



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

Guide to the

**The Wiz collection**

1974-1979

Sc MG 320

Processed by Tamara Stewart.

## Summary

**Title:** The Wiz collection

**Date:** 1974-1979

**Source:** Gift of Mildred Harper. SCM89-65.

**Abstract:** "The Wiz" Collection is primarily comprised of newspaper and magazine clippings, but also contains scripts for the Broadway production, as well as screenplays for the movie version. Other non-clipping materials include playbills, a Tony Award certificate of nomination to Ken Harper for "Best Director 1974-75", and "The Wiz Scrapbook," a promotional publication about the movie.

**Access:** Advance notice required.

**Preferred citation:** The Wiz collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Tamara Stewart; machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

**Related Materials:**

The Ken Harper Papers (4 lin. ft.) can be found in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Library for the Performing Arts, New York Public Library.

## Creator History

The Broadway musical smash hit "*The Wiz*" was an all African-American production based on the Frank Baum classic "*The Wizard of Oz*." Produced by Ken Harper, the musical opened at Broadway's Majestic Theater on January 5, 1975, and finally closed after an incredible 1,666 performances, on January 28, 1979. "*The Wiz*" garnered seven Tony Awards, including "Best Musical" of 1975, and its original cast album was also a success. A number of talented individuals were associated with the original production, most notably Stephanie Mills who got her "big break" in "*The Wiz*" when she was only 15 years old. It is interesting to note that "*The Wiz*" opened to mixed reviews, and attendance was lethargic during the first two weeks of performances. In fact, a closing notice was posted on its Broadway

opening night as a result of the poor box office showing. Fortunately, Twentieth Century-Fox (the musical's backer) decided to put up additional funds, both to keep the show running, and to finance an intensive publicity campaign. While *"The Wiz"* was not the first Broadway show to use video commercials as part of its advertising strategy, its campaign was the most massive to date at that time. The television advertising, combined with enthusiastic word-of-mouth and black radio and press reviews, was extremely successful, and *"The Wiz"* went on to become one of the longest running Broadway musicals ever produced, grossing approximately \$70 million in revenues. The popularity of *"The Wiz"* created a worldwide demand for the musical, and numerous road productions were performed throughout the U.S., and abroad in Canada, England, and even Japan. Harper also produced a movie version of *"The Wiz"* in 1978 for Universal Pictures, which starred Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Nipsey Russell, and Lena Horne. At the time of its production, the movie had the distinction of being the most expensive movie produced to date. An original movie soundtrack was also recorded and released. The collection was apparently gathered together by Ken Harper, and donated by Mildred Harper, his mother, after his death in 1988.

### **Scope and Content Note**

*"The Wiz"* Collection documents various aspects of both the musical and the movie. There are two series; the first pertains to the Broadway musical, and the second, to the movie version. The materials in the collection span the period from 1974-1979. Newspaper and magazine clippings constitute almost all of the material in both series, however, a few pieces of additional documentation is included in the form of play scripts, screenplays, playbills, "The Wiz Scrapbook" (from the movie version), and a Tony Award nomination certificate presented to Harper for "Best Musical- Producer," 1974-75. Photographs, posters, drawings, film and tapes are also part of this collection, but have been transferred to the appropriate divisions within the Schomburg Center and can be accessed there (see Separation Record p. 6).

## Container List

### b. 1 "The Wiz" Play

The series contains an extensive amount of material about various aspects of the play. The Scripts subseries includes the first, third, and two different final drafts of the play. The Cast, Crew Members and Production Staff subseries is comprised of folders of magazine and newspaper clippings for various people associated with the play, including Dee Dee Bridgewater (who played Glenda the Good Witch), Andre De Shields (who played the title role), Geoffrey Holder (who designed the costumes and directed the play), and Stephanie Mills (who played Dorothy), and a separate folder for other personages, including Toto. There are two subseries of reviews; one for the New York production, and the other for various road productions. The New York Production subseries is divided into opening night, print media, and radio and television reviews; the Road Productions subseries is divided into folders for California, Canada, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Pennsylvania production reviews, with separate folders for radio and television, and assorted other production locations. The Play series also includes documentation for numerous other aspects of *"The Wiz"*: playbills; awards and nominations; anniversaries, records and statistics; Broadway production closing; advertising, promotion and marketing; performance schedules; production costs and investment capital; ticket sales and revenues; auditions and casting; and the original Broadway cast album, round out the categories of materials included in the play series. In addition, there is a folder containing information about the musicians' strike, which halted performances for 25 consecutive days in 1975, and a folder of Broadway and society column commentary regarding *"The Wiz."*

### Scripts

#### *"The Wiz"*

- b. 1 f. 1 First Draft n.d.
- b. 1 f. 2 Third Draft June, 1974
- b. 1 f. 3 Final Draft Blocking Script September, 1975
- b. 1 f. 4 Final Draft Blocking Script July, 1976

#### Cast, Crew Members and Production Staff

- b. 1 f. 5 Hinton Battle 1975-1976
- b. 1 f. 6 Dee Dee Bridgewater 1975-1978
- b. 1 f. 7 William Brown 1975-1979
- b. 1 f. 8 Andre De Shields 1975-1979
- b. 1 f. 9 George Faison 1975-1978
- b. 1 f. 10 Al Fann 1975
- b. 1 f. 11 Ken Harper 1975-1979
- b. 1 f. 12 Geoffrey Holder 1975-1978
- b. 2 f. 1 Sidney Lumet 1976-1979
- b. 2 f. 2 Stephanie Mills 1974-1979
- b. 2 f. 3 Ted Ross 1975, n.d.
- b. 2 f. 4 James Wigfall 1975-1978
- b. 2 f. 5 Others 1975-1979
- b. 2 f. 6 Auditions and Casting 1975-1979
- b. 2 f. 7 Advertising, Promotion and Marketing 1975-1979
- b. 2 f. 8 Performance Schedules 1975-1978
- b. 2 f. 9 Production Costs and Investment Capital 1975-1978
- b. 2 f. 10 Playbills 1975-1978
- b. 3 New York Production Reviews

"The Wiz" Play (cont.)  
New York Production Reviews (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 1 Opening Night (Jan. 5, 1975) 1975
- b. 3 f. 2 Print Media 1975-1979
- b. 3 f. 3 Radio and Television 1975-1977

Road Productions

Reviews

- b. 3 f. 4 California 1975-1979
- b. 3 f. 5 Canada 1978
- b. 3 f. 6 Illinois 1976-1979
- b. 3 f. 7 Massachusetts 1979
- b. 3 f. 8 Michigan 1978
- b. 3 f. 9 Pennsylvania 1978
- b. 3 f. 10 Radio and Television 1976-1978
- b. 3 f. 11 Assorted 1978-1979
- b. 3 f. 12 Printed Matter 1978-1979
- b. 4 f. 1 Ticket Sales and Revenues 1975-1979
- b. 4 f. 2 Awards and Nominations 1975-1979
- b. 4 f. 3 Anniversaries, Records and Statistics 1976-1979
- b. 4 f. 4 Broadway Production Closing (Jan. 28, 1979) 1978-79
- b. 4 f. 5 Original Broadway Cast Album 1975-1978
- b. 4 f. 6 Musicians' Strike (Sept. 18 - Oct. 12, 1975) 1975
- b. 4 f. 7 Broadway & Society Column Commentary 1975-1979
- b. 4 f. 8 General 1975-1979

The General folder brings together newspaper, magazine, and newsletter articles that are about *"The Wiz"* or *"The Wizard of Oz"* in general (not reviews, however), or about an aspect of play production such as costuming, music, stage production, or photography, which discuss *"The Wiz"* within the article's context. A few letters of thanks for interviews, cast member appearances, and benefit performances, are also included. The General-References folder holds diverse clippings, articles and illustrations in which *"The Wiz"* or someone associated with the production is mentioned tangentially or in passing.

- b. 4 f. 9 General - References 1975-1979

b. 5 "The Wiz" Movie

The series contains categories similar to those found in the play series, although there is a much smaller volume of material in the movie series. Scenes toward a screenplay, and the first, second, and third drafts of *"The Wiz"* are contained in the Screenplays subseries. The Cast Members subseries includes separate clippings folders for Lena Horne (who played Glenda the Good Witch), Michael Jackson (who played the Scarecrow), Diana Ross (who played Dorothy), and Nipsey Russell (who played the Tinman). There is also material about the movie's October 24, 1978 premiere, reviews, advertising and promotion, production costs, ticket sales and revenues, the original motion picture soundtrack, and *"The Wiz Scrapbook,"* a souvenir journal which consists of pictures and written pieces about the cast and production. Lastly, a General folder holds both major write-ups and passing references about the movie itself, the history of *"The Wizard of Oz,"* costume designs, musicals-turned-movies, and other topics in which the movie or cast members are discussed.

Screenplays

*"The Wiz"*

- b. 5 f. 1 Scenes Toward a Screenplay n.d.
- b. 5 f. 2 First Draft March 11, 1977

"The Wiz" Movie (cont.)

Screenplays (cont.)

"The Wiz" (cont.)

b. 5 f. 3      Second Draft March 30, 1977

b. 5 f. 4      Third Draft May 15, 1977

Cast Members

b. 5 f. 5      Lena Horne 1978

b. 5 f. 6      Michael Jackson 1978-1979

b. 5 f. 7      Diana Ross 1978-1981

b. 5 f. 8      Nipsey Russell 1978-1979

b. 5 f. 9      Movie Premiere (Loews Astor Plaza, Oct. 24, 1978) 1978-79

b. 5 f. 10     Reviews 1978-1979

b. 5 f. 11     Advertising and Promotion 1978-1979

b. 5 f. 12     Production Costs 1978-1979

b. 5 f. 13     Ticket Sales and Revenues 1978-1979

b. 5 f. 14     Original Motion Picture Soundtrack 1978

b. 5 f. 15     "The Wiz Scrapbook" 1978

b. 5 f. 16     General 1978-1979