

\*T-Mss 2003-017

**Guide to the Mary Ellis Papers, 1897-2003**

Billy Rose Theatre Division



The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
New York, New York

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## **Descriptive Summary**

Title: Mary Ellis Papers, 1897-2003

Creator: Mary Ellis

Call Number: \*T-Mss 2003-017

Size: 13.625 linear feet (19 boxes)

Repository: The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.  
Billy Rose Theatre Division. New York, New York.

Abstract: During her long life, Mary Ellis (1897-2003) was a successful singer and actress in opera, theatre, film, radio, and television. Working first in her native United States, then from the 1930s in her adopted home of England, she played dozens of roles and crossed paths with hundreds of theatrical personalities. This collection, which includes correspondence, personal items, production files, photographs, scrapbooks, and clippings, spans Ms. Ellis' life and documents both her career and something of the artistic environment in which it flourished.

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## **Administrative Information**

Source: The Mary Ellis Papers were donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Division by Ms. Ellis' nephew, Joshua Liveright, in June 2003.

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

Preferred Citation: Mary Ellis Papers, \*T-Mss 2003-017. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

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## Biographical Note

Singer and actress Mary Ellis was born May Belle Elsas, June 15, 1897 (some sources say 1900) in New York, NY. Her father, German-born Herman Elsas, was a successful businessman, and her mother, Caroline (Reinhardt) Elsas, was a talented pianist, so May grew up in a relatively privileged, artistic household. Her first encounter with opera around 1910 set the young girl's vocational course, and she spent the next few years developing her lyric soprano instrument under the tutelage of Belgian contralto Frieda de Goebele and Italian operatic coach Fernando Tanara.

In 1918, the Metropolitan Opera auditioned May, signed her to a four-year contract, and, given wartime anti-German sentiments, mandated a name change. The newly dubbed Mary Ellis made her Metropolitan debut December 14, 1918, in the world premiere of Giacomo Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, part of a triptych of short operas also including *Il Tabarro* and *Gianni Schicchi*, in which she understudied leading player Florence Easton. In 1919, she appeared with Enrico Caruso in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, and also shared the Met stage with Fyodor Chaliapin in *Boris Godunov*. At the end of the year, she originated the role of Mytyl in Albert Wolff's operatic rendering of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird (L'Oiseau Bleu)*, and in 1921 she appeared opposite mentor Geraldine Farrar in Gustave Charpentier's *Louise*, playing two comic supporting parts, including one billed as the "Street Arab."

Perhaps it was the theatrical acumen she displayed in the latter that attracted the notice of impresario David Belasco, who asked Ms. Ellis to play Nerissa in his 1922 production of *The Merchant of Venice*. The nascent actress' tenure at the Metropolitan was over, but her theatrical career was galvanized when she was cast in the title role of Rudolf Friml's 1924 operetta *Rose Marie*, becoming the toast of Broadway with a pianissimo high B-flat during "Indian Love Call." Yet after a year she changed course once again, leaving *Rose Marie* for a downtown Neighborhood Playhouse production of An-Ski's *The Dybbuk*. In 1926, Ms. Ellis began appearing with British actor Basil Sydney's company The Garrick Players (so named for the Garrick Theatre, where they often performed), starring as Katherine in an acclaimed 1927 modern-dress version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, among other productions. In 1929, she and Basil Sydney were wed; it was Mary Ellis' third marriage, following two short-lived unions, in 1919 and 1923.

Her acting career continued in high gear. In 1930 she and Sydney had a hit with Edwin Justin Mayer's *Children of Darkness*, and took the play -- retitled *Knave and Queen* -- to London in 1931. Later that year, they returned to the West End with the Theatre Guild's production of Eugene O'Neill's groundbreaking, five-hour stream-of-consciousness drama *Strange Interlude*. The couple took up residence in England, a country Mary Ellis adopted as her primary home until her death. At His Majesty's Theatre in 1933 she sang professionally for the first time since *Rose Marie* in Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Music in the Air*, and noticed a more than normally attentive audience member during one matinee performance. It was Ivor Novello, the writer-composer-actor-director whose versatility and popularity rivaled Noel Coward's. Over the next decade, Mary Ellis acted as Novello's muse for three musical plays. But before their collaboration could get

under way, she was summoned to Hollywood, where she starred for Paramount Pictures in three films, including *Paris in Spring* (1935). On her return, she played opposite Novello in his *Glamorous Night* (1935), a romantic musical confection encompassing kings and gypsies and early television. It ran for months at the Drury Lane to sold-out crowds--including, at one performance, King George V and Queen Mary--and was filmed in 1937. The next Novello musical, *The Dancing Years* (1939), was just as successful, even though its decades-spanning Vienna-set storyline touched on the brutality of Nazism. By this time, Ms. Ellis had split from Sydney, and married a fourth husband, wealthy Scotsman Jock Roberts, in 1938.

She took time off during the early war years for welfare and hospital work, but in 1943 Novello lured her back to the West End for his new show, *Arc de Triomphe*. Set in World War I Paris, the musical included an opera sequence, composed by Novello, featuring Ms. Ellis as Joan of Arc. In 1944, the actress appeared in Noel Coward's *Point Valaine*, and after the war, she had a particularly gratifying triumph in 1948 opposite Eric Portman in Terence Rattigan's *Playbill*, composed of the one-acts *The Browning Version* and *Harlequinade*.

The early 1950s were a difficult period for Ms. Ellis. She lost her husband, Jock Roberts, to a climbing accident in 1950, and in 1951 Novello also died unexpectedly. In 1954, she had a professional disappointment as Mrs. Erlynne in Noel Coward's *After the Ball*, a poorly received musical version of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. It was Mary Ellis' last singing role. But she continued to take on new acting challenges: as Volumnia in *Coriolanus* at Stratford-upon-Avon (1952); as Christine Mannon in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1955); and as Eliza Gant in *Look Homeward, Angel* (1962). She also appeared in many television plays, and even brought the Queen of Brobdingnag to life in the 1960 film *The Three Worlds of Gulliver*. Ms. Ellis' last stage appearance was in a 1970 production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in Guildford. A non-ghost-written autobiography, *Those Dancing Years*, appeared in 1982, revealing a woman of lively intelligence and rich experience. Approaching her centenary in the 1990s, she came to the attention of a new generation of audiences when she appeared in Granada Television's *Sherlock Holmes* series.

Mary Ellis died January 30, 2003, at age 105. In obituaries, she was identified as probably the last surviving singer both to create a role in a Puccini opera, and to appear opposite Caruso. Her fame may not have endured beyond her death, but Mary Ellis' life and career intersected with some of the leading figures and defining achievements of 20th-century performing arts history.

## Scope and Content Note

The Mary Ellis papers span the years 1897 to 2003, from a newspaper published on the date of her birth to the obituaries following her death. The collection, which consists of correspondence and personal papers, production files, photographs, scrapbooks, clippings, and a few items of ephemera, documents the singer-actress' life and career in opera, theatre, film, and television, both in her native United States and in her adopted home of England.

The correspondence series of the collection is particularly strong, containing hundreds of items of a predominantly personal nature from many friends and colleagues, including Peggy Ashcroft, Noel Coward, John Gielgud, Helen Hayes, Gertrude Lawrence, Vivien Leigh, and Laurence Olivier, over a period spanning more than eight decades. Dozens of letters from opera singer and longtime friend Geraldine Farrar; from actor and friend Romney Brent; and from actress Mary Morris, who lived with Ms. Ellis for a time in the 1950s, are characterized by their use of pet names and their affectionate tone. Ivor Novello, who wrote and composed three musical plays for her, is also well represented. Not contained in the collection is correspondence from any of Ms. Ellis' four husbands, with the possible exception of a letter from third husband Basil Sydney. There is also a smattering of professional correspondence from various stages of Ms. Ellis' career, including her time at the Metropolitan Opera.

Highlights of Ms. Ellis' personal papers include a copy of the "Rhapsody in Blue" score personally inscribed by George Gershwin, a signed portrait of Ivor Novello, and a number of items relating to Novello's death. Also included are stray pieces of artwork, souvenirs, and news items. Financial records are mostly absent from the collection.

Production files include scripts and programs, some with annotations or autographs, along with a few pieces of sheet music that were kept with the collection; a number of bound vocal scores were moved to the Music Division. There are also a few pieces of ephemera related to specific productions, notably a lace fan Ms. Ellis carried in *Rose Marie*.

Another strength of the collection is the photographs series. Portraits and snapshots cover Ms. Ellis' lifespan with few gaps, and also encompass a number of friends and family members. In addition, the actress' theatre and Hollywood film credits are particularly well represented by hundreds of black and white production stills.

Two volumes in the scrapbooks series provide excellent coverage of Ms. Ellis' time at the Metropolitan Opera, and of her largely American-based acting career through 1932. Another scrapbook contains some information about the actress' activities during the 1930s in London and Hollywood, while a fourth volume documents the 1935 production of *Glamorous Night*, mostly through photographs. The bulk of Ms. Ellis' career in England is not represented here, although it is well documented in the clippings series.

Finally, two printed photocollages among the collection's oversized materials demonstrate at a glance the breadth of the subject's life.

Some material was removed from the collection in October 2004 by Joshua Liveright, Ms. Ellis' nephew, and shipped to the Theatre Museum, London. These transferred items relate primarily to Ms. Ellis' career in England, and include mostly duplicate photographs, clippings, serials, scripts, scrapbook, and programs.

## **Organization**

- Series I: Correspondence
  - Subseries 1 - Personal correspondence
  - Subseries 2 - Professional correspondence
- Series II: Personal Papers and Ephemera
- Series III: Production Files
  - Subseries 1 - Scripts
  - Subseries 2 - Sheet music and songbooks
  - Subseries 3 - Programs and souvenirs
- Series IV: Photographs
  - Subseries 1 - Portraits, friends, and family
  - Subseries 2 - Productions
- Series V: Scrapbooks
- Series VI: Clippings
- Series VII: Oversized Materials
  - Subseries 1 - Photographs
  - Subseries 2 - Other materials

## **Series Descriptions/Container List**

### **Series I: Correspondence, 1912-2001**

3 boxes

Includes both purely personal and purely professional correspondence, and a considerable amount of correspondence that straddles the two categories. In such cases, more weight was given to the personal.

#### **Subseries 1 - Personal correspondence, 1912-1994**

2 boxes, 5 folders

Alphabetical.

Includes letters, cards, telegrams, and invitations Mary Ellis received over an 82-year period from many friends and loved ones, family members, and professional associates, most of whom were on a first-name basis with her. Among the most

frequent correspondents are friend Romney Brent; opera singer and mentor Geraldine Farrar; friend Mary Morris; and collaborator Ivor Novello. Ms. Ellis separated some of these pieces of correspondence roughly by date, and some by correspondent; others were separated into envelopes marked "very special letters" or, in one case, "interesting & very important notes, cards, and letters of a life-time." Since so much of the subject's correspondence could be interpreted as fitting that description, these have been integrated in alphabetical order with the rest.

- b. 1 f. 1 A- B, 1933-1994, undated  
Correspondents include Peggy Ashcroft, Jeremy Brett, and Lord Byng of Vymy.
- b. 1 f. 2 Oreste Basilio, 1912  
This is the earliest letter in the collection, written to a 15-year-old Mary by an Italian admirer.
- b. 1 f. 3 Beaumont, Hugh "Binkie," 1944-1954, undated
- b. 1 f. 4 Belasco, David, 1922-1929
- b. 1 f. 5 Block, Ralph, 1921  
Identified as "the most perfect love letter" on the enclosed envelope.
- b. 1 f. 6 Brent, Romney, 1935-1951
- b. 1 f. 7 Brent, Romney, 1953-1955
- b. 1 f. 8 Brent, Romney, 1956-1957
- b. 1 f. 9 Brent, Romney, 1958-1966
- b. 1 f. 10 C-F, 1929-1993, undated  
Correspondents include Mady Christians, Marc Connelly, Noel Coward, Ruth Draper, Kay Francis, and Christopher Fry.
- b. 1 f. 11 Farrar, Geraldine, 1914-1916
- b. 1 f. 12 Farrar, Geraldine, 1917-1923
- b. 1 f. 13 Farrar, Geraldine, 1932-1957
- b. 1 f. 14 Farrar, Geraldine, 1958-1967  
Includes letter from Sylvia Blein, Geraldine Farrar's

maid, following Ms. Farrar's death.

- b. 1 f. 15 **Farrar, Geraldine, undated**
- b. 1 f. 16 **G-H, 1914-1993, undated**  
Correspondents include John Gielgud, William Gillette, Peter Glenville, Stewart Granger, Peter Hall, Oscar Hammerstein II, Christopher Hassall, Helen Hayes, Richard Haydn, Robert Helpmann, Katharine Hepburn, and Michael Hordern.
- b. 1 f. 17 **J-L, circa 1935-1993, undated**  
Correspondents include Robert Edmond Jones, Dennis King, Fritz Lang, Gertrude Lawrence, Eva Le Gallienne, Vivien Leigh, and Margaret Leighton.
- b. 1 f. 18 **Liveright family, 1976-1988**  
Correspondents are family members.
- b. 2 f. 1 **M, 1937-1994, undated**  
Correspondents include Herbert Marshall and W. Somerset Maugham.
- b. 2 f. 2 **Morris, Mary, 1952**
- b. 2 f. 3 **Morris, Mary, probably 1952**  
Undated, but bundled with letters from 1952.
- b. 2 f. 4 **Morris, Mary, 1953**
- b. 2 f. 5 **Morris, Mary, 1954-1955**
- b. 2 f. 6 **Morris, Mary, probably 1954**  
Undated, but bundled with letters from 1954.
- b. 2 f. 7 **Morris, Mary, 1959, undated**
- b. 2 f. 8 **Morris, Mary, condolences on death, 1988**
- b. 2 f. 9 **Novello, Ivor, undated**
- b. 2 f. 10 **N-R, 1932-1993, undated**  
Correspondents include George Jean Nathan, Laurence Olivier, Maria Ouspenskaya, Eric Portman, Anthony Quayle, Terence Rattigan, and Ralph Richardson.
- b. 3 f. 1 **S-W, 1919-1994, undated**  
Correspondents include Paul Scofield, Robert



Sherwood, Laurette Taylor, Marie Tempest, Sybil Thorndike, and Emlyn Williams.

- b. 3 f. 2 Wilson, L. L., 1977-1978
- b. 3 f. 3 Wragg, Arthur "Raggy," 1940-1967, undated
- b. 3 f. 4 Unidentified, 1927-1994
- b. 3 f. 5 Unidentified, undated

**Subseries 2 - Professional correspondence, 1918-2001**

4 folders

Chronological.

Contains Metropolitan Opera contracts and other communications during Ms. Ellis' tenure with the company, a contract for her appearance in David Belasco's production of *The Merchant of Venice*, assorted other correspondence of a business nature over her career, and fan mail that primarily dates to her interviews and acting appearances later in life.

- b. 3 f. 6 Metropolitan Opera, 1918-1921
- b. 3 f. 7 Belasco contract, 1922
- b. 3 f. 8 General, 1939-1998
- b. 3 f. 9 Fan mail, 1939, 1977-2001, undated

**Series II: Personal Papers and Ephemera, 1897-2003, undated**

1 box

Chronological.

Contains a variety of items, including correspondence, photographs, programs, and clippings, that overlap to some extent with other series, but that hold a position of particular personal significance in Ms. Ellis' life.

- b. 4 f. 1 Birth certificate, 1897 June  
Photocopy of original.
- b. 4 f. 2 Note in German to parents, 1905 December 30
- b. 4 f. 3 *Vielles Chansons pour Les Coeurs Sensibles* songbook,

before 1918

French-language songbook is undated, but inscribed by "May Elsas," Mary Ellis' given name before changing it for her professional career.

- b. 4 f. 4 Autographed portrait of David Belasco, 1923
- b. 4 f. 5 Drawing of Basil Sydney, 1923  
Signed by artist, Gordon Bryant.
- b. 4 f. 6 Score for *Rhapsody in Blue* , by George Gershwin, 1924  
"For Mary" stamped in gold on cover, and inscribed to "Mary" by "G" inside.
- b. 4 f. 7 Caricature of Mary Ellis, probably 1925  
Signed by artist, Aline Fruhault. Given the hairstyle, probably as seen in *The Dybbuk* , 1925.
- b. 4 f. 8 Menu for Patrick Cardinal Hayes luncheon, 1928 May 8
- b. 4 f. 9 Portrait of Ivor Novello, 1935  
Inscribed by Novello.
- b. 4 f. 10 Invitation and seating plan for Sir Edward Marsh dinner, 1937 March 17
- b. 4 f. 11 Royal invitations, 1939
- b. 4 f. 12 Autographed menu for *Arc de Triomphe* party, 1944
- b. 4 f. 13 Writings, 1949, undated  
Includes a 1949 article on decorating written for the British magazine *Woman's Own* , a typewritten piece titled "Youth Waits," and a handwritten essay titled "It Isn't Easy." The latter two are undated and unidentified as to publication or ultimate use.
- b. 4 f. 14 Death of Jock Roberts, 1950  
Contains a news item about fourth husband's estate.
- b. 4 f. 15 Alys Bentley obituary, 1951 January 9  
Bentley was Mary Ellis' music and dance teacher from 1912.
- b. 4 f. 16 Death of Ivor Novello, 1951  
Includes funeral program, souvenir program for "Salute to Ivor Novello" memorial concert at The London Coliseum, poem and words in tribute by Mary Ellis, condolences and

other correspondence, and obituaries.

- b. 4 f. 17 **Financial records, 1950s**  
Includes 1953-54 ration book.
- b. 4 f. 18 **Souvenir program for Queen Elizabeth II coronation, 1953 June 2**
- b. 4 f. 19 **Paul Elsas exhibition catalog, 1956**  
French language. Artist is Mary Ellis' cousin.
- b. 4 f. 20 **Award from Yale University School of Drama, 1965 November 6**
- b. 4 f. 21 **Obituaries, 1972 November 14**  
Side-by-side New York Times obituaries of Rudolf Friml--"my first starring role"--and Margaret Webster--"my last..." More specifically, this refers to *Rose Marie* , composed by Friml, starring Mary Ellis in the title role in 1924, and to the 1970 Margaret Webster-directed production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* , which marked Ms. Ellis' last appearance on the stage. Also noted: the date is fourth husband Jock Roberts' birthday.
- b. 4 f. 22 **Sigmoidoscopy procedure, 1974**
- b. 4 f. 23 **Death of Mary Morris, 1988**  
Includes funeral program, copies of will, and obituaries.
- b. 4 f. 24 **Ivor Novello audiocassette sleeve notes, 1990**  
Contains biographical note and track list for the EMI Cedars Series recording *Ivor Novello: The Classic Shows* .
- b. 4 f. 25 **Al Hirschfeld book, 1990**  
The volume *Al Hirschfeld: Self-Portrait in My 86th Year* is a limited edition compilation of etchings and lithographs available at The Margo Feiden Galleries.
- b. 4 f. 26 **"Happy Birthday, Mary Ellis," 1999**  
Contains typewritten copy of article by James Watters, which is subtitled "Name-dropping at 102." Also includes color photocopies of Ms. Ellis with her companion aide, Lyris Knight; of Ms. Ellis at age 100; and of a poster for the film version of *Glamorous Night* .
- b. 4 f. 27 **Theatre Royal Drury Lane souvenir brochure, 2000**  
200th anniversary commemorative brochure includes page on *The Dancing Years* .

- b. 4 f. 28 *Turandot* program sheet, 2001
- b. 4 f. 29 *Love From Ivor* program, 2002  
Concert performance of Novello songs.
- b. 4 f. 30 Mary Ellis obituaries, 2003
- b. 4 f. 31 Artwork, undated  
Unidentified items include drawings, caricatures, cartoons, and costume sketches.
- b. 4 f. 32 Flyer for *Lady Windermere's Fan* , undated  
Fan-shaped flyer appears to date from original production.
- b. 4 f. 33 Greeting cards and invitation, undated
- b. 4 f. 34 Autographed portrait of John Gielgud, undated
- b. 4 f. 35 *The School Recorder Book - Part One* by Edmund Priestley and Fred Fowler, undated
- b. 4 f. 36 Souvenir postcards, undated

**Series III: Production Files, 1918-1996**

3 boxes

Alphabetical.

This series charts the course of Mary Ellis' career primarily as a live performer, both in opera and theatre. It is divided into three subseries: scripts, sheet music and songbooks, and programs and souvenirs.

**Subseries 1 - Scripts, 1922-1996, undated**

1 box, 7 folders

Alphabetical.

Includes scripts for productions that Ms. Ellis appeared in, and some that she did not. The dates for the latter are taken from the title page of the scripts, where included. Some of the scripts (notably *Arc de Triomphe* and *Becky Sharp* ) are annotated. Two are bound copies. The subseries also contains a script for a 1941 British radio broadcast Ms. Ellis presented on Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* , and 1990s-era adaptations (by David Christy) of Ivor Novello's *The Dancing Years* and *Glamorous Night* .

- b. 5 f. 1 *The Age of Innocence* , by Margaret Ayer, undated
- b. 5 f. 2 *Arc de Triomphe* , a play with music by Ivor Novello, 1943  
Includes annotations and revised pages.
- b. 5 f. 3 *Becky Sharp* , by Langdon Mitchell, 1929  
Includes annotations.
- b. 5 f. 4 *The Browning Version* , by Terence Rattigan, 1948
- b. 5 f. 5 *Cheri* , by Anita Loos, undated
- b. 5 f. 6 *The Dancing Years* , by Ivor Novello, 1939  
Includes a few annotations.
- b. 5 f. 7 *The Dancing Years* , adaptation and additional material by David Christy, 1995  
Mary Ellis is a character in a new opening scene.
- b. 5 f. 8 *The Dybbuk* , by S. An-Ski, translated from the original Yiddish by Henry G. Alsberg and Winifred Katzin, 1926  
Bound volume is autographed by the company of the Neighborhood Playhouse production.
- b. 5 f. 9 *Fanny Kemble* , by Mary Cass Canfield and Ethel Borden, 1938
- b. 5 f. 10 *From Little Acorns...* , by Romney Brent and Elsa Larralde, undated
- b. 6 f. 1 *Glamorous Night* , by Ivor Novello, 1996  
Revised book and additional material by David Christy.
- b. 6 f. 2 *Harlequinade* , by Terence Rattigan, 1948
- b. 6 f. 3 *I Am Laughing* , by Edwin Justus Mayer, undated
- b. 6 f. 4 *Madame Thirteen* , by Howard Richardson and Hugh Fellows, undated
- b. 6 f. 5 *The Merchant of Venice* , by William Shakespeare, as arranged for the contemporary stage by David Belasco, 1922  
Bound volume, with preface by Belasco.
- b. 6 f. 6 *Perdita* , by Terence Rattigan, undated

b. 6 f. 7

*Rhapsody in Blue* (Radio program), 1941 September 18  
The script for a radio broadcast of George Gershwin's music presented by Mary Ellis.

**Subseries 2 - Sheet music and songbooks, 1924-1943, undated**

5 folders

Alphabetical.

While most of the sheet music and vocal scores in the Mary Ellis collection have been transferred to the Music Division, several key pieces were kept. Because her collaboration with Ivor Novello was a central element to both their careers, sheets of the composer's songs and a bound book from *The Dancing Years* (with a dedication from Novello to Mary) have been retained. A 1924 songsheet for "Indian Love Call," introduced by Mary in *Rose Marie*, has also been kept with the collection, as has a 1935 songsheet for "Paris in the Spring" featuring Mary's photo.

b. 6 f. 8

*The Dancing Years*, Book and Music by Ivor Novello, Lyrics by Christopher Hassall, 1939  
Dedication by Ivor Novello.

b. 6 f. 9

"Indian Love Call" from *Rose Marie*, Book and Lyrics by Otto Harbach & Oscar Hammerstein, Music by Rudolf Friml and Herbert Stothart, 1924

b. 6 f. 10

Ivor Novello songs, undated  
Loose sheets of songs with lyrics by Christopher Hassall and music by Ivor Novello.

b. 6 f. 11

"Paris in the Spring," *Paris in Spring*, 1935

b. 6 f. 12

"St. Joan" opera sequence from *Arc de Triomphe*, Book and Music by Ivor Novello, Lyrics by Christopher Hassall, 1943

**Subseries 3 - Programs and souvenirs, 1918-1994**

1 box

Alphabetical.

Includes Metropolitan Opera, theatre, and film programs, some of which are autographed. Also contains souvenirs of various productions and performances in which Ms. Ellis

appeared.

- b. 7 f. 1 A-C, 1929-1930
- b. 7 f. 2 *Coriolanus* , 1952  
Contains programs and a cast party invitation.
- b. 7 f. 3 D, 1926, 1939
- b. 7 f. 4 *Glamorous Night* , 1935
- b. 7 f. 5 H-L, 1925-1962
- b. 7 f. 6 Metropolitan Opera, 1918-1920
- b. 7 f. 7 M, 1923-1970
- b. 7 f. 8 *Paris in Spring* , 1935  
Signed artwork from the crew.
- b. 7 f. 9 R, 1924, 1926
- b. 7 f. 10 *Sherlock Holmes* , 1987-1994
- b. 7 f. 11 Marie Tempest Jubilee Concert, 1935  
A signed song sheet from everyone who participated in the concert.
- b. 7 f. 12 *The Three Worlds of Gulliver* (Motion picture), 1960

**Series IV: Photographs, 1901-1990s**

3 boxes

Alphabetical.

The photographs series includes nearly a century's worth of portraits and personal photos both of Mary Ellis and the people in her life, as well as numerous stills from theatre and film productions. Almost all of the photographs are black and white.

**Subseries 1 - Portraits, friends, and family, 1901-1990s, undated**

1 box

Alphabetical.

Contains professional portraits and snapshots of Ms. Ellis and others.

- b. 8 f. 1 Romney Brent, 1909, 1970s, undated
- b. 8 f. 2 Mary Ellis, 1901-1915, undated  
Since the subject subtracted three years from her age for most of her professional life, the dates on some of the earliest photographs are questionable.
- b. 8 f. 3 Mary Ellis in Hollywood, 1934-1936  
Includes studio publicity photographs from Mary Ellis' contractual period at Paramount Pictures.
- b. 8 f. 4 Mary Ellis in Hollywood, negatives, 1934-1936
- b. 8 f. 5 Mary Ellis portraits, 1917-1940s, undated  
Several of these portraits are signed by Mary Ellis, with dedications to such individuals as Ralph Block and "my teacher."
- b. 8 f. 6 Mary Ellis portraits, ca. 1950-1990s
- b. 8 f. 7 Mary Ellis snapshots, 1920s-1960s
- b. 8 f. 8 Mary Ellis with Ivor Novello, 2 May 1935  
The costars are pictured reading newspaper critiques the morning after the *Glamorous Night* opening.
- b. 8 f. 9 Mary Ellis with Jock Roberts (fourth husband), 1937-1939
- b. 8 f. 10 Mary Ellis with Basil Sydney (third husband), 1930-1933, undated
- b. 8 f. 11 Caroline R. Elsas (mother), 1938
- b. 8 f. 12 Geraldine Farrar, 1910s, 1946, 1950
- b. 8 f. 13 Mary Morris, undated
- b. 8 f. 14 Basil Sydney and The Garrick Players, undated
- b. 8 f. 15 Various friends and colleagues, 1910s-1950s, undated  
Includes photos of Tim Brooke, Tullio Carminati, Mady Christians, Jean Cocteau, Frieda de Goebele, Dolores Del Rio, Florence Easton, Fritz Lang, and Blanche Yurka. Some of the photographs are unidentified.

**Subseries 2 - Production photographs, 1918-1970**



2 boxes

Alphabetical.

Includes photographs from theatre, film, and television productions.

- b. 9 f. 1 *After the Ball* , 1954
- b. 9 f. 2 *After the Ball* negative, 1954
- b. 9 f. 3 *All the King's Horses* (Motion picture), 1934
- b. 9 f. 4 *Arc de Triomphe* , 1943
- b. 9 f. 5 *Bella Donna* (Motion picture), 1934
- b. 9 f. 6 *Children of Darkness* , 1930
- b. 9 f. 7 *Coriolanus* , 1952  
Includes autographed photos from costars Siobhan McKenna and Michael Hordern.
- b. 9 f. 8 *The Crown Prince* , 1926
- b. 9 f. 9 *The Dancing Years* , 1939
- b. 9 f. 10 *Double Harness* , 1933
- b. 9 f. 11 *The Dybbuk* , 1925
- b. 9 f. 12 *The End of Summer* (Television program), 1950s
- b. 9 f. 13 *Fatal Lady* (Motion picture), 1936  
1 of 2 folders
- b. 9 f. 14 *Fatal Lady* (Motion picture), 1936  
2 of 2 folders
- b. 10 f. 1 *Glamorous Night* , 1935  
Includes print and negative of king and queen's attendance at performance.
- b. 10 f. 2 *Glamorous Night* (Motion picture), 1937
- b. 10 f. 3 *Hamlet* , 1926  
As Ophelia in modern-dress version, Newport, R.I.
- b. 10 f. 4 *Hattie Stowe* , 1947

- b. 10 f. 5 *He Who Gets Slapped* , 1924  
Mary Ellis was not in this production, which starred Basil Sydney.
- b. 10 f. 6 *The Humble* , 1926  
Production was a theatrical adaptation of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* .
- b. 10 f. 7 *The Innocent Party* , 1937
- b. 10 f. 8 *Jewel Robbery* , 1932
- b. 10 f. 9 *Look Homeward, Angel* , 1962
- b. 10 f. 10 *Love Scenes From Four Centuries* , 10 March 1929  
In this benefit performance for the Eleanora Duse Fellowship Endowment, Basil Sydney played the title character and Mary Ellis played Catherine of France in a scene from Shakespeare's *Henry V* .
- b. 10 f. 11 *Meet the Prince* , 1929
- b. 10 f. 12 Metropolitan Opera, 1918-1922  
Includes photographs from the productions *La Reine Fiamette* , *L'Elisir d'Amore* , *The Blue Bird (L'Oiseau Bleu)* , and *Louise* , and an autographed photo from *Blue Bird* composer Albert Wolff.
- b. 10 f. 13 *Mourning Becomes Electra* , 1955
- b. 10 f. 14 *Mrs. Warren's Profession* , 1970
- b. 10 f. 15 *Music in the Air* , 1933
- b. 10 f. 16 *Paris in Spring* (Motion picture), 1935  
Alternate titles on some of the photos include *Paris Love Song* and *Two on a Tower* .
- b. 10 f. 17 *Playbill* , 1948  
Evening was composed of two Terence Rattigan one-act plays, *The Browning Version* and *Harlequinade* .
- b. 10 f. 18 *Point Valaine* , 1944
- b. 10 f. 19 *Rose Marie* , 1924
- b. 10 f. 20 *Strange Interlude* , 1931
- b. 10 f. 21 *The Taming of the Shrew* , 1927

b. 10 f. 22

Unidentified productions, undated

**Series V: Scrapbooks, 1913-1936**

4 scrapbooks and 1 songbook

Chronological.

The five volumes in this series include four scrapbooks of clippings, photos, and other materials, and one oversized songbook.

b. 11

**Geraldine Farrar concert songbook, 1913**

1 volume

The title "Miss Farrar's Concert, October 1913" is embossed in gold on the cover of this bound volume of sheet music, as is the name "May Elsas." A mounted program inside indicates that the concert took place October 25 at Carnegie Hall. On the same page is a handwritten December 1914 Christmas greeting from Farrar to "Maikind."

b. 12

**Scrapbook, 1918-1921**

1 volume

Includes clippings, programs, photographs, and rehearsal notices relating to Ms. Ellis' career at the Metropolitan Opera. Productions covered include *Suor Angelica* , *La Reine Fiammette* , *L'Elisir d'Amore* , *The Blue Bird (L'Oiseau Bleu)* , and *Louise* . Also included are general articles about Ms. Ellis and about the Metropolitan Opera. Some of the looser enclosed materials, including clippings and a few photographs, were removed and integrated into the appropriate series.

b. 13

**Scrapbook, 1922-1932**

1 volume

Contains clippings about and some programs for productions of *The Merchant of Venice* , *Fanshastics* , *Rose Marie* , *The Dybbuk* , *The Romantic Young Lady* , *The Humble* , *The Crown Prince* , *Banco* , *The Devil's Disciple* , *Hamlet* , *The Taming of the Shrew* , *Twelve Thousand* , *Meet the Prince* , *Love Scenes From Four Centuries* , *Becky Sharp* , *Children of Darkness* , and *Strange Interlude* . The clippings range from reviews to features to news photographs and cartoons; one is from a German-language publication. Other clippings concentrate on Ms. Ellis' transition from opera to operetta

to drama, and document her 1929 marriage to Basil Sydney and the activities of The Garrick Players both in New York and at the Newport Casino Theatre Festival. The scrapbook also includes a 1927 note from David Belasco to Claud Saunders at the Garrick Theatre, a French-language letter from Spanish singer Raquel Meller's secretary to Ms. Ellis, and some clippings covering Ms. Meller's 1926 professional engagement in New York. A unique item is a merchandise tag labeled "Mary Ellis Bag," complete with a photo of the performer. A sheet on the front of the scrapbook indicates that it covers the period 1918-1932, but there are no items clearly dating from before 1922 inside.

b. 14

**Scrapbook, 1935**

1 volume

Includes a number of black and white photographs from the play *Glamorous Night*, one photograph on each side of the 10x14 pages. The scrapbook's first page contains a mounted program cover for *Glamorous Night*, a German-language dedication from "Leo" (probably director Leontine Sagan), and an English-language dedication from Ivor Novello.

b. 15

**Scrapbook, 1935-1936**

1 volume

Contains clippings and program for the play *Glamorous Night*, clippings about the films *All the King's Horses*, *Paris in Spring*, and *Fatal Lady*, about Ms. Ellis' Hollywood career in general, and about her divorce from Basil Sydney. Also included is a telegram from Ms. Ellis to "H. R. Dennis," and correspondence between David Dennis and such other persons as singer Harriet Hilliard and actor Richard Barthelmess. Other clippings cover such Metropolitan Opera-related news as the retirement of general manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza and the death of baritone Antonio Scotti; numerous news photographs and items about the activities of singer Hilliard (including her marriage to orchestra leader and future sitcom husband Ozzie Nelson); and news photographs of the opera singer Gladys Swarthout. The scrapbook also contains various theatre, music, and film programs, ticket stubs, and other printed material. It differs from the other scrapbooks in that only about half of the contents relate directly to Mary Ellis.

**Series VI: Clippings, 1918-2000**

1 box

Chronological.

Includes reviews and feature articles from American and British publications.

- b. 16 f. 1                    1918-1929  
Articles cover Ms. Ellis' Metropolitan Opera career (1918-1921) and such productions as *The Merchant of Venice* (1922), *The Dybbuk* (1926), and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1927).
- b. 16 f. 2                    1930-1933  
Includes clippings relating to productions of *Strange Interlude* (1931) and *Music in the Air* (1933).
- b. 16 f. 3                    1934-1939  
Clippings cover Ms. Ellis' mid-1930s film career, the 1935 production of *Glamorous Night* and the 1939 production of *The Dancing Years* .
- b. 16 f. 4                    1943-1949  
Includes press coverage of *Arc de Triomphe* (1943) and *Playbill* (1947).
- b. 16 f. 5                    1950-1960s  
Includes press coverage of *After the Ball* (1954) and *Look Homeward, Angel* (1962), as well as an excerpt from the book *The World of Musical Comedy* , by Stanley Green.
- b. 16 f. 6                    1976-2000  
Includes profiles of Ms. Ellis in her 80s, 90s, and beyond.
- b. 16 f. 7                    Ivor Novello, 1949-1950  
Contains articles by and about Ivor Novello, including a 1950 serialized profile from *Woman's Pictorial* .

**Series VII: Oversized Materials, 1897-1952, undated**

3 oversized boxes

Includes a number of oversized black and white photographs along with an assortment of other oversized materials.

**Subseries 1 - Photographs, 1912-1936, undated**

2 oversized boxes

Portraits and personal photographs, followed by productions filed alphabetically.

Includes portraits and production photographs.

- b. 17 f. 1 Mary Ellis portraits, 1927, 1936, undated
- b. 17 f. 2 Mary Ellis with Basil Sydney, undated
- b. 17 f. 3 Caroline R. Elsas and Herman Elsas (parents), 1928, undated
- b. 17 f. 4 Geraldine Farrar, 1916
- b. 17 f. 5 Various friends and colleagues, 1912-1935, undated  
Includes portraits of Eleanora Duse, Lewis Milestone, Antonio Scotti, teacher Alys Bentley, and several unidentified individuals.
- b. 17 f. 6 *Becky Sharp* , 1929
- b. 17 f. 7 *The Blue Bird (L'Oiseau Bleu)* , 1919
- b. 17 f. 8 *Cherries Are Ripe* , 1928
- b. 17 f. 9 *Children of Darkness* , 1930
- b. 17 f. 10 *The Crown Prince* , 1926
- b. 18 f. 1 *Double Harness* , 1933
- b. 18 f. 2 *Jewel Robbery* , 1932
- b. 18 f. 3 *The Merchant of Venice* , 1922
- b. 18 f. 4 *The Merry Wives of Gotham* , 1924
- b. 18 f. 5 *Music in the Air* , 1933
- b. 18 f. 6 *Paris in the Spring* (Motion picture), 1935  
Includes one autographed photo to "Maude."
- b. 18 f. 7 *The Romantic Young Lady* , 1926
- b. 18 f. 8 *Rose Marie* , 1924
- b. 18 f. 9 *The Taming of the Shrew* , 1927

b. 18 f. 10 *Twelve Thousand* , 1928

b. 18 f. 11 Unidentified, undated

**Subseries 2 - Other materials, 1897-1952, undated**  
1 oversized box

Includes photocollages, artwork, ephemera, and other oversized materials.

b. 19 f. 1 *The Evening Sun* , 1897 June 15  
New York newspaper from date of Mary Ellis' birth.

b. 19 f. 2 Photographs, 1926, 1943, undated  
Contains oversized photographs from *The Dybbuk* and *Arc de Triomphe* , as well as from an unidentified dinner party.

b. 19 f. 3 Drawings, 1927, undated  
Contains pencil sketches of Ms. Ellis and a caricature depicting a scene from *The Taming of the Shrew* .

b. 19 f. 4 Photocollages, 1930  
Two collages of photographs from *Children of Darkness* .

b. 19 f. 5 Soap advertisement, probably 1932  
Ad for Lux Toilet Soap features testimony from Mary Ellis, and accompanying photo. Publication source is unidentified.

b. 19 f. 6 Window card, 1952  
Advertising the 1952 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre summer season in Stratford-upon-Avon. Mary Ellis appeared in a production of *Coriolanus* .

b. 19 f. 7 *La Boheme* sheet music, undated  
Annotated sheet music for "Si Michiamano Mimi," Act 1.

b. 19 f. 8 Photocollages, undated  
Two printed collages of photographs covering Mary Ellis' life and career, from childhood to the 1970 production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* .

b. 19 f. 9 Swiss Air menu, undated  
Printed on a cloth handkerchief.

## **Separated Material**

Selected items were relocated to the following areas:

### **Music Division**

- 3 cartons of bound vocal scores and sheet music.

### **Theatre Division**

- \*T-Cabinet - Lace fan from 1924 production of *Rose Marie* .
- Davies, Hunter. *Born 1900: A Human History of the Twentieth Century - For Everyone Who Was There* . London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998.
- *The New York Stage: Famous Productions in Photographs* . Edited by Stanley Appelbaum. New York: Dover Publications, 1976.