

JPB 04-20

Guide to the Eleanor Spencer Papers, 1900 - 1973

Music Division

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

New York, New York

Music Division, New York Public Library.

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Processed and encoded by: Matthew Snyder

Date Completed: October 2004

Processed and encoded through a gift from Robert W. Wilson.

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Eleanor Spencer Papers, 1900 - 1973

Creator: Spencer, Eleanor

Call Number: JPB 04-20

Size: 1.5 linear feet ; 2 boxes

Repository: The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
Music Division. New York, New York

Abstract: Eleanor Spencer was an American concert pianist. A student of Theodor Leschetizky, she was most active in Europe and America from 1910 to 1938. She gradually went deaf in her 40s and retrained herself, resuming performances in 1947 after an extended break. The Spencer Papers consist of correspondence, writings, promotional material, clippings, concert programs, music manuscripts, diaries and photos.

Languages Represented: English

Administrative Information

Access: Collection is open to the public. Photocopying prohibited. Advance notice required

Preferred Citation: Eleanor Spencer Papers, JPB 04-20 . Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Biographical Note

Eleanor Spencer (b Chicago, 30 Nov. 1890, d Locarno, Switzerland, 12 Oct. 1973) began studying piano as a small child, and performing at age 10. She studied with William Mason, and at 14 moved to Europe, where she continued her studies with Harold Bauer and Theodor Leschetizky. Her recital debut was in Bechstein Hall in London on 28 Apr. 1910, after which she performed further in Britain and Europe, including many appearances with major orchestras. Her American debut was in Carnegie Hall on 3 Nov. 1913. Spencer garnered consistently good notices for both her solo and orchestral performances; critics noted her strong technique, rich sound, and tasteful musical sense. She settled in Paris and based her career in Europe until the start of World War II, when

she moved to New York. By that time she had started to go deaf and begun a decade-long hiatus from performance, during which she retrained herself. In the mid-1940s, though deaf, she resumed periodic solo performances, receiving strong reviews. Spencer spent her last years in Switzerland.

Scope and Content Note

The Eleanor Spencer Papers consist of one and a half linear feet of material dating from 1900 to 1973, with the bulk dating from 1900 - 1954. Most of the career documentation, in the form of promotional material and clippings, dates from childhood up to just before Spencer began going deaf (the late 1930s). The diaries and letters mostly date from ca. 1940 forward. Spencer's diaries, in the form of datebooks, are a unique day-by-day record covering 16 years during which the pianist was losing her hearing, relearning the piano, and resuming performances. Music manuscripts contain some of Spencer's piano exercises. The Papers contain essentially no documentation of Spencer's life or career after 1954.

Organization

- Series I: Writings, 1901 - 1954 and undated
- Series II: Promotional material, 1900 - 1973 and undated
- Series III: Photographs, ca. 1900 - ca. 1948 and undated

Series Descriptions/Container List

Series I: Writings, 1901 - 1954 and undated

11 folders.

Chronological

This series contains correspondence, essays, ephemera, music manuscripts and diaries. Four of the letters date from 1914 or before, and three from 1944 - 1948. One typed excerpt of a letter from Spencer to A.S. Moore in 1944 describes Spencer's method of practicing her mental hearing as her deafness increases. Essays include a 1938 discussion by Spencer of her favorite orchestral conductors, and the text of a speech, author unknown, introducing Spencer at one of her concerts after she had gone deaf, from ca. 1947. Ephemera include a menu with writing, sketches and music drawn on it. The hand-written music manuscript pages are technical piano exercises. One larger page is a set of exercises sent to Spencer by a friend. The diaries consist of one datebook for each year. Spencer wrote brief descriptions of her activities for every day in all 16 books. Some of the books have prayers written in the front sections.

b. 1 f. 1

Correspondence, 1901 - 1948 and undated
One leaf in fragile condition.

Nine items.

b. 1 f. 2 Essays and ephemera, 1938 - ca.1947 and undated
Six items.

b. 1 f. 3 Music Manuscripts, 1933 and undated
One leaf in fragile condition.
Ten leaves.

Diaries, 1939 - 1954

b. 1 f. 4 1939 - 1940
Two notebooks

b. 1 f. 5 1941 - 1942
Two notebooks

b. 1 f. 6 1943 - 1944
Two notebooks

b. 1 f. 7 1945 - 1946
Two notebooks

b. 1 f. 8 1947 - 1948
Two notebooks

b. 1 f. 9 1949 - 1950
Two notebooks

b. 1 f. 10 1951 - 1952
Two notebooks

b. 1 f. 11 1953 - 1954
Two notebooks

Series II: Promotional Material, 1900 - 1973 and undated

Three folders.

Chronological

This series contains promotional flyers and cards, clippings and concert programs. The flyers span Spencer's career to ca. 1947 and date from her earliest public performances in Chicago. Most consist of a photo, current press quotes, and listings of previous appearances. The earliest are notable for their presentation of Spencer as a 10-year-old prodigy. One clipping is a review of Spencer at Town Hall in 1948, post-deafness. Another 1973 clipping, in German, may not have any content related to Spencer. Most of the programs are from European

appearances. One, for a 1973 Berlin Festival, may not have any content related to Spencer.

- b. 1 f. 12 Brochures, 1900 - ca. 1947 and undated
Seventeen items.
- b. 1 f. 13 Clippings, 1913 - 1973 and undated
Six items.
- b. 1 f. 14 Concert Programs, 1920 - 1973 and undated
Thirteen items.

Series III: Photographs, ca. 1900 - ca.1948 and undated

Three folders.

Chronological

The photographs document Spencer's career as well as her mentors, friends and, possibly, family. Photos of Spencer are mainly publicity photographs, but also include a pencil sketch. Other subjects include her teacher, Theodor Leschetizky, and "D. Bredius." Unidentified subjects may include Spencer's childhood home in Chicago.

- b. 2 f. 1 Eleanor Spencer, ca.1900 - ca. 1948 and undated
Eight photographs, one framed with pencil sketch.
- b. 2 f. 2 Identified others, undated
Seven photographs.
- b. 2 f. 3 Unidentified others, n.d
Fifteen photographs.