



ABOVE: When Collins appeared in a local stage production of the musical *Finian's Rainbow* in 1952, she noticed that a castmate was blacked up to play the larger role of the sharecropper. Two years later, the show was to be remounted and Collins was invited to return. She agreed, but only on the condition that she play the sharecropper. She got the part. Here is Eleanor on *Showcase*, in a CBC Vancouver production still. (14 August 1963)

RIGHT: With Juliette and Alan Millar on *Eleanor* (7 August 1955)

 Lots of great photos from CBC Vancouver: links at [friends.ca/2020calendar](https://www.friends.ca/2020calendar).



ELEANOR COLLINS

FOR FUN AND COURAGE

On June 19, 1955, *The Eleanor Show* debuted nationally on CBC TV. Produced in Vancouver, the summer replacement series showcased the city's musical talent, headlined by singer Eleanor Collins.

That it was one of the few shows produced on the west coast shown across the country was notable enough. But that was a minor milestone compared to its significance as the first Canadian television series bearing the name of a female Canadian singer (beating Juliette by a year), and the first bearing the name of a Canadian black performer.

Born in Edmonton, Collins began singing in her teens in local clubs and dance halls. During the 1940s she settled in Vancouver and sang on CBC radio as part of the Swing Low Quartet with two of her sisters.

She made her television debut in 1954's *Bamboula: A Day in the West Indies*, a three-episode series which capitalized on the growing interest in Caribbean rhythms. It was both the first live musical series broadcast from CBU's Vancouver studios and the first Canadian series featuring a mixed-race cast.

Collins chose to remain in Vancouver to raise her family and to ensure they didn't face the same challenges she had. Collins tackled prejudice in a direct manner. When her family moved to Burnaby in the 1950s, neighbours spread rumours that they were bootleggers. She combatted these impressions by becoming deeply involved in the community, taking on tasks such as teaching music to local Girl Guides.

"I sang first for fun and then for courage," she explained in a 1957 interview with *Weekend Magazine*. "I sang for my people and I sang because we could use the money. But all I really want to do is live normally with the right beliefs in my own community, sing in our church choir and go to PTA meetings."

Collins hosted a second run of *The Eleanor Show* in 1964, and continued to perform in Vancouver into the 21st century.