

MG
725

BERNIECE HALL

PAPERS

The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research
in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, New York 10037

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BERNIECE HALL (1920-2004). PAPERS, 1948-1997, (bulk dates, 1956-1980). 2 archival boxes (.8 lin. ft.)

Biographical Sketch:

Berniece Hall, soprano, was born in Philadelphia on July 2, 1920. She considered herself a New Yorker however, as she was raised in New York from the age of 10. Hall was introduced to the world of music through the glee club and school productions. She also studied voice with Hortense Love, Robert Tabori and William Hermann. After she won an amateur contest at a local club her singing career took off. In the 1940s and early 1950s, she sang in clubs and with concert groups and choral ensembles such as the Eva Jessye and the Hall Johnson concert choirs. From 1956 to 1958 she performed in *De Paur's Opera Gala* (1956) which featured notable soloists Lawrence Winters, Inez Matthews and Luther Saxon. Hall made her Broadway debut in *Finian's Rainbow* (1953) performing the role of Sharon Lonnergan to high acclaim. She also performed in summer stock versions of the show in theatres around the United States.

In the 1960s, Hall worked in the editorial department of the Negro Heritage Library, New York. She joined Voices Inc., a musical theatre group from Newark, New Jersey, which was invited to perform *Trumpets of the Lord* (1963) in Paris at the French National Festival of the Arts from May 13-26, 1966 under the auspices of the Association pour la rencontre des cultures. After the Festival she toured Italy with Gino Bramieri performing at many venues. She then joined the Folk Studio Singers in Rome and appeared in concerts and performances in Italy, Greece, Paris, Sweden, Germany and Denmark from 1966 to 1969. Hall returned to the United States in 1968 on an invitation to perform in another *Trumpets of the Lord* tour, a National Education Television version of which was taped in Ontario, Canada. After living in Italy for 4 years, she returned to live permanently in the United States in 1970.

Hall's professional career slowed down in the mid 1970s, and in 1978 she began working for the New York City Housing Authority, retiring from there in 1994. Throughout her life Hall continued to perform at church events, community concerts and celebratory events for various organizations. She participated in numerous programs of the Memorial Baptist Church and Mother A.M.E Zion Church in New York City. Berniece Hall passed away on February 20, 2004 while at the Dewitt Rehab and Health Care Center in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

The Berniece Hall Papers span the years 1948 to 1997 and document her professional career as a soprano soloist in Europe as well as North America. Approximately one third of the collection provides a glimpse into her personal life.

The **PERSONAL PAPERS** series, **1948-1997 (.3 lin. ft.)** consists of biographical information, correspondence, 1948-1997, financial records, and miscellaneous materials. The Biographical information subseries includes self-prepared, handwritten biographical sketches, address books, a travel diary, notebooks, awards and her retirement program. The Financial records category comprises ad hoc lists of personal expenditures including shopping lists and hotel receipts. Among the Correspondence are letters of congratulations from friends and fellow performers. Some of the letters she wrote to friends are included in her papers. The Miscellaneous file contains a variety of materials, among which is a copy of Countee Cullen's poem, *Yet do I marvel*, with handwritten notes in the right margin, and invitation cards to various church events.

The **PROFESSIONAL PAPERS** series, **1953-1995 (.5 lin. ft.)**, which consists of seven subseries, illustrates Hall's performance history. The Correspondence subseries consists of letters and telegrams pertaining to Hall's professional life. Noteworthy pieces of correspondence addressed to her include a letter dated December 13, 1965 from arranger and composer, Eubie Blake, expressing gratitude for a calendar from Educational Heritage, and a congratulatory message to Voices, Inc. from John Conyers, Member of Congress, 1st District, Michigan. The file also includes letters of congratulations from several public and private institutions regarding her performances. Letters from the City Center of Music and Drama Inc. and Circle in the Square refer to contracts to perform in March-April 1969 in Washington and Spring 1965 with the New York City Opera respectively. The Contract file consists of a contract with Voices, Inc. for the period October 20 to November 9, 1975. The Schedules subseries details the order of performances for the *De Paur's Opera Gala* in 1957 and 1958 in the United States and, with Voices, Inc. in Paris. Undated, handwritten schedules for performances in Italy are also part of this subseries. The Voices, Inc. subseries contains letters to the performing group, the brochure for the album, *Roots, Anthology of Negro Music in America* (1965) compiled by the group and produced by Columbia Records. A letter dated April 19, 1965, proposing a profit-sharing plan by members

refers to a 1964 birthday tribute to President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Scripts subseries includes the following scripts: *God's Trombones* (n.d), *Song of the Black Journey* (196?), *Songs of Freedom Music of the Civil Rights Movement* (a World of Music program produced by National Educational Television)(1965), *Harlem Heyday* (1972), *Harlem Remembered* (1988) and several scripts for performances by Voices, Inc. produced in the 1960s. The Music subseries includes handwritten song lists, lyrics and published sheet music. The Printed Matter subseries includes programs for Hall's performances in musical theatre, on- and off-Broadway, and in Europe as well as at church events in the United States. 3 posters announcing Hall's performances in Italy and France are also included. Articles from foreign (Italian, Swedish and Greek) and English newspapers and journals are included in the Clippings files which cover Hall's performances from 1948 through 1995.

Provenance

SCM02-69 Donated by Berniece Hall, December 13, 2002.

Processed by: J. Modeste

Date: July 2009

Container List

Box Folder

1

Personal Papers

Biographical Material

- 1 1961
- 2 1969-1973, n.d.
- 3 1966-1967
- 4 1968, n.d.
- 5 1983-1994, n.d.
- 6 1983-1994, n.d.
- 7 Correspondence 1972-1997, n.d.
- 8 Financial Records 1967-1968
- 9 Miscellaneous 1948-1993, n.d.

Professional Papers

Correspondence

- 10 1960-1969
- 11 Conyers, John, 1929- , 1965
- 12 Blake, Eubie 1883-1983, 1965
- 13 Contract, 1975
- 14 Schedules, 1957-1975, n.d.
- 15 Voices, Inc, 1965-1968, n.d.

Scripts

- 16 n.d.

2

- 1 1964-1965, n.d.
- 2 1972-1976, n.d.
- 3 1988, n.d.

Music

- 4 Song Lists, n.d.
- 5 Lyrics, n.d.
- 6 Sheet Music

Printed Matter

Programs

Musical Theatre

- 7 1953-1958, n.d.
- 8 1960-1994, n.d.

Church Events

- 9 1948-1966, n.d.
- 10 1977-1975, n.d.

Container List**Box Folder**

2	11	Posters*
		Clippings
		United States
	12	1949-1984, n.d.
	13	1949-1984, n.d.
		Other Countries
	14-15	1966-1968, n.d.

- Filed in flat drawers: "Manuscript collections, E-H"

MANUSCRIPTS, ARCHIVES AND RARE BOOKS DIVISION

SEPARATION RECORD

The following items were removed from:

Name of Collection/Papers: Berniece Hall Papers, 1948-1997

Accession Number: SCM02-69 (MG 725)

Donor: Berniece Hall

Gift X

Date received: 12/13/2002

Date transferred: 12/26/2002, 7/6/2009

The item(s) listed below have been sent to the division indicated, either to be retained or disposed of there. Any items that should receive special disposition are clearly marked.

Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:

14 photographs, 1 album (63 photographs)

General Research and Reference Division:

6 books and 1 periodical

Other:

Programs to MARB Division, Program Collection

Separated by: Judith Modeste **Date:** July 2009