

OBERLIN



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We had it coming, but jazz is going

By Howard Reich
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It's billed as the largest privately held jazz record collection in America, and it's heading out of Chicago. More than 100,000 jazz recordings tracing the history of the art form — from swing to the avant-garde — will be donated to Oberlin Conservatory of Music, in Oberlin, Ohio, by Chicagoans James and Susan Neumann. James Neumann, who graduated from Oberlin College in 1958 as a liberal arts major, began acquiring inexpensive jazz albums as a teenager, long before the LPs became collectors' items. He eventually amassed a collection of the complete recordings of Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and more, he says.

Why didn't the Neumanns donate the treasures to a Chicago institution? "I tried to," says James Neumann, "but I was rejected. ... A lot of organizations didn't have room for it." Because Oberlin Conservatory plans to open the \$22 million Phyllis Litoff Building for jazz studies in 2009, the school could accommodate the Neumanns' trove (which also includes posters, autographs and other jazz memorabilia). James Neumann places the value of the collection "in the neighborhood of \$500,000"; its complete recorded contents will be transferred to digital files.