Summary

Creator: Stratas, Teresa

Title: Teresa Stratas papers

Date: 1938-2016

Size: 41.56 linear feet (86 boxes, 6 volumes, 2 tubes); 217.5 kb (9 computer files)

Source: Donated by Teresa Stratas, 2016.

Abstract: Teresa Stratas (born 1938) is a Canadian-born American soprano regarded as one of the greatest and most expressive opera actresses of all time. Her papers, dating from 1938 to 2016, document her life and career through letters, photographs, annotated scores, subject files, posters, programs, clippings, datebooks, costume and set designs, awards, and art.

Conditions Governing Access:

Audio and moving image items are unavailable pending preservation transfer.

Conditions Governing Use: For permission to publish, contact the Chief, Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.


Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2017.

Creator History

Teresa Stratas (née Anastasia Strataki) is a Canadian-born American soprano regarded as one of the greatest and most expressive opera actresses of all time. Born in Toronto in 1938, she was the daughter of Greek immigrants, and grew up in poor circumstances. She sang at community events from
a young age, and later performed in clubs, movie houses, and on radio programs. Stratas sang mainly Greek songs and standards until, at the age of 16, she heard opera for the first time when a touring production of the Metropolitan Opera performed La Bohème in Toronto.

Stratas studied with Irene Jessner at the University of Toronto for three years, and debuted with the Canadian Opera in 1958. The following year, she won the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air, and was offered a contract with the company. After making a few appearances in small roles, Stratas was asked to substitute as Liú in Turandot, for which she received huge ovations and strong reviews, launching her to fame. In addition to the Met, she began to perform at major opera houses across the United States and in Britain, Italy, Germany, Russia, and Paris during the 1960s.

Stratas’s regular appearances in New York included those as Sardula (Menotti’s Le Dernier Sauvage), Lisa (The Queen of Spades), Nedda (Pagliacci), Micaëla (Carmen), Zerlina (Don Giovanni), Cherubino (The Marriage of Figaro), Despina (Cosi Fan Tutte) and Hänsel (Hänsel and Gretel). In 1961, she created the title role in Peggy Glanville-Hicks’s Nausicaa at the Athens Festival. Stratas sang the title role of Alban Berg’s Lulu in that opera’s first complete performance and recording (1979), and sang Violetta in Francisco Zeffirelli’s film of La Traviata in 1983. She appeared on Broadway in Rags in 1986, performed on a new recording of the musical Show Boat in 1988, and portrayed Marie Antoinette in the 1991 Metropolitan premiere of John Corigliano’s The Ghosts of Versailles. Her other filmed roles include Nedda in Pagliacci, and the title role in Salome.

Stratas was friendly with Lotte Lenya and had a particular liking for the music of Kurt Weill, recording two albums of his material: Teresa Stratas Sings the Unknown Kurt Weill (1981), for which Lenya sent Stratas unpublished songs; and Stratas Sings Weill (1985). She also served for several years as a judge for the Lotte Lenya vocal competition, sponsored by the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music.

Stratas took two breaks from her performance career, the first in the 1980s to work with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, the second in the 1990s to work in a Romanian orphanage. She has received several honorary degrees and prizes, as well as the Canadian Governor General’s Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement (2000).

In 1995, Stratas underwent a botched surgery on her nose which effectively ended her singing career, and she sued the surgeon. During the 1980s, she was married to the British poet and playwright Tony Harrison; she had previous relationships with the conductor Zubin Mehta and the set designer Gerd Staub. Among her close friends are conductor James Levine and mezzo-soprano Rosalind Elias.

Scope and Content Note

The Teresa Stratas papers, dating from 1938 to 2016, document the singer’s life and career through letters, photographs, annotated scores, subject files, posters, programs, clippings, datebooks, costume and set designs, awards, art, and books. The largest components of the collection are letters, photographs, scores, and subject files. Small portions of the collection are electronic; these consist of Microsoft Word files.

Letters date from the 1950s onward. They contain postcards, notes, and multi-page letters from friends, colleagues, and family of Stratas, as well as from fans, opera companies, and managers. The bulk is arranged chronologically; fan mail and letters from some correspondents are filed separately. These include Rosalind Elias, Tony Harrison, Zubin Mehta, Gerd Staub, Winthrop Sargeant, David Diamond, and Rudolf Bing. Letters from these individuals, as well as fan mail, can also be found among the chronological letter files.
Photographs consist of formal and informal portraits of Stratas; opera production scenes; and shots of Stratas with colleagues, including Zubin Mehta, Rosalind Elias, James Levine, Herbert Von Karajan, Lotte Lenya, Placido Domingo, and Gianni Schicchi, among others. Most of the photographs are loose, but some are housed in albums.

The production photographs date from the early 1960s to the 1980s. They are arranged by title, and often contain documentation of more than one company. Besides the Met, there are photographs of productions at Covent Garden, Bayerische Staatsoper, La Scala in Milan, the San Francisco Opera, and other companies. Also present are screenshots of films in which Stratas appeared, including Pagliacci, Salome, and La Traviata.

The photographs filed under Metropolitan Opera hold images of Stratas's audition, as well as shots of her with Rudolf Bing. The portraits of Stratas date from the 1960s to the 2010s and include headshots in roles, as well as promotional images. The photographs also contain a file of images of Tony Harrison.

Scores consist primarily of annotated piano-vocal scores and librettos for operas, some in multiple copies. These include Amahl and the Night Visitors, Ariadne auf Naxos, The Bartered Bride, La Bohème, Don Giovanni, Eugene Onegin, Händel and Gretel, Lulu, Manon, The Marriage of Figaro, The Merry Widow, Nausicaa, Pagliacci, Pelléas et Mélisande, Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, Rusalka, Salome, Suor Angelica, La Traviata, and Turandot. Also present are the musicals Kiss Me, Kate, Rags, and Show Boat, as well as inscribed song scores by Samuel Barber, Lee Hoiby, Richard Hundley, and Ned Rorem, among others. Annotated scores for songs recorded by Stratas on her Kurt Weill recordings can be found in the Subject Files under Stratas Sings Weill. Vocal and piano-conductor scores for Rags can also be found in the Subject Files. Some score files also contain letters or memorabilia.

The Subject Files document projects, events, people, productions, and other topics. They contain notes, contracts, letters, photographs, programs, clippings, royalty statements, ephemera, and other papers. The largest components are Rags, which holds cast and fan letters, photographs, and scores; and Stratas's lawsuit against the surgeon who unsuccessfully operated on her. Those files contain Stratas's medical history as it pertains to that operation, depositions, clippings, narratives, and other legal files and correspondence.

The Subject Files also include transcripts of speeches and interviews with Stratas; biographies; the transcript of Stratas's interview of Rosalind Elias (filed under Elias); contracts and business letters; correspondence with artist managers Harrison-Parrot Limited and the Robert Lantz Office; and scripts, letters and production information regarding television and motion picture films, including Amahl and the Night Visitors, Callas Forever, La Traviata, and Under The Piano. Also present are Stratas's proposal for a film of the opera Suor Angelica; and files on the Metropolitan Opera and the Bayerische Staatsoper. The Met files include correspondence regarding a dispute between the company and Stratas over the dual production of Il Tabarro and Pagliacci. The subject files also hold material pertaining to Tony Harrison, including poetry manuscripts, notebooks, programs, clippings, and posters, all dating primarily from the 1980s to early 1990s.

Datebooks and Calendars offer coverage from the mid-1960s to 2007, but have a gap between 1987 and 1994. The clippings and programs both date from the 1950s to the 2000s and offer extensive but not comprehensive coverage of Stratas's career. Programs and clippings can also be found in the subject files in relation to specific projects.

The costume designs (watercolor paintings and drawings) are for unidentified roles dating from the
1960s and 1970s. The set designs consist of drawings and two scale models for Met productions, one for *The Ghosts of Versailles* and the other for *Il Tabarro*.

Stratas's awards and honors include honorary degrees, the Canadian Governor General's Performing Arts Award, the Order of Canada, and a medal from Queen Elizabeth II. Posters advertise performances in the United States and Europe, as well as recordings, and date from 1960 to 1989.

Art is comprised of pen or ink portraits of Stratas by unidentified artists, as well as two large oil-on-canvas paintings of Stratas in unknown roles, both of which date from 1997.

The books, all inscribed, consist mainly of copies of Tony Harrison's poetry.

The collection also contains over 350 audio recordings and over 100 moving images dating from 1958 to the 2000s. These include operas, recitals, and other performances, many unreleased, as well as practice and rehearsal sessions, recording studio outtakes, and interviews with Stratas. The operas include many Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts, as well as video of Met performances. Recording outtakes are mostly from Stratas's Kurt Weill projects. Other notable items include special events such as the 1999 Canadian Governor General's Performing Arts Awards ceremony and Stratas's performance at the White House in 1989; a 1967 CBC film of Stratas in performance; and audio recordings of Tony Harrison reading his poetry. Audio and moving images are unavailable pending preservation transfer.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged in twelve divisions: Art; Awards, Honors, and Degrees; Books; Clippings; Datebooks and Calendars; Designs; Letters; Photographs; Posters; Scores; and Subject Files. Content within the divisions are arranged either chronologically or alphabetically.
# Container List

## Art
- **b. 1 f. 1** 1960s-1998
- **b. 3** 1986, 1993
  - **t. 1** 1997 (Oil on canvas.)
    - Stratas in an unidentified opera role.
  - **t. 2** 1997 (Oil on canvas.)
    - Stratas in an unidentified opera role.

## Awards, Honors and Degrees
- **b. 2 f. 2** 1951-1997
- **b. 1 f. 2** 1959, 1980-1999
- **b. 8** 1972-2015
- **b. 6 f. 1-2** American Immigrant Law Foundation New York Immigrant Achievement Award 2000, 2005
- **Governor General's Performing Arts Awards**
- **b. 6 f. 3-6** 2000
  - Includes photos. See also box 8.
- **er. 1** Rasky, Harry 2001
  - (2 computer files 44 kilobytes)
    - Recommendation letters for Rasky, from Stratas.
- **b. 2 f. 3** The Juilliard School 1995
- **b. 6 f. 7** McMaster University 1986
- **b. 7 f. 1** Opera Canada Awards 2003-2004
- **b. 7 f. 2** Order of Canada 1979, 1990, 1997
- **b. 7 f. 3** Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal 2012
- **b. 7 f. 4-5** University of Athens 2015
  - Contains the transcript of an interview with Stratas. See also box 8.
- **b. 7 f. 6** University of Rochester 1998, 2000
- **b. 7 f. 7** University of Toronto 1994
- **b. 9 f. 1** York University 1999-2000
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- **b. 10** Books 1967, 1980, 1992
  - All inscribed to Stratas.

## Clippings
- **b. 9 f. 2-5** 1951-1962
- **b. 13 f. 1** 1959-1965
- **b. 11 f. 7** 1961-1967
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- **b. 15 f. 1-5** 1986-2013

## Datebooks and Calendars
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The Ghosts of Versailles 1991

Il Tabarro 1989

A model by David Reppa, gifted to Stratas on the night of the premiere at the Metropolitan Opera.

Letters

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A ballet shoe inscribed by dancer Evelyn Hart to Teresa Stratas that was originally included with a letter. The shoe was worn by Hart in her titular role as Giselle during the 1980s. The inscription on the bottom of the shoe reads “Giselle Act II”.

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b. 42 f. 3 Levine, Rhoda 2009
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b. 42 f. 5-6 Masura, Frank 1979
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b. 43 f. 1-3 1962-1967
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b. 44 f. 1-3 1973-1987
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b. 44 f. 5 Tooley, John 1979
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b. 45 f. 2 Walter, Arnold 1962-1973
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b. 47 f. 1 1980s-1990s
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    *Cosi Fan Tutte*
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*Dialogue of the Carmelites* 1993

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*Gianni Schicchi* 1989

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*Otello* 1974

b. 64 f. 1  
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*La Rondine by Giacomo Puccini* 1970s

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b. 64 f. 6  
*Show Boat* 1988

b. 64 f. 7  
*Il Tabarro* 1989

b. 65 f. 1  
*Der Zarewitsch* 1960s-1990s

*Autographed
Arranged by composer.*

b. 67 f. 1  
B-G 1968-2000

Includes Samuel Barber.

b. 67 f. 2  
Hoiby, Lee 1987-1996

b. 67 f. 3  

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Subject Files

b. 65 f. 2  
Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television 1997

b. 65 f. 3  
*Amahl and the Night Visitors* 1978

Contains the script and production schedule for a television production.

*The Bartered Bride*

b. 65 f. 4  
Film Treatment by Gerhard Reutter 1978

b. 65 f. 5-7  
Metropolitan Opera Production 1978

Contains an annotated libretto.

b. 68 f. 1  
Bayerische Staatsoper 2010-1011

Biographies

b. 68 f. 2  
1960s-2001

er. 2  
2001

(1 computer file 21 kilobytes)

b. 68 f. 3-4  
*Callas Forever* 2000-2001

A film by Francisco Zeffirelli which Stratas declined to appear in. Contains correspondence between Stratas’s and Zeffirelli’s agents.

b. 68 f. 5  
Canadian National Exhibition 1986, 2010

Contains a letter from David Diamond.
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Contracts and Business Letters
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b. 69 f. 1-3  1965-1998
b. 69 f. 4  Metropolitan Opera 1966-1978, 1994
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b. 69 f. 6  Elias, Rosalind 1990
            Contains a transcript: "Teresa Stratas Interviews Rosalind Elias On Stage Direction."

b. 69 f. 7  EMI Classics 2009
b. 69 f. 8  *Eugene Onegin* 1960s
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b. 69 f. 9  Fardink, Michael 1991
b. 70 f. 1  *The Ghosts of Versailles* 1988-1994
b. 70 f. 2-3  Giant: A Tribute to Jon Vickers 2016
                An event hosted by Stratas. Contains her speech regarding Vickers, and photographs of the event.

b. 70 f. 4  Goldschmidt, Niki 2003
                Contains Stratas's forward to a biography of Goldschmidt.

b. 70 f. 5  Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Jon Vickers 1998
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b. 78  Posters 1980s

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            These include manuscripts, notebooks of poetry, and annotated galleys.

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b. 72 f. 1-4  1979-1992
b. 73 f. 1  1983-1992
b. 73 f. 2-3  Harrison-Parrott Limited 1979-1982
b. 73 f. 4  *The Human Voice With Teresa Stratas* 1998
            A film proposal.

b. 73 f. 5  Immigration 1996
            (1 computer file 65 kilobytes)
            Contains requests to friends for immigration reference letters, with model texts.

b. 73 f. 6-7  In Performance at the White House 1989
            Contains a performance schedule, script, letters from the White House and WETA, and photographs.

b. 73 f. 8  Interview Transcripts 1990, 1999

b. 73 f. 9  Kurt Weill Foundation for Music
b. 74 f. 1-9  Kurt Weill Festival, Dessau 2000
b. 75 f. 1  Lotte Lenya Competition for Singers 1998-2016
b. 75 f. 2  Lotte Lenya Portrait 2014

Levine, James
b. 75 f. 2  2010-2011
                Contains letters and Stratas's introduction to Levine's book.

b. 75 f. 3  A Tribute To James Levine 2009
Subject Files (cont.)
Levine, James (cont.)

er. 4  A Tribute To James Levine 2009
(2 computer files 30 kilobytes)
Contains drafts of Stratas's remarks.

b. 75 f. 4  Lost In The Stars 1993-1994
A concert film in which Stratas appeared. Contains correspondence, a script, shooting
schedules, and production information.

b. 75 f. 5-8  Lulu 1975-1979, 1986
Documents the Paris Opera and Metropolitan Opera productions.

Medical Lawsuit
See also the National Association of Teachers of Singing.

b. 77 f. 1-3  1999-2000
Metropolitan Opera

b. 77 f. 4-5  Il Tabarro/ Pagliacci Dispute 1994-1995
b. 79 f. 1  Video Contracts 1983-1984
Metropolitan Opera Guild

b. 79 f. 2  Met Legends: Teresa Stratas 2007-2008
b. 79 f. 3  Awards Ceremony 2015
b. 79 f. 4  National Association of Teachers of Singing 1997-1998
Contains the text of Stratas's address to the association which describes the botched operation
on her nose.

b. 79 f. 5  Notes on Programs, Recordings, Concerts, and Repertoire 1970-1980s
b. 79 f. 6  Personal Archives 2006, 2010
Letters and notes regarding the disposition of Stratas's collection.

Rags
b. 79 f. 7  Cast Cards and Letters 1986
b. 80 f. 1-2  Clippings 1986
b. 80 f. 3-4  Fan Letters 1986
b. 80 f. 5  Photographs 1986
b. 81 f. 1-2  Thank You Notes 1986
b. 83 f. 4  Piano-Conductor Score 1989
b. 81 f. 3  Production Letters 1986
Also contains Stratas's notes on the production, and letters regarding the Tony and Drama
Desk awards.

b. 82 f. 1  Scripts and Vocal Scores 1986
Many are annotated.

b. 81 f. 4-5  Scripts and Vocal Scores 1986
b. 83 f. 1-3  Scripts and Vocal Scores 1986

Recordings
b. 83 f. 5  1986-1990
b. 83 f. 6  Kurt Weill Projects 1985-1986
b. 84 f. 1  Robert Lantz Office 1986-1990
Stratas's manager.

b. 84 f. 2  San Francisco Opera 1997
The Seven Deadly Sins
Subject Files (cont.)
The Seven Deadly Sins (cont.)

b. 84 f. 3-4  Brooklyn Academy of Music
The file includes a libretto with notes.

b. 84 f. 5   Film

b. 84 f. 6   Sony/BMG Royalty Statements 1995, 2005-2009
Speeches

b. 84 f. 7-8 1960-1999
er. 5  Mayor’s Immigrant Coalition 1990s
(1 computer file 16 kilobytes)

Stratas Sings Weill and The Unknown Kurt Weill
The files hold annotated scores, production notes, and letters.

b. 82 f. 2-3  Recording 1981-1985
b. 85 f. 1-2  Recording 1981-1985
Folder 1 contains an interview with Stratas about Weill.

b. 85 f. 3-5  Television Film 1986-1988
Suor Angelica

b. 85 f. 6  1995-1996
b. 86 f. 1  1996
er. 6  Circa 1996
(2 computer files 40 kilobytes)

b. 86 f. 2  Teresa Stratas: Stratasphere 1983-1984
Contains letters regarding the book based on the film by Harry Rasky.

b. 86 f. 3-4  La Traviata 1982-1984
A film by Francisco Zeffirelli in which Stratas appeared. Contains correspondence and the script.

b. 86 f. 5  Troyanos, Tatiana 1993
Holds Stratas’s eulogy.

Under The Piano
Scripts and production information.

b. 86 f. 6  1995

b. 4 f. 1-4  1995-1997

b. 4 f. 5  Vincent and Farrell Associates 1997
Management and publicity.

b. 4 f. 6  Wall To Wall Kurt Weill, Symphony Space 2000