

Chet Baker Materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra
Guides to Special Collections in the Music Division of the Library of Congress



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Collection Summary

Title: Chet Baker Materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra

Span Dates: 1970-1989

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1987-1988)

Call No.: ML31.B25

Creator: Baker, Chet

Creator: Vavra, Diane, 1940-

Extent: 108 items

Extent: 2 boxes

Extent: 1.7 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English and French

Location: Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016570625>

Summary: Chet Baker was an American jazz trumpeter whose early success in the 1950s was due not only to his musical talents, but also to his model good looks. He rose to prominence as a member of baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan's quartet and later established himself as acclaimed vocalist during the 1950s. Baker began an on-again, off-again relationship with Diane Vavra in 1970 and was with her during the last years of his life. The collection contains correspondence, photographs, and other items related to his personal life and career.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Baker, Chet--Correspondence.

Baker, Chet--Friends and associates.

Baker, Chet.

Baker, Chet.

Vavra, Diane, 1940-

Vavra, Diane, 1940-

Weber, Bruce, 1946-

Subjects

Jazz musicians--United States--Biography.

Jazz musicians--United States--Correspondence.

Jazz musicians--United States--Portraits.

Form/Genre

Address books.

Autographs (Manuscripts)

Biographies.

Contracts.

Personal correspondence.

Photographs.

Portraits.

Promotional materials.

Provenance

Purchase, Diane Vavra, 2015.

Custodial History

Materials were collected by Diane Vavra and maintained in her possession until time of acquisition.

Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

Processing History

Pamela Murrell processed the Chet Baker Materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra and created a finding aid for the collection in October 2019. Morgen Stevens-Garmon coded the finding aid for EAD format in November 2019.

Other Repositories

A file of Chet Baker clippings is maintained at the Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco.

Related Material

Additional information on Baker may be found in the [Gerry Mulligan Collection](#) at the Library of Congress.

Copyright Status

Items from the Chet Baker Materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra are governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.) and other applicable international copyright laws.

Access and Restrictions

The Chet Baker Materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Music Division prior to visiting in order to determine whether the desired materials will be available at that time.

Certain restrictions to use or copying of materials may apply.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [item, date, container number], Chet Baker Materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1929, Dec. 23	Born Chesney Henry Baker in Yale, Oklahoma
1946	Signed into the U. S. Army by his mother and enlisted in the 298th Army Band.
1948	Enrolled in El Camino Junior College in Torrance, California, and joined the school band.
1950	After being arrested for cannabis, Baker chose to enlist in the Army over a jail sentence and was assigned to the Sixth Army Band at the Presidio in San Francisco
	Married Charlaine Souder (divorced 1956).
1951	Left the military to play in jazz clubs along the West Coast.

- 1952 Performed with Charlie "Bird" Parker at the Trade Winds nightclub in Inglewood, California. That evening's performance was recorded and released in 1989 as *Bird & Chet: Inglewood Jam (Live at the Trade Winds, 16 June 1952)*.
Joined Gerry Mulligan's quartet.
- 1953 June 12 Performance with tenor saxophonist Stan Getz recorded. It was eventually released in 1997 as *West Coast live*.
- 1954 Released debut vocal album, *Chet Baker sings*.
Down Beat magazine hailed Baker the nation's top trumpeter via the results of a readers' survey in which he bested jazz legends Louis Armstrong, Clifford Brown, Miles Davis, and Dizzy Gillespie.
- 1955 Voted best trumpeter in America second year in a row by *Down Beat* magazine.
- 1956 Married Halema Alli (divorced 1964).
- 1957 Son Chesney Aftab Baker is born.
- 1959 Sentenced to six months in jail at Rikers Island, New York, due to several previous arrests.
Released two months early for good behavior.
- 1960 Starred in Italian film, *Urlatori alla Sbarra (Howlers in the dock)*
Sentenced by Italian court to nineteen months in jail for drug-related charges. Baker ultimately served eight months.
- 1962 Deported from Germany to Switzerland due to past crimes of prescription forgery, narcotics violations, and theft.
Deported from Switzerland. Baker is denied entry into Italy and retreats to London.
Son Dean Albert Baker born to Carol Jackson.
- 1963 Starred in British-American film, *Stolen hours*.
- 1964 Arrested in Germany and deported to the United States.
Married Carol Jackson.
- 1965 Son Paul Baker born to Jackson.
- 1966 Daughter Melissa "Missy" Baker born to Jackson.
Drug altercation in San Francisco left Baker in so much pain that he had his upper teeth removed.
Over the next three years, he taught himself how to play while wearing dentures.
- 1970-1973 Began relationship with Diane Vavra.
- 1974 Recorded reunion concert with Gerry Mulligan at Carnegie Hall, later released on Epic Records.
- 1982 Resumed relationship with Vavra.
- 1983 Collaborated with English rock musician Elvis Costello on the UK Top 40 hit song, "Shipbuilding".
- 1986 Performed with Costello and Irish rock fusion singer Van Morrison at the world-renowned Ronnie Scotts' Jazz Club in London.
- 1987 Began work on autobiographical film, *Let's get lost*, which premiered in New York in March 1989.
- 1988, May 13 Died as a result of falling from hotel room window in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Scope and Content Note

The Chet Baker materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra consist of a small amount of letters, business and personal papers, and photographs dating from 1970 through the late 1980s. Fourteen manuscript love letters, all in Baker's hand and addressed to his long-time partner, Diane Vavra, comprise the Correspondence series. His musings about life on the road are dominated by confessions of love, requests for her presence, and apologies and inquiries about her fidelity. Evident throughout the documents are hints of Vavra's gradual withdrawal from Baker, whom she ultimately left as a result of his physical abuse and overindulgence in drugs.

Business and personal papers represent a small window into Baker's professional life and include promotional materials, address books, a royalty statement, a visa application, and a contract with documentary filmmaker Bruce Weber. The series also contains a suicidal message written on yellow legal paper. In the undated note, Baker confesses that he has attempted

to kill himself by ingesting "large quantities of cocain [sic] and heroin." Vavra's rejection is cited as the catalyst for his baneful decision, for without her, music was all he had left to "hang on to."

The Photographs comprise the largest amount of material in the collection. Of the 83 images, about two-thirds are black and white, with a majority of these being professional portraits of Baker. Many of the images depict him performing, while others feature him and Vavra in various cozy postures. Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden are the four primary locales represented within the series. Aside from Baker himself, other individuals most frequently portrayed are Vavra and musicians with whom he collaborated.

Organization of the Chet Baker Materials from the Papers of Diane Vavra

The Collection is organized in three series:

- [Correspondence, 1983-1986](#)
- [Business and personal papers, 1987-1989](#)
- [Photographs, 1970-1989](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1	<u>Correspondence, 1983-1986</u> 14 handwritten letters. Arranged chronologically by year.
BOX 1-2	<u>Business and Personal Papers, 1987-1989</u> Material connected to the professional and personal life of Chet Baker. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX 1-2	<u>Photographs, 1970-1989</u> Images of Chet Baker with Diane Vavra and others. Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1	Correspondence, 1983-1986 14 handwritten letters. Arranged chronologically by year.
BOX-FOLDER 1/1	Baker, Chet to Diane Vavra, 1983-1986 and undated
BOX 1-2	Business and Personal Papers, 1987-1989 Material connected to the professional and personal life of Chet Baker. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX-FOLDER 1/2	Address books, undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/3	Contract with Bruce Weber, undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/4-5, 2/1	Promotional materials <i>Chet's romance</i> , 1988 <i>Let's get lost</i> , 1988-1989 <i>New morning at night</i> , 1988
BOX-FOLDER 1/6	Royalty statement, 1987
BOX-FOLDER 1/7	Suicide note, undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/8	Visa application for Japan, 1987
BOX 1-2	Photographs, 1970-1989 Images of Chet Baker with Diane Vavra and others. Arranged alphabetically by subject.
BOX-FOLDER 1/9, 2/2	Baker, Chet, 1970-1984, 1988, and undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/10, 2/3	Baker with Diane Vavra 1984, 1987, and undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/11, 2/4	Baker with others, 1988 and undated
BOX-FOLDER 1/12	Vavra, Diane, 1989 and undated