



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

Guide to the

**Sharon Bridgforth papers**

1989-2015

Sc MG 845

Processed by Nora Soto, 2016.

## Summary

**Creator:** Bridgforth, Sharon

**Title:** Sharon Bridgforth papers

**Date:** 1989-2015

**Size:** 5.63 linear feet (14 boxes, 1 oversize folder)

**Source:** Gift of Sharon Bridgforth, 2011-2015.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** The Sharon Bridgforth papers, 1989-2015, document her personal life and her career as a writer, playwright, and performer. The bulk of the collection consists of her writing and materials related to productions of her plays and films, such as manuscripts and drafts, programs and promotional material, and clippings.

### Conditions Governing Access:

Participant release forms for events with root wy'mn Theatre Company have been removed.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Sharon Bridgforth papers, Sc MG 845, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Nora Soto, 2016.

### Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio and moving image materials. For more information, please contact the division at [schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org](mailto:schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org) or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

## Related Materials:

In the Life Archive (ITLA) miscellaneous collections, Sc MG 736, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

## Creator History

Sharon Bridgforth is a Black lesbian writer, playwright, performer, and theatrical jazz artist. She was born on May 15, 1958, in Chicago, and raised by her mother in South Central, Los Angeles. After attending Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California from 1975 to 1976, she worked as a radio intern for KPFK 90.7 FM and a production assistant for MGM Studios. In 1982, she gave birth to her daughter, artist Sonja Perryman.

After graduating from California State University, Los Angeles, with a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing and Broadcast Media in 1985, Bridgforth began working as a family-planning counselor at Planned Parenthood of Santa Monica. In 1989, she moved from Los Angeles to Austin, Texas, where she worked for the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department as a disease intervention specialist, STD tester, counselor, HIV outreach worker, and educator until 1998. From 1993-1995, she also served as director of The Wrap It Up Show, a call-in radio show on KAZI 88.7 FM sponsored by Planned Parenthood of Austin for teenagers to discuss safe sex.

Bridgforth first began writing poetry at the age of fifteen, and continued to develop her style throughout her early career. In 1992, she wrote and directed *shadows...that which is cast to the side*, a "choreofilm", combining poetry, performance, and video recording; the following year, she wrote and produced *sepia's blues*, a dramatic video presentation. From 1994 to 1997, she worked as a freelance journalist for the *Austin American-Statesman*. In 1993, Bridgforth began writing *the bull-jean stories*, a collection of theatre pieces, poems and short stories which she deemed a "performance novel". She submitted "that beat" for *does your mama know?: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories* in 1995, which was published in 1997 by RedBone Press, an independent publisher for Black gay and lesbian writers founded by Lisa C. Moore. That year, Bridgforth's poem "sonata blue" was anthologized in *Má-Ka: Diasporic Juks: Contemporary Writing by Queers of African Descent*, while excerpts of her work for root wy'mn Theatre Company, *lovve/rituals and rage* and *dyke/warrior-prayers*, were featured in *KenteCloth: Southwest Voices of the African Diaspora*. In 1998, *the bull-jean stories* was published by RedBone Press to critical acclaim; it won the 1998 Lambda Literary Award for Best Book by a Small Press, and was nominated for the Lambda Literary Award for Best Lesbian Fiction and the American Library Association Award for Best Gay/Lesbian Book. Bridgforth herself was voted the Best Author/Poet in *The Austin Chronicle* "Best of Austin" Readers Poll for 1999 and 2000.

Bridgforth established the Finding Voice method of creative writing in 1999, which she developed into a workshop series and later expanded into a web radio show on 91.7 KVRX Radio Caracol. In 2002, she helped organize the inaugural Fire and Ink: A Writers Festival for GLBT People of African Descent, the first national conference for Black LGBT writers helmed by Lisa C. Moore. Bridgforth returned to Fire and Ink III: Cotillion as a performer and panelist guest in 2009. In 2003, she co-edited *voices for racial justice: eliminating racism, empowering women* with Jennifer Margulies as part of the Racial Justice Program of the YWCA of Greater Austin.

*love/conjure blues*, Bridgforth's second performance novel, was published in 2004 and won an Urban Spectrum Black Book Award. In 2007, she directed the *love/conjure blues Text Installation*, a multimedia project of short films with live narration and music based on the novel. In 2010, Bridgforth published *Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: Art, Activism, Academia, and the Austin Project*, co-edited with Omi

Osun Joni L. Jones and Lisa L. Moore. Bridgforth's writing has additionally been anthologized in *Roll Call: A Generational Anthology of Social and Political Black Literature and Art*, *Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity*, *Voices Rising: Celebrating 20 Years of Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Writing*, *First Person Queer: Who We Are (So Far)*; and *solo/black/woman: scripts, interviews, and essays*.

Notably, Bridgforth's career in theater and the performing arts began in 1990, when Word of Mouth Women's Theatre adapted her handwritten poems into *sonnata blue*, a one-woman show starring Starla Benford. In 1992, she wrote *Voices in the Dark*, a dramatic poem performed by the Voices in the Dark Repertory Theatre Company, an all-Black female company directed by Tommye Myrick. In 1993, Bridgforth founded the root wy'mn Theatre Company, an all-Black female Austin-based theatre troupe that combined poetry, dance, and music into performance pieces centered on the experiences of Black women. Bridgforth served as the company's playwright and artistic director from 1993 to 1998, working with Lori Wilson, the company manager, and frequently collaborating with performer Sonja Parks. root wy'mn toured nationally with *lovve/rituals & rage* (1993), *no mo blues* (1995), and *dyke/warrior-prayers* (1997) from 1993-1998, performing at Frontera@Hyde Park Theatre, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, the Out on the Edge Festival of Lesbian and Gay Theater, Randolph Street Gallery, the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, and Walker Art Center's Dyke Nite. The company was voted Best Theatre of the South in *The Austin Chronicle* "Best of Austin" 1996 Critics' Poll. Bridgforth disbanded root wy'mn in 1998 to focus on her writing career.

In 1998, Bridgforth collaborated with Laurie Carlos, international theatre pioneer, who directed *blood pudding* at Frontera@Hyde Park Theatre. She was awarded a grant from the Theatre Communications Group/National Endowment for the Arts for the 2000 playwright-in-residence award at Frontera@Hyde Park Theatre, where she wrote and produced *con flama*. That year, she also held workshops at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio. In 2002, Bridgforth became an anchor artist for the Austin Project, a ten-week program for female scholars, artists, and activists held at the Center for African and African American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She was subsequently named artist-in-residence at the Austin Latino Lesbian/Gay Organization (ALLGO), a Texas organization for queer people of color, and was later appointed ALLGO's artist director in 2004. In 2003, she collaborated with her daughter, Sonja Perryman, on *amniotic/flow*, a spoken-word and music CD.

In 2005, Bridgforth was diagnosed with cervical cancer and underwent a radical hysterectomy. Her next multimedia theater piece, *delta dandi*, was commissioned by Women and Their Work through a Creation Fund Award granted by the National Performance Network in 2007, and premiered at the Long Center for the Performing Arts in 2009. Bridgforth has been a resident playwright at New Dramatists since 2009. She founded the Theatrical Jazz Institute, which was produced by the Theatre School at DePaul and Links Hall in Chicago from 2011 to 2012. In 2013, she premiered *River See*, a theatrical jazz performance installation funded as part of the 2012 National Performance Network Creation Fund. Her awards include the 2001 YWCA Woman of the Year in Arts and Communications and the 2008 Alpert/Hedgebrook Residency Prize. She most recently received a 2016 Creative Capital Award to fund *dat Black Mermaid Man Lady*, a series of interactive community-based events that include oracle readings, performance installations, workshops, processions, and tiny house building projects.

## Scope and Content Note

The Sharon Bridgforth papers, 1989-2015, document her personal life and her career as a writer, playwright, and performer. The bulk of the collection consists of her writing and materials related to productions of her plays and films, such as manuscripts and drafts, programs and promotional material, and clippings.

**Arrangement:** Arranged into four series: (1) Personal; (2) Writing; (3) Productions; and (4) Professional.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American lesbians  
African American radio broadcasters  
African American women authors  
African American women dramatists  
African American women motion picture producers and directors  
African American women performance artists  
African American women poets  
Authors, Black

### **Names**

Bridgforth, Sharon  
Bridgforth, Sharon. Delta dandi  
Moore, Lisa C.  
Perryman, Sonja, 1982-

## Container List

### Personal 1989-2013

This series includes correspondence and printed emails, research material for her website, awards and honors, and ephemera. Bridgforth's personal collection of programs, playbills, and clippings of friends and collaborators' works demonstrate her involvement with a community of Black LGBT writers and performance artists that includes Djola Branner, Laurie Carlos, Daniel Alexander Jones, and Lisa C. Moore. The series also features one bound scrapbook, four unbound scrapbooks, and one photo album with clippings and photos related to her writings and performance pieces.

- b. 1 f. 1-3 Correspondence 1989-2013  
Includes undated correspondence and printed emails.
- b. 1 f. 4 Website material
- b. 1 f. 5 Awards and honors
- b. 1 f. 6 Ephemera
- Scrapbooks
  - b. 14 Bound 1990-1992  
Box 14 replaces box 1, folder 7.
- b. 1 f. 8 Unbound ca. 1994-2003
- b. 2 f. 1-5 Includes a scrapbook about root wy'mn Theatre Company, ca. 1995.
- b. 3 f. 1 Photo album 2004
- Programs and playbills
  - b. 3 f. 2 1991-1999
  - b. 3 f. 3 2000-2010
  - b. 3 f. 4 Jones, Daniel Alexander
  - b. 3 f. 5 Marie, Sonia
  - b. 3 f. 6 Clippings
- b. 14 Posters  
Includes posters of Bridgforth's work and others' work.

### Writing 1990-2008

This series features Bridgforth's published books, *the bull-jean stories* and *love conjure/blues*; material includes drafts, notes and annotated manuscripts, promotional matter, clippings, and reviews. The series also contains clippings of Bridgforth's articles and reviews for the *Austin American-Statesman* and *Lambda Book Report*, and excerpts of her work in such publications as *Austin Arts Downtown*, *Tongues*, *La Voz de Esperanza*, and *Allgo Pasa*. There are also several unpublished manuscripts and annotated drafts from the 1990s.

#### Published 1997-2004

##### *the bull-jean stories*

- b. 4 f. 1 Manuscript
- b. 4 f. 2 Promotional material
- b. 4 f. 3-4 Clippings 1997-2000
- love conjure/blues*
  - b. 4 f. 5 Early notes
  - b. 4 f. 6 First draft, annotated 2003
  - b. 4 f. 7 Second draft, annotated 2003
  - b. 4 f. 8 Annotated with stage notes 2004
  - b. 4 f. 9 Final book

Writing (cont.)

Published (cont.)

love conjure/blues (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 10 Promotional material
- b. 4 f. 11 Clippings
- b. 4 f. 12 Articles and reviews
- Journals and anthologies
- b. 4 f. 13 General
- b. 5 f. 1
- b. 5 f. 2 Promotional material and clippings
- b. 5 f. 3 "a wo'mn called sir" 2001
- b. 5 f. 4 "litany: blood in the soil/texas" 2003
- b. 5 f. 5 Unpublished

Productions 1990-2013

This series consists of Bridgforth's theatrical performances and film work. The Theatre subseries consists of drafts, annotated manuscripts, cue scripts, technical notes, and lighting plots for *Voices in the Dark*, *blood pudding*, *con flama*, *geechee's crossing/martha's overture*, *amniotic/flow*, *delta dandi*, and *River See*. Additionally, materials include programs, promotional material, clippings, and reviews. The root wy'mn Theatre Company subseries features drafts, annotated manuscripts, technical notes, and lighting plots for *lovve/rituals and rage*, *no mo blues*, and *dyke/warrior-prayers*, as well as related programs, promotional material, clippings, and reviews. There are also general folders for programs and promotional material, press kit files, and clippings about the theater company in general. Additionally, the financial document file includes grant applications and budget material. The Film subseries consists of film scripts and annotated shooting scripts for *shadows...that which is cast to the side*, as well as production material, promotional material, and clippings. In addition, the series includes *sepia's blues* production material, promotional material, and correspondence.

Arranged into 3 subseries: (1) Theater; (2) root wy'mn Theatre Company; and (3) Film.

Theater 1992-2013

- b. 6 f. 1 *Voices in the Dark* 1992  
Includes script and program.
- blood pudding*
- b. 6 f. 2 *First draft (griffon/zin zin)* 1996
- b. 6 f. 3 Script annotated with notes 1997
- b. 6 f. 4 Cue script, annotated 1997
- b. 6 f. 5 Programs and promotional material
- b. 6 f. 6 Clippings
- con flama*
- b. 6 f. 7 Programs and promotional material
- b. 6 f. 8 Clippings
- geechee's crossing/martha's overture*
- b. 6 f. 9 First draft, annotated 2000
- b. 6 f. 10 Second draft 2000
- b. 6 f. 11 Third draft 2001
- b. 6 f. 12 Final draft 2002
- amniotic/flow*
- b. 6 f. 13 First version of manuscript, annotated 2001
- b. 6 f. 14 Cue script, annotated 2001
- b. 6 f. 15 Programs and promotional material

Productions (cont.)  
Theater (cont.)  
amniotic/flow (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 16      Clippings  
                  *delta dandi*  
                  Manuscripts
- b. 7 f. 1      Early draft
- b. 7 f. 2      Partial script with notes by Daniel Alexander Jones 2008
- b. 7 f. 3      Staged reading script, annotated, Long Island Center for the Performing Arts 2008
- b. 7 f. 4      Script, annotated with notes 2008
- b. 7 f. 5      Script, "Women Unbound" 2008
- b. 7 f. 6      Collector's edition script 2009
- b. 7 f. 7      Script, Long Island Center for the Performing Arts 2009
- b. 7 f. 8      Stage manager script, Fire and Ink 2009
- b. 7 f. 9      Script, Annie May Swift Hall 2009
- b. 7 f. 10      Final script 2011
- b. 7 f. 11      Correspondence
- b. 7 f. 12      Programs and promotional material
- b. 7 f. 13      Poster
- b. 7 f. 14      Clippings
- River See*
- b. 8 f. 1      Early draft 2010
- b. 8 f. 2      Draft excerpt 2012
- b. 8 f. 3      Edited draft excerpt 2012
- b. 8 f. 4      Draft 2012-2013
- b. 8 f. 5      Notebook 2013
- b. 8 f. 6      Draft with notes 2013
- b. 8 f. 7      Final draft 2013
- b. 8 f. 8      Final script 2013
- b. 8 f. 9-10      Programs and promotional material  
                  Includes event packets.
- root wy'mn Theatre Company
- lovve/rituals and rage*
- b. 8 f. 11      Early drafts
- b. 8 f. 12      First draft, annotated 1992
- b. 8 f. 13      First script 1992
- b. 8 f. 14      Second script 1992
- b. 8 f. 15      Third script 1992
- b. 8 f. 16      Second draft, annotated 1993
- b. 8 f. 17      Fourth script with tech notes 1992-1993
- b. 8 f. 18-20      Programs and promotional material  
                  Includes material for Houston and San Antonio.
- b. 8 f. 21      Clippings
- no mo blues*

Productions (cont.)  
root wy'mn Theatre Company (cont.)  
no mo blues (cont.)

- b. 9 f. 1 First draft, script and plot 1995
- b. 9 f. 2 Second draft, annotated 1995
- b. 9 f. 3 Cue script, annotated, Hyde Park Theatre 1995
- b. 9 f. 4 Final script, Hyde Park Theatre 1995
- b. 9 f. 4 Script, Michigan Womyn's Music Festival 1995
- b. 9 f. 6 Lighting plot
- b. 9 f. 7 Programs and promotional material
- b. 9 f. 8 Clippings
- dyke/warrior-prayers*
- b. 9 f. 9 Early drafts 1995
- b. 9 f. 10 First draft 1995
- b. 9 f. 11 First script, annotated 1996
- b. 9 f. 12 Cue script, annotated, Frontera@Hyde Park Theatre 1996
- b. 9 f. 13 Tech script, annotated, Frontera@Hyde Park Theatre 1996
- b. 9 f. 14 *dyke/warrior-prayers da re-mix singers' performance chapbook, annotated* 2002
- b. 9 f. 15 Programs and promotional material
- b. 9 f. 16 Clippings
- b. 10 f. 1-2 Programs and promotional material  
Includes press kit files.
- b. 10 f. 3 Appearances and events
- b. 10 f. 4 Clippings
- b. 10 f. 5 Financial documents
- o. 1 Play planning
- Film 1990-1996
- shadows...that which is cast to the side*
- b. 10 f. 6 Performance script 1990
- b. 10 f. 7 Film script 1991
- b. 10 f. 8 Shooting script 1992
- b. 10 f. 9 Shooting script, annotated 1992
- b. 10 f. 10 Production material
- b. 10 f. 11 Promotional material
- b. 10 f. 12 Clippings
- sepia's blues* ca. 1993
- b. 10 f. 13 Production material
- b. 10 f. 14 Promotional material
- b. 10 f. 15 Correspondence



## Professional 1990-2015

This series contains programs and promotional material for writers' conferences, poetry readings, workshops, theater events, music festivals, and general performances featuring Bridgforth, including general event packets and material related to Fire and Ink, a conference series for Black LGBT writers. The series also features clippings about Bridgforth's professional profile and general work, as well as a general professional correspondence folder. The Finding Voice subseries consists of Bridgforth's creative writing workshop and web radio show of the same name, and includes grant funding proposals, radio and promotional programming, printed blog posts, financial documents, and release forms for participants who appeared on the show.

Arranged into 4 subseries: (1) Appearances and events; (2) Clippings; (3) Correspondence; and (4) Finding Voice.

### Appearances and events 1994-2015

#### Programs and promotional material

- b. 11 f. 1 1994-1998
- b. 11 f. 2 1999
- b. 11 f. 3 2000-2002
- b. 11 f. 4 2003
- b. 11 f. 5 2004-2009
- b. 11 f. 6 2010-2015
- b. 11 f. 7-8 Event packets 2011  
Includes packet for Butch Voices, 2011.
- b. 11 f. 9 Fire and Ink

#### Clippings

- b. 12 f. 1 1993-1998
- b. 12 f. 2 1999
- b. 12 f. 3 2000
- b. 12 f. 4 2001-2002
- b. 12 f. 5 2003
- b. 12 f. 6 2004-2010
- b. 12 f. 7 Correspondence

#### Finding Voice

- b. 13 f. 1 Grant funding
- b. 13 f. 2 Programming and promotional material
- b. 13 f. 3 Blog
- b. 13 f. 4 Financial documents
- b. 13 f. 5 Release forms  
Restricted.