



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

Guide to the

**Bertha Des Verney papers**

1929-1977

Sc MG 449

Home to Harlem Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Compiled by Janice Quinter, 2010. Finding aid edited and adapted to digital form by Kay Menick in 2016. Photographs transferred to Photographs and Prints Division. Audiotapes, videotapes and films transferred to Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division. Books and magazines transferred to General Research and Reference Division.

## Summary

**Creator:** Des Verney, Bertha

**Title:** Bertha Des Verney papers

**Date:** 1929-1977

**Size:** .46 linear feet (2 boxes)

**Source:** Donated in 1977.

**Revision History:** This finding aid was updated by Allison Hughes.

**Abstract:** Bertha Des Verney was a pianist, composer, arranger, writer, singer, playwright, concert promoter, and music teacher. The Bertha Des Verney papers include programs and flyers for musical events that she was involved in, annotated musical texts, scripts, holograph music of her arrangements and compositions, correspondence, and news clippings. From the Washington Music School there are reports, financial records, and a history of the school (1931). Material for the National Association of Negro Musicians includes programs for conventions. The collection also includes two scrapbooks, one of which contains news clippings and programs for musical concerts, primarily featuring African-American artists (1929-1957). The second scrapbook contains news clippings about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other noteworthy events in the Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson families, as well as obituaries of a number of black personalities, and some musical programs (1936, 1959-1974). There are also a few letters in the collection.

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**Preferred citation:** [Item], Bertha Des Verney papers, Sc MG 449, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

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## **Creator History**

Bertha Des Verney was an African American pianist, composer/arranger, singer, playwright, concert promoter, and music teacher, who devoted much of her time to church and community activities. Des Verney joined Harlem's Mother A.M.E. Zion Church in 1919 and for more than forty years served as the director of several of its choirs and was president of the church's Dramatic Club. Among other educational responsibilities, she was director of the Washington Music School in Albany, New York in the 1930s. Des Verney was a member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, serving as president in 1964. She also organized the Ministers of Music and Drama League, which honored performing artists. She died in 1975 in New York City.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American music teachers  
African American musicians  
African American singers  
African American women composers  
African Americans -- Music  
African Americans in the performing arts  
Arrangers (Musicians) -- United States -- 20th century  
Composers

### **Geographic Names**

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Programs (documents)  
Scores  
Scrapbooks  
Sheet music

### **Names**

Des Verney, Bertha  
Ministers of Music and Drama League (New York, N.Y.)  
Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (New York, N.Y.)  
National Association of Negro Musicians (U.S.)  
Washington Music School (Albany, N.Y.)

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Mother A.M.E. Zion Church 1929-1975
- b. 1 f. 2 National Association of Negro Musicians 1956-1977
- b. 1 f. 3 Programs - Other Venues 1939-1973
- b. 1 f. 4 Birthday Tribute to W.C. Handy and Other Events 1947-1957
- b. 1 f. 5 Scripts and Other Writings by Des Verney 1933-1963
- b. 2 f. 1-2 Music - Original and Arrangements
  - b. 2 f. 3 Lyrics - Author Unidentified undated
  - b. 2 f. 4 Ministers of Music and Drama League Citations to Others and Program 1954-1956
  - b. 2 f. 5 Washington Music School, Albany, New York 1931, undated
  - b. 2 f. 6 Teaching Material 1942, undated
  - b. 2 f. 7 Scrapbook No. 1 1929-1957
  - b. 2 f. 8 Scrapbook No. 2 1936, 1959-1974
  - b. 2 f. 9 Miscellaneous 1934-1972