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Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Muriel Sharon papers

1924-1996 [bulk 1948-1972]

*T-Mss 2000-039

Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2013

Summary

Creator: Sharon, Muriel

Title: Muriel Sharon papers

Date: 1924-1996 [bulk 1948-1972]

Size: 10.87 linear feet (28 boxes)

Source: Donated by Sydney Tillim, 2000.

Abstract: Muriel Sharon (1918-1996) was a children's theater director and director of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA's Children's Drama Department from 1947 to the early 1970s. The Muriel Sharon papers (1924-1996) document her career producing theater for children and teaching drama; her involvement in children's theater organizations; and her study and use of drama as an educational and therapeutic tool, especially through creative dramatics and psychodrama. The collection contains production papers, scripts, scores, promotional and publicity materials, correspondence, photographs, notes, articles, and administrative records.

Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audio materials in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatrediv@nypl.org). Audio/visual materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

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Preferred citation: Muriel Sharon papers, *T-Mss 2000-039. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2013 Most materials were refoldered; original order was maintained in most instances.

Creator History

Muriel Sharon (née Schochen, 1918-1996) was a children's theater director and director of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA's Children's Drama Department from 1948 to the early 1970s. She studied dance with Martha Graham in the 1940s. It was Graham who suggested that she change her name from Schochen to Sharon. Over the course of her career, Sharon also studied acting and mime. She married Sidney Tillim in 1956, and sometimes used the name Muriel Sharon Tillim professionally and socially.

As director of the 92nd Street Y's Children's Drama Department, Sharon conceived of and directed children's productions, with both child and adult actors. In 1956, she founded the Pocket Players, a children's theater company based at the 92nd Street Y. In the 1960s, she served as regional chairman of the American Educational Theater Association's Children's Theater Conference (CTC), and as chairman of the CTC's Plays Committee. She was active in the Association des Amis du Théâtre pour l'Enfance et pour la Jeunesse (ATEJ) and the Association Internationale du Théâtre de l'Enfance et la Jeunesse (ASSITEJ).

Sharon's approach to children's theater was grounded in creative dramatics, a field that emphasized the role of improvisational drama in child development. In the early 1970s, Sharon was certified as a psychodrama director through the Moreno Institute of Psychodrama.

Scope and Content Note

The Muriel Sharon papers (1924-1996, bulk 1948-1972) document Sharon's career producing theater for children and teaching drama; her involvement in children's theater organizations; and her study and use of drama as an educational and therapeutic tool. The collection contains production papers, scripts, scores, promotional and publicity materials, correspondence, photographs, notes, articles, and administrative records. Sharon's interest in psychodrama and its role in creative dramatics is reflected in documents throughout the collection. The collection also holds caricatures that Sharon did of Martha Graham and her colleagues in the 1940s, and three dance sketches by Christine Engler.

The collection contains a small amount of biographical material, including resumes and timelines, records from high school and college, and early career clippings. Some of these materials are mounted on pages from an unbound scrapbook.

Materials related to Sharon's research and teaching consist of correspondence, notes, fliers, clippings, reports, articles, and drafts. Sharon's writing about creative dramatics and her approach to children's theater productions are included here, as are her notes from lectures and discussions with Peter Slade and Brian Way, British pioneers in educational drama. The files contain articles and clippings, publicizing Sharon's work, as well as correspondence, articles, and internal reports on the Children's Drama Department at the 92nd Street Y. Records of workshops, lectures, and panel discussions about children's theater, intended for adult audiences, are here. Sound recordings of some workshops and lectures are present. The collection holds a 1960 Pollock's toy theater, with scripts, paper scenes, and character sheets.

Research and teaching files also contain notes from classes with Stella Adler and background material for Sharon's lecture on the play, *Tango*, which includes notes from an interview she did with playwright Slawomir Mrozek. An audio recording of the interview is present. The collection holds audio recordings of Sharon's discussions with Dr. J.L. Moreno about psychodrama from 1969.

Records of day-to-day activities in her classes and workshops for children can be found in Sharon's notebooks, many of which contain exercises and assignments. The class notebooks date from 1948 to

1973. Notes on class activities are brief and do not describe class activities in detail. To a lesser extent, notebooks contain production notes, concepts for plays, and notes on creative drama.

Sharon's participation in children's theater organizations is documented in correspondence, memoranda, newsletters, meeting minutes, and reports. Materials date chiefly from the 1960s to 1971. In 1965, the CTC Plays Committee commissioned Conrad Aiken to write a children's play based on his work, *The Kid*; the collection holds the script and relevant correspondence. Organization records are intermixed with teaching and research materials.

Production files contain programs, scripts, scores, production notes, correspondence, administrative and financial records, photographs, articles, clippings, contracts, and designs and rough sketches. Records date between 1948 and 1981 and deal with individual productions, children's programming at the 92nd Street Y, the Pocket Players theater company, and other children's theater groups that Sharon directed. Productions include *L'Histoire du Soldat*, *The Marvelous Adventures of Tyl*, *Pinocchio*, *The Prince Who Learned Everything out of Books*, *The Snow Queen*, *Tango*, *Turandot*, and Sharon's film, *The Unborn*, based on a concept by Betty Jean Lifton. Prompt books are present for *Emil and the Detectives* and *The Glass Slipper*. Sharon collaborated frequently with playwright Jonathan Levy, and production files hold his works and correspondence. The collection contains sound recordings related to some of the productions, and a 1964 film of *Servant of Two Masters*.

Production files also hold music manuscripts, chiefly by Sharon's friend and collaborator, composer Kurt List. These include music for *The Glass Slipper* and *Emil and the Detectives*. Scores of other works by List, dating between 1937 and 1944, are present, as is a complete autograph score for *The Wise and the Foolish*, his children's opera from 1951. Sound recordings of this opera are present. Included here is the 1981 score for Sharon's musical theater adaptation of Conrad Aiken's "*Silent Snow, Secret Snow*," with music by Helen Tobias-Duesberg. The script, synopsis, and correspondence regarding "*Silent Snow*" can be found with the score and elsewhere in the production files.

Photographs are mostly of plays, but also include images of Muriel Sharon and some personal photographs. The bulk of the photographs date to the 1950s and 1960s. A small number of photographs can also be found in production files.

Correspondence is both personal and professional, and dates mostly to the 1950s and 1960s. Subjects include ASSITEJ, the 92nd Street Y's theater classes, invitations for the Pocket Players to perform, reactions to Sharon's productions, possible future productions, contracts for actors, and Sharon's opinions on contemporary developments in creative dramatics and children's theater. Similar correspondence is also located throughout Sharon's files. Correspondents include Elke Baur, Isaac Rosenfeld, William Packard, and Kurt List. With the correspondence are folders of List's published articles. A letter from Aline Bernstein, criticizing Sharon's production of *Pinocchio*, is present.

Inquiries regarding audio/visual materials in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatrediv@nypl.org). Audio/visual materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged in six categories: biographical materials; correspondence; children's theater organizations and research and teaching materials, which are largely intermingled; dance sketches and caricatures; photographs; and production files.

Key Terms

Subjects

Children's theater
Drama in education

Names

Levy, Jonathan
List, Kurt
92nd Street Y (New York, N.Y.)
Association du the'atre pour l'enfance et la jeunesse (France)
Children's Theatre Conference (U.S.)
International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People

Container List

- b. 25 f. 1 Biographical Materials 1933-1952
- b. 1 f. 1-4 Biographical Materials 1936-1970
 - Correspondence
 - b. 23 1940s-1975, 1990, 1996
 - b. 24 1950-1972, 1980
 - b. 22 1954-1971
 - b. 21 f. 6 1956-1967
 - b. 27 f. 1 Dance Sketches by Christine Engler undated
 - b. 28 Dancer Caricatures 1940s
 - Organizations, Research, and Teaching
 - b. 16 1940s-1974
- b. 17 f. 1-5 1947-1979
 - b. 13 1952-1975
 - b. 15 1953-1970, 1976
 - Includes Conrad Aiken play commission materials.
 - b. 14 1955-1970
- b. 12 f. 12 1966-1967
 - Notebooks
 - b. 18 1948-1960
 - b. 17 f. 9 1953-1978
 - b. 19 1960-1969
 - b. 20 1966-1970
 - b. 21 f. 1-5 1970-1980
 - b. 25 f. 2 Toy Theater 1960
 - b. 17 f. 6-8 Toy Theater Scripts, Scenes, and Characters 1947-1960s
- Photographs
 - b. 12 f. 1-11 1940s-1971
 - b. 10 1946-1971
 - b. 8 f. 5-6 1948-1971
 - b. 9 1948-1971
 - b. 11 1950s-1970, 1993
 - b. 27 f. 3-8 1955-1960s
- Production Files
 - b. 5 1924, 1950s-1971
 - b. 1 f. 5-17 1948-1970
 - b. 2 1948-1970
 - b. 4 1948-1971
 - b. 3 1949-1969
 - b. 6 1949-1977
 - b. 8 f. 1-4 1951, 1964-1966

Production Files (cont.)

- b. 7 1959-1981
- b. 27 f. 2 Pocket Players Flier 1956
- Scores
- b. 25 f. 3-14 1937-1962
- b. 26 Undated
- b. 27 f. 10 Silent Snow, Secret Snow 1978-1981
- b. 27 f. 9 The Wise and the Foolish 1951