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Joseph Horace Benton Collection

Benton, Joseph Horace (1898–1975). Papers, 1815–1970. 1.66 feet.

Professor. Correspondence (1815–1893) from Benton’s family; correspondence (1892–1896) from Giuseppe Verdi and Francesco Tamagno; memorabilia (1913–1970) concerning Lynn Riggs; scores (1911–1926) of Franz Joseph Haydn’s “The Seasons” and Felix Mendelssohn’s “Elijah”; four Japanese music books; programs (1899–1968) from various musical productions; scrapbooks (1900–1967) of reviews and programs; clippings (1924–1939); and posters (1924–1934) advertising the performances of Benton, a University of Oklahoma professor of voice who sang professionally under the name of Joseph Bentonelli.

Biography:

In 1921, Benton received the degree of music in voice from the University of Oklahoma and taught there until 1923. He left to study under Jean de Reszke in France and debuted on Dec. 11, 1924 in Nice. He performed in over 35 operas in France. In 1925, he traveled to Italy and studied for 4 more years before debuting there. He changed his name to Giuseppe Bentonelli and sang in 512 performances of 51 different operas during his European career. He also worked as a reporter and critic for several newspapers at this time. Upon his return to the United States, he changed his name to Joseph Bentonelli and on Nov. 13, 1934 debuted at the Chicago Grand Opera Company. In 1936, he debuted at the Metropolitan Opera Company. He made several extensive tours of the United States and Canada. In 1940-1941, he took his Master's degree in modern languages at the University of Oklahoma. In 1944, he became chairman of the Department of Voice at the University of Oklahoma and taught in that position until his retirement in 1969. He was elected to the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1951 and died in April of 1975 in Norman, Oklahoma.

About the collection:

This collection consists of five document boxes and 6 outsized boxes of correspondence, land records and operatic materials plus 11 posters. The personal correspondence is between Benton family members, and letters collected by Benton. The Benton family land records are associated with homesteading. The operatic materials include programs, scores, reviews, scrapbooks and posters.

Box 1

Folder:

1. Bound thesis by Benton entitled *L' Elemento Folkloristico Nelle Tre Opere Principalli Di Giovanni Verga*. In Italian.
2. Unbound copy of Benton's thesis.

Research paper, 1958: Submitted by Joyce George and contains photographs and programs of Benton’s performances.

3. Research paper.

Land Records (1839-1908)

Certificates and receipt made out to Oliver H, Benton for homestead land sales from the U.S. government. One certificate is signed by Theodore Roosevelt and one is signed by Martin Van Buren.

4. Land Records.

Correspondence (1815- 1970)

Personal correspondence to and from Benton family members and letters collected by Benton.

5. A.L.S. to and from Giuseppe Verdi collected by Benton. (1892-1896)

6. A.L.S. to and from Benton family members in Iowa and PA. (1815-1893)

7. Lynn Riggs memorabilia collected by Benton. (1954-1970)

Brief in support of the establishment of the Institute of Indian Education at the University of Oklahoma.

8. Brief - undated.

Manuscripts – undated

9. Arabic writing (possibly from the Koran) with hand-painted illuminations in gold given to Benton in Cairo, Egypt.

10. English translation by Benton of the Portuguese book by Nogueira de Sa's entitled *Nel Delirio Della Vita*.

Box 2

Folder:

11. *The Y's Slate* newsletter published by the Business & Professional Girl's League. (1929)

Script 1967

12. From *Die Zauberflote* presented by the Metropolitan Opera Guild, Inc.

Scores (circa 1911-1926) Scores acquired by Benton of various operas.

13. Haydn's *The Seasons* & Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and related matters.

14. Japanese music books, one of which bears an autograph by Puccini which may not be authentic. [Note: these items were previously described as having handwritten notes by Puccini in them. A researcher in 2014 stated that the handwriting is not Puccini's, nor his librettists' or publisher's. The authenticity of the autograph is questionable because most Puccini dedications reportedly have a precise date, not just the year]:

- Sueharu Kitamura, arr., *Japanese Dramatic Music vol. 2: Nagauta Tsurukame*. Score (Shamisen and voice music arranged for violin, with lyrics both in Japanese and romanized). Tokyo: The Kyoei Shosha, 1901. This item bears an autograph (likely inauthentic) by “G. Puccini, 1911.”
- Tozan Nakao, arr., *Soukyoku Setsugekka*. Score (Koto music arranged for violin, with lyrics). Osaka: Maekawa Gomei Gaisha, 1871.
- Utazawa Dayu Yonsei Shibakin, proofread, Takuro Fukushima, ed., *Hauta zenshu vol. 1: Harusame, Goshoguruma*. Score (Shamisen and voice music arranged for violin, with lyrics). Tokyo: Jujiya, 1909. [This item bears a note by Joseph Benton that indicates he received three pieces of Japanese music that he believed had been owned by Puccini. This is likely not the case.]
- Sueharu Kitamura arr., *Nagauta Zenshu vol. 1: Echigo jishi*. Score (Shamisen and voice music arranged for violin, with lyrics). Tokyo: Jujiya gakkiten, 1915.

Publication 1967

15. *Your Musical Cue*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Indiana University School of Music. Contains an article concerning the Japanese music books in Box 2, Folder 14.

Programs 1899-1968: Programs collected by Benton for musical productions, some of which he was a performer. Includes productions of the University of Oklahoma, the Metropolitan Opera, the University of Tulsa Opera and various others.

16. University of Oklahoma performances.
17. Metropolitan Opera.
18. University of Tulsa.
19. Various productions.

Newspaper Clippings (1924-1939): Reviews of Benton's performances and clippings pertaining to the University of Oklahoma.

20. Reviews written in foreign languages. (1924-1938)
21. Reviews written in English. (1924-1939)
22. Student council and fraternity activities on the University of Oklahoma campus. (1925-1930)

Reviews

Theatre Record Books kept by Benton of operas at various opera houses he attended with newspaper clippings of reviews, programs and postcards pictures of the performers.

23. 1904-1912 season-unindexed.

Box 3

Folder:

24. 1911-1912 season-indexed.

25. 1913-1926 seasons-unindexed.

26. Various seasons from 1896-1920's-indexed.

27. Various seasons from 1922-1937-unindexed.

Box 4

Folder:

28. Various other reviews of Benton's performances or collected by Benton.

Publicity Brochures (circa 1925-1937)

29. Brochures circulated by management groups for Benton and Rachel Morton.

Scrapbooks (circa 1900-1967)

Compiled by Benton and includes reviews, programs and pictures of Benton and other opera performers and newspaper clippings of Benton's Oklahoma interests. Some of the scrapbooks are partially indexed.

30. Vocal Repertoire. (no cover with black string ties)

31. Snapshots, clippings and programs in France, etc. 1923-1925

32. Red covered book with clippings from 1936.

33. Awards

Outsized Material:

34. Scrapbooks compiled by Benton.

35. Book entitled *The Western Harp* given to Benton in 1937, but was published in 1843.

36. Playbill for Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden in 1890.

Posters

37. University of Oklahoma Glee Club picture posters from 1917-1923 when Benton was a member. The performers are identified by Benton on most of the posters.

Posters collected by Benton of various performers.

Opera posters of Benton's performances:

Andrea Chenier from Teatro Reale Dell' Opera, 1933-34 season.

Cecilia (Nuovissima) from Teatro Reale Dell 'Opera, 1933-34 season.

Lucia ' Di ' Lammermoor from Civico Teatro Frascini-Pavia, 1931.

Madame Butterfly from Casino Municipal de Nice, 1924-25 season.

Don ' G iovanni from Varietes-Casino, Dec. 1924.

Kursall (D'Ostende) from Societe Anonyme Les Palaces d'Ostende 1929.

Il Trovatore, La Gioconda, Madame Butterfly, Otello, Aida, La Boheme and Mefistofele from Real Teatro "Miramar" Tripoli (Africa) April 1928.

La Boheme from Teatro Comunale, 1929.

Tosca from Teatro Sociale-Biella, Sabato 15 Febbraio-Ore 21.

Faust from Politeama Casalese, Martedi 8 Mercoledì 9 Novembre-ore 21 precise.

Travatore & Boheme from Teatro Malibrán, Domenica 23 Dicembre-ore 15: Trovatore - ore 21: Boehme.

Box 5

(Addition 9-17-2008)

A scrapbook of photographs (1927-1938) showing tourist scenes throughout Europe, featuring Joseph Benton; also an autographed Friends of English National Opera program for the 90th birthday celebration of Dame Eva Turner (1982).

Addition from the OU Fine Arts Library, 4-10-2009:

1. Correspondence between Joseph Benton and Ernest Lippert, and related material, 1924-1936.
2. Programs and printed material regarding Joseph Benton's performances (1930, 1935), including a memorial program from Benton's funeral (1975).
3. Newspaper clippings regarding Joseph Benton and his performances, n.d.

Addition 6-16-2011

4. Program: Joseph H. Benton concert tour, with Professor Josef W. Noll, Accompanist. Summer, 1925. Multiple copies.