clubs, where visitors from near and far could regularly see performances by renowned musicians such as Charlie Parker and Nat Cole. However, as a result of the demographic shifts following the loosening of redlining practices, many South Side clubs had closed by the 1960s. Black residents could now live in other neighborhoods, or the suburbs, and Black jazz players could more easily find gigs downtown, where the pay was better.

After opening in 1982, the Velvet Lounge quickly became known for its bi-weekly jam sessions, and by the 1990s, visitors could expect lively performances by varied musicians Tuesday through Saturday evenings. A genre-bending saxophonist himself, Anderson made Velvet a place where players could be adventurous and innovative. He mentored many young musicians who launched their careers playing at Velvet.

A native of Monroe, Louisiana, Anderson moved to Chicago with his mother when he was eight years old. Apart from a few music courses, he largely taught himself to play the saxophone by listening to the recordings of famous jazz musicians. He started as a professional musician in the 1960s, appearing in a 1967 album by Joseph Jarman. Along with Jarman and several others, Anderson launched the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, which merged community organizing with encouraging the presentation of original music. After establishing the Velvet Lounge, he became a regular fixture of the Chicago Jazz Festival in the 1990s and helped to create in 2005 the Vision Festival dedicated to “avantjazz.”

In 2006, Anderson was forced to move the club from its original location on South Indiana Avenue and 21st Street to a new site less than two blocks away on Cermak Road. When Velvet later closed its doors following Anderson’s death in 2010, it was seen as the close of an era--the era of Black jazz clubs on the South Side.

Scope Note

A part of the Chicago Jazz Archive, the Velvet Lounge Collection consists of a variety of materials that document the club’s physical space, performances held there, the different musicians who played with Fred Anderson at the club, and jazz events held at various venues around Chicago from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s. The materials include event ephemera, newspaper articles, and photographs, all of which are arranged in boxes by size and subject matter. Two physical artifacts -- a drumhead and a lampshade -- have been separated into their own boxes. The signature on the drumhead is unknown, as is the location of the lampshades inside the club. The conserved newspaper articles provide information on the life and contribution of Anderson, the ensembles of which he was a part, and the place of the Velvet Lounge in the history of the Chicago jazz scene.

Related Resources

Jazz Institute of Chicago. Artwork and Posters. Collection

Jazz Institute of Chicago. Figi, Jamil. Papers

Jazz Institute of Chicago. Records

Jazz Subject Files. Collection

University of Chicago. Library. Chicago Jazz Archive. Exhibits. Records

Subject Headings

- Anderson, Fred, 1929-2010
- African American jazz musicians
- Jazz musicians--Portraits.
- University of Chicago. Chicago Jazz Archive

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

Fliers concerning the Velvet Lounge, circa 1990-2010

Box 2

Folder 1

Newspaper articles concerning the Velvet Lounge and Fred Anderson, 1980-2005

Box 2

Folder 2

Mounted newspaper article about Velvet Jam Band, 1995

Box 3

Folder 1

Posters concerning the Velvet Lounge and Fred Anderson, 1981-2006

Box 3

Folder 2

Large mounted photograph of two jazz players, undated

Box 4

Folder 1

Posters concerning the Velvet Lounge and Fred Anderson, circa 2000

Box 5

Folder 1

Posters concerning other Chicago jazz players and venues, circa 1990-2007

Box 6

Signed drumhead, undated

Box 7

Lampshades, undated