



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Black nativity files**

1961-1980

\*T-Mss 2003-009

Processed by Elisabeth Elkind.

## Summary

**Creator:** Black Nativity

**Title:** Black nativity files

**Date:** 1961-1980

**Size:** 3.5 linear feet (3 boxes)

**Source:** The Black Nativityfiles were given to the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts by Barbara Friedlander in March 2003.

**Abstract:** The collection documents the production history of Black Nativity, a gospel song-play by Langston Hughes.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:  
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

**Conditions Governing Access:**

Photocopying prohibited.

**Conditions Governing Use:** For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

**Preferred citation:** Black Nativityfiles, \*T-Mss 2003-009. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Elisabeth Elkind; Machine-readable finding aid created by Elisabeth Elkind.

## **Creator History**

*Black Nativity*, a gospel song-play based on a script by Langston Hughes originally titled, *Wasn't That a Mighty Day*, with music arranged by the show's stars, Marion Williams and Alex Bradford, was produced by Michael Santangelo and Barbara Griner. The show used two gospel singing groups: The Stars of Faith and the Bradford Singers and also starred Princess Stewart. It was directed by Vinnete Carroll and opened for a limited run on Broadway at the 41st St. Theatre in December 1961 to critical and popular acclaim. The production was invited to make its European debut at the Spoleto Festival in Italy. After Spoleto, *Black Nativity* opened in London where it was taped for a television special by the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company. *Black Nativity* continued to tour in Europe, the United States and Australia through 1964, with an interruption for a Christmas week run at Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center in 1962.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The *Black Nativity* files contain correspondence and memos on the production; various drafts of the script; a production handbook and a few lists of cues, costumes, songs, etc.; publicity including press releases, flyers, posters, pressbooks and production history; programs; photographs and clippings. The show, presented in many different countries, is documented by photographs, programs and reviews. Of interest are carbon copies of letters by Langston Hughes with his handwritten signature and notes added on, regarding efforts to produce *Black Nativity* around the world.

**Arrangement:** Series I. Correspondence Series II. Scripts Series III. Production materials Series IV. Publicity Series V. Programs Series VI. Photographs Series VII. Clippings Series VIII. Oversized material

## Container List

### Series I. Correspondence 1962-1963 (3 folders)

Correspondence and memos relating to producing *Black Nativity*.

- b. 1 f. 1 *Correspondence and memos on Black Nativity* 1962-1963 (1 folder)  
Mostly carbon copies of letters by Langston Hughes with his signature and handwritten notes added on.
- b. 1 f. 2 *Correspondence of Michael Santangelo on Black Nativity* 1962-1963 (1 folder)  
Michael Santangelo was the show's producer.
- b. 1 f. 3 *Memos of the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company on Black Nativity* 1962-1963 (1 folder)  
WBC (radio and television) sponsored the show.

### Series II. Scripts 1961, n.d (6 folders)

Includes various drafts and clean copy of the script for *Black Nativity* by Langston Hughes.

- b. 1 f. 4 *Black Nativity proposal and libretto by Langston Hughes* n.d. (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 5 *Wasn't That a Mighty Day script* 1961 (1 folder)  
Earlier title.
- b. 1 f. 6 *Black Nativity script called "2nd draft"* 1961 (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 7 *Black Nativity script called "Third draft"* 1961 (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 8 *Black Nativity clean script* 1961 (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 9 *Black Nativity script pages with a few revisions* n.d. (1 folder)

### Series III. Production materials 1962, n.d (3 folders)

A small file with single page lists, a handbook about putting on the show and a souvenir piece of sheet music.

- b. 1 f. 10 Lists of narrator's cues, costumes, songs and credits n.d. (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 11 *Production handbook for Black Nativity* 1962? (1 folder)  
Includes photographs.
- b. 1 f. 12 *Printed sheet music for At the Feet of Jesus* n.d. (1 folder)  
Inscribed: "For Marion Williams--With admiration--Langston"

### Series IV. Publicity 1962-1965 (6 folders)

Press releases, printed flyers and other publicity for various productions of *Black Nativity*.

- b. 1 f. 13 *"Black Nativity...How It Happened"* n.d. (1 folder)  
Mimeographed accounts of the production's history, different versions, some with handwritten revisions.
- b. 1 f. 14 *Press releases on Black Nativity by the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company* 1962-1965 (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 15 *Publicity for the Lincoln Center production of Black Nativity* 1962 (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 16 Printed flyers 1962-1965, n.d (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 17 *Press book for Black Nativity* 1962-1963, n.d (1 folder)  
Contains photocopied photos, programs, reviews and clippings.
- b. 1 f. 18 *Scrapbook for Black Nativity* 1962-1964, n.d (1 folder)  
Contains photographs, programs, reviews and clippings.

### Series V. Programs 1962-1964 (2 folders)

Programs for productions in the United States, Europe and Australia.

- b. 2 f. 1 Programs--United States 1962-1964 (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 2 Programs--overseas 1962-1964 (1 folder)

**Series VI. Photographs 1962, n.d (7 folders)**

Primarily production and publicity shots, also some rehearsal and snapshots, most undated. Also contains photographs of Marion Williams from other productions including *The Soul in Jazz*.

- b. 2 f. 3-5 Production, publicity and rehearsal shots 1962, n.d (3 folders)
- b. 2 f. 6 Photographs of Marion Williams n.d. (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 7 *Photographs of The Soul in Jazz* n.d. (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 8 Photographs: snapshots, casual scenes n.d. (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 9 Photographs from magazines and programs n.d. (1 folder)

**Series VII. Clippings 1961-1980, n.d (6 folders)**

Photocopied clippings and reviews of *Black Nativity*. The 1980 clippings are of Marion Williams, one of the stars of the show. Includes clippings in other languages including French and German.  
Chronological

- b. 2 f. 10 Clippings and reviews 1961 (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 11 Clippings 1962 (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 12 Clippings 1963 (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 13 Clippings 1964-1966 (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 14 Clippings n.d. (1 folder)
- b. 2 f. 15 Clippings on Marion Williams 1980 (1 folder)

**Series VIII. Oversized material 1962, n.d (4 folders)**

Photographs and posters.

- b. 3 f. 1 Photographs: production shots n.d. (1 folder)
- b. 3 f. 2-3 Posters n.d. (2 folders)  
Six posters for productions of *Black Nativity* in Europe.
- o. 1 Posters 1962, n.d (1 folder)  
Three posters for productions of *Black Nativity* in the United States and Europe.