



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

Guide to the

Mabel Mercer collection

1941-1984

Sc MG 536

Summary

Creator: Mercer, Mabel, 1900-1984

Title: Mabel Mercer collection

Date: 1941-1984

Size: 0.33 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Gift of Pearl Lemert, June 1986.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Mabel Mercer (1900-1984) was a singer, song stylist, and night club entertainer. Born in England in 1900 to a Black musician father, Benjamin Mercer, and a white English vaudevillian mother, Emily Wadham Stonehouse, Mercer started her show business career at the age of fourteen. She joined a song and dance act with her mother and aunt in Europe. Later, in the 1920s, she appeared in Lew Leslie's Blackbirds in London, as part of a vocal trio. Around this time, Mercer started studying singing, with aspirations of becoming a concert singer. In the 1920s and 1930s, she was a successful night club singer in Paris, appearing at Ada "Bricktop" Smith's Bricktop's. She made her first appearance in the U.S. in 1938 and settled here in 1941, after marrying singer Kelsey Pharr, a member of the Delta Rhythm Boys. Mercer became an American citizen in 1952, where she was known as one of the most popular supper club singers for many years. The Mabel Mercer collection consists of articles, correspondence, interviews and profiles, publicity flyers, programs, and a scrapbook.

Preferred citation: [Item], Mabel Mercer collection, Sc MG 536, 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: Accessioned by Berlena Robinson, October 1986.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Related Materials:

Mabel Mercer papers, Sc MG 341, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Creator History

Mabel Mercer (1900-1984) was a singer, song stylist, and night club entertainer. Born in England in 1900 to a Black musician father, Benjamin Mercer, and a white English vaudevillian mother, Emily Wadham Stonehouse, Mercer started her show business career at the age of fourteen. She joined a song and dance act with her mother and aunt in Europe. Later, in the 1920s, she appeared in Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds* in London, as part of a vocal trio. Around this time, Mercer started studying singing, with aspirations of becoming a concert singer. In the 1920s and 1930s, she was a successful night club singer in Paris, appearing at Ada "Bricktop" Smith's Bricktop's. She made her first appearance in the U.S. in 1938 and settled here in 1941, after marrying singer Kelsey Pharr, a member of the Delta Rhythm Boys. Mercer became an American citizen in 1952, where she was known as one of the most popular supper club singers for many years.

Scope and Content Note

The Mabel Mercer collection consists of articles, correspondence, interviews and profiles, publicity flyers, programs, and a scrapbook.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American women dancers
African American women entertainers
African American women singers
African Americans in the performing arts

Names

Mercer, Mabel, 1900-1984
Short, Bobby

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Obituary 1984
- b. 1 f. 2 Programs 1960-1984
- b. 1 f. 3 Correspondence 1964-1980
- b. 1 f. 4 American Cabaret Honoring Mabel Mercer, Whitney Museum of American Art and Composers' Showcase 1981
Includes invitation and Mercer's introduction by Isabelle Stevenson.
- b. 1 f. 5 News clippings and articles 1953-1982
- b. 2 f. 1
- b. 1 f. 6 Postcards of Mercer in her teens and 20s
- b. 2 f. 2 *Poster of Stereo Review's 1984 Mabel Mercer Award to Frank Sinatra* 1984
- b. 2 f. 3 Calendar of great women in jazz (includes Mercer) 1979-1980
- b. 2 f. 4 Scrapbook ca. 1941-1968
Mostly includes clippings, articles, flyers, and programs.