

# **Guide to the Gertrude Ribla Papers, 1935-1979**

**JPB 06-53**

## **Music Division**

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
New York, New York**

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## Descriptive Summary

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Gertrude Ribla Papers</b>
<b>Collection ID:</b>	<b>JPB 06-53</b>
<b>Creator:</b>	<b>Ribla, Gertrude</b>
<b>Extent:</b>	<b>4.19 linear feet (6 boxes)</b>
<b>Repository:</b>	<b>Music Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts</b>

**Abstract:** The Gertrude Ribla Papers document the performing and teaching career of the American-born and trained opera singer through clippings, photographs, programs, publicity materials, and scrapbooks. Ribla, who entered the field of international opera in an unlikely manner, ultimately enjoyed a varied and distinguished career as a soprano. She performed with Arturo Toscanini, Eugene Ormandy, and the Metropolitan Opera before becoming a music teacher later in life.

## Administrative Information

### Access

Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

### Publication Rights

For permission to publish, contact the Chief, Music Division.

### Preferred Citation

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### Processing Information

The collection was processed and cataloged in January 2007.

## Biographical Note

Contemporary publicity material regarding the American soprano Gertrude Ribla (real name, Ribler, 1914-1980) frequently cited the Cinderella aspect of her initially unlikely entrance into the field of international opera, in which she ultimately enjoyed a varied and distinguished career. A native New Yorker, Ribla did not come from a musical background, but first became interested in singing and acting as a student at Bryant High School in Long Island City, where she performed in several school productions. Despite her obvious talent, she had been urged by her family to enroll in business school after graduation to study stenography. Ribla was working as a typist in 1935, when she entered a singing contest sponsored by a newspaper. She won in the contralto category and as a result was introduced to the well-known soprano and vocal teacher, Frances Alda, who agreed to train her as a soprano and helped her to secure a sponsor (Mrs. Alfred P. Sloan) to support Ribla's training with Alda over a three-year period. Ribla made her formal debut in 1938 at a concert at the Barbizon Plaza Hotel. She worked steadily throughout the 1940s, touring North America extensively in numerous appearances with small opera companies, orchestra concerts, and on the radio, before finally achieving her major goal of performing at the Metropolitan Opera.

Ribla had received another big break in 1943, when Arturo Toscanini selected her to be the soloist with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in a special all-Verdi program he put together to mark the resignation of Benito Mussolini. Later in the decade, she worked with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, most notably in 1947 in a concert version of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. In May 1948, Ribla was a finalist in the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air, earning a contract for the next season. She made her debut in 1949 in the title role of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*. Although she received favorable reviews, Ribla inexplicably was retained by the company for only the following season, in which she added parts in *Il Trovatore* and *Die Walküre*.

Noted for her dramatic, as well as her vocal abilities, Ribla continued to explore the standard repertory during the 1950s through numerous engagements with opera companies throughout the United States, as well as Cuba, Germany, and Italy. She also participated in modern works, including the world premiere of Raffaello de Banfield's one-act opera, *Lord Byron's Love Letter* (1955), which featured a libretto by Tennessee Williams, and she appeared frequently in recitals. With performance opportunities beginning to dry up in the early 1960s, Ribla turned to teaching as her primary source of income, serving as an instructor at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri from 1961 to 1968 and becoming an associate professor at the University of Missouri, St. Louis in 1968. She was on the faculty of the Indiana University School of Music at the time of her sudden death from a heart attack in 1980.

## Scope and Content Note

The Gertrude Ribla Papers document the performing and teaching career of the American-born and trained opera singer. The collection is comprised chiefly of clippings, photographs, programs, publicity materials, and scrapbooks. The limited amount of correspondence is mainly professional in nature. Although it provides only an incomplete picture of Ribla's career, in the evidence it presents of the frequently unglamorous life of a hardworking performer and instructor, the collection offers some material that may be of interest to researchers studying the professionalization of music as a discipline in the United States, as well as the development of repertory and opportunities for women opera singers during the twentieth century.

## Organization

The collection is organized into 4 series. They are:

Series I: Personal and Professional Papers, 1935-1979 and undated

Series II: Photographs, 1937-1970 and undated

Series III: Scrapbooks, 1938-1943

Series IV: Oversized Materials, 1949 and undated

## Series Descriptions

### **Series I: Personal and Professional Papers, 1935-1979 and undated** **2 boxes**

Arranged: Alphabetical

The Personal and Professional Papers series primarily documents Ribla's performing and teaching career through extensive newspaper clippings, a selection of publicity materials, and some programs. It also contains some fragmentary evidence of her preparation for roles, such as a notebook for an unidentified Havana production and an incomplete script in Spanish (both appear to be for *Die Fledermaus*). There is only a small amount of correspondence, but material of note includes some items from Ribla's first teacher and earliest patron, as well as letters from colleagues, including Vasso Argyris and Raffaello de Banfield. Much of the extant material relates to performances in Cuba and Italy. Although English predominates, Ribla was multilingual and some items can be found in Italian, French, German, and Spanish throughout the collection.

### **Series II: Photographs, 1937-1970 and undated** **1 box**

Arranged: Alphabetical

The bulk of the Photographs series consists of formal studio photographs of Ribla in costume for various roles and staged publicity shots of performances or rehearsals. The collection also includes several autographed headshots from many of Ribla's colleagues from the world of opera, including Giovanni Martinelli, Jan Peerce, and Giorgio Tozzi. There are a few unidentified sets of snapshots documenting travel (probably in Italy and Cuba), as well as some images of probable family members and friends.

**Series III: Scrapbooks, 1938-1943**

**2 boxes**

Arranged: Chronological

The three volumes included in the Scrapbooks series contain additional clippings, most of which date from a period earlier than the majority of those represented in the clippings folders, as well as a few programs, photographs, and pieces of correspondence.

**Series IV: Oversized Materials, 1949 and undated**

**1 box**

Arranged: Alphabetical

The Oversized Materials series includes a single scrapbook, which contains only clippings (mainly related to Ribla's appearances with the Metropolitan Opera), a photograph, a poster, and an inscribed leaf from *Musical America*.

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b><u>Series I: Personal and Professional Papers, 1935-1979 and undated</u></b>	
<b>Box 1</b>	
F. 1	Address books, undated
F. 2	Certificates, undated
F. 3	Chicago Yacht Club menu, 1956 (Autographed by friends.)
	Clippings
F. 4	1937-1948
F. 5	1949
F. 6	1950-1959
F. 7	1964-1971
F. 8	Undated
F. 9	Congratulatory notes, undated (Probably included with floral bouquets; possibly for performance of <i>Lord Byron's Love Letter</i> .)
	Correspondence
	General
F. 10	Al-Am, 1935-1944 (Includes three items from Ribla's first vocal coach, Frances Alda.)
F. 11	Argyris, Vasso, 1949 (In English and Italian.)
F. 12	B-D, 1939-1970 and undated (Includes items from Raffaello de Banfield.)
F. 13	F-R, 1943-1979 and undated
F. 14	Sloan, Mrs. Alfred P., 1938-1941 (Ribla's early patron.)
F. 15	St-V, 1953-1959
F. 16	Unidentified, 1959
F. 17	Greeting cards, 1956-1979 and undated (Includes undated Christmas card from Louis Melançon.)
F. 18	Italy, 1956-1957 (Regarding engagements; in Italian.)
F. 19	Letters of recommendation, 1959-1968
F. 20	Teaching positions, 1970-1971 (Applications for music schools in New York City area.)
F. 21	Tenure review, 1970-1972 (For University of Missouri at Saint Louis; includes correspondence and versions of curriculum vitae.)
F. 22	Costume sketch, undated (In pencil; removed from front of 1943 scrapbook.)
F. 23	Havana notebook, 1952 (Notes on unidentified role, possibly in production of <i>Die Fledermaus</i> , with newspaper clippings in Spanish.)
<b>Box 2</b>	
	Publicity materials, undated
	Fliers and brochures
F. 1	1942-1965
F. 2	Undated
F. 3	Newsletters, 1955-1972 and undated
F. 4	Press material on Gertrude Ribla, undated (Compilations of press releases prepared by National Concert and Artists Corporation.)
F. 5	Press notices, undated (Typed and handwritten; includes English translation of article in 1950 Cuban newspaper.)
	Programs
F. 6	1943-1949
F. 7	1951-1965
F. 8	Script, undated (Incomplete typescript in Spanish, with annotations in pencil; probably for production of <i>Die Fledermaus</i> .)
F. 9	Tax records, 1950-1956
	Travel ephemera

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Description</b>
F. 10	Cuba, 1951
F. 11	Italy, 1956-1957 and undated
F. 12	Union card, 1950-1951 (American Guild of Variety Artists.)
	<b><u>Series II: Photographs, 1937-1970 and undated</u></b>
<b>Box 3</b>	
F. 1	Family and friends, undated (Includes unidentified, but probable image of Ribla's parents and sister.)
F. 2	Passport photographs, undated Portraits
F. 3	Autographed, 1937-1961 and undated (Includes Frances Alda, Giovanni Martinelli, Jan Peerce, Giorgio Tozzi, and Richard Tucker.)
F. 4	Unidentified, undated
F. 5	Postcards, undated (Unidentified opera singers from Italy.) Publicity and performance
F. 6	General, 1943 and undated
F. 7	<i>Aida</i> , 1942-1957 and undated
F. 8	Headshots, undated
F. 9	Eugene Ormandy, undated (Rehearsal or performance shots.)
F. 10	<i>Lord Byron's Love Letter</i> premiere, 1954
F. 11	Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air, 1948 (Includes letter from Warwick & Legler Advertising.)
F. 12	Portraits, undated
F. 13	Santiago de Cuba recital, 1951
F. 14	Stephens College, undated
F. 15	Teaching, circa 1970
F. 16	Various roles, undated (In costume.) Travel
F. 17	Milan, Italy, 1956
F. 18	Wiesbaden, Germany, 1953 Unidentified
F. 19	Black and white prints, undated (Some may be of Cuba.)
F. 20	Color prints, 1952-1953 (Includes one identified as Paris and one as Curaçao.)
F. 21	Negatives, 1952-1958 and undated (Safety negatives.)
	<b><u>Series III: Scrapbooks, 1938-1943</u></b>
<b>Box 4</b>	
F. 1	1938-1940
F. 2	1941-1943
<b>Box 5</b>	1940-1942
	<b><u>Series IV: Oversized Materials, 1949 and undated</u></b>
<b>Box 6</b>	
F. 1	<i>Mephisto's Musings</i> , 1949 (Sheet from <i>Musical America</i> , inscribed to Ribla, possibly by author.)
F. 2	Photograph, undated (Ribla in costume for role, probably in <i>Aida</i> .)
F. 3	Poster, undated (Advertising the world premiere of Tennessee Williams' double bill, <i>27 Wagons Full of Cotton</i> and <i>Lord Byron's Love Letter</i> in New Orleans.)
F. 4	Scrapbook, 1949 (Clippings only.)