

Jerry Wexler: Mr. "Rhythm & Blues"

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[Jerry Wexler](#), Class of 1946, passed away on August 15, 2008 at the age of 91. A native of New York, he entered K-State by chance when his mother selected the college while pouring over college descriptions in the mid 1930s. He came to Manhattan in 1935 but dropped out of college only to quit the school again when he returned the next year. No doubt his lack of success as a student was due in part to the numerous trips Wexler made to Kansas City where he got caught up in the city's jazz scene. After a stint in the military during WWII, Wexler returned to K-State as a more serious student. Wexler said the "university accepted him back" and he "worked hard and did very well, stayed out of pool rooms." He received a degree in journalism in 1946.

After graduating, Wexler landed a job with Billboard magazine reviewing records. It was during this time that he and others were attempting to come up with a new term for "race music." When he coined the phrase "rhythm and blues" it stuck as Wexler gained notoriety for integrating this style of music into the popular white culture.

In 1953, Wexler was asked to join Atlantic Records where he became a partner in the company. For over 20 years he was instrumental in building Atlantic into a major record label. Wexler signed and produced performers such as Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, The Coasters, and The Drifters, to name a few. Later, he was influential in advancing the careers of Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, and Dylan, who he helped win a Grammy in 1979. Others he worked with included Dire Straits, Carlos Santana, and Willie Nelson!

Wexler won numerous awards during his illustrious career including the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Blues Foundation in 1995, and the coveted Trustee Award at the Grammy Award ceremony in 1996. He was inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. K-State recognized Wexler's achievements by honoring him as an Alumni Fellow in 1996.

In 1986, Wexler honored K-State by donating a collection of approximately 2,000 recordings to the University. It contains albums he received from Atlantic as well as items from his own collection. The core of the collection consists of recordings from the mid-1960s into the 1980s and reflects Wexler's professional and personal interests. The K-State Department of Music and the K-State Libraries collaborated to receive the collection from Wexler; it is available for use in the Morse Department of Special Collections. Titles can be identified by conducting a keyword search in the K-State Libraries on-line catalog.

In 1993, Wexler published his autobiography, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music*.

One need not go any further than the K-State Libraries to learn more about K-Stater Jerry Wexler and his influence on America's music!

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Sources. "Jerry Wexler: The Steward of Rhythm and Blues." A&S. Spring, 1986; "Wexler Finds Success at KSU-And in Life." K-Stater. July, 1993; Vertical File-Jerry Wexler, University Archives.