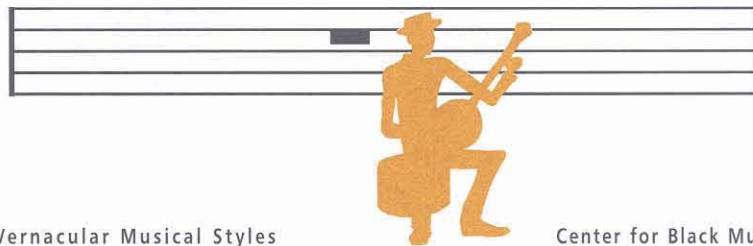


# STOP-TIME!



Spring 2000 Tracing U.S. Black Vernacular Musical Styles

Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College Chicago

Chicago musician, collector, and educator Charles E. Walton has worn many hats during his long career. Many knew him as the house-band drummer of Von Freeman's long-running South Side jam session at Club Enterprise on 75th Street or, perhaps, as a member of the Johnny Pate Trio. Others have experienced his educational philosophies during his tenure as a professor at Malcolm X College, a local junior college. And within the small circle of black music bibliophiles in the city, Walton is known as a collector of rare black music memorabilia. These experiences have given Walton a singular perspective of Chicago's black music history of the last fifty years. At age seventy-five, he shows little sign that his passion for music is abating.

Raised in what was known as Bronzeville, a large African-American community on Chicago's South Side, Walton heard the popular musical styles of the day. However, his musical career did not begin in earnest until 1945 when he entered Chicago's Roosevelt

University to pursue a music degree in voice. While studying at Roosevelt, Walton began gigging with small bands around town and became fascinated with the drums. He soon invested in his first drum set. After brief tenures at Kentucky State College and Maryland State University in pursuit of a degree in music education—a switch from his voice major—Walton returned to Chicago because he decided that the freelance work that



The Johnny Pate Trio ca. 1950. Top to bottom: Charles Walton, Johnny Pate, Lionel Bright. Photograph courtesy of the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

## Local Musician Spotlight Charles Walton

BY MONICA MCPHERSON

Walton is known as a collector of rare black music memorabilia.

was available to him in Kentucky and Maryland would not adequately support the lifestyle he desired.

In 1949, in an attempt to become a more “responsible” man, he dropped out of school and landed a regular job. But his musical interests were too great to completely abandon his dream of a music career. By day, he worked for the Board of Health, and, by night, he freelanced, playing with an array of musicians—a veritable who’s who of the Chicago music scene.

Eventually he realized that the “responsible adult” in him was too much in love with music to settle for anything less than his full commitment to music. Like many musicians before him, Walton decided to “try New York,” and in 1957, he moved to New York City.

But the Big Apple's crowded streets and fast-paced lifestyle did not appeal to Walton, and he soon returned to Chicago to finish his college degree. He graduated from Roosevelt University with a degree in music education and soon began graduate study. At the same time, he worked as the director of a community music foundation that still exists today. By 1970, Walton had established a career as a professor at Malcolm X College. There he taught music theory and composition for nineteen years. His unique and quite varied perspectives, gained from his experience as a practicing musician, served him and his students well.

Today, the energetic Walton is concentrating on a project he calls “Bronzeville,” a collection of interviews and photographs of Chicago's African-American music community. It features numerous musicians, particularly Walton's contemporaries. Walton says that he is attempting to capture the spirit of the 1940s and 1950s when Bronzeville was “happening.” This kind of work is invaluable as more and more of these musicians pass away,

(continued on page 2)













