



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

Guide to the

Marion and Clarissa Cumbo papers

1882-1989

Sc MG 306

Processed by Emily P. Dunne in 2023.

Summary

Creator: Cumbo, Clarissa W.

Title: Marion and Clarissa Cumbo papers

Date: 1882-1989

Size: 15.0 linear feet (41 boxes)

Source: Donated by Davies Burton to the Schomburg Center in 1988.

Abstract: Marion and Clarissa Cumbo were a Black married couple based in New York City who worked as musicians and arts fundraisers. Their papers, dating from 1882 to the 1980s, contain materials related to their music careers. The collection holds Professional Files, Correspondence, Printed Matter, and Personal Files that address performances, tours, the lives of the Cumbo family, and their arts organizations, Symphony for the New World and Triad Productions.

Preferred citation: [Item], Marion and Clarissa Cumbo papers, Sc MG 306, 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 Emily P. Dunne in 2023.

Separated Materials:

Photographic materials transferred to the Marion and Clarissa Cumbo photographs in Prints and Photographs, Schomburg Center.

Audio and moving image materials transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division, Schomburg Center.

Creator History

The original biographical sketch was written by Christopher Stahling and Miranda-Tarisa Mims in 2014,

with some additional writing by Emily P. Dunne in 2023.

Marion Warren Cumbo (1899-1990) and Clarissa Wilhelmina Burton, later Cumbo (1903-1988), were Black musicians and art patrons in New York City. The couple were leading figures in the Harlem Renaissance and continued to support musicians into the 1980s. Clarissa Cumbo became a significant arts organizer in the 1960s and 1970s, and founded two non-profits to encourage and support Black musicians. She also served on the board of many arts organizations. Marion Cumbo and Clarissa Burton married in 1924 and had a son, William Burton Cumbo, in 1926.

Marion Cumbo was born in New York in 1899, and grew up in an orphanage in the Bronx with his brother Earl. While studying in New York City public schools, Marion Cumbo's musical talent was recognized. Cumbo began studying classical cello at the Martin-Smith School of Music, and during this time he met his mentor, performer Minnie Brown. While studying at the Institute of Musical Art (later the Juilliard School of Music), Cumbo supported himself by performing live concerts in New York City, particularly churches in Harlem. In addition to performing as a soloist, Cumbo played with other musicians and orchestras, including Marion Anderson and Nat King Cole, the New York Chamber Orchestra, the Cosmopolitan Little Symphony, the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra, and the Harlem Philharmonic Orchestra. Marion also ran a piano tuning business, and would tune pianos at major concert halls and community spaces, including the piano in the listening room of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.

Clarissa Wilhelmina Burton was born in Roseau, Dominica in 1903 to Davies Charles Burton and Jane Elizabeth Pinard Burton. Her father was a cathedral organist and choir director. Clarissa and her family moved to New York City in 1917 to further her music career. Trained as an opera singer and pianist, Clarissa toured throughout the 1920s, notably with Josephine Baker in *The Chocolate Dandies Revue*. In 1946, Clarissa joined her husband Marion as a member of the short-lived group called the State Orchestra, an interracial group of both men and women musicians. Later in her career, Clarissa focused on organizing funding and support for Black musicians. Throughout the 1950s, she participated in and organized several ensembles of Black performers, including the Community Friends of Music.

In the 1960s, Clarissa co-organized a charity called Friends of the Symphony of the New World. The charity was created to support the first racially integrated symphony orchestra in the United States, Symphony of the New World. After founding the charity, Clarissa Cumbo became very involved in the symphony, even joining as a board member. Marion Cumbo also played in the cello section of the orchestra. Once securing support for the Symphony of the New World, Clarissa and Marion Cumbo founded a non-profit organization called Triad Presentations in 1970, to aid and encourage Black musicians and artists, which included an annual concert held in Alice Tully Hall.

Both died in New York, Clarissa Cumbo in 1988, and Marion Cumbo in 1990.

Scope and Content Note

The Marion and Clarissa Cumbo papers date from 1882 through the 1980s, and are organized into four groups, Professional Files; Correspondence; Printed Matter; and Personal Files.

Professional Files include materials related to the Cumbos' businesses, arranged by founding date. There are files for Symphony of the New World, Triad Productions, Marion Cumbo's piano tuning work, and various other organizations that the Cumbos were a part of. The Cumbos kept address books and calendars for all of their professional activities.

The Symphony of the New World files were compiled and produced while Clarissa Cumbo founded the charity, Friends of the Symphony of the New World, in the 1960s. Included are Administrative Files; Correspondence; and Printed Materials. The Administrative files contain the by-laws, financial materials, and board of directors' meeting minutes. Correspondence consists of letters from musicians who played with the symphony, fundraising letters to supporting members, and administrative conversations between Clarissa Cumbo and other staff. The letters are filed alphabetically by last name. The printed materials are arranged chronologically and contain programs and clippings.

The Triad Productions files date from 1908 to the 1980s, and hold materials compiled by Clarissa Cumbo. Most of the files are from 1970 to 1984, when Clarissa Cumbo was president of the organization. Materials include Administrative Files; Correspondence; Performer Subject Files; Programs; and Clippings. Administrative records hold by-laws, financial papers, board minutes, and other official documentation created by the non-profit. The correspondence files include letters from supporters of Triad, and are filed alphabetically by last name. There are subject files for several artists who worked with or wanted to work with Triad. The artist files contain clippings, resumes, and correspondence with the artist or their management. The programs, which are filed chronologically, are contemporary billings organized by Triad in the 1970s and 1980s.

Correspondence files date from 1902 through the 1980s. The files are arranged into General and Family correspondence. The material in the general grouping is correspondence that was not with family or directly related to Clarissa Cumbo's work with Symphony of the New World or Triad Productions. Most letters in this group are from friends or other musicians, and are filed alphabetically by the sender's last name.

Family Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by the sender's last name. Notable correspondence includes letters from Marion's mother, Maggie Cumbo to her sister Lilla [Hurst], shortly before Maggie's death. A letter from Maggie and Lilla Cumbo's mother, who they gave the nickname "Toma." The majority of the material in these files are letters between Marion and Clarissa Cumbo, and dates from early in their marriage while touring or otherwise apart. There are also letters from Marion's father, William Cumbo; siblings; nieces; nephews; and grandchildren located here.

Printed Material contains sheet music, programs, and clippings from the 1900s through the 1980s. Sheet music is arranged alphabetically by composer's last name. Programs and clippings are grouped separately, and placed in chronological order. The sheet music was used by Marion and Clarissa Cumbo, and some were annotated or handwritten by Marion Cumbo. Most of the arrangements are classical music to be performed by the cello, but there are some more contemporary arrangements, including some popular American songs with lyrics. Performance Programs are from productions that were not explicitly staged by Symphony of the New World or Triad Productions. This includes performances by Marion Cumbo and friends. The clippings held here are mostly articles about Marion Cumbo and other musicians, but do not relate to the Cumbo's non-profit work.

The Personal files date from the 1920s until 1983, and are arranged into files about Marion and Clarissa, and files about their son, William (Bill) Cumbo. Marion and Clarissa Cumbo's files include biographical information, financial documents, and clippings. Biographical files include their marriage certificate and various official documents. William Cumbo's files contain schoolwork and notes from his traffic enforcer job.

Arrangement: This collection is arranged into four groups: Professional Files (by organization or business), Correspondence (both general and family letters), Printed Material (by type), and Personal Files (according to individual.)

Key Terms

Subjects

African American musicians
African American women musicians
Arts fund raising
Harlem Renaissance
Musicians -- United States -- Photographs
Symphony orchestras -- New York (State) -- New York

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Minutes (records)
Notated music
Personal correspondence
Theater programs

Names

Cumbo, Clarissa W.
Cumbo, Marion W.
Symphony of the New World (New York, N.Y.)
Triad Productions

Container List

Professional Files

Symphony of the New World

- b. 1 **Administrative Files 1965-1979**
- b. 2 f. 1-3 Contains constitution and by-laws, and documents related to finances, fundraising, Board of Directors, and the Bronx-Manhattan Friends of the Symphony of the New World.
- b. 2 f. 4-6 **Correspondence 1965-1982**
Includes newsletters, a "Survey of Minority Musicians," and general correspondence.
- b. 2 f. 7-9 **Performance Programs 1965-1977**
- b. 3 f. 1-6
- b. 40 f. 1
- b. 3 f. 7 **Press 1964-1973**

Triad Productions

- b. 3 f. 8-11 **Administrative Files 1970-1989**
- b. 4 f. 1-3 Contains by-laws, files related to finances, fundraising, the Board of Directors, and company contact lists.

Correspondence 1970s-1980s

- b. 4 f. 4 **Newsletters 1976-1984**
- b. 4 f. 5 **A-B**
Includes correspondence with Raoul Abdul.
- b. 4 f. 6 **C-D**
Includes correspondence from Clarissa and Marion Cumbo, the Chinese Music Ensemble of New York, and The Dance Theatre of Harlem.
- b. 4 f. 7 **E-G**
- b. 4 f. 8 **H-K**
Includes correspondence with David Hollister and Howard University.
- b. 5 f. 1 **L-M**
Includes correspondence with the Library for the Performing Arts.
- b. 5 f. 2 **N**
Includes correspondence with National Council for Culture and Art and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.)
- b. 5 f. 3 **O-R**
- b. 5 f. 4 **S**
Includes correspondence with St. John's Settlement House.
- b. 5 f. 5 **T**
Includes correspondence with The Thomas Music Study Group.
- b. 5 f. 6 **U-Z**

Artist Files 1920s-1980s

- b. 5 f. 7 **List of Represented Artists**
- b. 5 f. 8 **Leslie Adams**
- b. 5 f. 9 **Betty Allen**
- b. 5 f. 10 **B**
Includes Jim Bartow, Julien Barber, Cecily Reeves Beasley, Eubie Blake, Carol Brice, and Blanche Burton.
- b. 5 f. 11 **Cam-Cat**
Includes Byrne Camp, Nicola Campbell-James, Valerie Capers, and Minto Cato.
- b. 5 f. 12 **Frances Cole**

Professional Files (cont.)

Triad Productions (cont.)

Artist Files (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 13 **Con-Cun**
Includes Barbara Smith Conrad, William Cooper, and Arthur Cunningham.
- b. 6 f. 1 **D**
Includes Clamma Churita Dale, Osceola Davis, and Dean Dixon.
- b. 6 f. 2 **E**
Includes Eglevsky Ballet Company, Anderson Ellison, Rose Battle English, Dorothy Maxine Ennett, and Lillian Evanti.
- b. 6 f. 3 **Maxine Franklin**
- b. 6 f. 4 **G**
Includes Edward Harrison Gordon and Barbara Washington Grant.
- b. 6 f. 5 **Felipe Hall**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Harlem Piano Trio**
- b. 6 f. 7 **Sammy Heyward**
- b. 6 f. 8 **Gail Hightower**
Artistic Director of the Universal Symphony.
- b. 6 f. 9 **Hin-Hu**
Includes Kathryn Hinton, David M. Hollister, and Armenta Adams Hummings.
- b. 6 f. 10 **Eva Jesseye**
- b. 6 f. 12 **J**
Includes Hall Johnson, Betty Jordan, and Robert Jordan.
- b. 6 f. 13 **K**
Includes Mitchell Kaplan and Emme Kemp.
- b. 6 f. 14 **L**
Includes C. Larie, Hannah Lorain, and William Lawrence.
- b. 6 f. 16 **Ma-Mi**
Includes Arthur Bramwell Mapp, Edward Margetson, Jacquelyn Miles, and John Miles.
- b. 6 f. 17 **Janette Moody**
- b. 7 **N**
Includes Cy Neadle, Roosevelt Newson, and Jessye Norman.
- b. 7 f. 2 **O**
Includes Babatunde Olatunji, Jimmy Owens, and Robert Owens.
- b. 7 f. 3 **P**
Includes John Patton, Vereda Pearson, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, Marendra Perry, Helen Phillips, and Karl Hampton Porter.
- b. 7 f. 4 **R**
Includes Muriel Rahn, Diana Ramos, Orrett Rhoden, and Beatrice Rippy.
- b. 7 f. 5 **S**
Includes Wilma Shakesnider, Louis Edward Smart, Rawn Spearman, William Grant Still, Elmer C. Stoner, and Howard Swanson.
- b. 7 f. 6 **Dean Taylor**
- b. 7 f. 7 **Th-Tu**
Includes Helen Thigpen, Ceola Thompson, Leon Thompson, and Walter Turnbull.
- b. 7 f. 8 **V**
Includes Tom Valvo and Catherine Van Buren.
- b. 7 f. 9 **Frances Walker**
- b. 7 f. 10 **Catherine Collins Wallace**

Professional Files (cont.)

Triad Productions (cont.)

Artist Files (cont.)

- b. 7 f. 11 **Wa**
Includes Ward-Phillips Duo, William Warfield, Laurence Watson, and Leontyne Watts.
- b. 7 f. 12 **Ida Wells**
- b. 7 f. 13 **Wen- Wi**
Includes Bruce Wendell, Frank Wiens, Ethyl Wise, and Camilla Williams.
- b. 7 f. 14 **John Young**
- b. 7 f. 15 **Performance Programs 1970-1986**
- b. 8 f. 2-4
- b. 8 f. 5-6 **Clippings 1970s-1980s**
- Piano Tuning Business**
 - b. 8 f. 7 **Manuals 1970s**
 - b. 8 f. 8 **Notes 1970s-1980s**
 - b. 8 f. 9-10 **Purchase Orders 1971-1983**
 - b. 9 f. 1-5 **Calendars 1963-1983**
 - b. 10 f. 1-2 Contains notes about piano tuning appointments, performances by Marion, Symphony of the New World, and artists working with Triad Productions.
 - b. 41 f. 1
 - b. 39 **Address Books 1980s**
Primarily contains contacts related to Marion's piano tuning business, but also other musicians, including members of Symphony of the New World and Triad Productions.
- Other Non-Profits and Organizations**
 - b. 10 f. 3 **1943-1984**
 - b. 10 f. 4 **The Cosmopolitan Symphony Society of New York 1946-1949**
 - b. 10 f. 5 **American String Quartet 1950**
 - b. 10 f. 6 **American Symphony Orchestra League, Women's Association 1960-1964**
 - b. 10 f. 7 **Amateur Chamber Music Players, Theatre Authority Incorporated 1962-1968**
 - b. 10 f. 8 **Jamaica Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra 1965**
 - b. 10 f. 9 **New York Harlem Core 1967**
Also called the Independent Harlem School System Organization.
 - b. 10 f. 10 **Afro-American Cultural Foundation 1970-1971**

Correspondence

1920s-1980s

Includes correspondence with friends, fans, other musicians, and organizations written to both Marion and Clarissa.

- b. 11 f. 1 **A-B**
Includes correspondence with Raoul Abdul.
- b. 11 f. 2 **Minnie Brown**
- b. 11 f. 3 **C**
Includes correspondence with Valerio Canez and Mercer Cook.
- b. 11 f. 4 **D-E**
Includes correspondence with Georgio Da Costa, Dean Dixon, Robert Durant, and Lillian Evanti.
- b. 11 f. 5 **F-G**
Includes correspondence with Samuel A. Floyd Jr. and Evelyn Gordon.
- b. 11 f. 6 **H-I**
- b. 40 f. 2 Includes correspondence with Antoinette Handy and Nora Holt.
- b. 11 f. 7 **J**
Includes correspondence with David Johnson and Iris Alenalsa Jones.

Correspondence (cont.)
1920s-1980s (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 8 Eva Jessye
- b. 11 f. 9 Hall Johnson
- b. 12 f. 1 K-L
Includes correspondence with Anne Kersha and Joyce Lavie.
- b. 12 f. 2 Lafayette School #6
Includes letters from students after attending a performance by Marion.
- b. 12 f. 3 M
Includes correspondence with E. Arthur Middleton.
- b. 12 f. 4 Harold E. Mason
- b. 12 f. 5 Charles McCabe
- b. 12 f. 6 N-O
Includes correspondence with Humphrey F. Noyes.
- b. 12 f. 7 P-R
Includes correspondence with Richard Pruitt, Leonard de Paur, and Karl Hampton Porter.
- b. 12 f. 8 S
Includes correspondence with William Grant Still, Hale Smith, and J. Sergei Sawchyn.
- b. 12 f. 9 Eileen Southern
- b. 12 f. 9 T-V
Includes correspondence with H. Ingram Thomas.
- b. 12 f. 10 W-Z
Includes correspondence with Clarence Cameron White and Janet Wolfe.

Family

- b. 13 f. 1 Maggie Cumbo and Lilla [Hurst] 1902-1906
Photocopies of the letters contain annotations from Marion.
- b. 13 f. 2 Imdela (Millie) Burton and Clarissa Cumbo 1920-1936
Includes correspondence from Imelda Burton to her sister, Clarissa.
- b. 13 f. 3-14 Marion and Clarissa Cumbo 1922-1960s
Includes some greeting cards from the 1950s.
- b. 14 f. 1 Earl and Marion Cumbo 1924-1986
- b. 14 f. 2 William to Earl and Marion Cumbo 1928-1937
Letters sent to Earl and Marion by their father, William.
- b. 14 f. 3 Billy (William) and Marion Cumbo 1930s-1960
Letters from Billy (William) to his father, Marion.
- b. 14 f. 4 Grandchildren, Nieces, Nephews, and Others 1933-1985

Printed Material

Sheet Music 1900s-1960s

- b. 24 f. 7-9 1920s-1960s
b. 36 Contains sheet music by unidentified composers and songbooks of music by various artists.
- b. 38 f. 3-4
- b. 25 f. 1 B
- b. 25 f. 2 Johann Sebastian Bach
b. 37 f. 1
- b. 25 f. 3 Samuel Barber
- b. 25 f. 4 Ludwig van Beethoven
b. 37 f. 2
- b. 25 f. 5 Irving Berlin
- b. 26 f. 1 Luigi Boccherini

Printed Material (cont.)
Sheet Music (cont.)

- b. 26 f. 2 Léon Boëllmann
- b. 26 f. 3 Hugo Bornn
- b. 26 f. 4 Johannes Brahms
- b. 26 f. 5 Frank Bridge
- b. 26 f. 6 Oscar Brückner
- b. 26 f. 7 Henry Thacker Burleigh
- b. 26 f. 8 C
- b. 26 f. 9 Archangelo Corelli
- b. 27 f. 1-4 Samuel Coleridge-Taylor
- b. 27 f. 5 Paul Creston
- b. 27 f. 6 Arthur Cunningham
- b. 28 f. 1 D
- b. 28 f. 2 Carl Davidoff
- b. 28 f. 3 Claude Debussy
- b. 28 f. 4 Friedrich Dotzauer
- b. 37 f. 3 Antonín Dvo_ák
- b. 28 f. 5 E
- b. 28 f. 6 Duke Ellington
- b. 28 f. 7 F
- b. 28 f. 8 Gabriel Fauré
- b. 28 f. 9 G
- b. 28 f. 10 George Gershwin
- b. 28 f. 11 Reinhold Glière
- b. 28 f. 12 George Goltermann
- b. 29 f. 1 George Alfred Grant-Schaefer
- b. 29 f. 2 Friedrich Grützmacher
- b. 29 f. 3-4 H
- b. 30 f. 1 Charles-Louis Hanon
- b. 30 f. 2 W. C. Handy
- b. 30 f. 3 Joseph Haydn
- b. 30 f. 4 Jean Huré
- b. 30 f. 5 I
- b. 30 f. 6 J
- b. 30 f. 7 Hall Johnson
- b. 30 f. 8 Jerome Kern
- b. 31 f. 1 L
- b. 31 f. 2 Edouard Lalo
- b. 31 f. 3 William Lawrence
- b. 31 f. 4 M
- b. 37 f. 4
- b. 31 f. 5-6 Edward Henry Margetson
- b. 32 f. 1 Emanuel Middleton

Printed Material (cont.)

Sheet Music (cont.)

- b. 37 f. 5 Alfred Edward Moffat
- b. 32 f. 2 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- b. 32 f. 3 N
- b. 32 f. 4 Cy Neadle
- b. 32 f. 5 O-P
- b. 37 f. 6
- b. 32 f. 6 Montague Phillips
- b. 32 f. 7 Alfred Pochon
- b. 33 f. 1-2 David Popper
- b. 33 f. 3 Cole Porter
- b. 33 f. 4 R
- b. 33 f. 5 Sergei Rachmaninoff
- b. 33 f. 6 Karl Rissland
- b. 34 f. 1-2 S
- b. 38 f. 1
- b. 34 f. 3 Camille Saint-Saëns
- b. 34 f. 4 Hale Smith
- b. 34 f. 5 William Grant Still
- b. 34 f. 5 Richard Strauss
- b. 35 f. 1 T
- b. 35 f. 2 Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
- b. 35 f. 3 V
- b. 35 f. 4 W
- b. 35 f. 5 Richard Wagner
- b. 35 f. 6 J. Werner
- b. 35 f. 7 Clarence Cameron White
- b. 38 f. 2
- b. 35 f. 8 Willem Wilke
- b. 36 f. 1 Nándor Zsolt

Performance Programs

Programs include performances from Marion's career and members of the Symphony of the New World and Triad Productions.

- b. 14 f. 5-10 1882-1987
- b. 15-22 Includes some programs with no dates.
- b. 23 f. 1-2
- b. 40 f. 3
- b. 41 f. 2
- b. 23 f. 4 Notes 1900s-1980s
- Drafts of performance program setlists written by Marion.
- b. 23 f. 5-9 Clippings 1920s-1980s
- b. 41 f. 3

Personal Files

Marion and Clarissa Cumbo

- b. 23 f. 10 Identification and Certificates 1924-1965
- Includes copies of Marion's work identification cards, letters from social workers from his orphanage, and materials related to Clarissa's application for citizenship and eventual Certificate of Naturalization. There are also copies of Clarissa and Marion's marriage certificate.

Personal Files (cont.)

Marion and Clarissa Cumbo (cont.)

- b. 23 f. 11 **Finances 1932-1951**
Paperwork from Clarissa's position as a clerk at the post office and later the Bureau of Internal Revenue.
 - b. 24 f. 1 **Death Arrangements and Obituaries 1902-1981**
Funeral arrangements, eulogies, and memorial service programs for friends and family.
 - b. 24 f. 2-3 **Writing 1950s-1970s**
Biographic sketches of both Marion and Clarissa, and poetry by Marion.
- Bill (William) Cumbo**
- b. 24 f. 4 **Baby Charts and Holy Communion Certificate 1926-1940**
 - b. 24 f. 5 **Education 1935-1949**
 - b. 24 f. 6 **Police Notebooks 1955-1958**