



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Lili Darvas papers**

1913-1974

\*T-Mss 1975-001

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014

## Summary

**Creator:** Darvas, Lili, d.-1974

**Title:** Lili Darvas papers

**Date:** 1913-1974

**Size:** 3.23 linear feet (8 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Estate beneficiaries, 2012

**Abstract:** The collection dates from 1913 to 1974 and documents the career of Hungarian actress Lili Darvas through photographs, scrapbooks, correspondence, reviews, and programs.

### Conditions Governing Access:

T-Cabinet materials may be viewed by appointment only. For assistance, please email the Theatre Division ([theatre@nypl.org](mailto:theatre@nypl.org)).

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**Preferred citation:** Lili Darvas papers, \*T-Mss 1975-001. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014 One scrapbook was disassembled and placed into folders.

## Creator History

Lili Darvas (1902-1974) was a Hungarian actress who worked in theater, television, and film. She made her stage debut in 1921 as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* at the Magyar Színház in Budapest. A few years later she was discovered by Austrian-American actor and director Max Reinhardt, and traveled and acted under his aegis for nearly ten years. During that time she performed at his Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna, the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, and in the Salzburg Festival. While with

Reinhardt's company, Darvas made her Broadway debut in his 1927 revival of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The two maintained a professional relationship until Reinhardt's death in 1943; at that time, she was working as his assistant.

In 1926, Darvas married Hungarian dramatist Ferenc Molnár, who wrote multiple plays for her, including *Riviera* (1925) and *Olympia* (1928). The couple fled to the United States from Vienna in 1938. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Darvas performed in several Broadway and touring productions, the first of which was in Ferdinand Bruckner's *The Criminals* (1941) at The Studio Theatre of the New School in New York City. On Broadway she performed in *Soldier's Wife* (1944), *Hamlet* (1945), *Bravo!* (1948), the *Hidden River* (1957), and *Les Blancs* (1970). Darvas also worked extensively in radio and early television throughout the 1950s. Among the films she performed in are *Affairs of Maupassant* (1935), *Meet Me in Las Vegas* (1956), and *Szerelem* (Love), for which she received special mention at the 1971 Cannes Film Festival.

Lili Darvas died in New York City in 1974.

## Scope and Content Note

The collection dates from 1913 to 1974 and documents the acting career of Lili Darvas through scrapbooks, photographs, correspondence, biographical material, and production files.

Biographical material in the collection consists of feature stories on Darvas, awards, biographical sketches, passports, travel documents, and material relating to her mother's immigration to the United States. Condolence letters sent to Darvas after her mother's death are also present. A Hungarian film award from Magyar Újságírók Országos Szövetsége (National Association of Hungarian Journalists) is a metal plaque housed in a custom case. Also included is a decorative metal box encrusted with stones.

Correspondence chiefly consists of fan mail and good-luck telegrams on the opening nights of shows. Fan letters commend Darvas on her screen performances in *Star in the Summer Night* (Goodyear Playhouse, 1954) and *Szerelem* (1971).

Other correspondence documents Darvas's professional relationship with Max Reinhardt. Letters from Rudolf Kommer (Reinhardt's representative during the 1920s) to Darvas discuss the planning stages of Reinhardt's *Das Mirakel* (The Miracle), which debuted on Broadway at the Century Theatre in 1924. Other correspondence relates to Reinhardt and Erich Wolfgang Korngold's 1944 production of *Helen Goes to Troy*. The letters discuss casting, contracts, and pitching songs and scenes to potential actors. Reinhardt's letters to Gertrude Lawrence and Jarmila Novotna concern the early planning stages of the production. The correspondence is accompanied by script and scene synopses and the production contract. Correspondents include Reinhart, Darvas, Korngold, Helene Thimig, and the general manager of the New Opera Company, Yolanda Mero-Irion. Several of the letters and notes here are in German.

Photographs exhibit several aspects of Darvas's personal and professional life. Personal photographs documenting Darvas's travels in Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and France throughout the 1930s and 1940s have been compiled into labeled photograph albums. Other personal photographs display the interior of Darvas's house, coupled with a magazine article in which her home was featured. Portraits of Darvas span the length of her career from her beginnings in Hungary until after the success of her performance in *Szerelem*. Early images depict Darvas at the Magyar Színház in Budapest, and as the title role in Ferenc Molnár's production of *Olympia*. Portraits and casual photographs of Darvas with Max Reinhardt, Ferenc Molnár, and other friends and colleagues are also present. Production stills

depict scenes from *Anastasia* (Yale, 1956), *Chéri* (1959), *Les Blancs* (1970), and many unidentified stage productions in Berlin, Vienna, and the United States. Several of the personal and publicity photographs show Darvas with her West Highland White Terriers.

Production files document stage and screen productions that Darvas acted in, including *Bravo!*, *The Miser*, *Les Blancs*, and *The Hidden River*. Each production file generally contains reviews, programs, and photographs. Some files, such as those for *Les Blancs*, contain script excerpts and notes on scenes. Smaller files include those for *Labor for the Wind* and *Adeline Girard*, which only hold scripts. *Szerelem* files contain a copy of her 1971 Cannes International Film Festival Award; a timeline of events surrounding the film; film stills and publicity photographs; and extensive film reviews in English, Hungarian, and French. Programs and reviews represent the breadth of Darvas's acting career in Hungary, Germany, Italy, and the United States

There are two scrapbooks in the collection. One contains clippings from Hungarian newspapers documenting Darvas's early performances in Budapest from 1919 to 1921. The other scrapbook documents Darvas's stage and television performances in the United States through reviews, programs, and photographs dating from 1941 to 1958. Productions represented include *Soldier's Wife*, *Hamlet*, *Bravo!*, and *Horses in Midstream*. Photographs consist of headshots and portraits of Darvas in her home.

Material in the collection is in English, Hungarian, German, and some French.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged alphabetically by format. Production files are arranged alphabetically by title.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Actors

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Correspondence

Photographs

Programs (documents)

Scrapbooks

Scripts

### **Subjects**

Motion Pictures -- Hungary

Theater -- Germany

Theater -- Hungary

Theater -- United States

### **Names**

Korngold, Erich Wolfgang, 1897-1957

Molna\_r, Ferenc, 1878-1952

Reinhardt, Max, 1873-1943

New Opera Company

## Container List

### Biographical Material

- b. 1 f. 1-9 1917-1973
- b. 8 f. 4 1927-1972
- Decorative Box Undated
- T-Cabinet.
- Hungarian Film Award 1971
- T-Cabinet.

- b. 2 f. 1-6 Correspondence 1923-1974

### Photographs

- b. 2 f. 7-9 1913-1930
- b. 8 f. 3 1920s
- b. 3 f. 1-7 1921-1950
- b. 7 f. 2-3 1930-1932
- b. 4 f. 1-8 1951-1973

### Production Files

- b. 4 f. 9 *Adeline Gerard* 1954
- b. 8 f. 6 *Affairs of Maupassant* 1934-1935
- Tagebuch der Geliebten.*
- b. 5 f. 4-5 *Les Blancs* 1970
- b. 4 f. 10 *Chéri* 1959
- b. 4 f. 11 *First Love* 1961-1962
- b. 5 f. 1 *Happiness* 1967
- b. 5 f. 2 *Hidden River* 1957
- b. 5 f. 3 *Labor for the Wind* 1943
- b. 5 f. 6-7 *The Miser* 1969
- b. 5 f. 8 *Seagull* 1954
- Szerelem*
- Love.*
- b. 8 f. 7 1971
- Photographs.
- b. 5 f. 9-10 1971-1972
- b. 6 f. 1-2 1971-1972
- b. 6 f. 3 *Waltz of the Toreadors* 1957-1958
- b. 6 f. 4-10 Programs and Articles 1921-1973
- b. 8 f. 5 Programs and Articles 1972-1974
- b. 7 f. 1 Scrapbook 1919-1921
- b. 8 f. 1-2 Scrapbook 1941-1958