

**Edna Smith de Nunzio Papers**  
**Museum of Performance + Design**

INTRODUCTION

Provenance

This collection of photos and papers documenting the career of Edna Smith de Nunzio was donated to PALM in 1983 by Smith when she was entering a rest home. It was accepted by Russell Hartley, who wrote a brief biography on her career and deposited it with the collection.

Restrictions

Entire collection is open for research use.

Publication Rights

Consult librarian regarding reproduction of or quotation from materials within this collection.

Size

No. of containers: 2 boxes

Linear ft.: one

Processed by

Paul Padgette and Marianne Carden

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BIOGRAPHY

Edna Elizabeth Smith was born June 16, 1905, in San Francisco. She was the daughter of J.E. Smith of the Public Health Service and was educated at Roosevelt Junior High and graduated from the Girls' High School. From an early age, she had been interested in a singing career. When the San Francisco Opera opened for its first season in 1923, she was engaged by Gaetano Merola to sing in the chorus. During the next several seasons, she appeared in many opera productions, including the San Francisco premiere of Puccini's Turandot in 1927. By the late twenties, she had developed enough in the company to travel to Los Angeles for performances at the Shrine Auditorium.

During these years, Edna augmented her experience and exposure to the musical public by making many radio appearances and by performing in musical society recitals and concerts. In 1927, she sang the role of Inez in Trovatore and as Gilda's maid in the 1929 production of Rigoletto.

Throughout the early thirties, she continued to make radio guest appearances on KGO, often with conductor Alfred Hertz of the San Francisco Opera. During the 1934 opera season, Smith sang in The Bartered Bride, Carmen, and La Rondine. She followed these performances by singing the role of Musetta in the 1935 SFO production of La Boheme.

At this time, Smith married Arthur de Nunzio, a baritone from Los Angeles, who had a wide experience in that city organizing classical music performances on the radio. In 1935, he was general manager and impresario of Corriere dell' Aria, an Italian language "newspaper of the air" in which he featured the voice of Edna Smith de Nunzio. By 1937, she was singing on a KYA radio series called Ship of Joy Cruises.

It was also in 1937 that Mme. Gina Cigna, Metropolitan Opera and La Scala star, heard de Nunzio in recital in San Francisco and agreed to assist in forwarding Edna's career. She became her benefactor and in February 1938, they sailed to Italy to study together and to promote a "promising brilliant career." In Milan, Edna de Nunzio was placed under contract to Cigna's manager, Attilio Lamponi.

She gave her first public concert in Italy in November 1938, at Circolo Fascista di Milno. In April 1940, she won the Italian government's national concert audition. This enabled her to gain the artistic permit necessary to "debut" in Italy. This occurred in July 1940, when she appeared as Leonora in Trovatore at the Teatro

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Italia in Milan. She later sang in Tosca and soon achieved a repertoire of eleven opera roles. She also sang extensively on Italian radio.

By August 1942, it was necessary for de Nunzio to return to San Francisco because of the Second World War raging in Italy. After the war, it is difficult to determine her movements and progress. She returned to Italy and renewed some of her contacts. Judging from the Italian press clippings in the collection, she achieved some of her pre-war glory. She wrote to her mother in 1949 of her frustrations, setbacks, and uncertainties. The Italian reviews reveal that she regularly changed her stage name in an effort to retain her novelty, but she did not attain the acclaim she hoped for. Among the stage names she used were Laura Vetta, Anne de Nunzio, and Nerina Ferrari.

Edna de Nunzio returned to San Francisco on an unidentified date after 1950 (the last date of her Italian reviews.) She worked for the probation department in San Francisco until declining health forced her into a rest home. Edna Smith de Nunzio died in San Francisco on May 25, 1985, less than a month before her 80th birthday.

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS

The outstanding feature of these papers is the one hundred autographed and inscribed photographs addressed to Edna Smith de Nunzio from many of the most illustrious singers, conductors, and directors active in the twenties and thirties. Her association with the San Francisco Opera in the twenties is documented through photos of many SFO associates, including Gaetano Merola, Alfred Hertz, Louis D'Angelo, Beniamino Gigli, Louise Homer, Giovanni Martinelli, Claudia Muzio, Elizabeth Rethberg, Tito Schipa, and Lawrence Tibbitt. During the same years, she compiled two autograph albums filled with the inscriptions of many of these individuals and other opera luminaries of equal importance. There are 24 letters in the papers, some illuminating particular facets of her life and career. Programs, posters, and clippings from her performances in San Francisco and in Italy are also included. A unique autograph in the collection is one by Puccini sent to de Nunzio by George Maxwell, former president of the American Association of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, with a letter identifying the autograph.

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SERIES DESCRIPTION

SERIES I. PHOTOGRAPHS  
20 folders

Consists of photos of singers, conductors, and directors, as well as portraits of de Nunzio in costume and candid family shots. Arranged in alphabetical order.

SERIES II. PROGRAMS AND REVIEWS, UNITED STATES  
8 folders

Includes programs and newsclippings documenting de Nunzio's performances in the United States. Arranged chronologically.

SERIES III. PROGRAMS AND REVIEWS, ITALY  
5 folders

Contains programs and newsclippings documenting de Nunzio's performances in Italy. Arranged chronologically.

SERIES IV. CORRESPONDENCE  
3 folders

Consists of personal letters as well as letters from Gaetano Merola and letters to Fortunato Gallo. A few of these letters are in Italian. Grouped by correspondent.

SERIES V. NOTEBOOKS  
1 folder

Includes a roles notebook and music score notebook compiled by de Nunzio as she prepared to sing various opera roles.

SERIES VI. AUTOGRAPHS  
2 folders

Contains two autograph books with inscriptions by many of the opera personages pictured in the photographic series, as well as the Puccini autograph and related documentation.

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CONTAINER LIST

SERIES I. PHOTOGRAPHS

Note: all photos are 8 x 10 unless otherwise noted.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1	1	Ammando Agnini, SFO stage 1925 director 4 photos, 2 inscribed	
	1	Marguerite D'Alvarez as Carmen one 3 1/2x5 1/2, inscribed	n.d.
	1	Pasquale Amato one 6 x 8 photo, inscribed	n.d.
	1	Louis D'Angelo, 3 photos: - portrait - with Mario Chamlee (insc.) - with Alfredo Gandolfi & Edna Smith in scene from <u>Bartered Bride</u> (insc.)	1928 1934 1934
	1	Angelo Bada one photo, inscribed	1927
	1	Gennaro Barra, 2 photos: - 8 x 12, inscribed - inscribed	1929 1930
	1	Dino Borgioli, inscribed	1932
	1	Marie Bullus, one 3 1/2x5 1/2 photo, inscribed	n.d.
	1	Albert Caiati, one 4 x 6 photo	n.d.
	1	Natale Carosslo, ballet master for the first SFO ballet, inscribed	1925
	1	Joseph Cavadori, inscribed	1926
	1	Mario Chamlee, inscribed	1927
	1	Gina Cigna, de Nunzio's sponsor in Italy, inscribed	1937
	2	Pietro Cimini, inscribed	1929
	2	Eugene Conley, one 3 1/2x5 1/2, inscribed	n.d.
	2	Antonio Cortis, inscribed	1925
	2	Guiseppe Danise, 2 photos: - inscribed - inscribed	1928 1931
	2	Myrtle Donnelly, inscribed	1927
	2	"Fay-Yen-Fah," S.F. Opera Co. principals from Monte Carlo: Edmund Warnery, Lucille Bertrand, and Rene Maison	1926

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<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1	2	Cesare Formichi, one 3 1/2x5 1/2 photo, inscribed	1925
	2	Beniamino Gigli, 4 photos: - 3 1/2x5 1/2, autographed - 5 x 7, inscribed - 3 1/2x5 1/2, inscribed - 5 x 7, inscribed	1926 1928 1938 1940
	2	Hope Hampton, inscribed	n.d.
	2	Alfred Hertz, inscribed	1934
	2	Louise Homer, one 5 x 7 photo, inscribed	1926
	2	Marcel Journet, one 4 x 6 photo, inscribed	1925
	2	Maria Jeritza, one 3 1/2x5 1/2 photo, inscribed	n.d.
	3	Rudolf Laubenthal, inscribed	1927
	3	Giocomo Lauri-Volpi, 2 photos: - 9 x 12 portrait - inscribed	n.d. 1929
	3	Juan and Anita Lucay, insc.	1934
	3	Rosa Low (or Law), insc.	1936
	3	Giovanni Martinelli, insc.	1932
	3	Kathryn Meisle, 2 photos: - inscribed - inscribed	1926 1927
	3	Luella Melins, inscribed	n.d.
	3	Jose Mercado, inscribed	1928
	3	Gaetano Merola, 4 photos: - 5 x 8 - inscribed - inscribed - inscribed	1927 1929 1932 1938
	3	Tamaki Miura as Butterfly, 3 1/2x5 1/2, autographed Miura in Japanese costume, Manhattan Opera Co., in Japanese opera <u>Namiko San</u> Composer of <u>Namiko San</u> , 3 1/2x5 1/2 photo, insc. to Edna Smith, sig. not legible; also insc. to Smith by Miura on verso	n.d. n.d.
	4	Nina Morgana, inscribed	1929
	4	Claudia Muzio, 3 photos: - inscribed - inscribed - 6 1/2x9, inscribed	1926 1933 n.d.

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<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1	4	Maria Neveso, 2 photos: - 4 x 6, inscribed	1928
		- 3 1/2x5 1/2, inscribed	1929
	4	Helen Newson, 5 x 7 photo	n.d.
	4	Ladovico Oliviero, insc.	1927
	4	Bernice de Pasquali, 3 1/2x5 1/2, inscribed	n.d.
	4	Millo Picco, inscribed	1928
	4	William Pilcher, inscribed	1927
	4	Elizabeth Rethberg, 3 photos: - with Marek Windheim	1931
		- Rethberg as Aida	n.d.
		- portrait, inscribed	n.d.
	4	Sidney Rayner, 6 1/2x9, insc.	1930
	4	Anne Roselle, inscribed	1927
	4	Manuel Salazar, inscribed	1926
	4	Natalie de Sanctis, 5 1/2x8 1/2, inscribed	n.d.
	4	Euganio Sandrini, inscribed	1929
	4	Bidu Sayao (?)	n.d.
	5	Bernice Schalher, inscribed	n.d.
	5	Tito Schipa, 3 photos: - inscribed	1925
		- inscribed	1926
		- 3 1/2x5 1/2, autographed	n.d.
	5	Joseph Schwartz, inscribed	1926
	5	Riccardo Stracciori, 4 x 6, inscribed	1925
	5	Ludovico Tornarotuo (or Tomarotvo), 2 photos: - inscribed	n.d.
		- 6 1/2x9	n.d.
	5	Lawrence Tibbett, 2 photos: - inscribed	1928
		- inscribed	1933
	5	Armand Tokatyan, inscribed	1928
	5	Marian Talley, inscribed	1926
	5	Mario Valle, 3 1/2x5 1/2, insc.	1926
	5	Ninon Vallin, inscribed	1934
	5	Elda Vettori, inscribed	1934
	5	Ramon Vinay, 4 x 6, insc.	1950
	5	Anna Young, inscribed	n.d.
	6	5 unidentified photos	n.d.

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<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Dates</u>
2		Oversize photos stored at rear of box: - 10x15 photo of premier of <u>Turandot</u> at Civic Aud. 1927 - 8x10 photos of SFO, Tilden Hotel 1927 - 8x10 photos of SFO chorus 1929 - 9x13 photo of Joseph George Goesson's class of 1927-28	
1	7	Personal photos: 27 photos, various sizes, including snapshots, newspaper photos, and commemorative group photos. In addition to photos of Edna de Nunzio, there are photos of Madame Gina Cigna (with S.F. mayor Angelo J. Rossi), Signor Attilio Lamponi (Madame Cigna's manager), Amedeo Berdini, tenor, and Gaetano Merola, SFO director	
	8	Personal photos: 101 photos, various sizes, many removed from scrapbooks. Sites include S.F. Bay Area, Europe. Casual photos including Maestro Merola Maestro Gennai, Mr. Berdini, Mrs. Leis (Saratoga), Irene Fleishacker, Ethel Fleishacker, Gina Cigna, Garibaldi Pellegrion et al.	
	9	Photo portraits of Edna Smith de Nunzio 9 photos, 4 tinted, various sizes	
	10	Edna Smith de Nunzio as Aida 5 photos, 1 tinted	
	11	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>Balle in Maschera</u> , 2 photos, 1 tinted	
	12	Edna Smith de Nunzio as <u>Carmen</u> 4 photos, 2 tinted	
	13	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>Cavalleria Rusticana</u> , 2 photos	
	14	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>Faust</u> , 2 photos, both tinted	

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	15	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>La Forza del Destino</u> , 4 photos, 1 tinted
	16	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>Lohengrin</u> , 1 photo
	17	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>Rigoletto</u> , 6 photos, 1 tinted
<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
1	18	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>Tosca</u> , 7 photos, 2 tinted
	19	Edna Smith de Nunzio in <u>Il Trovatore</u> , 12 photos
	20	Edna Smith de Nunzio in various roles, 6 photos, 3 tinted

SERIES II. PROGRAMS & REVIEWS, UNITED STATES

2	1	These programs include appearances by Edna Smith at the San Francisco Grand Opera.
		First Season
		Exposition Auditorium 1923
		First S.F. Spring Music Festival, Exposition Auditorium 1924
		S.F. Opera Co., Civic Auditorium third season Sept. 1925
		third season Oct. 1925
		fourth season 1926
		Flyer sheet 1926
		fifth season 1927
		seventh season 1929
	2	5 programs:
		S.F. Opera, season in Los Angeles, Shrine Auditorium 1929
		twelfth season 1934
		Smith singing in <u>Carmen</u> n.d.
		Los Angeles Grand Opera Season, Shrine Auditorium 1934
		thirteenth season 1935
	3	Opening program for SFO at War Memorial Opera House 1932 (This copy has several autographs and messages addressed to Smith)
	4	Various concert and recital programs in United States featuring Edna 1923-

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Smith de Nunzio 1938

5 Two sheets from SFO program covers 1932  
 autographed by several opera  
 personalities including Lily Pons,  
 Arturo Casiglia, Andre Ferrier, Ezio  
 Pinza, Gaetano Merola et al.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Dates</u>
2	6	Typewriter portraits created by Edna Smith: One of Alfred Hertz plus xerox copy One of Lucrezia Bori plus inscribed photo copy addressed to Smith One of Lawrence Tibbitt, original inscribed by Tibbitt to "Elizabeth de Nunzio" plus xerox copy	1933
	7	Reviews and interviews, United States	1923- 1942
	8	3 San Francisco Bay Area magazines having features about de Nunzio: <u>Women's City Club, Oakland</u> <u>Gagliardiu</u> (Italian magazine) <u>Donne Moderne</u> (edited by Arthur de Nunzio)	March 1930 Sept 1930 Dec 1938

SERIES III. PROGRAMS AND REVIEWS, ITALY

2	1	4 Italian contracts covering concert, opera, and radio appearances	
	2	3 Italian opera posters: <u>Il Trovatore</u> with Ednade Nunzio Concert featuring Laura Vetta <u>Cavalleria Rusticana</u>	n.d. n.d.
	3	<u>Italian press clippings</u>	1940- 1950
	4	Puccini Commemorative Newspaper notice and program featuring Laura Vetta (see also Puccini autograph & letters)	1950
	5	24 Italian programs, posters, and season brochures	1939- 1949

SERIES IV. CORRESPONDENCE

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2	1	6 letters or postcards: Letter to Smith from Eve J. Limbaugh	n.d.
		Letter to Smith from Mary Newson (Newson was an SFO singer)	Oct 1930
		2 portrait postcards to Smith from Ebe Stignani	1938
		Letter to Smith from Ruth Lionetti concerning end of war in Italy 1945	May
<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Dates</u>
2	1	Letter from Smith to mother from Zug, Switzerland concerning the progress of her singing career	June 1949
	2	4 letters from Gaetano Merola Typed letter to Smith concerning current opera season	Oct. 1924
		Typed letter to Smith concerning opera personalities & seasons	Sept. 1938
		Photocopy of letter to Fortuno Nov. Gallo, Chicago City Opera Co., 1942 concerning Smith's return to USA from Italy because of war and his recommendations for her employment	
		Photocopy of letter to Michael De Pace concerning Smith's availability for singing engagements	11/42
	3	7 letters and/or postcards: 3 letters from Maestro Galli introducing Smith in Italy 3 letters in Italian (two addressed to Smith's husband) 1 postcard	1939 1938- 1939 n.d.

SERIES V. NOTEBOOKS

1	Small notebook, unbound, containing typed libretto scores for Edna Smith de Nunzio
2	Small music manuscript folio with various music notations in Smith's transcriptions

SERIES VI. AUTOGRAPHS

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1	2 autograph books: Autographs and inscriptions from many very prominent opera personalities of the era with clippings and newspaper photos	1923- 1927
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<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Dates</u>
2	2	Puccini autograph and related letters: A Puccini pencil autograph attached to a scrapbook page with notations on its identity. 3 letters from George Maxwell, former president of the American Association of Composers, Authors & Publishers. All three letters are interesting comments on the S.F. and N.Y. opera society. In the earliest letter, Maxwell confirms that he is sending the requested Puccini autograph.	1927- 1928