

Amazingrace, Records of, 1971-1978

Series 31/6/67

Box 1 (dropfront)

History

In the midst of the political upheaval of 1970, Northwestern University replaced the informal cafeteria in the bottom of Scott Hall with rows of vending machines. A group of students (Andrew Frances, Lindsay Davis, Dan Einbender, Amanda Killham, Jim "J.T." Thomas, Darcie Sanders, David Conant, Billy Graessle, Margot Myers, Lenny Karnel, Jeff Beamsley, Flawn Williams, Craig LaFollette) took over the now defunct kitchen, and began serving food healthier and cheaper than the vending machine fare. Accompanying the brown rice and tofu was music piped in through stereo systems, and the promise of a mellow atmosphere. The name Amazingrace was selected for the collective. Soon local folk music acts were performing before a packed house. At first the audience consisted mainly of students, but soon word of Amazingrace spread to the greater Evanston community.

In the fall of 1971, the Amazingrace group was asked by the University to leave Scott Hall to make way for offices. At this point the group's position on campus was ambiguous because most of the members of the collective were no longer Northwestern students. Although the argument was made that the non-student group should leave campus in to make way for an actual student group, a last minute reprieve allowed Amazingrace to stay on campus if it agreed to find a new abode, and to encourage student participation in its operation. Northwestern president Robert Strotz promised to help fund Amazingrace's plans to renovate a new space and improve the current technology if Amazingrace promised to use bouncers to prevent under age attendance and alcohol use.

The group moved from Scott Hall to the former ROTC quarters at Shanley Hall (2031 North Sheridan) in the spring of 1972. The larger accommodations allowed Amazingrace to continue its tradition of combining leftist ideas, mellow music, expression of feelings, and the best coffee house food on campus. By fall, 1973, the Amazingrace group enjoyed a reputation beyond the confines of the campus for hosting folk singers such as Steve Goodman, Jim Post and Ed Holstein, serving cheap food and providing its trademark ambiance. The twelve members of the collective had by that time either graduated from NU or dropped out, and had taken up residence in a house at the corner of Sherman and Colfax.

Then the city of Evanston cited Amazingrace in violation of zoning laws in that it was operating a commercial venture on land zoned for educational use. Northwestern administration refused to negotiate a change in the zoning law for fear that the university would lose its tax-exempt status. During this time the city also learned of the Amazingrace group's communal living arrangement, and charged that twelve people living in a house zoned for a maximum of three unrelated people violated a residential zoning law.

Over two thousand signatures were collected on a petition to save the coffeehouse as a vital element of the Evanston community. In November the city and Amazingrace came to an agreement that because Amazingrace was classified as a student organization it did not have the authority to change its own zoning status, and that the University was responsible for altering the zoning laws. Northwestern was given a December 6th deadline to decide whether or not Amazingrace could remain on campus. Amazingrace met with representatives from the University's Human Resources, Planning and Development, and University Relations departments. A student forum urged the university to allow Amazingrace's continued operation.

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Meanwhile, the city ordered the Amazingrace collective to vacate its living quarters on Colfax in December, 1973. The Amazingrace group called in an ACLU lawyer to urge the Evanston zoning board to expand the definition of "family." The city deferred its final decision pending a Supreme Court case concerning the fate of a similar cooperative in New York.

In January, 1974, the business portion of Amazingrace won its fight to stay on the Northwestern campus. The coffeehouse was slated to be under the jurisdiction of the Student Union. Coincidentally, the Amazingrace bookkeeper, David Conant ('72), had been appointed Assistant Director of Norris University Center. The collective made plans to expand services to include an after school drop-in, a day care center, meeting places for artists, and an *avant garde* theater. Shanley Hall was required to meet fire code specifications before Amazingrace could reopen and the day care center could begin to operate.

When in April, 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of New York State zoning ordinances, the decision was a blow to the Amazingrace collective. The members met again with the Evanston City government in hopes of changing the zoning ordinance's definition of "family," and urged Evanston to hold a public hearing on the matter. A technical snag was hit when the city allowed a religious commune, the Reba Place Covenant, to move into the same sort of zoning area with more than three unrelated people living under one roof.

In August 1974, the Zoning committee decided that one married couple living within a communal residence complied with zoning codes for the northeastern residential section of Evanston, thus saving the Reba Place community. The Amazingrace collective lacked the needed married couples, and was ordered to disperse. Five members left Evanston and moved to Eugene, Oregon, to open a club similar to Amazingrace.

At this time real-estate developer Ed Noonan began to renovate a building in south Evanston at Main and Chicago with the intention of opening a shopping complex. Amazingrace decided to move the coffeehouse to this location, while moving the remaining six members of the cooperative into an apartment 6 blocks away, on Crain Street. The move occurred in October 1974. While considerably larger, the Main Street space required extensive renovation. In the midst of this renovation, with beams and pipes still exposed, the Amazingrace reopened. The collective expanded its repertoire and began featuring non-folk bands and comedy acts. Since it had not yet passed health inspections, the Amazingrace did not cook food, but did allow vendors to set up booths inside the club that sold coffeehouse fare and health food. In order to meet their rent of over \$1,000 a month, Amazingrace raised its admission price from \$1.50 weekdays, \$2.50 weekends to \$2.50 weekdays, \$3.50 weekends. Despite these changes the club not only maintained but also increased its patronage.

In the move Amazingrace severed its remaining ties with Northwestern University. Amazingrace settled its debt with the Student Government, which had a claim to the stereo equipment their funds had paid for. Most of this stereo equipment had accompanied the Eugene group to the West Coast. The Amazingrace collective agreed to reimburse the Student Government for the equipment and also to forfeit any profits from the sale of property left in Shanley Hall.

During the next three years, Amazingrace was considered one of the best places to hear music in the Chicago area. Customers appreciated the mellow atmosphere, the relatively low admission price, and musical acts such as Corkey Seigel, Bonnie Koloc, Odetta, Ry Cooder, and Bryan Bowers. However, shifts in the cultural climate began to affect the hippie philosophy of

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the Amazingrace collective. Four more members left the collective. While the remaining members of the collective still placed importance on the music experience, focus had shifted in the general culture to the profitability of musical groups. Refusing to embrace the business ethos, the Amazingrace group was unable to maintain a profit margin. In 1978 the collective fell behind in its rent. The new owners of the Main Building, the real estate firm of Heil, Heil, Smart, and Golee, evicted Amazingrace. The two remaining members prepared for their last show in July. The show, featuring Jim Grace and Harry Waller, ended successfully with a singing of the spiritual "Amazing Grace." While the possibility of an eventual revival of Amazingrace was hinted at during this last show, it never materialized.

Description of the Records

Records consist of newspaper clippings and other items documenting the history of the Amazingrace Coffee House, and of posters advertising events and performances. Clippings and flyers, dating between 1971 and 1978, fill one folder and are arranged chronologically. The posters, with the bulk dating from 1973-74, are arranged chronologically (with the exception of one oversized poster from 1972 at the bottom of the box). Some posters announce one performer or group, while other posters list all upcoming events and performance for the month. Most of the posters are silkscreens on colored stock, featuring the bold graphic style of the era. The majority of the posters have been encapsulated in mylar by the Northwestern University Library Conservation Laboratory to protect them.

Provenance: The records of the Amazingrace Coffee House were transferred from the University Archives' General Files.

Restrictions: None.

Separations: A few duplicate clippings were discarded.

Processor: Jennifer Liebman, August, 2000. Revised February, 2002.

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CONTAINER LIST

Clippings and Flyers, 1971-1978

Posters

Year/Date

Performance

1971

October 8 II nd Smashed week, Captain Video presents only even Piranhas have
Scruples
December 12 Bill Quateman and Friends

1972

March 1 Mahavishnu Orchestra
April Calendar of events
April 16 Photography at Grace
April 25 Anthony Russo speaking on "The Truth on Trial: the Pentagon Papers
Case"
Monday night concert series: Bill Quateman with Davoid Spinozza and Kenny Ascher
May 15 Cody and his lost planet airmen
May 19 Summertime Blues: Luther Allison and band; Steve Goodman
May 29 Siegel Schwall Blues band
September Calendar of events
September 23 Blind Jim Brewer, Johnny Long
October 7 Jim Glover, Virginia Klemens
November 3-5 Bill Quateman
November 14 Ted Berrigan, Anslem Hollo
November 16 Philip Whalen
November 19, December 3 Fred Anderson Quartet
December 7, 8, 9 Gerry Grossman

1973

January Calendar of events [includes the following:]
Steve Goodman
Ed Holstein
Fred Anderson Jazz quartet
Blind Jim Brewer
Johnny Long
Luther Allison
Otis Bush Blues Band
Chuck Hollins
Dave Bromberg
Marko and Ranno

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<u>1973</u>	
February 2, 3, and 4	Robbie Basho
April 18	Cream; the Fairwell concert, A Robert Stigwood film
April 27-29	Pamela Polland, Jack Schechtman
May 12	The Incredible String Band with Batteaux
May 12	The Incredible String band
June 2 and 3	A Midsummer night's dream
July 20-22	Bob Gibson and Mississippi Flanagan
July- August-	Grace Flicks [movie schedule]
August 3-5	Glitter Rock review: Jim post, and Ed Holstein
August 10-12	Michael Goldberg Band, and David Gross
September 7, 8, 9	Pamela Polland, Redwood Landing
September 21-24	Mike Seeger, and Ginny Clemmens
Fall	Grace Flicks [movie schedule]
October-	Amazingrace presents Food lunches weekdays at noon
October 12-15	Jack Schechtman with pleasant street String Band
October 19-22	Jim Post
October 26-29	Biff Rose and David Pomerantz
November 1	The Grateful Dead
November Billings:	[Calendar of Events]
	9-12--Jim Bassett and Claudia Schmidt
	16-19--Bob Gibson, Larry Rand
	23-26--Vassar Clements, Ron Crick Band
	30-December 3--Odetta, National Recovery Act
November 2-5	Pamela Polland: Redwood Landing
November 9-12	John Bassette, and Claudia Schmidt
November 23-26	Vassar Clements, and Ron Crick
December 28-30	Sam Leopold
<u>1974</u>	
January 2-6	Tom Rapp, Skyfarmer
January 9	Bryan Bowers, and Claudia Schmidt
January 18-21	John Bassette, and Redwood landing
February 1-4	Patrick Sky, and Ron Crick Band
February 8-11	Vassar Clements, pleasant street String Band
February 11-15	Pamela Polland, and Ken Bloom (2x)
February 22-25	The Jefferson Schecht, Jack Schechtman, National recovery Act
March 15-18	Autoharp Wizard Bryan bowers, and Raleigh Powell
April 5-8	Bob Gibson, and Diana Marcovitz
April 12-15	Biff Rose, David MacKenzie

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<u>1974</u>	
April 26-29	John Bassette (2x)
May 3-6	Norman Blake, Tut Taylor, and Ron Crick
May 10-13	Jaime Brockett, Richard and Susan Thomas
May 17-20	Hamid Hamilton Camp and the Skymonters; Claudia Schmidt
May 31-June 3	Bonnie Koloc, Markow and Rand
June and 6	Ry Cooder, and Ken Bloom
June 7, 8, and 9	Wendy Waldman, and Ken Bloom
June 14-17	Ellen McIlwaine, and Sam Leopold
June 18, 19, and 20	John Hartford and the Bray Brothers with Pat burton
June 28-July 1	Spider John Koerner and Mark henley
July 4-8	Bryan Bowers
July 26-29	Hamid Hamilton Camp and the Skymonters; Diana Marcovitz
August 9-12	Norman Blake and Josh "Buck" Graves two of the worlds finest pickers
August 16-19	Redwood landing, and Deaf Evanston Slim
August 23-25	John Fahey and Ken Bloom
September 27	Poster and Candle Sale
October 4	Steve Goodman
October 11-14	Redwood Landing with Ken Bloom
November 14-18	Jim post and the Jim Schwall Band
November 29- December 1	Luther Allison and Corky Siegel(2x)
December 5- 9	Bonnie Koloc, and Severin Browne
December Announcements:	
12-14	Roy Buchanan
16-18	Asleep at the wheel
19-22	Odetta, Hamilton Camp, and True Brothers
26-30	Bryan Bowers, and the Country Gentlemen
December 12-14	Roy Buchanan; December 16 th -18 th - Asleep at the Wheel
December 19-22	Odetta, Hamilton Camp and the Skymonters (2x)
December 26-30	Bryan Bowers and the Country Gentlemen
<u>1975</u>	
January 9-13	Harvey Mandel and the Screaming Gypsy Brothers
March 7-9	Doug Carn, Streetdancer
<u>1977</u>	
January 21-24	Country Gentlemen, Steve Wade; January 28-29- McCoy Tyner; January 30-31 Lost Gonzo Band, Dave Mackenzie
May 20-22	The Persuasions, Caroline Peyton; May 27-30 Norman Blake, Peter Lang; June 3-4 John Hartford
September 28-29	Tom Paxton, Josh White, Jr.; September 30- Doc Watson, Dave Mackenzie; October 1-2- Jethro Burns