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Music Division**

Guide to the

Ethel Burns papers

1954-1975 (bulk 1954-1970)

LPA Mss 2011-001

Compiled by Matthew Snyder, December 2011

Summary

Creator: Burns, Ethel

Title: Ethel Burns papers, 1954-1975 (bulk 1954-1970)

Size: 10.29 linear feet (25 boxes)

Source: Donated by Roy J. Bernstein, Executor, Estate of Ethel Burns, 2011.

Abstract: The Ethel Burns papers document the music, arts and children's programs Burns produced and directed at radio/television station WNYE and television station WCBS in New York City. The files include scripts, correspondence, production information, press releases, reviews and photographs. Among other programs, the collection contains information on the series American Musical Theatre and Dial M For Music.

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

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Chief, Music Division, The New York Library for the Performing Arts.

Preferred citation: Ethel Burns papers, LPA Mss 2011-001. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Processing note: Processing consisted of arranging and foldering files.

Related collections

The Paley Center for Media holds the only surviving copies of some of the programs produced by Ethel Burns. These include episodes of American Musical Theatre, Dial M For Music, Our American Musical Heritage, and the charity broadcast A Gift Of The Heart.

Creator history

Ethel Burns (ca. 1908-1998, born Ethel Feingold) grew up in Brooklyn, the child of Russian immigrants. She studied piano and graduated from the Juilliard School and Columbia University. She began teaching music at Boys High School in Williamsburg in 1938. There, she formed the Melody Men, a racially integrated chorus that performed around New York City and the Catskills. Following a brief marriage to another teacher named Bernstein, she took a shortened version of that name.

In 1950, Burns took a job at WNYE, the radio/television station of the city's Board of Education, where she co-created a radio show about music for grade schoolers called *It's Fun To Sing*. She produced several other programs for the station before moving to WCBS in 1959. There, she co-created the television program *American Musical Theatre*. The show featured performers, writers and directors from the Broadway, opera and ballet worlds discussing and performing their art before an audience of students. An early form of public television, the show's guests included Bob Fosse and Gwen Verdon, Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock, Richard Rodgers, Harry Belafonte, Richard Burton, Sammy Davis Jr., Marc Blitzstein, Edward Villella, Abe Burrows, Sally Anne Howes, Stephen Sondheim, Roberta Peters, Shirley Verrett, Betty Comden, Adolph Green and Jule Styne, and Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Lowe. The weekly half-hour program, which ran for six years, won three Emmy Awards and was also broadcast in Australia, Japan, England and Canada.

Following the cancellation of *American Musical Theatre*, Burns produced *Dial M For Music*, a series featuring jazz musicians. Among its guests were the Count Basie Orchestra, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Herbie Mann, Carmen McRae, Coleman Hawkins, Cannonball Adderley, Art Blakey, Horace Silver, The Modern Jazz Quartet, Dave Brubeck, Dizzy Gillespie and Maynard Ferguson. That program, too, won an Emmy, as did *Our American Musical Heritage*, a series Burns produced featuring jazz and other types of American music.

The assassination of Robert Kennedy spurred Burns to produce *A Contemporary Memorial*, a musical tribute to Kennedy featuring Duke Ellington, Bill Evans, Dizzy Gillespie, the Woody Herman Orchestra, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Horace Silver, Grady Tate and Joe Williams. Burns retired in the early 1970s.

Source: Blumenthal, Ralph, "The Legacy of a Stage-Struck Teacher; Dusty Treasures Reveal a Golden Era for Broadway, TV and Ethel Burns (Who?)," *New York Times*, October 22, 1998.

Scope and content note

The Ethel Burns papers document the radio and television programs she produced for WNYE and WCBS in New York City. The files consist of scripts, correspondence, production information, press releases, reviews and photographs. Productions documented include programs devoted to music and theatre, such as *American Musical Theatre*, *Dial M For Music*, *It's Fun To Sing*, *Our American Musical Heritage* and *Tune-Up Time*; programs for children including *Around The Corner*, *Candles On The Cake*, *Jack And The Beanstalk*, and *Neighbors And Friends*; and a musical tribute to Robert Kennedy, *A Contemporary Memorial*.

Arrangement

The Ethel Burns papers are organized into the following series:

Series I: Project Files, 1954-1974

Series II: General Files, 1959-1975

Key terms

Names

Adderley, Cannonball

Armstrong, Louis, 1901-1971

Burns, Ethel

Columbia Broadcasting System, inc.

Modern Jazz Quartet

Roach, Max, 1924-2007

Rodgers, Richard, 1902-1979

WCBS-TV (Television station : New York, N.Y.)

WNYE (Television station : Brooklyn, New York, N.Y.)

Occupations

Film directors

Film producers

Special formats

Black-and-white photographs

Clippings (information artifacts)

Commercial correspondence

Personal correspondence

Press releases

Screenplays

Container list

Series I: Project Files, 1954-1974 (24 boxes)

This series contains files documenting the programs Ethel Burns produced and/or directed for WNYE and WCBS. Some of the WCBS programs were distributed nationally on the CBS network. Notes for each program specify the producing station. File contents can include scripts; episode listings; production and research notes; press releases, clippings, photographs, and other publicity materials; and correspondence and inter-departmental memos.

The majority of the files (about 16 boxes) are devoted to *Around The Corner*, a television program for young children that ran from 1963 to 1970. Other programs with significant content include *American Musical Theatre*, *Dial M For Music*, *It's Fun To Sing*, and *Our American Musical Heritage*.

The *American Musical Theatre* files have scripts for the first 28 episodes, press releases announcing many of the guests, and a separate folder documenting Richard Rodgers's appearance on the show. The *Dial M For Music* files contain photographs of the musicians performing on the show, including Louis Armstrong, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Max Roach, and Cannonball Adderley.

The files for *It's Fun To Sing* contain most of the scripts for the series. The folders for *Our American Musical Heritage* contain a grant application to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to make the Emmy-winning series, which had been produced for local broadcast by WCBS, available for nationwide distribution on PBS.

Other files in the series include the music programs *Music Is...*, *Let's Make Music*, *The Man And The Music*, *Children's Musical Theatre*, *Tune-Up Time* and *Words And Music*; general programs for children including *Aladdin*, *Candles On The Cake*, *Jack And The Beanstalk*, *Neighbors And Friends* and *Pinocchio*; *A Contemporary Memorial*, a program in memory of Robert Kennedy which featured jazz musicians; and *A Gift Of The Heart*, a Catholic Charities appeal broadcast. The files also contain proposals for projects that were never produced, such as a music show which would have been hosted by Woody Herman.

b.1 f.1	All City High School Chorus and Orchestra Concert, 1971 (WCBS.)
b.1 f.2	<i>Aladdin</i> , 1967-1971 (WCBS.)
b.1 f.3	<i>Almanac</i> , 1958 (WNYE.)
	<i>American Musical Theatre</i> , 1959-1966 (WCBS.)
b.1 f.4-5	General
b.1 f.6	Press Releases and Clippings
b.1 f.7	Rodgers, Richard
b.1 f.8-10	Scripts
	<i>Around The Corner</i> (WCBS.)
b.2 f.1	General, 1963-1970
	Episode Files, 1962-1970
b.2 f.2-17	1-15
b.3 f.1-38	16-53
b.4 f.1-31	54-84

Series I: Project Files, 1954-1974 (24 boxes)... (cont.)

Around The Corner (WCBS.) (cont.)

Episode Files, 1962-1970 (cont.)

b.5 f.1-13	85-97
b.6 f.1-2	98-99
b.6 f.3-8	101-106
b.6 f.9	108
b.6 f.10	110
b.6 f.11	114-115
b.6 f.12	123
b.6 f.13-16	127-130
b.6 f.17	131
b.6 f.18	133
b.7 f.1-2	134-135
b.7 f.3-16	140-152
b.8 f.1-9	153-161
b.8 f.10	163
b.8 f.11	165
b.9 f.1-5	166-170
b.9 f.6-7	172-173
b.10 f.1-15	174-188
b.11 f.1-10	189-198
b.12 f.1-8	199-206
b.13 f.1-6	207-212
b.14 f.1-7	213-219
b.15 f.1-6	224-229
b.15 f.7-8	231-232
b.16 f.1-3	233-235
b.16 f.4	Hour-Long Version, 1968
b.16 f.5	Payment Memos and Contracts, 1965-1966
b.16 f.6	Photographs
b.16 f.7-8	Publicity, 1965-1970
b.17 f.1-3	Rerun Lists, 1963-1971
b.17 f.4	Reviews, 1965-1967
b.17 f.5	Tape Erasures, 1964
b.17 f.6-8	<i>Candles On The Cake</i> , 1954-1955 (WNYE and WPIX.)
b.17 f.9	<i>Children's Musical Theatre</i> , 1965-1966 (WCBS.)
b.18 f.1	<i>A Contemporary Memorial</i> , 1968 (WCBS.)
b.18 f.2	<i>A Day To Remember</i> , 1954-1955 (WNYE.)
	<i>Dial M For Music</i> (WCBS.)
b.18 f.3	Correspondence, 1965-1968
b.18 f.4	Episode Lists, 1965-1968

Series I: Project Files, 1954-1974 (24 boxes)... (cont.)

Dial M For Music (WCBS.) (cont.)

- b.18 f.5 Photographs, 1969-1970
- b.18 f.6-7 Publicity and Clippings, 1965-1970
- b.19 f.1 Publicity and Clippings, 1965-1970
- b.19 f.2 Rerun Lists, 1965-1966
- b.19 f.3 Scripts, 1965-1966
- b.19 f.4 *For Your Information*, 1966 (Unproduced pilot script.)
- b.19 f.5-6 *A Gift Of The Heart*, 1968 (WCBS.)
It's Fun To Sing, 1955-1958 (WNYE.)
- b.20 f.1 General
Scripts
- b.20 f.2 Series I
- b.20 f.3-4 Series II
- b.20 f.5 Series III
- b.20 f.6 *Jack and the Beanstalk*, 1966 (WCBS)
- b.21 f.1-2 *Let's Make Music*, 1963-1964 (WNYE.)
- b.21 f.3-6 *The Man and His Music*, 1959-1962 (WNYE.)
- b.22 f.1-2 *Music Is....* (WNYE.)
- b.22 f.3 *Music! Music! Music!* (Program proposal)
- b.22 f.4-5 *Neighbors And Friends*, 1955 (WNYE.)
Our American Musical Heritage, 1971-1974 (WCBS.)
- b.22 f.6 Corporation for Public Broadcasting Proposal
- b.23 f.1-3 Scripts
- b.23 f.4 *Pinnocchio*, 1965-1966 (WCBS.)
- b.23 f.5-6 *Songs To Remember*, 1956 (WNYE.)
- b.24 f.1-2 *Songs To Share*, 1958-1959 (WNYE.)
- b.24 f.3 *Tune-Up Time*, 1957 (WNYE.)
- b.24 f.4 *We Point With Pride*, 1966 (WNYE.)
- b.24 f.5 Woody Herman Program Proposal
- b.24 f.6 *Words And Music*, 1956-1957 (WNYE.)

Series II: General Files, 1959-1975 (1 box)

This series contains correspondence; notes and proposals for untitled programs; photographs; and reports from the New York City Board of Education on its radio and television programming. The correspondence is in two parts: a folder for general correspondence to Burns, and memos and letters from WCBS and CBS. Much of the correspondence to Burns is fan mail for American Musical Theatre. There are also letters and telegrams of congratulations regarding the Emmy awards her programs won. The notes and proposals file contains feedback from school students on program ideas. The photographs contain production stills from unidentified music programs. The Board of Education reports give a yearly indication of Burns's output. All are noted with page numbers that refer to her programs.

Series II: General Files, 1959-1975 (1 box)

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- b.24 f.7 Board of Education Radio and Television Reports, 1961-1970
Correspondence
- b.24 f.8 General, 1959-1969
- b.25 f.1 CBS and WCBS, 1961-1967
- b.25 f.2 Notes and Proposals
- b.25 f.3 Photographs, 1960s-1975