

**The New York Public Library
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Billy Rose Theatre Division**

Guide to the

Anthony Holland papers

1956-1988

*T-Mss 2001-067

Compiled by Alison Dundy, Palmer School, Long Island University, 2013, February 2012

Summary

Creator: Holland, Anthony

Title: Anthony Holland papers, 1956-1988

Size: 1.78 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: Donated by Ethel Holland, 2001

Abstract: Anthony Holland (1928-1988) was an actor and playwright best known for his comic performances in theater, film, and television. He was a founding member of the Second City satirical improvisation comedy troupe in Chicago. This collection documents his personal and professional life from 1956 to 1988.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying and photography will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Anthony Holland papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library

Processing note: This collection arrived with no clear original order and was arranged alphabetically by genre type.

Related collections

Anthony Holland (Photographs). Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator history

Anthony Holland (1928-1988) was an actor, playwright, artist, and art teacher. He was born James Gardiner Holland in Brooklyn, New York, on March 3, 1928. The family moved to Chicago, where Anthony Holland attended high school and the University of Chicago. He was an honors student in the humanities department, earned a Master's degree in art history, and taught art classes at the University of Chicago. While attending an art history convention in Philadelphia, Anthony Holland made up his mind to switch careers and become an actor.

Holland's early interest in art and movement informed his work as an actor. In an interview with the Los Angeles Herald Examiner (June 15, 1980), Holland described his technique as "more like dance," and "imagery acting—the use of the whole body." His upbringing in a diverse, multi-ethnic neighborhood infused his writings and performances with wordplay and vocal accents. His play, *Shoe Palace Murray*, co-written with William Hoffman in 1976, is a take-off on the life of his own father who was a shoe salesman to Broadway actors. The play was produced by the American Conservatory Theatre in 1978 and revived in an Off-Off Broadway production in 2005.

Holland changed his name from James Gardiner Holland to Anthony Holland when he joined Actor's Equity. He began his acting career at the University Theatre in Chicago, where he met kindred spirits, who pooled their artistic talents and meager financial resources to found the Playwrights Theatre Club. After two years, this theater was closed down by the fire department. Holland and the actors then organized The Compass Players, developing their signature style of comedy improvisation and social satire.

In the fall of 1959, Holland and other actors from the old Playwrights Theatre Club formed the Second City comedy troupe. They opened their own club, taking their name from A. J. Liebling's derisive profile of Chicago in the *New Yorker* magazine. Second City performances won national acclaim, eventually becoming an institution with a school and workshop to train improvisational comic actors.

Holland next moved to New York City to train with Lee Strasberg in his Actor's Studio. Anthony made his Broadway debut in 1963 in Lillian Hellman's comedy, *My Mother, My Father and Me*. He appeared in many Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional, and national theater productions. He won a New York Critics Poll Award as well as an Obie Award in the 1969-1970 season for his distinguished performance in *The White House Murder Case*. Other stage performances include: *Division Street*, *The Leaf People*, *Dreyfus in Rehearsal*, *We Bombed in New Haven*, *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman*, *Nathan Weinstein*, *Mystic Connecticut*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *Measure for Measure*. Holland's screen credits include *Klute* (1971), *All That Jazz* (1979), and *The Tempest* (1982). He appeared in numerous commercials and television series, such as *M*A*S*H*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Cagney & Lacey*, and *Hill Street Blues*.

Holland wrote theater scripts, screenplays, and concepts for screenplays. He collaborated with former colleagues from Second City, including Barbara Harris, who co-authored *Be Kind To Your Servants*. They are *Your Closest Friends*. He also co-wrote several plays and screenplays with William Hoffman, including *Cornbury: The Queen's Governor*, which was produced Off Broadway in 2009, and was included in the anthology *Gay Plays: The First Collection*, ed. William Hoffman (New York: Avon Books, 1979).

Holland was suffering with AIDS and committed suicide on July 9, 1988 in New York City.

Scope and content note

The Anthony Holland papers document his personal and professional life from the beginning of his career as an actor and artist in the late 1950s in Chicago until his death in 1988. Two brief autobiographies in the collection are particularly notable for the insight they provide into the people, places, and events that influenced Holland's personal and professional development. The collection includes correspondence with friends and family members. None of the letters are from or to actors or playwrights with whom Holland collaborated professionally. The collection also includes a folder of Holland's unpublished poems. Holland's address book, appointment books, and notebooks are fragmentary documentation of his creative work, including poetry, recipes, concepts for theater productions, and cast lists. The two sketchbooks date from 1956 when Holland was studying art in

Chicago and document his study of the artistry of movement, which informed his method of acting.

Materials in the collection documenting Holland's professional life include awards, scripts, playbills, telegrams, an Actor's Equity contract, and theater reviews, all of which relate to Holland's career on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and nationwide. The collection contains twelve scripts written by Anthony Holland, some with annotations. Several scripts are described as musicals but no accompanying music is included in the collection. Photographs of stage performances and publicity photographs document Holland's professional career. There are also photographs of Holland off-stage and with family and friends.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged alphabetically by format with miscellaneous items at the end.

Key terms

Subjects

Comedians -- United States

Improvisation (Acting)

Playwrights

Names

Harris, Barbara, 1935-

Hoffman, William, 1939-

Holland, Anthony

Second City (Theater Company)

Special formats

Notebooks

Photographs

Playbills

Posters

Scripts

Sketchbooks

Container list

- b.1 f.1 Address Book, undated
 - Appointment Books
- b.1 f.2 1967-1970
- b.1 f.3 1972-1973
- b.1 f.4 Awards, 1969-1976
- b.1 f.5 Biographies, undated
 - Correspondence
- b.1 f.6 1960-1977
- b.1 f.7 1978-1983
- b.2 f.1-4 Notebooks, undated
- b.2 f.5 Photographs, 1956-1981
 - Playbills, 1956-1980
- b.3 f.1 A-D
- b.3 f.2 H-S
- b.3 f.3 T-W
- b.3 f.4 Poems, undated
 - Scripts
- b.3 f.5 *And the Nights Are Beautiful*, 1982
- b.3 f.6 *Be Kind to Your Servants. They Are Your Closest Friends*, undated
- b.3 f.7 *The Cherry Orchard. Part Two*, 1978
- b.3 f.8 *Cornbury—The Queen's Governor*, 1976
- b.3 f.9 *Early in the Morning*, undated
- b.3 f.10 *Father Earth*, undated
- b.3 f.11 *The Great American Mud*, undated
- b.4 f.1 *The Horn of Plenty*, undated
- b.4 f.2 *Lekathos*, undated
- b.4 f.3 *Martin's Day*, 1972
- b.4 f.4 *Shoe Palace Murray*, 1976
- b.4 f.5-7 Sketchbooks, undated
- b.4 f.8 Theater Reviews, 1960-1980
 - Miscellaneous, undated
- b.4 f.9 Miscellaneous Material
- of.1 Poetry Reading Poster