

**The New York Public Library**  
**New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center**  
**Music Division**

Guide to the  
**Dessoiff Choirs records**

1924-2008

JPB 13-01

Compiled by Philip Heslip, January 2013

## **Summary**

**Creator:** Dessoiff Choirs

**Title:** Dessoiff Choirs records, 1924-2008

**Size:** 12.38 linear feet (32 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by The Dessoiff Choirs in multiple accessions, 1991-2008.

**Abstract:** The Dessoiff Choirs is a Manhattan-based amateur choral group founded by Margarete Dessoiff. The choirs encompass both a symphonic choir and a chamber choir, and perform a broad repertory of classical music from Renaissance to contemporary compositions. This collection documents the choirs' administrative activities and performance history through administrative files, correspondence, financial records, programs, and scrapbooks.

**Access:** Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photography and photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

**Copyright information:** For permission to publish, contact the Chief, Music Division, The New York Public Library.

**Preferred citation:** Dessoiff Choirs records, JPB 13-01. Music Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** <sup>□</sup> The collection arrived with little meaningful order but with several well-labeled file types. These were grouped together into the present arrangement. The order for the General Alphabetical Files was maintained.

The Dessoiff Choirs have deposited many of their live concert recordings, spanning 1983 to the present, in The Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, New York Public Library. These recordings can be found by searching the New York Public Library catalog for "Dessoiff Choirs collection," call number \*L (Special) 98-13.

## Creator history

In 1924, Austrian émigré and musician Margarete Dessoiff (1874-1944) and pianist Angela Diller (1877-1968), founder of the Diller-Quaile School of Music, established the Adesdi Chorus of Women's Voices. In 1928, Dessoiff created the mixed voice A Cappella Singers of New York. She united these choirs in 1930 as the Dessoiff Choirs, and officially incorporated them into a membership organization in 1934. Dessoiff was one of the first women to conduct concerts at the major concert venues of New York City, such as Carnegie Hall and Town Hall; she is also notable for being one of the first women to conduct a prominent mixed voice ensemble and did so to wide critical acclaim.

According to early bylaws, Dessoiff founded the choirs to give talented amateurs a forum to sing in a high quality ensemble, and to present to the public the works of lesser known composers. She was an pioneering champion of Medieval and Renaissance music, and her choirs' performances of Josquin des Pres, Guillaume de Machaut, and Claudio Monteverdi, among others, helped pave the way for the early music revivals of the 1950s and 1960s. Paul Boepple, Dessoiff's successor who served as conductor from 1936 to 1968, was a proponent of both early music and many contemporary composers, such as Judith and Nicolas de Flue, Arthur Honegger, Frank Martin, and George Perle. Under Boepple, the ensemble made thirteen recordings for various record companies, including Fantasy, Vanguard, and Vox. Subsequent conductors, later titled music directors, include Thomas Sokol (1969-1973), Michael Hammond (1973-1983), Amy Kaiser (1983-1995), Kent Tritle (1996-2004), James Bagwell (2005-2010), and currently Chris Shepard (2010-present). The ensemble primarily performs in the New York City region, and frequently gives concerts at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Town Hall, and other churches and concert halls in the area.

The Dessoiff Choirs are governed by a board of directors and managed by a small professional staff and various elected officers. The group is comprised of two types of members: "singing members" who perform in concerts and pay annual dues, and "contributing members" (also called "Dessoiff associates") who donate financially to the choir.

## Scope and content note

This collection documents the Dessoiff Choirs' administrative activities and performances from throughout the ensemble's history. The records reveal the ensemble's efforts to introduce early music and contemporary compositions to their audiences, and document the changing logistical and financial struggles of an independent amateur choir in New York City throughout the 20th century.

The collection is organized by file type, such as concert files, financial records, programs, etc. The files were created by various members of the choirs' administration and staff, and their file naming conventions are reflected in the collection's organization. Below are descriptions for the file sections with names that do not adequately capture the scope of their contents:

The Concert Files document the programming, planning, and critical response to most of the choirs' concerts between 1959 and 1979. Present are letters between the choirs' management and venues concerning logistics and promotion, as well as internal communications among the choirs' staff and members. The files occasionally contain concert hall seating plans, financial records, programs, and concert reviews.

General Alphabetical Files are subject files that were organized by a Dessoiff staff member. The original order of the files has been maintained.

Membership Materials are made up of letters, member lists, member handbooks, and other documents concerning the Dessoiff Choirs' singing and associate members. Of note are copies of the Dessoiff Crier, the membership newsletter (1943-1988), and "The DSheet," a weekly handout containing organizational updates and rehearsal schedules (1996-1997).

President's Files contain various documents kept and created by Dessoiff Choirs presidents David Prager (1955-1956), Emily Greenberg (1976), Natalie Jaffe (1977-1978), and Sue Keusch (1979-1980). These include budgetary reports, meeting minutes, letters and memoranda to and from staff members, and summer greetings to choir members from the president.

Recording Files document the creation of many of the Dessoiff Choirs' sound recordings, and consist of communications with record companies, items documenting the recording programming and planning process, and the sale and dissemination of the recordings.

The Scrapbooks largely contain materials related to the ensemble's performances, such as programs, reviews, press, and flyers. Many of the volumes have overlapping date ranges. Of note is the Adesdi Chorus scrapbook (1924-1931), which contains membership lists, meeting minutes, budget reports, and correspondence.

## **Arrangement**

The Dessoiff Choirs records are organized into 17 sections by file type.

## **Key terms**

### **Subjects**

Choirs (Music) -- United States

### **Names**

Boepple, Paul, 1896-1970

Dessoiff Choirs

Dessoiff, Margarethe, 1874-1944

### **Special formats**

Contracts

Financial Records

Minutes

Programs (documents)

Scrapbooks

T-shirts

## Container list

- b.1 f.1-2 Artifacts, 1989-1999 (Two T-Shirts.)
  - Concert Files
- b.1 f.3-6 1959-1961
- b.2 f.1-6 1961-1963
- b.3 f.1-7 1964-1966
- b.4 f.1-10 1966-1968
- b.5 f.1-13 1968-1971
- b.6 f.1-17 1971-1975
- b.7 f.1-12 1976-1979
  - b.8 f.1 1979
- b.8 f.2-5 Concert Reviews, 1949-1956, 1976-1994
- b.8 f.6-10 Contracts, 1934-1967, 1984-1994
  - Correspondence, 1947-1999
- b.9 f.1-4 General, 1947-1956
- b.9 f.5-6 Hoffman, Christine, 1986-1988 (President)
- b.9 f.7 Pledge to Finance *Golgotha*, 1951-1952
- b.9 f.8 Prager, David, 1957 (President)
- b.10 f.1 Schrade, Leo, Editor of Monteverdi's *Vespers*, 1954-1955
- b.10 f.2-3 Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Committee, 1999
- b.10 f.4-10 Financial Records, 1949-1999
- b.11 f.1-11 Financial Records, 1949-1999
- b.12 f.1-6 Foundation Records, 1947-1994
  - Bylaws, constitutions, and incorporation records
  - General Alphabetical Files
- b.12 f.7 "Amateur Music Making in Future Society" Report, undated
- b.12 f.8 Anti-Defamation League Letter, 1969
- b.12 f.9 ASCAP, 1977
- b.12 f.10 Boepple, Paul, 1968 (Conductor)
- b.12 f.11 Churches, 1973
- b.12 f.12 Concert Halls, 1965-1969
- b.12 f.13 Dessoiff Choirs Series, 1971-1981
- b.12 f.14 Development Committee, 1968-1969
- b.12 f.15 Fact Sheets, 1971-1980
- b.13 f.1 *Golgotha* Notes, 1951
- b.13 f.2 Hammond, Michael, 1973-1974 (Music Director)
- b.13 f.3 Levy, Ernst (1895-1981), 1938-1959 (Composer)
- b.13 f.4 Library Inventory, 1974
- b.13 f.5 Music Presented by the Dessoiff Choirs (1924 to 1952), 1952
- b.13 f.6 Questionnaire Committee, 1969-1970
- b.13 f.7 Rockefeller Center Tree Lighting, 1976

General Alphabetical Files (cont.)

- b.13 f.8 Stage Seating Charts, undated
- b.13 f.9-11 Grants, 1974-1988
- Marketing Files
  - Concert flyers, press releases, membership mailings, and print advertisements
- b.13 f.12-13 1976-1989
- b.14 f.1-6 1979-1999 (Includes photographs of choir members.)
- b.28 f.1 Concert Posters, undated
- Meeting Records
  - b.14 f.7 Association of New York City Choruses Meetings, 1975-1981
  - Board of Directors Meetings
    - b.14 f.8-9 1931-1934
    - b.15 f.1-6 1946-1965
    - b.16 f.1-11 1965-1980
    - b.17 f.1-8 1980-1990
    - b.18 f.1-7 1990-1999
  - b.18 f.8-11 Member Meetings, 1964-1989
  - b.19 f.1 Member Meetings, 1987-1992
  - b.19 f.2-9 Membership Materials, 1940-1999
  - b.20 f.1-5 Membership Materials, 1940-1999
- President's Files
  - b.20 f.6-8 General Files, 1976-1980
  - b.21 f.1-2 Prager, David, 1955-1956
  - b.21 f.3 Summer Letters to Members, 1967-1980
- Programs, 1924-2008
  - b.21 f.4-7 1920s-1930s
  - b.22 f.1-5 1940s-1950s
  - b.23 f.1-6 1960s-1970s
  - b.24 f.1-5 1970s-1990s
  - b.25 f.1-5 1990s
  - b.26 f.1-2 2000s
- Recording Files
  - b.26 f.3-7 General Files, 1957-1981
  - b.26 f.8 Carnegie Hall Recording Company, 1958
  - b.26 f.9 Channel 13, 1964
  - b.26 f.10 Concert Hall Society, 1954-1958
  - b.26 f.11 Everest Recordings, 1950-1965
  - b.26 f.12 Fantasy Records, 1959-1962

Recording Files (cont.)

- b.26 f.13 Polish Records, 1971
- b.26 f.14 Private Victoria Recordings, 1959
- b.26 f.15 Vanguard Recordings Society, Inc., 1958-1965
- b.27 f.1 Vox Productions, 1960-1967

Scrapbooks

- b.28 f.3 1924-1931 (Adesi Chorus)
- b.29 f.1-2 1926-1932
- b.29 f.3 1928-1931
- b.27 f.2 1928-1934 (From Mary Walker Delafield)
- b.29 f.4 1929-1935
- b.30 1932-1950
- b.28 f.2 1933-1937
- b.31 1950-1958
- b.32 1957-1980
- b.27 f.3-8 Staffing, 1956-1994