



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

Guide to the

Frederick Wilkerson papers

1924-1984 [bulk 1944-1982]

Sc MG 377

Summary

Creator: Wilkerson, Frederick

Title: Frederick Wilkerson papers

Date: 1924-1984 [bulk 1944-1982]

Size: 5.67 linear feet (14 boxes)

Source: Gift of Gaynelle Reed Lewis, December 1985.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Frederick Wilkerson was a singer, vocal clinician, consultant, and coach. This collection consists of correspondence, student records and applications, sheet music, and records of the Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation, which he founded.

Preferred citation: [Item], Frederick Wilkerson papers, Sc MG 377, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

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Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio and moving image materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Creator History

Frederick Wilkerson was a singer, vocal clinician, consultant, and coach. Born in Texas, Wilkerson joined the Williams Quintet at 13; he trained at Brick's College in North Carolina, sang in various choirs, and studied with Elizabeth Loguen. Wilkerson appeared professionally in Europe under the stage name

of Gilbert Adams. His student roster included Roberta Flack, Maya Angelou, Earl Hyman, William Parker, Phyllis Diller, Inez Matthews, Joyce Bryant, and others. He taught voice pedagogy at Howard University in the late 1940s and 1950s, and part-time at Catholic University. He served as vocal coach for the 1947 stage production of *Porgy and Bess*. He also published two articles, which have become standard references for music teachers, "Early American Music" and "Constructive Anxiety on the Part of Young Vocal Students". In 1967, Wilkerson founded the Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation in Washington D.C., for deserving students and artists in need of financial assistance. Wilkerson also served as its artistic director and head of the Wilkerson Scholarship Choir. The Foundation tried to build a conservatory of vocal arts in Washington. Its first fundraiser was a concert given by mezzo-soprano Janet Baker at Constitution Hall on February 15, 1968. Wilkerson also was a member of various professional organizations, including the National Association of Teachers of Singing and the Washington Music Teachers Association. He passed away in 1980.

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of personal papers and professional materials related to Frederick Wilkerson's career as a vocal coach and founder of the Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation. Personal papers consist of biographical information, correspondence, notes for a book, a copy of Wilkerson's will, and memorial service programs. The Teaching career series mostly contains student applications, performance programs of his students, and printed matter on former students. There also are articles on vocal techniques and coaching methods. The Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation series consists of administrative information, such as by-laws, Board of Directors meeting minutes, patron lists, mailing lists, correspondence, and financial information. Additionally, there are materials related to the programs sponsored by the Foundation, such as the production of *Paradise Lost and Regained*, written by and conducted by Eva Jessye, and Roberta Flack conducting the Frederick Wilkerson Choir. Sheet music contains music and lyrics by various composers and arrangers, including Margaret Bonds, Hall Johnson, and Philippa Schuyler; this music was most likely used by Wilkerson for his students. The Subject files include printed matter (clippings, articles, and programs) on various individuals, publications, and topics of interest to Wilkerson (such as Black musicians). This series also contains various musical programs and playbills collected by Wilkerson over the years. The two scrapbooks include musical reviews and commentaries on various artists, including some of Wilkerson's students, and personal correspondence and photographs.

Arrangement: Arranged into 6 series: I. Personal; II. Teaching career; III. Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation; IV. Sheet music; V. Subject files; and VI. Scrapbooks.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American music teachers
African American singers
African American vocal coaches
African Americans -- Scholarships, fellowships, etc
African Americans in the performing arts
Authors, Black
Music -- Instruction and study
Nonprofit organizations
Singing -- Instruction and study

Names

Angelou, Maya

Bryant, Joyce

Flack, Roberta

Jessye, Eva, 1895-1992

Parker, William, 1952-

Wilkerson, Frederick

Container List

Personal 1966-1982

Mostly arranged chronologically.

- b. 1 f. 1 **Resume and biographical information** ca. 1978
- b. 1 f. 2-3 **Correspondence** ca. 1966-1982
- b. 1 f. 4 **Miscellaneous** 1966-1969
Includes notes, receipts, and a poem.
- b. 1 f. 5 **Printed matter** 1974-1975
Includes a clipping on Wilkerson, a program for a play in which he performed, and a program for Willis Allan Hines, in which Wilkerson delivered a tribute.
- b. 1 f. 6 **Rental agreement** 1976
- b. 1 f. 7 **Notes for book** 1979
Possible titles were "Wilkie" (Wilkerson's nickname) and "Now Listen Dear Ones".
Includes some correspondence.
- b. 1 f. 8 **Will** 1980
- b. 1 f. 9 **Obituaries and memorial service programs** 1980 April

Teaching career 1947-1983

- b. 1 f. 10 **Business card, letterhead, and flyers** ca. 1947-1970s
Includes a flyer for coaching under his stage name, Gilbert Adams.
- b. 1 f. 11 **General mailing list**
- b. 2 f. 1 **Correspondence** 1951-1976
Includes correspondence from Hall Johnson, Roland Hayes, and Roberta Flack. Also includes correspondence to and from students.
- b. 2 f. 2 **Teaching material** undated
Includes notes, lesson plans, and articles.
- b. 2 f. 3 **Contracts** 1955-1963
Includes a draft contract and signed contract for The Frederick Wilkerson Studio Choir. The 1955 contract might have been used as a template.
- b. 2 f. 4 **Male ensemble** 1966-1973
Includes resumes, reviews, and performance programs.
- b. 2 f. 5 **Professional organizations** 1964-1980
Includes correspondence, mailings, directories, and publications mostly from the National Association of Teachers of Singing, but also from the Washington Music Teachers Association Convention and the American Institute of Vocal Pedagogy.

Students

- b. 2 f. 6 **Administrative** 1963-1976
Includes payment information, shirt sizes, and notes.

Applications

- b. 2 f. 7 **1963-1964**
- b. 2 f. 8 **1965**
- b. 3 f. 1 **1966-1967**
- b. 3 f. 2 **1968-1969**
- b. 3 f. 3 **1970**
- b. 3 f. 4 **1971**
- b. 3 f. 5 **New York students** 1971-1979

Teaching career (cont.)

Students (cont.)

Applications (cont.)

b. 3 f. 6 1972-1973

b. 3 f. 7 1974-1975

b. 4 f. 8 1976-1978

Wilkerson Studio performance programs

b. 4 f. 1 1961-1970

b. 4 f. 2 1971-1979

b. 4 f. 3 undated

Student files

b. 4 f. 4 Angelou, Maya 1971-1977

Includes invoices, notes, an itinerary, and scripts for parts I (Legacy) and II (The Inheritors) of *Afro-American History Specials: The Arts*, a television series, written by Maya Angelou in 1976. It seems that Wilkerson was in charge of hiring the choirs for the series. Additionally, there is material (correspondence and notes) related to *And Still I Rise*, most likely for the musical adaptation in 1977, which was ultimately not produced until 1992.

b. 4 f. 5 Balthrop, Carmen 1975-1977

b. 4 f. 6 Beck, Mary 1964-1977

b. 4 f. 7 Bryant, Joyce 1971-1978

b. 4 f. 8 Colvin, Felicia 1982
Daughter of William Colvin.

b. 4 f. 9 Driver, Alberta 1963-1983

b. 4 f. 10 Estill, Jeni ca. 1974-1983

b. 4 f. 11 Flack, Roberta 1969-1980

b. 13 f. 1 Also includes a signed album cover.

b. 4 f. 12 Gipson, Karl 1977-1983

b. 5 f. 1 Harrell, Richard 1976

b. 13 f. 2 Holmes, Clint 1970-1973

b. 5 f. 2 Huffman, Marjorie 1974-1976

Although not a student of Wilkerson's, she often was the accompanist for his students' performances.

b. 5 f. 3 Jones, Delores 1980

b. 5 f. 4 Matthews, Inez 1979

b. 5 f. 5 McLean, Joy (or Joy McLean Bosfield) 1963-1981

b. 5 f. 6 Merritt, Myra 1975-1979

b. 5 f. 7 Olaker, Charlae 1972-1980

b. 5 f. 8 Parker, William 1968-1980
Also includes correspondence.

b. 5 f. 9 Rhodes, Alburtt 1981

b. 5 f. 10 Ross, Elizabeth Lyra 1981

b. 5 f. 11 Savage, Marilyn 1961-1969
Also includes correspondence.

b. 5 f. 12 Vroom, John 1974-1980

b. 5 f. 13 Waddell, John 1966-1979
Also includes correspondence.

b. 5 f. 14 Ward, Richard III 1972

Teaching career (cont.)

Students (cont.)

Student files (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 15 **Washington, Cozette** undated
Includes her proposal for a television special.
- b. 5 f. 16 **Multiple student performances** 1966-1971
Includes programs with multiple former students performing. Wilkerson labeled them "mixed bag".

Possible former students or acts with whom Wilkerson worked 1956-1983
It is unclear if all of the individuals included in these files were Wilkerson's students, but he labeled many of them as "baritone", "soprano", etc., which he seemed to do with his former students. It is possible that many were not his students, but acts with whom he worked.
Arranged within each folder alphabetically by last name.
- b. 5 f. 17 **A-K**
- b. 5 f. 18 **L-Y**

Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation 1965-1982

- b. 6 f. 1 **Articles of incorporation** 1967 June
- b. 6 f. 2 **By-laws** 1965-1967
- b. 6 f. 3 **About the Foundation and mission statement** 1967-1969
- b. 6 f. 4 **Tax exemption and charitable solicitation certificate** 1968-1979
- b. 6 f. 5 **Board meeting minutes and agendas** 1967-1979
- b. 6 f. 6 **Staff and Board of Directors lists** undated
- b. 6 f. 7 **Financial statements** 1967-1972
- b. 6 f. 8 **Proposal and notes for conservatory** 1969
- b. 6 f. 9 **Letterhead and notes** undated

Correspondence
Most of the correspondence is to and from Joy McLean, Wilkerson's former student and the chair of the Concert Committee, and Gaynelle Reed Lewis, the president of the Foundation.
- b. 6 f. 1 **1968-1977**
- b. 6 f. 11 **1978-1982**
- b. 6 f. 12 **undated**
- b. 6 f. 13 **Mailing lists, patrons, and donors** 1972-1978
- b. 14 Alphabetical index cards can be found in box 14.
- b. 6 f. 14 **Wilkerson Foundation Choir** 1965-1970

Programs
- b. 6 f. 15 **Scholarship applications and inquiries** 1965-1981
- b. 6 f. 16 **Various** 1969-1978
Includes performance programs for Janet Baker and Joyce Brant, among others.
- b. 6 f. 17 ***Paradise Lost and Regained, music by Eva Jessye and libretto by John Milton*** 1971-1972
- b. 13 f. 3 Includes correspondence with Jessye, draft of the script, receipts, programs, clippings, reviews, and publicity for the Bernice Hammond Dancers, who also performed.
- b. 6 f. 18 **Roberta Flack conducting the Frederick Wilkerson Choir** 1972-1973
Includes correspondence and a contract with the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, a performance flyer, and a concert program.
- b. 7 f. 1 **Howard Roberts Chorale** 1974-1976
Includes background information on Roberts, correspondence, seating charts, and ledgers for two performances, the first at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts and the second at the Lisner Auditorium, George Washington University.
- b. 7 f. 2 **Master Classes workshop with Chloe Owen** 1975 February
Includes a flyer for the workshop and a draft introduction for Owen.

Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation (cont.)
Programs (cont.)

- b. 7 f. 3 Mark Fax project for the Bicentennial (unrealized) 1976

- b. 7 f. 4 Library master files 1982

b. 14 Includes lists and index cards of the Foundation's library of sheet music, cassettes, reels, records, books, and plays. Index cards can be found in box 14

Sheet music 1924-1979

Includes printed music and manuscripts. Listed by composer and/or arranger.

Most dates indicate when sheet music was published.

Listed alphabetically by last name or title.

- b. 7 f. 5 Bach, J. S. Various choral works

- b. 7 f. 6 Bonds, Margaret 1966-1967

b. 13 f. 4 Includes "Esek'el Saw the Wheel" (signed by Bonds) and a notebook with various handwritten sheet music and a note from Bonds, among others.

- b. 7 f. 7 Bowman, Arlene 1975

Includes "October Days" and "Walls", among others.

- b. 7 f. 8 Burleigh, H. T (arranged by). "I've Been in de Storm So Long" (incomplete)

- b. 7 f. 9 Bright, Houston. Trilogy for women's voices 1967

- b. 7 f. 10 Davis, John. "Riley" undated

- b. 7 f. 11 De Paur, Leonard (arranged and/or adapted by) 1938-1965

b. 13 f. 5 Includes "No Bottom" and "Jerry", among others.

- b. 7 f. 12 Dett, R. Nathaniel (adapted by). Folk songs of the South 1924

- b. 7 f. 13 Fax, Mark. "The Gettysburg Address" 1966

- b. 7 f. 14 *Gershwin, George. Porgy and Bess excerpts* ca. 1935

b. 13 f. 6

- b. 8 f. 1 Goodell, Walter (arranged and edited by). Forty-two popular spirituals 1924-1939

- b. 8 f. 2 Handy, W. C. (composed and/or arranged by) 1925-1942

Includes "The Bridegroom Has Done Come" and "Steal Away to Jesus", among others.

- b. 8 f. 3 Haydn, Joseph. "Kyrle Eleison" 1957

- b. 8 f. 4 Howell, Hudson D. (arranged by). "Over My Head" undated

- b. 8 f. 5 Jessye, Eva (adapted by). "Rock Mt. Sinai!" 1965

- b. 8 f. 6-7 Johnson, Hall (composed and/or arranged by) 1941-1963

Includes "Run Li'l Children" and "I Got Shoes", among others.

- b. 8 f. 8 Marks, Johnny. "Ballad of Smokey, the Bear" 1965

- b. 8 f. 9 *McGinnis, Hirschel. Music and Sculpture: Long Overdue* 1979

- b. 8 f. 10 Mells, H. F. (arranged by) 1949-1950

Includes various spirituals and Christmas carols.

- b. 8 f. 11 Morris, Kenneth. "I Won't Have to Cross the River of Jordan All Alone" 1946

- b. 8 f. 12 Reagon, Bernice (composed and/or arranged by) undated

Includes "Titanic" and "Alberta", among others.

- b. 8 f. 13 "Rocks and Gravel" undated

- b. 8 f. 14 Schuyler, Philippa 1936-1938

Includes "Three Little Pieces", "Five Little Pieces", "Eight Little Pieces", and "Nine Little Pieces", all of which are signed except for "Eight Little Pieces".

- b. 8 f. 15 Various hymns and songs undated

Subject files 1944-1984

Dates indicate when material in each folder was published. Also, some folders overlap with folders in other series (Jessye, Eva in Frederick Wilkerson Scholarship Foundation series, etc.)

Arranged alphabetically by name, topic, or title.

- b. 8 f. 16 The arts 1971-1979
- b. 8 f. 17 Blacks in broadcasting (articles by Geraldine Lange) 1968-1972
- b. 13 f. 7 Black musicians and music 1971-1973
- b. 8 f. 18 Brown, Aaron, Jr. (chef) undated
 - b. 9 f. 1 Classical music and opera 1962-1979
 - b. 9 f. 2 Funding for the arts 1965
 - b. 9 f. 3 Guides and maps undated
 - b. 9 f. 4 Jessye, Eva 1964-1972
 - b. 9 f. 5 Johnson, Hall undated
- Programs and playbills 1944-1980
 - Includes programs and playbills collected by Wilkerson over the years, although not of performances by his students. Also includes a few memorial service programs.
 - b. 9 f. 6 1944-1965
 - b. 13 f. 8 Includes a program for *Othello* starring Paul Robeson (1944) and a broadside for *Ouanga!* at Carnegie Hall, performed by the National Negro Opera Company (1956), among others.
 - b. 9 f. 7 1966-1973
 - Includes a program for Duke Ellington and His Orchestra and various Kennedy Center programs, among others.
 - b. 9 f. 8 1974-1975
 - Includes various Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall programs, among others.
 - b. 9 f. 9 1976-1977
 - Includes various Kennedy Center programs, among others.
 - b. 10 f. 1 1978-1980
 - Includes various Kennedy Center programs and a program for a performance of *Bubbling Brown Sugar* in Paris, among others.
- b. 10 f. 2 *Personal Communications (periodical)* 1984 March
- b. 10 f. 3 Singing 1977-1979
- b. 10 f. 4 Steele, Gary and Roderic Gorney. "Human Survival and the Mass Media of Entertainment" ca. 1972
- b. 10 f. 5 *Tower (Catholic University of America's newspaper)* 1973
- b. 10 f. 6 Youth center, Bayonne (N. J.) ca. 1950s

Scrapbooks 1962-1978

Index cards include contact information for students and Foundation members; scrapbooks are mostly about students.

- b. 11 Scrapbook of music reviews and commentaries ca. 1962-1978
 - Includes clippings, some of which profile Wilkerson's students.
- b. 12 Wilkerson scrapbook ca. 1969-1973
 - Includes letters, clippings, and photographs, both professional and personal.