

The New York Public Library
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
Music Division

Guide to the

Jessica Dragonette papers

1927-1973 (bulk 1927-1950)

JPB 13-02

Compiled by Susan Malsbury, February 2013

Summary

Creator: Dragonette, Jessica, 1900-1980

Title: Jessica Dragonette papers, 1927-1973 (bulk 1927-1950)

Size: 5.61 linear feet (17 boxes)

Source: Unknown

Abstract: Jessica Dragonette (c. 1905-1980) was a soprano who achieved popularity through her twenty two year career performing on radio and for her efforts to support troops during World War II. The Jessica Dragonette papers document Dragonette's long and successful career singing on the radio and in concert performances. The papers contain correspondence, legal contracts, press releases, programs, radio scripts, and scrapbooks.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying and photography will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Chief, Music Division, The New York Public Library.

Preferred citation: Jessica Dragonette papers, Music Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Collection was partially processed in the past. The majority of scrapbooks were removed from their original bindings due to deterioration.

Related collections

Jessica Dragonette papers, 1919-1982. University of Wyoming, The American Heritage Center

Jessica Dragonette papers, 1936-1967. Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library

Creator history

Jessica Dragonette (c. 1900-1980) was a soprano who achieved popularity through her twenty-two year career performing on radio, and for her efforts to support troops during World War II. Dragonette was born in Calcutta to Italian-American parents who both died shortly after returning to the United States. Dragonette was six years old at the time and was subsequently raised in various Roman Catholic Church institutions. She attended the Catholic High School in Philadelphia and then Georgian Court College in Lakewood, New Jersey, which was also a convent. Dragonette remained a devout Roman Catholic throughout her life and returned to Georgian Court College annually to perform.

While Dragonette was still in college, she began training under the renowned voice teacher Estelle Liebling in New York City. In 1924, Dragonette made her debut in the offstage role of angel in Max Reinhardt's *The Miracle*. She performed in two more Reinhardt productions, *The Student Prince* and *The Grand Street Follies*. In 1926, Dragonette appeared on the *Coca-Cola Hour*, radio's first original singing and acting serial, as Vivian (the Coca-Cola girl). The next year Dragonette started appearing on another popular show, the *Philco Radio Hour*. She performed weekly on the *Philco Radio Hour* from 1927 until 1930 when she left the program to star on the *Cities Service Concert Series*. In 1937, Dragonette became the star of the *The Palmolive Beauty Box*, but the show folded later that year. Dragonette had a dedicated fan base throughout her radio career; she was voted "Queen of the Radio" in a nation-wide *Radio Guide* contest in 1935 and "Radio Star of Stars" in 1938. Dragonette took a temporary leave from performing on radio full-time and began touring around the United States and Canada. In 1939, Dragonette sang the part of Princess Glory in the animated motion picture *Gulliver's Travels*. During World War II, Dragonette performed for troops and sold war bonds.

In 1947, Dragonette married businessman Nicholas Turner and retired from performing, though she occasionally sang at special events. In 1950, she recorded an album of religious songs called *Ave Maria*. Dragonette wrote an autobiography about her career and her Roman Catholic faith called *Faith is a Song* (1952), and a book on voice instruction called *Your Voice and You* (1966). Dragonette died March 18, 1980 in New York City, where she resided most of her life.

Scope and content note

The Jessica Dragonette papers document Dragonette's long and successful career in radio broadcasting and performing in concert. The papers contain correspondence, legal contracts, press releases, programs, radio scripts, and scrapbooks.

The correspondence was previously processed and came arranged in two groupings, a chronological run and an alphabetical run, and consists of holiday and greeting cards, and letters from family, friends, and fans. While the correspondence is mostly incoming, there is a small quantity of outgoing letters. The correspondence is primarily of a business nature and includes letters to and from Dragonette's sister Nadea Dragonette Loftus in her capacity as Dragonette's manager.

The scrapbooks are arranged in chronological order and represent the entirety of Dragonette's career. They contain correspondence, news clippings, photographs, and programs. In addition to her radio and concert appearances, the scrapbooks document her work during World War II entertaining the troops and selling war bonds; medals and honors she received; and her public appearances.

Dragonette's popularity is represented throughout the collection by fan letters, issues of the *Jessica Dragonette Fan Club* newsletter, and scrapbooks compiled by fans. The scripts are arranged in chronological order and include an almost complete run of scripts from the *Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre* radio show, from 1934 to 1936.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged alphabetically by record type.

Key terms

Subjects

Radio -- United States
Theater -- United States
Women singers

Places

New York (N.Y.)

Names

Catholic Church
Dragonette, Jessica, 1900-1980

Special formats

Fan mail
Photographs
Programs
Scrapbooks
Scripts

Container list

- b.1 f.1 Awards, 1935-1948
- b.1 f.2-3 Contracts and Receipts, 1930-1941
 - Correspondence
- b.1 f.4-10 1938-1941
- b.2 f.1-13 1942-1973, undated
- b.2 f.14-20 A-Z, 1933-1946
 - b.2 f.21 Loftus, Nadea Dragonette, 1934-1973
- b.3 f.1 Unidentified, 1935-1939
- b.3 f.2-3 Fan Club Newsletters, 1933-1948 (Incomplete run)
 - b.3 f.4 Light Cues, undated
 - b.3 f.5 Notes, 1950
 - b.3 f.6 Photographs, undated
- b.3 f.7-8 Press Releases, 1934-1971
 - b.3 f.9 Programs and Publicity Fliers, 1927-1960
- b.4 f.1-8 Programs and Publicity Fliers, 1927-1960
 - Scrapbooks
 - b.5 f.1 1927-1930
 - Contains news clippings and programs relating to Dragonette's appearances on the *Philco Radio Hour*.
 - b.12 1927-1930
 - Contains news clippings relating to Dragonette's appearances on the *Philco Radio Hour*. Compiled by a fan.
 - b.5 f.2 1934-1935
 - Contains news clippings and photographs of Dragonette. Compiled by a fan.
 - b.5 f.3 1934 (Contains news clippings.)
 - b.13 1935-1950
 - Contains fan letters as well as incoming and outgoing business correspondence, photographs, and publicity fliers. Notable material includes a photograph of Dragonette with Franklin D. Roosevelt on Armistice Day, 1935, and printed material regarding *Ave Maria*.
 - b.14 1935-1938 (1 of 2)
 - Contains news clippings. Scrapbook is composed of numbered folios.
 - b.15 1935-1938 (2 of 2)
 - b.5 f.4 1935
 - Contains photographs of, and letters from, members of the Jessica Dragonette Fan Club. Compiled by the fan club.
 - b.9 1936-1951
 - Contains news clippings and programs regarding Dragonette's concert appearances and *Ave Maria*. The material is affixed by straight pins and researchers should use care when handling.
 - b.17 1936-1937 (Contains news clippings.)
 - b.10 1937-1945
 - Contains letters from fans regarding her appearances on the *Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre*.

Scrapbooks (cont.)

- b.5 f.5 1937
Contains news clippings and photographs of Dragonette's appearance at the Second Annual New Jersey National Home Show on March 20, 1937. Compiled by the New Jersey Association of Real Estate Boards.
- b.11 1939-1947
Contains news clippings, photographs, and programs. The photographs include unpublished proofs of promotional photographs.
- b.16 1941-1949
Contains promotional photographs, many of them signed by Dragonette, news clippings, programs for the *Saturday Night Serenade*, and letters from Dragonette to a fan. Compiled by a fan.
- b.5 f.6 1942 (Contains news clippings.)
- b.17 1943
Contains news clippings and press releases relating to Dragonette's visit to Toronto, Canada. Compiled by her benefactor for the trip, Canada's Fifth Victory Loan company.
- b.9 1945-1956
Contains news clippings, press releases, and programs. The material is affixed by straight pins and researchers should use care when handling.

Scripts

- b.5 f.7 General, 1929-1950
- b.5 f.8-9 Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre, 1934-1936
- b.6 f.1-5 Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre, 1934-1936
- b.7 f.1-5 Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre, 1934-1936
- b.8 f.1-5 Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre, 1934-1936
- b.8 f.6 Sheet Music, 1938-1942
- b.8 f.7 Speeches, 1948, undated