

# Commonwealth Arts Festival:

## An Inventory of Its Records at the Harry Ransom Center

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### Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Commonwealth Arts Festival (1965: London, England)
- Title:** Commonwealth Arts Festival Records
- Dates:** 1964-1965
- Extent:** 6 document boxes (2.52 linear feet), 2 oversize folders (osf), 1 galley file (gf)
- Abstract:** The Commonwealth Arts Festival Records consist of materials from the Verse and Voice program of poetry readings staged at London's Royal Court Theatre from September 20 to October 2, 1965. Scripts, notes, and correspondence document festival planning and performances. The collection also contains correspondence and poems from a variety of writers from Commonwealth countries.
- Call Number:** Manuscript Collection MS-00891
- Language:** English
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**Administrative Information**

**Preferred Citation** Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Commonwealth Arts Festival Records (Manuscript Collection MS-00891).

**Acquisition:** Purchase, 1968 (68-05-123-P)

**Processed by:** Ellen Cunningham, 1985; Ancelyn Krivak, 2019

**Repository:** [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)

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## Historical Sketch

The Commonwealth Arts Festival was a series of performances and exhibitions in celebration of the cultural contributions of artists, performers, and writers from the British Commonwealth nations. Multiple venues in London, Cardiff, Glasgow, and Liverpool hosted events from September 16 to October 2, 1965. The festival encompassed performances of music and dance, theatrical productions, exhibits of artworks and textiles, film screenings, and poetry readings. Approximately 250 individuals from around 20 Commonwealth countries traveled to Great Britain to take part in the festival. The Royal Albert Hall, Southbank Centre, Royal Academy, Royal Court Theatre, the Design Centre, and the Commonwealth Institute were among the many venues for the festival's events; free lunchtime performances were staged outdoors in London's Trafalgar Square.

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## Sources:

In addition to materials within the collection, the following source was used:

Hunter, Ian. "The Commonwealth Arts Festival." *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts* 113, no. 5108 (July 1965): 605-611. JSTOR.

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## Scope and Contents

The Commonwealth Arts Festival Records primarily consist of materials from the Verse and Voice program of poetry readings staged at London's Royal Court Theatre from September 20 to October 2, 1965. Scripts, correspondence, notes, and texts of poems considered for inclusion document the performances, which were presented as two series, Empire into Commonwealth, from September 20-25 and Commonwealth Poetry Today, from September 26-October 2. Drafts and proofs of the Verse and Voice program, publicity materials, correspondence between festival administrators and participants, and other planning documents reveal the work behind the scenes to organize and promote the Verse and Voice events. Other materials document the Leeds Conference on Commonwealth Literature held in September 1964 and Commonwealth Arts Festival impresario Sir Ian Hunter's 1964 tour of the Commonwealth countries. With the exception of a draft program and schedule that lists all Festival events, the records do not contain documentation of the Festival's music, dance, and theater performances or its art and film exhibitions.

The collection is divided in two series: Series I. Leeds Conference on Commonwealth Literature, 9-12 September 1964 and Series II. Verse and Voice: A Festival of Poetry, Poems and Ballads of the Commonwealth at the Royal Court Theatre, 1965. Series I contains schedules, conference papers, notes, and correspondence from 1964's Leeds Conference on Commonwealth Literature, the first international conference on Commonwealth literature. Also in this series are copies of country reports submitted by Commonwealth Arts Festival impresario Sir Ian Hunter during his 1964 tour of the Commonwealth countries.

Series II contains the bulk of the collection's records and is organized in three subseries. Subseries A. Empire into Commonwealth, 20-25 September 1965 contains scripts, music manuscripts, correspondence, notes, typescripts of poems, and other materials documenting six successive nights of poetry performances at the Royal Court Theatre. Subseries B. Commonwealth Poetry Today, 26 September-2 October 1965 contains scripts, correspondence, notes, and typescripts of poems for seven nights of performances, as well as materials related to a screening of British and Australian television films, *Poets in Vision*, and a special event, *Poets Debating*.

Subseries C. Other Verse and Voice Records, 1964-1965 consists of general correspondence related to the Verse and Voice series and poetry events in Cardiff and Liverpool, drafts and proofs of the Verse and Voice souvenir program, publicity materials, contracts, cost estimates, and schedules. In this subseries and others, the original order of materials is retained; original folder titles are transcribed in the container list and indicated by single quotes.

All correspondence in the collection is indexed at the end of this finding aid. The collection contains correspondence and typescripts of poems by a variety of Commonwealth authors, including African writers I. K. Hoh, Christopher Okigbo, Lenrie Peters, and Wole Soyinka; Caribbean poets John Figueroa, George Lamming, Vivian Virtue, and Derek Walcott; and South Asian writers Nissim Ezekiel, Zulfikar Ghose, and Dom Moraes. Also represented are Australian and New Zealand poets such as Fleur Adcock, Allen Curnow, Basil Dowling, A. D. Hope, Randolph Stow, and C. K. Stead, and Canadian authors including Earle Birney and David Wevill. Other correspondents include BBC Radio producer Douglas Cleverdon, director of the Verse and Voice poetry productions; Eric Walter White, secretary of the Poetry Book Society and publisher of the Verse and Voice souvenir program; Anthony Besch, arts administrator of the festival; festival impresario Sir Ian Hunter; Transcription Centre director Denis Duerden; and British poets such as John Betjeman, C. Day Lewis, and Stevie Smith.

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## Related Material

The British National Archives holds papers related to the Commonwealth Arts Festival in various collections at the National Archives, Kew and the London Metropolitan Archives.

The Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington holds a collection of the papers of Verse and Voice producer David Cleverdon, including materials related to the Commonwealth Arts Festival.

The Ransom Center holds additional materials related to the Commonwealth Arts Festival and festival organizers and participants in several other collections, including the Transcription Centre Records, Eric Walter White Papers, Zulfikar Ghose Papers, Christopher Okigbo Papers, Dom Moraes Collection, and John Betjeman Collection.

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## Index Terms

### People

Cleverdon, Douglas.

White, Eric Walter, 1905-1985.

### Organizations

Commonwealth Arts Festival (1965: London, England).

Poetry Book Society.

### Subjects

African poetry (English).

Art festivals.

Australian poetry.

Canadian poetry.

Caribbean poetry (English).

Commonwealth poetry (English).

Ghanaian poetry (English).

India--Poetry.

Jamaican poetry.

New Zealand poetry.

Nigerian poetry (English).

Poetry reading.

Poets, Australian.

Poets, Canadian.

Poets, Commonwealth.

Poets, Ghanaian.

Poets, New Zealand.

Poets, Nigerian.

**Document Types**

Blueprints.

Contracts.

Correspondence.

Galley proofs.

Notes.

Scripts.

Serials (publications).

Sheet music.

Typescripts.

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**Series I. Leeds Conference on Commonwealth Literature, 9-12 September, 1964**

Conference schedule, country reports from Sir Ian Hunter's Commonwealth tour, short papers delivered at conference, list of attendees [?], program notes, and correspondence, 1964-1965

**Container**  
1.1-2

## Series II. Verse and Voice: A Festival of Poetry, Poems and Ballads of the Commonwealth at the Royal Court Theatre, 1965

### Subseries A. Empire into Commonwealth, 20-25 September 1965

#### From the Island of Britain

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1.3

Correspondence, music manuscripts, list of artists, running order for program, notes and printed material, 1965 **Container**  
1.4

#### The New World

Script. Directed by Garry O'Connor, 1965 **Container** 1.5

Introductions for program, list of artists, and notes, 1965 **Container** 1.6

#### The Antipodes

Script. Devised and presented by A. L. Lloyd, and correspondence, 1965 **Container**  
1.7

Music manuscripts, list of artists, running order for program, and notes, 1965 **Container**  
1.8

#### Africa

Script, Part I. Compiled by Douglas Cleverdon and directed by Garry O'Connor, 1965 **Container**  
1.9

Correspondence, notes, texts of poems for program, and Bibliography and Biography of Rhodesian Poets, 1965 **Container**  
1.10

#### The Enchantment of the Orient

Script. Compiled by Francis Watson, produced by Douglas Cleverdon, 1965 **Container**  
2.1

Correspondence and notes, 1965 **Container** 2.2

The Seven Seas script. Compiled and produced by A. L. Lloyd, with correspondence, and notes, 1965 **Container**  
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### Subseries B. Commonwealth Poetry Today, 26 September-2 October 1965

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