

Dame Nellie Melba correspondence

Accession number TR 1797

Date 1882-1986

Author / Creator

Melba, Nellie, Dame, 1861-1931

Phillips, Thea

Abstract Dame Nellie Melba was born Helen Porter Mitchell, she married Charles Armstrong in 1882 and had a son, George. She changed her name to Melba, in tribute to her home town of Melbourne, when preparing for a professional career under Madame Marchesi in Paris. The collection contains correspondence, photographs and newspaper clippings.

Scope and content This collection consists of correspondence sent by Nellie Melba to her singing master Signor Pietro Cecchi. There are eight letters and one telegram, all addressed to her teacher. The collection also contains several newspaper clippings on Dame Nellie Melba, as well as original photographs of Pietro Cecchi and one of Melba dated 1921; an unidentified house associated with Melba and 5 cartes-de-visite.

System of arrangement Arranged into 4 series

Description 8 letters, 1 telegram, 1 folder newspaper clippings, 8 photographs

Administrative / Biographical history Dame Nellie Melba was born Helen Porter Mitchell on 19 May 1861 in Richmond, Victoria. She lived with her parents, Isabella and David Mitchell, and seven younger brothers and sisters, and attended the Presbyterian Ladies College in Melbourne for her schooling.

Access restrictions Unrestricted access.

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Custodial history Thea Phillips, who had a distinguished singing career in Europe, where she apparently knew Melba, before coming to Australia in 1934, and by descent to the owner who sold the collection through Christie's. (Information taken from the Christie's auction catalogue.)

Preferred citation

TR 1797, Dame Nellie Melba Correspondence, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

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Series 1: Correspondence (1882-1886)

Series number 1

Series title Correspondence

Date 1882-1886

Scope and content

This series consists of eight letters and one telegram, written by Dame Nellie Melba to her singing teacher Signor Pietro Cecchi, between 1882 and 1886.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 8 letters, 1 telegram

Locate OMBOX Box 9556

Items in this series:

Letter to Signor Cecchi (15 September 1882)

Unit ID TR 1797/1

Date 15 September 1882

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Your Affectionate Pupil, Nellie Mitchell'. This letter was written from Port Mackay on 15 September 1882. In the letter, Nellie requests that Signor Cecchi send her some music in English to perform to local audiences.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Letter to Signor Cecchi (15 October 1882)

Unit ID TR 1797/2

Date 15 October 1882

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Your Affectionate Pupil, Nellie Mitchell'. The letter was written from Port Mackay on 15 October 1882, and in it Nellie thanks Signor Cecchi for sending a selection of songs in English.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Letter to Signor Cecchi (12 April 1883)

Unit ID TR 1797/3

Date 12 April 1883

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Always Your Affectionate Pupil, Nellie Armstrong'. This letter was written from Rushcutters Bay in Sydney on 12 April 1883, where Nellie was staying after leaving Melbourne on the way home to Mackay. In the letter, she laments the fact she could have stayed in Melbourne a little longer for singing lessons since her husband was delayed in meeting her in Sydney.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Letter to Signor Cecchi (11 May 1883)

Unit ID TR 1797/4

Date 11 May 1883

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Your Affectionate Pupil, Nellie Armstrong'. This letter was written from Port Mackay on 11 May 1883. In this letter Nellie mentions the return voyage from Sydney, during which she was ill with sea sickness. In an addition to the original letter, Nellie mentions that she travelled to Mackay with a Mrs Parker whose daughter also studies with Signor Cecchi.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Letter to Signor Cecchi (4 Jul 1883)

Unit ID TR 1797/5

Date 4 Jul 1883

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Your Affectionate Pupil, Nellie Armstrong'. This letter was written from Port Mackay on 4 July 1883. She thanks Signor Cecchi for sending her more music, comments how glad she is that her younger sister Annie is studying singing with Signor Cecchi.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Letter to Signor Cecchi (1883-1884?)

Unit ID TR 1797/6

Date 1883-1884?

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Your Affectionate Pupil, Nellie Armstrong'. This letter was written from "The Hollow" (home of the Rawson family) at Port

Mackay and is undated, but was written between late 1883 and early 1884. In the letter she tells her teacher that her husband has agreed to let her make a career in music, and asks him to form a musical company so she can return to Melbourne straight away to earn some money, which the family desperately needed. Nellie's son George was born in 1883. Sometime after, she took her son to stay with the Rawson family. This is an indication of the difficulties she was having with her marriage. In January 1884 she and her son left Mackay, never to return. Also with this letter is a hand written note stating that Signor Cecchi sent a telegram in response to this letter asking Nellie to come to Melbourne immediately. This note is believed to have been written by Thea Phillips.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Letter to Signor Cecchi (7 Jun 1885)

Unit ID TR 1797/7

Date 7 Jun 1885

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Your Affectionate Pupil, Nellie Armstrong'. This letter was written from the Metropolitan Hotel in Sydney on 7 June 1885. In the letter, Nellie expresses her disgust with the reaction of Sydney audiences to her performance.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Telegram (23 January 1886)

Unit ID TR 1797/8

Date 23 January 1886

Scope and content

Telegram from Nellie Armstrong in Edgecliffe to Signor Cecchi in Melbourne dated 23 January 1886 and sent at 9.15am. In the telegram Nellie says that the benefit was a success and that she will send Cecchi the papers, presumably meaning the newspaper reports.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 telegram

Letter to Signor Cecchi (27 June 1886)

Unit ID TR 1797/9

Date 27 June 1886

Scope and content

One letter, addressed to 'My dear Signor Cecchi' and signed 'Your old pupil, Nellie Armstrong'. This letter was written from Burley House, Belgrave, Leicester, London on 27 June 1886. In the letter, Nellie talks about the London music scene. According to a note, probably by Thea Phillips, Nellie and Signor Cecchi parted on bad terms, after Nellie refused to pay for lessons she had been given by Cecchi for 7 years. According to the note, Signor Cecchi never replied to this letter.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie, 1861-1931

Description

Description 1 letter

Series 2: Clippings (1902; 1922; 1925; 1962; 1972; 1986)

Series number 2

Series title Clippings

Date 1902; 1922; 1925; 1962; 1972; 1986

Scope and content

This series consists of newspaper articles written about Dame Nellie Melba. Some are one-off articles, whereas other items consists of a series of articles published over several days.

Description

Description 1 folder

Locate OMBOX Box 9556

Items in this series:

Who taught Melba to sing? (20 September 1902)

Unit ID TR 1797/10

Date 20 September 1902

Scope and content

This article, entitled 'Who taught Melba to sing?' was published in 'The Catholic Press' on 20 September 1902. The author of the article is only identified in the byline which reads 'By One Who Knows'. The article relates the start of Melba's singing career under the tutelage of Signor Cecchi.

Description

Description 1 newspaper clipping

Singing: My Method (30 March 1922-22 April 1922)

Unit ID TR 1797/11

Date 30 March 1922-22 April 1922

Scope and content

This series of articles by Melba appeared in 'The Herald' between 30 March 22 April 1922. In each of the articles, Nellie talks about a specific technique required to become a singer. The

first article in the series is missing from this collection, the remaining articles are titled: Breathing; Enunciation and Pronunciation; Interpretation; and Voice and Resonance. At the bottom of each article, Nellie Melba's signature is reproduced.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie

Description

Description 0 newspaper clippings

Melodies & Memories: pages from a diva's life (8 September 1925-28 September 1925)

Unit ID TR 1797/12

Date 8 September 1925-28 September 1925

Scope and content

This is a series of 18 articles, published in 'The Daily Telegraph', reproducing sections of Nellie's autobiography 'Melodies and Memories'.

Author / Creator

Melba, Dame Nellie

Description

Description 0 newspaper clippings

The Melba Story (10 August 1962-16 August 1962)

Unit ID TR 1797/13

Date 10 August 1962-16 August 1962

Scope and content

This is a series of articles published in 'The Herald' in August 1962. The articles are written by Joseph Wechsberg, an Austrian born musician who at the time of writing was living in the United States and was a regular contributor to the 'New Yorker'.

Author / Creator

Wechsberg, Joseph

Description

Description 0 newspaper clippings

Melba's Melody Lingers On (4 March 1972)

Unit ID TR 1797/14

Date 4 March 1972

Scope and content

This article appeared in 'The Herald' on March 4 1972. The journalist, Ian Marshall, tells in the article of a visit he made to Coombe Cottage, Melba's home near Lilydale in Victoria.

Author / Creator

Marshall, Ian

Description

Description 1 newspaper clippings

Melba, legend and woman (16 August 1986)

Unit ID TR 1797/15

Date 16 August 1986

Scope and content

This article was published in 'The Sun Weekend' on 16 August 1986. In the article, the journalist, Neil McMahon talks about the book 'Melba - the Voice of Australia' by Therese Radic.

Author / Creator

McMahon, Neil

Description

Description 1 newspaper clipping

Series 3: Photographs (1921)

Series number 3

Series title Photographs

Date 1921

Scope and content

This series consists of 3 photographs - one of Nellie Melba, one of Pietro Cecchi and one of her family home in Lilydale, Victoria.

Description

Description 3 photographs

Locate OMBOX Box 9556

Items in this series:

Photograph of Nellie Melba (1921?)

Unit ID TR 1797/16

Date 1921?

Scope and content

This item is a black and white photograph, signed 'Nellie Melba, 1921'. It shows Nellie side on, with her head, arms and torso in the picture. Her hair is in two long plaits down her back, and her hands are clasped as if praying. An inscription on the back reads 'This will look nice in a frame. Now a letter.'

Description

Description 1 photograph

Photograph of Pietro Cecchi

Unit ID TR 1797/17

Scope and content

This photograph of Pietro Cecchi was taken by Growrelle studios in Swanston Street,

Melbourne. From information on the back of the photo, it would appear that the photograph may have been taken on behalf of, and for publication in, Allan's "Musical News", now known as Australian Musical News, a journal published from 1911 to 1963 in Melbourne.

Author / Creator

Growrelle Studios, Melbourne

Description

Description 1 photograph

Photograph of house

Unit ID TR 1797/18

Scope and content

This is a black and white photograph showing the house in which Dame Nellie Melba was born at Lilydale in Victoria. The photograph is undated and the photographer unidentified. Like the photograph of Pietro Cecchi, information on the back of the photograph indicates it may have been taken for inclusion in the 'Australian Musical News'.

Description

Description 1 photograph

Series 4: Cartes-de-visite (1865-1880?)

Series number 4

Series title Cartes-de-visite

Date 1865-1880?

Scope and content

This series consists of five cartes-de-visites - visiting cards with a small black and white photograph, popular in the late 1800s. People depicted include Garibaldi, W.E. Gladstone, and Thomas Carlyle.

Description

Description 5 cartes-de-visite

Locate OMBOX Box 9556

Items in this series:

Cartes-de-visite (1875?)

Unit ID TR 1797/19

Date 1875?

Scope and content

This cartes-de-visite shows a head and shoulders portrait of 'Firoudl'. The photograph was taken by 'Elliott & Fry', a photographic firm located in London. The name and address of the firm appears below the photo, and the name, address and logo appear on the back of the card. Information on the firm indicates that they were located at 55 Baker Street from 1863 to 1886, so the photograph would have been taken during this period.

Author / Creator

Elliott & Fry

Description

Description 1 cartes-de-visite

Cartes-de-visite (1865?)

Unit ID TR 1797/20

Date 1865?

Scope and content

This cartes-de-visite shows Thomas Carlyle, the British historian and essayist. The photograph was taken by 'Elliott & Fry', a photographic firm located in London. The name and address of the firm appears below the photo, and the name, address and logo appear on the back of the card. Information on the firm indicates that they were located at 55 Baker Street from 1863 to 1886, so the photograph would have been taken during this period. Similar photographs taken of Carlyle by the same firm are held by the National Portrait Gallery in London and have been dated ca. 1865.

Author / Creator

Elliott & Fry

Description

Description 1 cartes-de-visite

Cartes-de-visite (1870)

Unit ID TR 1797/21

Date 1870

Scope and content

This cartes-de-visite is a photograph of Guiseppe Garibaldi. The photograph was taken by the firm 'Furne Fils & H Tournier' in Paris.

Author / Creator

Furne Fils & H Tournier

Description

Description 1 cartes-de-visite

Cartes-de-visite (1880?)

Unit ID TR 1797/22

Date 1880?

Scope and content

This cartes-de-visite is a photograph of a caricature of a man holding a piece of sheet music believed to be that of Pietro Cecchi. The firm who took the photograph is identified as 'Foster & Martin', of Collins Street Melbourne.

Author / Creator

Foster & Martin

Description

Description 1 cartes-de-visite

Cartes-de-visite (1880?)

Unit ID TR 1797/23

Date 1880?

Scope and content

This cartes-de-visite shows a head and shoulders portrait photograph of The Right Honourable William Ewart Gladstone MP. The photographic firm who produced the photograph were 'The London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company', with premises in Regent Street and Cheapside.

Author / Creator

The London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company

Description

Description 1 cartes-de-visite