



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**Ellabelle Davis papers**

1903-1980 [bulk 1926-1950]

Sc MG 102

## Summary

**Creator:** Davis, Ellabelle, 1907-1960

**Title:** Ellabelle Davis papers

**Date:** 1903-1980 [bulk 1926-1950]

**Size:** 0.25 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Gift, of Marie Davis Tillman, 1982.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** Ellabelle Davis was a soprano opera singer. Prior to her career as a concert singer, she worked as a dressmaker. Davis began her musical career at The Town Hall in 1942. She was the first African American to play the lead role of Aida during her 1946 performance at the Opera Nacional in Mexico. She resumed her role as Aida at La Scala in 1949 and recorded for Decca in February 1950. Posthumously, an opera based on Davis was performed in 2009 and she was inducted into the New Rochelle Walk of Fame in 2011. This collection consists of performance programs, news clippings, and personal papers pertaining to Ellabelle Davis's career as an opera singer. A few programs document her appearance in a concert with Black composer Harry T. Burleigh.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Ellabelle Davis papers, Sc MG 102, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Accessioned by Diana Lachatanere, 1982.

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

## Creator History

Ellabelle Davis was a soprano opera singer. Prior to her career as a concert singer, she worked as a

dressmaker. Davis began her musical career at The Town Hall in 1942. She was the first African American to play the lead role of *Aida* during her 1946 performance at the Opera Nacional in Mexico. She resumed her role as *Aida* at La Scala in 1949 and recorded for Decca in February 1950. Posthumously, an opera based on Davis was performed in 2009 and she was inducted into the New Rochelle Walk of Fame in 2011.

## **Scope and Content Note**

This collection consists of performance programs, news clippings, and personal papers pertaining to Ellabelle Davis's career as an opera singer. A few programs document her appearance in a concert with Black composer Harry T. Burleigh.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American women singers  
African Americans in the performing arts  
Women in opera

### **Names**

Burleigh, H. T. (Harry Thacker), 1866-1949  
Davis, Ellabelle, 1907-1960

## **Container List**

- b. 1 f. 1 **Personal 1932-1937**  
Mostly includes correspondence; also contains an essay about the YMCA and its role in the community.
- b. 1 f. 2 **Clippings 1940-1980**
- b. 1 f. 3 **Programs 1923-1955**
- b. 1 f. 4 **Scrapbook**  
Contains clippings and programs.