

# **RUSSELL ATKINS COLLECTION**

Material is still being added to this collection.

**Processed by:  
Alexandra Bernet**

**July 2002**

*Atlanta University Center  
Robert W. Woodruff Library  
Archives and Special Collections*

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## SCOPE NOTE

Russell Atkins (b. 1926) is a poet, composer, editor and teacher in Cleveland, Ohio. He also served as a consultant to, and on panels for, many creative agencies in the Cleveland area. He ran and participated in many writers workshops and collaborated with poets and musicians on a variety of his works. Some notable collaborators include composer Hale Smith and poet Langston Hughes. Atkins founded the Free Lance Press in 1950 and served as editor and as a contributor throughout its 30 year history. *Free Lance* was a small press magazine for poetry and prose committed to publishing emerging African American poets.

This collection gives a glimpse into Atkins's life and work. The collection spans from 1935 until the late 1970s. The bulk of the items date in the 1950s to 1970s. The focus of the collection is correspondence related to the Free Lance Press and writings by Atkins. The items written by Atkins contain both typescripts and published materials. Included are anthologies where his works were published and printing paste-ups. Handwritten corrections are on some of these items. Also included are some literary writings by others. Of interest are articles about Atkins that address information about his poetry readings. A few items from his childhood make up the personal ephemera series.

## COLLECTION DESCRIPTION SHEET

Collection title: Russell Atkins Collection

Size: 2 linear feet (5 boxes)

Formats: Paper, photographs, bound volumes

Subject headings: Atkins, Russell  
Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967  
Jordan, Casper LeRoy  
Jordan, Norman  
Free Lance Press  
African American poets  
American poetry--African American authors  
Experimental poetry, American  
Poetry--Black authors  
Poetry, Modern--20th century  
Poets, American --20th century  
Poets, American --Ohio --Cleveland

Related Collections: Hoyt William Fuller Collection  
*Free Lance*, Closed Reading Room, various issues Call No. AP 270 .F875  
Vivian Harsh Collection, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, Ill.

## RUSSELL ATKINS BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

- 1926 February 25      Born in Cleveland, Ohio to Perry Kelly and Mamie Belle Atkins
- 1944                      Attend the Cleveland School of Art on scholarship
- 1944-1945              Attended Cleveland Institute of Music
- 1950-1979              Became founder and editor of *Free Lance Magazine*
- 1953-1954              Affiliated with the Iowa University Workshop for Writers
- 1956                      Created the music theory entitled *The Theory of Psychovisual Composition* at the Darmstadt Festival of Avant Garde Music in Germany, and was introduced by the composer Stefan Wolfe
- 1957-1960              Was the publicity manager and assistant to the director of the Sutphen School of Music, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1963-1965              Lectured for the Poets' Alliance, an organization in Cleveland, Ohio
- 1968                      Lectured and read at the Cleveland Summer Arts Festival
- 1972-1973              Consultant to the Cleveland Board of Education
- 1972-1986              Creative writing instructor at Karamu House, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1973                      Writer in residence at Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1976                      Honorary doctorate awarded from Cleveland State University
- 1978                      Received supporting grant for creative works from the Ohio Arts Council
- 1988                      Participated in the Artists in Education Program with the Cleveland Board of Education

REFERENCES FOR BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Russell Atkins Vertical File, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center

High, Ronald Henry. (1985). *Afro-American Poets Since 1955, Dictionary of Literary Biography*. (v. 41, pp. 24-31). Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research Group.

*Who's Who Among African Americans*. (2001). Atkins, Russell. (p. 45). Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research Group.

Atkins, Russell. (1974). *Contemporary Authors*. (v. 45-48, p. 27). New York: Gale Research Group.

## **SERIES DESCRIPTIONS**

### **Series 1 Correspondence**

Box 1 This series consists mainly of correspondence to Russell Atkins. It also contains correspondence from persons affiliated with Free Lance Press, such as Casper Jordan, Helen Collins and Adelaide Simon. The dates span from 1945 until 1977, but the bulk of the correspondence is in the 1950s and 1960s. The correspondence focuses on business dealings with writers and other poets and events such as poetry readings and literary performances. Notable correspondents include poets Langston Hughes and Dudley Randall. Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by sender.

### **Series 2 Writings about Atkins**

Box 2 This series contains items written about Atkins in various journals. It consists of reviews of his poetry, brief news articles about Atkins, and notices of poetry readings and events where he read. Writings about Atkins are arranged chronologically.

### **Series 3 Writings by Atkins**

Box 3 This series is comprised of finished and draft copies of Atkins's essays and poetry. There are typescripts, book paste-ups, and final works in published anthologies and poetry journals. Writings by Atkins are arranged chronologically.

### **Series 4 Writings by Others**

Box 4 This series contains publications that include writings by others, many of whom were personal associates of Atkins. Most of these writings are published poems and other items published in small press journals. Notable are the independent publication that include such as poems by d.a. levy and other experimental poets. Each publication includes writings by several authors. This series is arranged alphabetically by publication title.

**Series 5      Organizational Affiliations**

Box 5      This series is comprised of items that are from two organizations that Atkins was active in, the Free Lance Press and Ramakha. The Free Lance Press materials are ledgers of minutes, accounting and membership information, news clippings about Free Lance Press and typescripts of some of its publications. Ramakha was a space for arts education and performances. Items about Ramakha consist of financial and incorporation papers, and information about setting up a benefit, entitled One Night Affair, that was held at Cuyahoga Community College in 1972.

**Series 6      Personal ephemera**

Box 5      This series contains items from Atkins's youth, consisting of his 10<sup>th</sup> grade report card, a book given to him as a gift from his teacher, a graduation certificate from primary school and a musical composition sheet.

**Series 7      Photographs**

Box 5      This series has four black and white photographs of Russell Atkins and others at the Karamu House, Cleveland, Ohio, in September, 1975.

**FRAGILE ITEMS - DO NOT CIRCULATE**

Box 6      Due to the age and condition of many of the materials in the collection, preservation photocopies have been made for research use. In most cases, the originals have been placed in Mylar and are filed with the photocopies. The most fragile items have been removed and restricted. In such instances only the photocopies are available for research use. In addition to the fragile items, some oversized items have also been removed from the collection, and photocopies of these materials are interfiled in the collection.

## CONTAINER LIST

### Series 1. CORRESPONDENCE

Box	Folder	
		<b>Russell Atkins</b>
1	1	Ames, Elizabeth, 1956
	2	Bontemps, Arna, 1962
	3	Boros, Ethel, [n.d.]
	4	Bowen, Robert T., 1971
	5	Breman, Paul, 1962 - 1971
	6	Cheetwood, Donna, 1967
	7	Collins, Helen, 1945 - 1954
	8	[Corman, W.], 1952
	9	[Curry, Andrew], [n.d.]
	10	Edins, Walter, 1954
	11	Evans, Cecilia, 1972
	12	Evans, Shirlene, 1975
	13	Farrar, Straus and Young, Inc., 1951
	14	Franke, Christopher, 1969
	15	Gabel, John, 1976
	16	Gaffney, Floyd, 1967
	17	Gillespie, Chester K., 1969
	18	Griffith, E.V., 1976 and [n.d.]
	19	Harris, Jewel H., 1973
	20	Hill, Mozell C., 1957
	21	Hughes, Langston, 1946 - 1962
	22	Jaffin, David, 1970
	23	Jahn, Janheinz, 1954 - 1961
	24	Jefferson, Annetta, 1969 - 1970
	25	Kelley, Florence Josephine, [1957] - 1961
	26	Laughlin, James, 1970
	27	Leigh, Ronald, 1970
	28	Levinthal, Sonia, 1969
	29	[Lewis], Diane, 1977
	30	Lopous, Mona J., 1971
	31	Luton, Michael C., 1972
	32	McGovern, Robert, 1972
	33	Merims, Arthur, 1976
	34	Merrill, Frank R., 1975
	35	Mitchell, Mildred, 1976
	36	Moore, M., 1957 (envelope only)
	37	Morris, Richard, 1968
	38	<i>The Music Review</i> , [n.d.]

Box	Folder	
1	39	Ornstein, Bob, 1970
	40	<i>Playboy Magazine</i> , 1973
	41	Randall, Dudley, 1968 - 1973
	42	Raphael, Maryanne, 1965
	43	Reisman, Del, 1956
	44	Rendar, Annette, 1969
	45	Rivers, Conrad, 1962
	46	Robson, William J., 1971
	47	Sachs, Benjamin M., 1966 - 1968
	48	<i>Saturday Review</i> , [1957]
	49	Shaw, O'Wendell, 1962
	50	Shockley, Ann Allen, 1973
	51	Smith, Alsbrooks Jr., 1963 - 1964
	52	Smith, Hale, 1958
	53	[Sollid, John], 1971
	54	Stahl, Jayne Lyn, 1969 - 1971
	55	Storey, Juanita C., 1971
	56	Taylor, Margaret, 1972
	57	Thornburg, Patricia, 1963
	58	Tyler, Parker, 1946
	59	Waetjen, Walter B., 1976
	60	Walton, David A., 1967
	61	Winn, O. Howard, 1971
	62	[Cy], 1971
	63	____, Helen, 1962

### Helen Collins

Box	Folder	
1	64	Augustus, Beatrice, 1953
	65	Frye, Burton, 1952
	66	Grutzmachen, Harold M., Jr., 1957
	67	Head, Mrs. Depew, [195-]
	68	Jordan, Casper, 1952 and [n.d.]
	69	May, James B., 1955 - 1956
	70	Prescott, Katherine, 1957
	71	[Silburger], Don, 1957

### **Mrs. Dobbs**

Box	Folder	
1	72	[McLenore, Emma], 1952

### **Casper Jordan**

Box	Folder	
1	73	Augustus, Mrs., 1952
	74	Branson, Branley Allan, 1969 - 1970
	75	Cheetwood, Donna, 1969
	76	Grigsby, Lucy C., 1972
	77	Hughes, Langston, 1961
	78	Jahn, Janheinz, 1969
	79	Kass, Donald, 1969
	80	Mallinson, Judith, [n.d.]
	81	Marvin, Walter Rumsey, 1963
	82	Porter, Dorothy, 1952
	83	Uberman, Leonard, 1970

### **Norman Jordan**

Box	Folder	
1	84	Baraka, Imamu Amiri, 1972
	85	Randall, Dudley, 1972
	86	Rodgers, Carolyn M., 1972
	87	Zitch, Beryl, 1972

### **Adelaide Simon**

Box	Folder	
1	88	Butcher, Philip, 1956
	89	Flory, Raymond, [n.d.]
	90	Ohannessian, Miss., 1956
	91	White, Morton B., 1959

## Series 2. WRITINGS ABOUT ATKINS

Box	Folder	
2	1	<i>Call and Post</i> , 1950
	2	<i>Phylon</i> , "A Colloquy", 1950
	3	<i>Nite Shift</i> , "Verse Writers Convene", v.16 no. 9, 1963 April 22
	4	The Tiff Studio, 1963 May 12
	5	<i>Saturday Review</i> , "Ten from Cleveland", 1964 November 28
	6	<i>The Plain Dealer</i> , "Cleveland's Poetry Surge", 1965 June 13
	7	A Cleveland Sampler, Poetry, 1967 February 10
	8	<i>A Tribute to Jim Lowell</i> , 1967 June 23
	9	<i>Ohio Poetry Society Bulletin</i> , v.68-69 no. 16, 1968 February
	10	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i> , [advertisement], 1968 April 25
	11	Moonstones, Magic Number, [advertisement], [1968]
	12	<i>Twentieth Century Music</i> by H.H. Stuckenschmidt, 1969
	13	<i>Broadside News</i> , no. 3, 1970 January
	14	<i>Broadside News</i> , no.6, 1970 August
	15	<i>Eusi Sikukuu (Black Festival 2)</i> , 1971 May 18
	16	Karamu House, 1971 October 25
	17	<i>The Vindicator</i> , [advertisement], 1971 October 26
	18	<i>Directory of Small Press Editors</i> , 1971
	19	Fine Arts and lectures at the Cleveland State University, [1971]
	20	<i>Publisher's Weekly</i> , 1972 January 3
	21	<i>Forerunners: Black Poets in America #2</i> , 1972 May 20
	22	Cleveland Public Schools, "Contemporary Black Writers", 1972 December 6
	23	The Ohio Poets' Association, <i>The Voice and the Word</i> , VII, 1972
	24	<i>The Pride and Beauty of Blackness</i> , 1973 February 9
	25	The Voice and the Word Poetry Festival, 1973 May 5
	26	The One World Experimental Theatre Workshop, 1973 August
	27	The Ohio Poets' Association, <i>The Voice and the Word</i> , VIII, 1973
	28	Cuyahoga Writers' Workshop, Cleveland, Ohio, 1974 August
	29	<i>Viewpoint</i> , 1974 Fall
	30	<i>The Karamu News</i> , v.4 no. 1, 1975 Spring/Summer
	31	Cuyahoga Writers' Workshop, Cleveland, Ohio, 1975 August
	32	<i>Model City News</i> , "Black Talent", 1975 August
	33	<i>Poetry Forum</i> , 1976 January 17
	34	Cleveland State University, Commencement Program, 1976 [May]
	35	Ohio Arts Council, <i>Annual Report</i> , 1976
	36	<i>Poetry in Transit</i> , 1976
	37	<i>Poetry Forum</i> , 1977 January 8
	38	<i>The Plain Dealer</i> , "50 of Ohio's most important people", 1978 April 2

Box	Folder	
2	39	[PLGC], 1978 May 14
	40	Booksellers & Epilogue, [1978] May

### Undated

Box	Folder	
2	41	Benefit for Windameer Guild, ___ January 24
	42	Paul Breman limited, [catalogues]
	43	___, "Cleveland Poet Atkins to Speak at FC Tuesday"
	44	___, "Education Radio Hosts Artists"
	45	Fine Arts and lectures at Fenn College, ___ April 26
	46	___, "Jazz Poetry Relationship Up for Debate"
	47	"Langston Hughes Scans Folkways"
	48	<i>Young Students of Modern Arts</i>

### Series 3. WRITINGS BY ATKINS

Box	Folder	
3	1	<i>The Inertia Behind Psychic Content in a Psychovisual Perspective for "Musical" Composition</i> , 1958, typescript with corrections
	2	"Elegy", <i>In Memoriam - Beryl Rubinstein</i> composed by Hale Smith, 1959
	3	"On Seeing Cynthia Again", <i>The Galley Sail Review</i> , no. 5, 1959/1960 Winter
	4	"Editorial Poem on an Incidents of Effects Far-reaching", 1962
	5	<i>The Free Lance</i> , Index 1-13, [1963], printing paste-up
	6	<i>The Nail</i> , 1963, printing paste-up
	7	"Not Even Rape", "Birthdate", <i>Input</i> , v. 1 no. 4, 1964 December
	8	"Lake in a Storm", <i>Fine Arts, a Weekly Guide</i> , v. 11 no. 571, 1965 May 16
	9	"Second Movement: Beethoven", "Rehabilitation Bldg. Entrance: Four O'Clock", <i>Podium</i> , v.1 no. 1, 1965 July
	10	"Lakefront, Cleveland", <i>465 An Anthology of Cleveland Poets</i> , 1966
	11	"Langston Hughes and the Avant-Garde", [1967]
	12	<i>Podium</i> , v.1 no. 4, 1967, (book reviews)
	13	<i>Objects for Piano</i> , 1969
	14	<i>Maleficium</i> , Free Lance Press, 1971
	15	<i>Maleficium</i> , Free Lance Press, 1971, printing paste-up
	16	"Night and a Distant Church", "Achievement", <i>The Spring 1973 Oswego Poetry Festival</i> , 1973 Spring

Box	Folder	
3	17	“Abstractive”, <i>Everyman</i> , published by Cuyahoga Community College, 1973
	18	<i>Poetry Concert II</i> , 1974 May 25, (numerous poems)
	19	<i>Cleveland Oreo</i> , <i>First Voices in a Series</i> by Russell Atkins, Michael Gallagher, Akki Jomo Onyango, 1974
	20	“Trainyard at Night”, <i>A Poetry Ritual for Grammar Schools</i> by Robert McGovern, 1974
	21	“Lamps Re-Lighted”, “Irritable Song”, <i>Ju-Ju: Research Papers in Afro-American Studies</i> , 1975 Spring
	22	“Where There’s Water”, “Inner-City Lullaby”, <i>Poetry Now</i> , v.2 no. 1, 1975
	23	“Weekend Murder”, <i>Fornication</i> (poster), [1977]
	24	<i>Poet’s League of Greater Cleveland</i> , v. 4 no. 2, 1978 May 5, reviews
		<b>Undated</b>
	25	“Here in the”, <i>Other Men’s Flowers</i>

#### Series 4. WRITINGS BY OTHERS

Box	Folder	
4	1	<i>Black America</i> , 1964 Fall
	2	<i>The Black Arts</i> , v.1 no. 2, 1968 Spring
	3	<i>Black Ascensions</i> , v.1 no. 3 and 1971 Feb.
	4	<i>The Buddhist Oracle</i> , 1968 Nov.
	5	<i>Coercion</i> , [n.d.]
	6	<i>The Crusader</i> , v.4 no. 8, 1963 May, v.5 no. 4, 1964 May/June, v.6 no. 2, 1964 Oct.
	7	[Free Mae Mallory], 1963 May through 1965
	8	<i>Grand Jury</i> , 1967 Jan. 6
	9	<i>Kauri</i> , no. 4, 1964 Aug./Sep., no. 6, 1965 Jan./Feb., no. 15, 1966 July/Aug.
	10	<i>Ohio Poetry Review</i> , v. 1 no. 2, 1959 Winter
	11	<i>The Tibetan Stroboscope</i> by d.a. levy, 1968
	12	<i>Vibration</i> , no. 6, 1969 June 21
	13	<i>The Voice of O.I.C.</i> , v.1 no. 1, 1967 Oct.

## Series 5. GROUP AFFILIATIONS

Box	Folder	Free Lance Press
5	1	Minutes of the Poetry section of the Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop, 1950-1953
	2	Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop Membership List, 1952-1955
	3	Double entry ledger with membership dues information, 1952
	4	Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop, Subscription ledger book, 1953-1959
	5	Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop, Subscription ledger book, 1953-1959, (Items placed between pages in ledger book)
	6	Sterling Single entry ledger, membership and various group information, 1953-1961
	7	Typescript of an issue of <i>Free Lance</i> with corrections and notations, [195- ]
	8	Financial Papers
	9	Various items related to Free Lance Press

### Ramakha

10	[One Night Affair], 1972
11	Financial papers, 1972

## Series 6. PERSONAL EPHEMERA

Box	Folder	
5	12	Certificate of Promotion (from Primary school), 1935 October 13, St. James A.M.E. Church, Cleveland, Ohio
	13	<i>Just Because of You</i> by W.D. Nesbit, 1935, gift from teacher
	14	Musical Composition Sheet, [n.d.]
	15	Report Card, 1940-1941, Spring Semester

## Series 7. PHOTOGRAPHS

Box	Folder	
5	16	Atkins, Russell and others (4), 1975, Karamu House, Cleveland, Ohio

## FRAGILE ITEMS

### Box 6

Box	Folder	
2	26	The One World Experimental Theatre Workshop, 1973 August
2	30	<i>The Karamu News</i> , v.4 no. 1, 1975 Spring/Summer
3	22	“Where There’s Water”, “Inner-City Lullaby”, <i>Poetry Now</i> , v.2 no. 1, 1975
3	23	“Weekend Murder”, <i>Fornication</i> (poster), [1977]
3	25	“Here in the”, <i>Other Men’s Flowers</i>
4	1	<i>Black America</i> , 1964 Fall
4	4	Free Lance Poets and Prose Workshop, Subscription ledger book, 1953-1959
4	9	<i>Kauri</i> , no. 6, 1965 Jan./Feb., no. 15, 1966 July/Aug.
4	11	<i>The Tibetan Stroboscope</i> by d.a. levy, 1968