



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

Guide to the

Mabel Mercer papers

1900-1984

Sc MG 341

Summary

Creator: Mercer, Mabel, 1900-1984

Title: Mabel Mercer papers

Date: 1900-1984

Size: 17.08 linear feet (43 boxes)

Source: Purchased from the Mabel Mercer Estate, 1987. Some personal material and correspondence donated by Steven L. Jones, January 1988.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Mabel Mercer (1900-1984) was a singer, song stylist, and night club entertainer. The Mabel Mercer papers consist of personal and professional papers related to her singing career.

Preferred citation: [Item], Mabel Mercer papers, Sc MG 341, 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: Accessioned by Berlena Robinson, 1988.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: artwork.

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 or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Related Materials:

Mabel Mercer collection, Sc MG 536, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg

Creator History

Mabel Mercer (1900-1984) was a singer, song stylist, and night club entertainer. Born in England in 1900 to a Black musician father, Benjamin Mercer, and a white English vaudevillian mother, Emily Wadham Stonehouse, Mercer started her show business career at the age of fourteen. She joined a song and dance act with her mother and aunt in Europe. Later, in the 1920s, she appeared in Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds* in London, as part of a vocal trio. Around this time, Mercer started studying singing, with aspirations of becoming a concert singer. In the 1920s and 1930s, she was a successful night club singer in Paris, appearing at Ada "Bricktop" Smith's Bricktop's. She made her first appearance in the U.S. in 1938 and settled here in 1941, after marrying singer Kelsey Pharr, a member of the Delta Rhythm Boys. Mercer became an American citizen in 1952, where she was known as one of the most popular supper club singers for many years.

Scope and Content Note

The Mabel Mercer papers consist of personal papers, such as naturalization and immigration documents; correspondence with her husband, Kelsey Pharr; family papers; and fan mail. Professional papers include contracts; material pertaining to nightclub performances and recordings; sheet music and manuscript music performed and collected by Mercer; music with correspondence attached from composers and lyricists requesting Mercer to include their works in her repertoire; honors and awards; performance programs; posters; clippings and reviews; and a scrapbook.

Arrangement: Arranged into 5 series: I. Personal; II. Correspondence; III. Honors, programs, and clippings; IV. Professional; and V. Sheet music.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American actresses
African American women entertainers
African American women singers
African Americans in the performing arts
Revues -- United States

Names

Bricktop, 1894-1984
Mercer, Mabel, 1900-1984

Container List

- Personal 1900-1984
 - b. 1 f. 1 Biographical 1900-1984
 - b. 1 f. 2 Obituaries 1984
 - b. 1 f. 3 Personal papers
 - b. 1 f. 4 Immigration papers 1937-1948
 - b. 1 f. 5 Naturalization papers 1952
 - b. 1 f. 6-7 Marriage certificate and congratulations 1941
 - Correspondence
 - b. 1 f. 8 Outgoing
 - b. 1 f. 9 Paris business 1932
 - b. 1 f. 10 Stonehouse, Emily (mother) 1940-1941
 - b. 1 f. 11 Condolences for Emily Stonehouse's death 1941
 - b. 1 f. 12 Stonehouse, Thomas (stepfather) 1941
 - b. 1 f. 13-15 Pharr, Kelsey II
 - b. 1 f. 16 Other family (includes adopted siblings)
 - b. 42 Paintings
 - Correspondence 1939-1983
 - b. 2 f. 1 Rankin, Edith 1939-1941
 - b. 2 f. 2 Telegrams 1939-1952
 - b. 2 f. 3 Cutting, Helen 1940-1943
 - b. 2 f. 4 Fan mail 1939-1951
 - b. 2 f. 5 1940-1949
 - b. 2 f. 6 1940-1948
 - b. 2 f. 7 1943-1951
 - b. 2 f. 8 1940-1954
 - b. 2 f. 9 Business 1943-1951
 - b. 2 f. 10 Note, A. Smith 1949
 - b. 2 f. 11-12 General
 - b. 2 f. 13 Roscher, Don 1954-1962
 - b. 2 f. 14 Beard, Harry 1959
 - b. 2 f. 15 Lemert, Pearl 1965
 - b. 3 f. 1-2 1960-1969
 - b. 3 f. 3 Short, Bobby 1963-1981
 - b. 3 f. 4-8 1970-1983
 - b. 3 f. 9 Postcards
 - b. 3 f. 10 Greeting cards
 - Honors, programs, and clippings 1940-1984
 - Honors 1947-1983
 - b. 4 f. 1 Hamilton College 1947

Honors, programs, and clippings (cont.)

Honors (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 2 Hampton Institute 1967
- b. 4 f. 3 Berklee College, Honorary Degree of Music 1975 October 5
- b. 4 f. 4 *The Mark of Jazz, TV show* 1976
- b. 4 f. 5 Stereo Review Award 1975
- b. 4 f. 6 Smithsonian Institute Award 1975
- b. 4 f. 7 New England Conservatory, Honorary Degree 1980 May 18
- b. 4 f. 8 Whitney Museum of Art 1981
- b. 4 f. 9 Kool Jazz Festival 1982
- b. 4 f. 10 Rockingham Junior High School Fine Arts Festival 1982
- b. 4 f. 11 Compestela Award 1982
- b. 4 f. 12 Medal of Freedom 1983 February 23
- b. 4 f. 13 Union College Honorary Degree 1983 June 12
- b. 42-43 Other awards and honorary degrees (includes plaques and Key to City Hall, New York City)

Programs 1940-1969

- b. 4 f. 14 Mercer, Mabel 1958-1969
- b. 4 f. 15 Pharr, Kelsey 1940-1942

Clippings 1941-1984

- b. 4 f. 16 Bahamas 1941
- b. 4 f. 17 1943-1954
- b. 4 f. 18 *The Gambit article* 1952
- b. 4 f. 19 1949-1955
- b. 4 f. 20 1954-1960
- b. 4 f. 21 1955-1962
- b. 5 f. 1 Smith, Ada "Bricktop" 1949-1959
- b. 5 f. 2 Merron, Frances. "Niteclub" column 1949-1955
- b. 5 f. 3 By Walker, Danton 1949-1955
- b. 5 f. 4 By Cannon, Jimmy 1955
- b. 5 f. 5 By Kilgallen, Dorothy 1955-1958
- b. 5 f. 6 *The New York Times* 1955-1963
- b. 5 f. 7 By Knickerbocker, Charlie 1958
- b. 5 f. 8 By Sylvester, Robert 1955
- b. 5 f. 9 By Winchell, Walter 1955-1958
- b. 5 f. 10 By Wilson, Earl 1955
- b. 5 f. 11 1960-1980
- b. 5 f. 12 1960-1975
- b. 5 f. 13-14 1964-1977
- b. 5 f. 15 1980-1984

Professional 1937-1970

Arranged alphabetically.

- b. 6 f. 1-2 AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) 1959-1963

Professional (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 3 AGVA (American Guild of Variety Artists) 1959-1963
 - Atlantic Records
- b. 6 f. 4-5 1952-1969
- b. 6 f. 6 Reviews 1957-1959
- b. 7 f. 1 Benefits 1959-1963
 - Bon Soir (venue) 1962
- b. 7 f. 2 Correspondence
- b. 7 f. 3 Clippings
- b. 7 f. 4 Book of the Month Club
 - Byline Room
- b. 7 f. 5 Clippings 1955-1957
- b. 7 f. 6 Correspondence 1955-1956
- b. 7 f. 7 Clippings 1955
- b. 7 f. 8-9 Fan mail 1952-1959
- b. 7 f. 10 Chatham, NY
 - Cherry Lane Theater
- b. 8 f. 1 Clippings 1958
- b. 8 f. 2-3 "Monday Nights at Nine" program 1958
- b. 8 f. 4-8 First 5 shows 1958
- b. 8 f. 9 The Counsel program
- b. 8 f. 10 Decca Recordings 1963-1968
 - Financial records
- b. 8 f. 11-12 1970
- b. 8 f. 13 1937-1948
- b. 8 f. 14 1949
- b. 8 f. 15 Future concert
- b. 8 f. 16 Guest book
- b. 8 f. 17 Hampton Institute 1967
- b. 8 f. 18-19 hungry i (club, San Francisco) 1960
 - b. 9 f. 1 International Talent Associates 1960-1965
- b. 9 f. 2-4 Lownes, Victor A. (Blue Angel) 1954
 - Includes clippings and correspondence.
- b. 9 f. 5 Medicare and Social Security
- b. 9 f. 6 Morgan State College performance 1959-1960
- b. 9 f. 7 National Broadcasting Company 1963
- b. 9 f. 8 *The New Yorker* articles on King Arthur Room at the Round Table (venue)
1959-1961
 - Playboy*
- b. 9 f. 9 1959-1961
- b. 9 f. 10-11 Playboy Club clippings 1960-1961
- b. 9 f. 12 Television 1959
- b. 9 f. 13 Articles 1955-1956

Professional (cont.)

- b. 10 f. 1 Radio 1958
- b. 10 f. 2 Rome, NY (country home) 1950-1963
- b. 10 f. 3 Record reviews 1947-1958
- The Round Table (venue)
- b. 10 f. 4 King Arthur Room 1959-1961
- b. 10 f. 5 Clippings 1959-1961
- b. 10 f. 6 Correspondence 1959-1961
- b. 10 f. 7 Publicity 1960
- R.S.V.P. Club
- b. 10 f. 8 1957-1959
- b. 10 f. 9 Clippings 1959
- Le Ruban Bleu, Antibes, France ca. 1942
Includes program.
- b. 11 f. 1 Stock investments
- b. 11 f. 2 Schirmer, Gus, Jr 1958
- b. 11 f. 3-4 Taxes 1948-1967
- b. 11 f. 5 Television 1961-1965
- b. 11 f. 6 Wein, George 1968
Promoter of Mercer and Bobby Short concert.
- b. 11 f. 7 Winthrop, Stimson, Putnam and Roberts 1953-1957
- b. 12 f. 1 Notebook with repertoire lists
- b. 12 f. 2 Telephone books
- b. 12 f. 3 Printed matter
- b. 42 Posters in box 42.
- b. 41 Scrapbook

Sheet music

Music from musical revues and motion pictures

- b. 13 A-B
- b. 14 C-H
- b. 15 I-O
- b. 16 P-Q
- b. 17 R
- b. 18 S-Z

Music arranged alphabetically by title

- b. 19 A-K
- b. 20 I-L
- b. 21 M-S
- b. 22 T-Z

Miscellaneous music

- b. 23 A-E
- b. 24 F
- b. 25 G-L

Sheet music (cont.)

Miscellaneous music (cont.)

- b. 26 M-R
- b. 27 S-Z
- b. 28-40 Manuscript music