

**W.O. SMITH (1917-1991)**

4 audio cassette tapes (TCA-0088A/D)

Interviewer: Bruce Nemerov, audio archivist, Center for Popular Music, Middle Tennessee State University.

W.O. Smith was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1917 and learned music in orchestras in the public schools of Philadelphia. After graduation he joined a local jazz band which included Dizzy Gillespie.

Smith later won a scholarship to N.Y.U. and while a student there (1937-1942) he played string bass in several New York jazz bands. During World War II he served with a colored army band stationed in Arizona. Following the war he returned to school in New York and resumed his career in local clubs.

Smith also recorded with a number of prominent jazz artists and is perhaps best known for his work on Coleman Hawkins' "Body and Soul" recorded ca. 1939.

In 1952 he moved to Nashville where he became a member of the music faculty at Tennessee State University. He has retired from the T.S.U. faculty in 1982 but continued to work from his office in the W.O. Smith School of Music, which provides music lessons for low-income children at a nominal cost.

Smith was interviewed by Center audio specialist Bruce Nemerov in August 1989. During the interview Smith talked about this musical education, both academic and from other players; various bands and groups with which he played in New York in the 1930s; recording "Body and Soul" with Coleman Hawkins; the influence of church music and classical music on jazz; his army service; differences between music of and treatment of black and white bands; his relationship with Bessie Smith to whom his father was married; his career as an arranger and the techniques thereof; ethnomusicology and African music; his work with the Nashville Symphony; and his outstanding students.