



The New York Public Library Music Division

Guide to the

Alec Wilder papers

1909-2000 [bulk 1963-1979]

JPB 14-32

Compiled by Robyn Hjermstad, 2014

Summary

Creator: Wilder, Alec

Title: Alec Wilder papers

Date: 1909-2000 [bulk 1963-1979]

Size: 3.11 linear feet (8 boxes)

Source: Donated by The Mitch Miller Foundation, 2013.

Abstract: Alec Wilder (1907-1980) was an American composer and songwriter. The collection dates from 1909 to 2000 (bulk: 1963-1979) and contains correspondence, writings, photographs, and scores, as well as materials gathered by Wilder's lifelong friend, Frances Miller (wife of Mitch Miller), primarily after his death.

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Creator History

Alec Wilder (1907-1980) was an American composer. He attended the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York during the 1920s, though he was mostly self-taught. Wilder was best known as a popular music songwriter and wrote hundreds of songs. He composed music for operas, operettas, musicals, film, and concert songs for full orchestras and wind ensembles. Wilder co-wrote numerous songs with other American lyricists, including Arnold Sundgaard, William Engvick, and Loonis McGlohon. In 1972, Wilder wrote *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900–1950*. His second book, *Letters I Never Mailed: Clues to a Life*, was published in 1975.

Alec Wilder died in 1980.

Scope and Content Note

The collection dates from 1909 to 2000 and contains correspondence, writings, photographs, and scores; as well as materials gathered by Wilder's lifelong friend, Frances Miller (wife of Mitch Miller), after his death.

Correspondence is chiefly personal, and consists mostly of letters written to friends and colleagues between 1960 and 1980. Many letters are to Frances Miller and discuss their relationship and Wilder's feelings about his own work and life. Wilder's letters are often reflective, discussing his thoughts on aging, death, relationships, and his creative struggles. Incoming correspondence is generally in direct response to Wilder's letters about his writing and health, though some letters discuss other matters. Letters from James Sibley Watson date from 1969 to 1979. They discuss poetry and are sometimes accompanied by poems. Other correspondents include John Cheever, Peter de Vries, Edith Campbell, Gordon Stout, David Diamond, William (Bill) Ploss, Robert Levy, James T. Maher, and Gunther Schuller.

Writings consist of drafts of letters for his book, *Letters I Never Mailed: A Clue to a Life* (1975); song lyrics; and unpublished essays and poetry. Manuscript and typescript drafts of letters for *Letters I Never Mailed* are accompanied by handwritten letters he wrote to friends and colleagues during the process of writing and publishing the book, including Marian McPartland, James Sibley Watson, and Harvey Phillips. Notebooks contain some letters that were not included in the published version of the book. Unpublished essays include "The Bobble Birds," "Love," "Mrs. Albertini," "Full Circle," and a significantly longer piece called "Life Story," written in 1972. Wilder's unpublished poetry is also present, most of which was written in the mid to late 1970s. Handwritten drafts of song lyrics include the titles "Nobody but Me," "Everybody Has a Way to Shine," and an early draft of "I Wish I Had the Blues Again."

Scores are manuscript, copied, and published versions of full scores and individual parts for songs written by Wilder. Unpublished songs, sketches, and exercises are for melodies; piano and vocals; and barbershop quartets.

Photographs consist of headshots, childhood portraits, and candid studio shots of Wilder. Production photographs for his television musical, *Miss Chicken Little* (1953), are also present.

The Frances Miller files on Alec Wilder date from 1950 to 2000 and contain materials that she had gathered on or received from Wilder. The majority of the materials were collected after his death in 1980, with a limited amount of materials dating before his death, such as press materials for his radio show, *American Popular Song*, and a literary supplement catalog he created with William Engvick called *Touch & Thrash: Superior Waves*. Miller's files contain correspondence, articles, programs, and files for shows and projects honoring Wilder. Correspondence from Desmond Stone, Loonis McGlohin, Robert Levy, and Douglas Colby reflect upon their friendships with Miller and Wilder. Other correspondence relates to commemorative projects honoring Wilder that Miller was involved in, such as a tribute show produced at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. Also included are biographical sketches and obituaries. Show files contain publicity material, programs, and correspondence for shows produced after Wilder's death that featured his music or paid homage to his life and work, such as the Vineyard Theatre and Opera House's productions of *Alec Wilder—Clues to a Life* (1982-1983) and *While We Were Young: The Words and Music of Alec Wilder*. Also present is a manuscript written by Desmond Stone in 1990, accompanied by correspondence to Miller and other friends of Wilder.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged into the following categories: Correspondence, Writings, Scores, Photographs, and Frances Miller Files on Alec Wilder.

Key Terms

Occupations

Composers

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Letters (correspondence)

Scores

Writings (document genre)

Names

Miller, Frances Alexander

Container List

Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1-5 Incoming Letters 1963-1979
- Outgoing Letters
- b. 1 f. 6-7 1924, 1970s
- b. 1 f. 8-12 Miller, Frances 1956-1980
 - b. 2 f. 1 Miller, Mitch 1960-1974
Letters to and about Mitch Miller.

Writings

- b. 2 f. 2-5 Essays 1970s
- b. 2 f. 6-8 *Letters I Never Mailed: A Clue to a Life* 1970s
Manuscript drafts and notebooks.
- b. 3 f. 1-6 *Letters I Never Mailed: A Clue to a Life* 1974
Notebooks and typescripts.
- b. 3 f. 7-8 "Life Story" 1972
- b. 4 f. 1-2 "Life Story" 1972
- b. 4 f. 3-5 Lyrics and Poetry 1971-1977
- b. 4 f. 6 Miscellaneous 1954, 1961

Scores

- b. 4 f. 7-16 1947
Manuscript and annotated scores.
- b. 5 f. 1-10 1945-1979
Manuscript scores; manuscript copies; printed and published arrangements and scores.
- b. 8 f. 1-2 1950s
Printed scores.
- b. 6 f. 1-2 Photographs 1909-1975

Frances Miller Files on Alec Wilder

- b. 6 f. 3-7 1950-2000
Articles and programs; correspondence to Miller after Wilder's death; and a literary supplement catalog created by Alec Wilder and William Engvick called Touch & Thrash: Superior Waves.
- b. 7 f. 1-8 1980-1996
Tributes and shows; biographies and obituaries; documentary film proposal; Desmond Stone manuscript and book draft; and last will and affidavit.