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HELEN ARMSTEAD-JOHNSON THEATER COLLECTION
Elliot Carpenter Papers, 1922-1978

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HELEN ARMSTEAD-JOHNSON THEATER COLLECTION
Elliot Carpenter Papers, 1922-1978
SC MG 599

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Extent: Shelving Unit: 2 record cartons, 14 print boxes
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Abstract: Elliot Carpenter (1894-1982), was a pianist, composer, arranger, conductor and song stylist. Collection consists of personal and professional correspondence, handwritten and printed music, programs, lyrics, scripts, and

Provenance: Elliot Carpenter willed his collection to Helen Armstead-Johnson upon his death; in 1996 it was donated by Helen Armstead-Johnson to the Schomburg Center along with other theater-related collections.

Organization note: Collection is organized into seven series: personal papers, correspondence, music, lyrics, miscellaneous writings, programs, and printed material.

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Citation: [Item], Elliot Carpenter Papers, Helen Armstead-Johnson Theater Collection, Sc MG 599, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

Index Terms

Names: Elliot Carpenter, Eubie Blake, Bill Boyd, Everett Francis Briggs, Langston Hughes, Ada May, Flournoy E. Miller, Basil Travnikoff, Dooley Wilson.

Subject: Afro-American composers, Afro-American musicians, Afro-American entertainers, Composers, Musicians, Afro-American music, Afro-Americans in the performing arts, Afro-Americans B songs and music, Music - twentieth century, Scores, Scripts, Scrapbooks, Music - Manuscripts, Lyrics.

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Preface

This inventory was prepared as part of an archival preservation project to arrange, describe and catalog resources essential for the study of the African-American theater history. The necessary staff and supplies for the *Blacks on Stage: African-American Theater Arts Collections Project* were made available through a combination of funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the City and State of New York.

CARPENTER, ELLIOT (1894-1982). PAPERS, 1922-1978.

8.7 lin. ft., 16 boxes

Biographical Sketch

Elliot James Carpenter was a pianist, composer, arranger, conductor, and song stylist, with a career that spanned much of the twentieth century. Born in Philadelphia on December 28, 1894, he was educated at the Temple School of Music in that city. He became an organist in a Baptist church, and at age fifteen played Mendelssohn's Concerto for piano and orchestra with the Philadelphia Concert Orchestra under the direction of Gilbert Anderson. Carpenter, however, preferred performing popular music and after moving to New York, became a member of the Clef Club, a union and booking agent for black musicians and musical groups, which also sponsored its own concerts. It was during this time that he became a pianist with the James Reese Europe Orchestra, and married Mauvolyene Rollins, also of Philadelphia, in 1914.

Carpenter first went to Europe in 1921 with an orchestra under the direction of Seth Weeks of Clef Club fame. While in Europe he again performed with the Europe Orchestra, was coach-accompanist for singer Maurice Chevalier, and performed at the Apollo Theatre in Paris with a small orchestra under the management of Seth Weeks in 1922. He continued his musical studies while in France at the Conservatory in Fontainebleau with Deacroux and Fouchet, and also received training at the Tadlewski Institute of Nice.

When Carpenter returned to the United States in 1923, he formed a vaudeville team with Ike Hatch and performed in many theaters in Europe. Soon after he formed a band composed of himself, Opal Cooper, Creighton Thompson and Roscoe Burnett. Known as the Red Devils, the band toured Europe under the management of the Clef Club Singers and Players. He also performed as a piano soloist in cabarets, theaters and clubs in London and Paris, including the Follies Bergères, the Casino in Cannes, as well as in Cairo and Buenos Aires. After twelve years of performing and studying abroad he returned to the United States in 1935.

Carpenter's primary musical style was popular, but he also wrote and performed swing music. Although he wrote a substantial amount of original music principally using the themes of love and religion, only a modest number of pieces were published. He was a prodigious arranger of music authored by both black and white composers. While devoting most of his talent to composing music, he also wrote lyrics, sometimes with collaborators. Additionally Carpenter wrote a small number of original scripts, generally short, which might have been skits to be performed in nightclubs or on the radio; some of which were reworkings of scenes from plays popular at the time, such as *Showboat*.

In the 1930's Carpenter moved to Los Angeles, which eventually became his permanent home. In 1937 he collaborated with Clarence Muse to write and perform the music for the film *Spirit of Youth* starring Joe Louis, the boxing champion. Five songs from this movie were published by Mills Music, Inc. including "More Sleepy Time," "Mighty Men of Steel," and "It's the Little Things You Do."

In 1939 he arranged the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Mikado*

into a swing piece called *Swing Mikado*, also known as *Mikado in Swing*. A major boost to his career was his performance of the sound track for "As Time Goes By" in the film *Casablanca* as the playing hands of Sam, the character played by Dooley Wilson. This led to other opportunities including performing in the homes of Hollywood stars such as Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and Mary Pickford. He also appeared in radio programs on the London BBC, in Philadelphia and Hollywood and had roles in motion pictures, one of them being *Amos and Andy*.

Among his other accomplishments, Carpenter wrote a symphonic poem called "Moods" performed by the Federal Theatre Orchestra under the direction of Eusigli, and wrote two suites, *African Dance* and *Bolero for Dance*. A collaboration with Langston Hughes produced a song entitled "America's Young Black Joe," which was published. Three additional tunes "Album of Broken Dreams," "Cry Away Your Blues," and "We're Gonna Get Corny Tonight" were published under the pen name of Jimmy Fortune. He is also the author of a book entitled *Syncopation* which depicts the lives and works of early African-American composers. Although it is not clear how many recordings Carpenter made, he recorded "Jamaica" for Monte Carlo Records and "Priceless (Nightingale)" with Bonnie Bartlett on the Tip Top Label.

Carpenter frequently worked with other collaborators including Karen Bank, Bill Boyd, Everett F. Briggs, Dove See, Frank Lowry, and Kahl Ra-Faun. He also assisted other composers in the construction of melody and lyrics, the preparation of lead sheets, as a copyist, and by undertaking revisions of their work. Throughout the forty year period from the 1930s until the 1970s, Carpenter frequently accompanied performances in churches, community groups and colleges in Los Angeles and its environs, and became one of Hollywood's teachers of voice, style and piano. Carpenter died in 1982.

Note: A search of the literature has yielded very little published information about Carpenter other than what was found in the collection.

Scope and Content

The Elliot Carpenter Papers document the musical career of this composer, arranger, and performer and consists of personal and professional correspondence, handwritten and printed music, programs, lyrics, scripts, and newsclippings. The years from the 1940s to the 1970s are more fully documented than the earlier years. When acquired, these papers lacked any discernable order; the processor has imposed an order based upon type of material. In some instances folder titles written by Carpenter have been retained. Photographs which form part of the Elliot Carpenter Papers are described separately in the Photographs and Prints Division.

The Carpenter Papers are divided into seven series and three subseries. The titles, dates and box numbers are as follows:

Title	Dates	Box Numbers
Personal Papers	1937-1975	1
Correspondence	1922-1978	1
Music		
Elliot Carpenter		2-6
Collaborators		7-9
Other Composers		10-14
Lyrics	1943-ca. 1970's	15
Miscellaneous Writings	1946-ca. 1970's	15
Programs	1935-1968	15
Printed Material	1928-1977	16

The **PERSONAL PAPERS** series, **1937-1975 (5 folders)** includes family correspondence with Arthur W. Carpenter (Elliot's uncle), his mother, and others. An informal will indicates that Helen Armstead-Johnson was to receive the papers of Carpenter and his wife Mauvolyene (1974). This series has been arranged chronologically, with the name of significant correspondents and organizations placed alphabetically.

The **CORRESPONDENCE 1922-1978 (1 lin. ft.)** series contains letters from colleagues and individuals whom Carpenter assisted as a copyist and by revising and doing other related work in the preparation of their musical compositions. Individuals with whom he corresponded include Eubie Blake, Bill Boyd, Everett F. Briggs, Monroe Burnett, Langston Hughes, Helen Armstead-Johnson, Frank Lowry, Ada May, Kahl Ra-Faun, Dove See and Noah M. Thompson. Much of the correspondence pertains to songs he and his colleagues collaborated on. Of interest is correspondence with Eubie Blake which discusses mutual friends, and Carpenter's advice regarding Blake's music and personal matters (1966-1978). Other letters and postcards written by Blake to "Alex" Carpenter, which appears to

be Blake's nickname for Carpenter, also concern Blake's musical activities and travels (1944-1946, 1967). Letters from comedienne Ada May speak about her travels through Europe as a performer during 1946-1959. The series also includes correspondence with several professional organizations Carpenter belonged to: American Guild of Authors and Composers (re copyright notices), ASCAP (performance records), and Musicians' Protective Union. Agreements and contracts provide a fairly comprehensive list of collaborators, songs and fees for Carpenter's work from 1936-1964, and paystubs and earnings statements provide details about the royalties he was paid.

The **MUSIC (6.5 lin. ft.)** series consists almost exclusively of manuscript music, mostly copies made by Carpenter for his use as a composer/arranger. Nearly all of the music is accompanied by lyrics. Correspondence between Carpenter and the composers for whom there is music in the collection may be found in the Correspondence series; when a letter exists about a particular piece, a photocopy has been placed in the Music series with the compositions. There are also a number of composers who are represented by both music and lyrics; the different works will be found in the appropriate series. The subseries **Elliot Carpenter** (2 lin. ft.) consists of music Carpenter composed or arranged and is organized by title of piece. The subseries **Collaborators** (1.2 lin. ft.) consists of manuscript music and lyrics composed by Carpenter with a collaborator. The few pieces for which there is sheet music, written by a collaborator, have been incorporated into this subseries. The collaborators for whom there is a substantial amount of music include Harry Atwood, Karan Bank and George Goulding, Edward K. Bergstrom, Everett F. Briggs, James Doyle, Lynn Howard, Langston Hughes, Mark Hurley, Sister Mary Juanilla, Frank Lowry, Kahl Ra-Faun, Tish Sadler, Dove See, Dwight Strickland and Dooley Wilson.

This subseries is arranged by name of composer, then alphabetically by title of composition within each folder. Letters in the Correspondence series links the music which many of these collaborators worked on. The **Other Composers** subseries (1.6 lin. ft.) consists of manuscript music written by composers other than Carpenter. Composers in this subseries include Evelyn Burwell, P. R. Gracey, Mark Hurley, Oscar McLollie, Ada May, Basil Travnikoff and Stan Tull. This series concludes with two folders of printed music; one folder contains sheet music by other composers and annotated by Carpenter, but not considered to be arranged by Carpenter. The other folder contains sheet music by other composers autographed to Carpenter. In those instances where a composer and a lyricist are listed, the music has been filed by the name of the composer. When more than two composers wrote a piece, the music was alphabetized by the composer first listed on the work.

The series **LYRICS, 1943-ca. 1970s (.3 lin. ft.)** is comprised of lyrics written by Carpenter and other lyricists. Some lyrics appear to have been taken from popular tunes and reworked by

Carpenter. Other music was composed by Carpenter with lyrics written by other individuals, among them cowboy Bill Boyd, Nathaniel A. Davis, Lois Faith Kirby, Flourney Miller, and Kahl Ra-Faun. Lyrics written by Carpenter are arranged alphabetically by title; if untitled, they are placed alphabetically by first line. Lyrics by others are organized alphabetically by name of lyricist.

The series **MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS, 1946-ca. 1970s (.3 lin. ft)** consists primarily of scripts of varying lengths intended for performances on stage or radio. Most of the scripts were written by Carpenter; one is a treatment for a scene from *Showboat*, and some were prepared with collaborators such as Clarence Muse. A number of scripts were authored by others, such as the play *Topsy Turvy* by Jesse Kahn, a black version of *Alice in Wonderland*, with music by Carpenter. Scripts have been arranged into three groupings: by Carpenter, with collaborators, and by others.

The **PROGRAM series, 1935-1968 (.2 lin. ft.)** includes printed and handwritten programs for many of Carpenter's engagements as well as a few cue sheets and related production files.

The **PRINTED MATERIAL 1928-1977 (.2 lin. ft.)** series, encompasses two scrapbooks containing primarily newsclippings and some programs, correspondence, greeting cards and invitations discussing Carpenter's performances and activities in the United States. A few programs and newsclippings pertain to performances in England and Brazil; one article was written by Carpenter for the *Chicago Defender* about the Hollywood's Screen Actor's Ball in 1937.

Provenance

Elliot Carpenter's will indicated his plans to donate his papers to the Armstead-Johnson Foundation for Theater Research. Johnson donated her entire collection, including the Elliot Carpenter Papers, to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in December 1996.

SCM96-37

Processed by Janice Quinter with the assistance of Farah Madrid and Alex Mills.
May 2000

Container List

Box Folder

*1	PERSONAL PAPERS Family, 1937-1962 Family, 1934-1975 Will - Elliot and Mauvolyene Carpenter, 1974 Paystubs/Earnings Statements, 1940-1960 Certificates, 1957-1962 50th Wedding Anniversary Album CORRESPONDENCE 1922 France, 1930-1936 London, 1934 Buenos Aires, 1935 1933-1938 Legal Case, 1937-1938 1939-1940 1941-1942 1943-1944 Responses to Advertisement re Arranging Songs, 1944 1945 1946 1947-1948 1949 1940s Fan Mail, 1950 1950-1951 1952-1953 1954-1955 1956-1957 1958-1959 1960-1961 1962-1963 1964-1965 1966-1967 1968-1969 1970-1978 n.d. - Agreements and Contracts, 1936-1964
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*Offsite

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
1	American Guild of Authors and Composers, 1960-1976 American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), 1941-1977 Blake, Eubie to Alex (Elliot) Carpenter, 1944-1946, 1967 Blake, Eubie, 1966-1978 Boyd, Bill and Janice Boyd Hamilton, 1943-1945 Boyer, Adelaide, 1946-1947 Briggs, Everett F., 1956-1977 Briggs, Everett F. re song, " <i>Oh America</i> ", 1976-1977 Burnett, Monroe, 1934-1938 Chester, Edna and Joe, 1959 Clef Club Singers and Players, Red Devils, 1919-1933 Dalton, Tom, 1975 Dante, Bob, 1960 Darling, Gay, 1955 Davis, Nathaniel A., 1939-1945 Deacon Johnson's Studios, 1936-1943 53 Hughes, Langston, 1941-1967 54 Johnson, Helen Armstead, 1973-1979 Lowry, Frank, 1959-1975 Lowry, Frank re " <i>Dream Again</i> ," 1973-1977 May, Ada, 1946-1959 Clarence Muse, Chicago Fan Club, 1937-1938 Music Corporation of America, 1943-1956 Musicians' Protective Union, 1936-1960 Ra-Faun, Kahl, 1941-1944 See, Dove - re song, " <i>O, Infant Jesus</i> ," 1947-1951 Song Writers Protective Association, 1943-1958 Thompson, Noah M., 1943-1951 Toney, Robert, 1962 Publicity, n.d. 65 Voice Course Carpenter Taught, 1951 66 Record Labels and Addresses

Container List

Box Folder

MUSIC

Carpenter

A-An

Ar-Aq

Ba-Bc

Be-Bi

Bl

Bo-Bu

Ca-Cl

Co-Cu

D

E

F

G-Go

God-Gy

H-He

Hel-Hy

I-I Get

I Got-I Love

I Miss-If

Ig-It

J

K

La-Lim

Lit-Lo

Ma

Me-Mon

Moods

Moon-My

N

O-Oh

Ohi-Oz

Pa-Pe

Pi-Pr

Q

7 R

8 Sa-Se

9 Sh-Sm

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
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5	10	So-Som
	11	Son-Sou
		Sp-St
		Su-Sy
		T-Tha
		The-Too
		Top-Tw
		U
		V
		Wa-Wed
		Wel-Whe
		Whi-Wo
		Y
		Z

Collaborators

Atwood, Harry
 Austin, Ken
 Bacon, L. A.
 Bank, Karan and George Goulding
 Bayton
 Bergstrom, Edward K.
 Berlo, Gisele
 Borzage, Don
 Boyd, Bill
 Briggs, Everett F.
 Brooks, Rand
 Burleigh, H.
 Burwell, Evelyn
 Calucci, Joe
 Carter, Eugene, Lew Tobin, and John
 Thomas
 Cropper, Odessa M.
 Dante, Bob
 Davis, Nathaniel
 De Sousa, Maximiano
 Doran, Elsa
 Dou Deau, Yvonne
 Doyle, James
 Duval, Louise

Container List

Box Folder

7	Ellison, Ben Enders, Erica Englander, B. A. Gene, Jack Glass, Marcé Goodloe, Ambia Hecht, Don Herbert, J. D. Herrick, Ray Hickey, Joe Hill, Peggy House, Billy Howard, Betty Howard, Lynn Hughes, Langston
-	Hurley, Mark Jordan, Joe Juanilla, Sister Mary Kahn, Jessie Kahn, Louis Kaniho, Kamehamena K. Princess Lana Kila Kiggins, C. A. King, Lucille Kirby, Lois Faith Kotowicz, Caroline Lango, Edward Lawson, Vera Parker Leonard, Ann Lowry, Frank Lynn, Eve McAdoo, Bill McConnell, Helen McDonald, Eric McHenry, Frances McKinney, Mayme McLollie, Oscar Miller, Flournoy Moffatt, Hal Murray, Eve
-	Muse, Clarence

Container List

Box Folder

8		Quickel, Susan
	-	Ra-Faun, Kahl
		Reed, Don
		Robinson, Gus
		Roea, Ambia
-8		Sadler, Tish
9		St. George, Catharine
10		See, Dove
11		Sheeler, Sidney Beverly
12		Spikes, R.
13		Strickland, Dwight
14		Summerset, Maudeen
15		Tarry, Lillian
16		Thompson, Noah M.
17		Towns, Jack
18		Travnikoff, Basil
19		Warner, Tena
20		Weir
21		Whipper, Leigh
22		Wiginton, William
23		Wilson, Dooley
24		Woods, Paloma

Other Composers

A
 B-Ben
 Ber-Bl
 Bo-Broo
 Brow-Bul
 Burwell, Evelyn
 But-By
 C-Cam
 Car-Ch

 Cl-Cu
 D-Dou
 Doy-Du
 E
 F
 G-Gj

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
11	Gl-Gracey Gracy, P. R. Grah-Gu H-Hen Her-Hup Hurley, Mark I J-Joh Jor-Ju K L-Lev Lew-Lo McA-McDonald, E. McDonald, J.-McLe McLollie, Oscar McN-Max - May, Ada Maye-Mosb Moss-Mu N O P-Pat Pau-Pi Po-Pr Q R-Ric Rid-Ru S-Sil Sim-Stor Stoy-Sy T-To - Travnikoff, Basil Tull, Stan U V W-Williams, L. Williams, M.-Wy Z

Container List

Box

Folder

13

Printed Music
Annotated by Carpenter
Autographed to Carpenter

- 4 Unidentified
- 5 Unidentified Composers - Musical Style
Samples, Melodic Fragments, and
Unidentified Selections

*

LYRICS

Titled - A-M

Titled - N-Y

First Line - A-L

First Line - M-Y

Other Lyricists - with Music by Carpenter

- Other Lyricists - with Music by Other
Composers

Bank, Karan

Bell, Walter

Butts, Laura E.

Brunton, Garland

Calucci, Joe - "My Love"

Davis, Nathaniel A. - Patriotic Songs

Gjonovich, Miles S., 1955-1973

Herrick, Ray

Kahn, Jessie

Kirby, Lois Faith (Mrs. J. D. Herbert)

Landrum, Suzi

Miller, Flourney

Milton, Roy

Ra-Faun, Kahl

Roland, Annette W.

Scott, Ronnie B./George A. Adrian

Summerset, Maudeen

Williams, Dootsie

Songs of Loyalty and Sentiment

Patriotic and Sentimental Songs

*Offsite

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
*15		MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS
		By Carpenter
		Poems
		Characters
		Settings
		Finished Plots
		Emotional Scenes - Themes
		Publicity about King, Lucille
		Treatment of Scene from <i>Showboat</i> , 1966
	-	Scripts
		Fragments
		Miscellaneous Notes
		Collaborators
		Hughes, Langston
		Muse, Clarence - " <i>I See A Million</i> "
		Other Authors
		Other Authors
		Kahn, Jesse - Play, <i>Topsy Turvy</i>
		Synopsis by Leppe, Margaret
		Other Authors
		PROGRAMS
	-47	Programs
	48	Programs/Production Files
		PRINTED MATERIAL
		Programs
		Scrapbook
		1928-1943
		1944-1964
		1952-1962
		1935-1977
		Carpenter's Article, 1937

*Offsite

SEPARATION RECORD

The following items were removed from:

Name of Collection/Papers Elliot Carpenter Papers

Accession Number SCM 96-38

Donor: Helen A. Johnson

Date received: December 1996

Date transferred: May 2000

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:

1 photograph album and 1 scrapbook of Elliot and Mauvolyene
Carpenter's 50th Wedding Anniversary party, snapshots of family
and friends; vintage photographs of Carpenter, and autographed
photographs of black and white performers.

Other:

Sheet music transferred to Music Division, New York Public
Library for the Performing Arts.