



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Gene Frankel papers

1941-2004

*T-Mss 2005-013

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2013

Summary

Creator: Frankel, Gene, approximately 1920-2005

Title: Gene Frankel papers

Date: 1941-2004

Size: 15.66 linear feet (39 boxes)

Source: Donated by Laura Frankel, 2005.

Abstract: Gene Frankel (approximately 1920-2005) was an Obie Award-winning theater director, actor, and teacher. He is best known for his significant contributions to Off-Broadway theater. The Gene Frankel papers (1941-2004) document Frankel's career as an Off-Broadway director and teacher. The collection gives a comprehensive account of Frankel's professional endeavors, and holds biographical material, photographs, programs, production files, scripts, and teaching material.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

Conditions Governing Use: The author/creator retains copyright of materials. For information on obtaining permission to publish, contact the Theatre Division at theatrediv@nypl.org.

Preferred citation: Gene Frankel papers, *T-Mss 2005-013. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2013 Original order was maintained. Folder titles were retained when present. Loose material was placed into folders.

Creator History

Eugene (Gene) Frankel (approximately 1920-2005) was an Obie Award-winning theater director, actor, and teacher. He is best known for his significant contributions to Off-Broadway theater.

Frankel began his career in theater as an actor and was an early member of The Actor's Studio. During the 1940s, he was involved with several socially progressive theater groups, such as The Actors Ensemble Theater, Stage for Action Theater Group, and The People's Drama Theater. During World War II, he was assigned to the Special Services as a writer, producer, and entertainment director. While stationed in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, he wrote, produced, and acted in a weekly variety radio show called "On the Beam." He also directed and acted in *The Eve of Saint Mark* (1944) while there.

Frankel directed for Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional theater productions throughout his career. Among his Broadway works is *Indians* (1969), for which leading actor Stacy Keach won a Tony Award. Off-Broadway he was widely recognized for his direction of Jean Genet's *The Blacks: A Clown Show*, in 1961. The show ran for over 1,400 performances at the St. Marks Playhouse in New York City, and later toured in Europe. He won three Obie Awards: as Best Director for *Volpone* in 1957, and *Machinal* in 1960; and for Best Play for *The Blacks: A Clown Show* in 1961.

Frankel opened, directed, and taught acting classes at several Off-Broadway theaters. In 1973, Frankel's Mercer Arts Center, a theater complex situated in The Grand Central Hotel, collapsed. He later opened the Gene Frankel Theatre on Bond Street, which still stands today. Frankel created several educational programs through his Gene Frankel Theatre Workshop. Frankel also taught theater at Columbia University, New York University, and Boston University.

Gene Frankel died in 2005.

Scope and Content Note

The Gene Frankel papers (1941-2004) document Frankel's career as an Off-Broadway theater director and teacher. The collection gives a comprehensive account of Frankel's professional endeavors, and holds biographical material, photographs, programs, production files, scripts, and teaching material.

Biographical material in this collection documents several of Frankel's projects and achievements. Document types include correspondence, newspaper clippings, biographical essays, theater programs, press releases, reviews, and poetry. Frankel maintained clippings and reviews for the Gene Frankel Theater Workshop with his personal documents, such as biographical essays and correspondence. Press kits relating to the Mercer Arts Center are also interspersed throughout Frankel's more personal files. The press kits contain photocopies of articles relating to the various theater locations of Frankel's workshop programs. Several drafts of essays are here, such as Frankel's autobiographical essay "The Improbable History of the Man with an Edifice Complex," and drafts of a tribute to actress Viveca Lindfors. Poetry written by Frankel, dating from the 1960s to the 1980s, is present. Many of the poems are drafts of love poems with handwritten annotations and corrections. The newspaper clippings relate to Frankel's general success as a director, and to his founding and artistic directorship of Off-Broadway theaters. Correspondence primarily relates to Frankel's professional endeavors. Opening night telegrams and a limited amount of personal correspondence are also present. Primary topics of correspondence include Frankel's efforts to acquire support in his teaching projects and in opening and maintaining Off-Broadway theaters. Among the early correspondence are letters from WWII officers, commending Frankel's work in the Special Services. Frankel's proposal for a series of film and video cassettes for an acting class is present with several letters documenting support from university theater departments, staff, and theater companies around the United States. Also included are several letters of support from colleagues regarding the collapse of The Mercer Arts Center in 1973.

The photographs in this collection document several of Frankel's productions, including *The Blacks: A*

Clown Show (1961), *The Emperor Jones* (1964), and *Indians* (1969), among several others. Researchers interested in photographs of the production of *The Blacks: A Clown Show* should consult the production files for *The Blacks* in addition to the photographs. Many of the photographs depict unidentified productions put on at the Gene Frankel Theatre Workshop in the 1960s and 1970s. Images of productions, rehearsals, group and individual actors are included. The majority of the photographs date from the 1950s to the 1970s. Later photographs, from the early 2000s, document Frankel with actors that he taught throughout his career, such as Loretta Swit, F. Murray Abraham, James Earl Jones, and Marian Seldes.

This collection holds a limited amount of posters relating to individual productions and theater festivals. The Berkshire Theater festival, Carreño, and Hollow'd Ground are represented, among others.

The production files contain material relating to both produced and unproduced work written or directed by Frankel. Document types include reviews, correspondence, proposed budget plans, drafts of scripts and essays, programs, biographies, and photographs. Productions represented include *The Blacks: A Clown Show* (1961); *Enrico IV* (1964); *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* (1969); Carreño (1990); and *Hollow'd Ground* (1997), among others. Unproduced works represented here include *Mr. Tin Pan Alley* (1983) and *Othello* (1997-1999). Some productions are represented more extensively than others, such as *The Blacks: A Clown Show*. *Othello* files reveal Frankel's attempts to bring the show into fruition. Drafts of the script, correspondence, proposed budgets, and essays are present. Correspondence documents Frankel's efforts to find cast and crew, as well as individuals' intentions to be a part of the production. Several versions of an essay entitled "Notes on *Othello*" are here. Material relating to *Hollow'd Ground* demonstrates Frankel's writing process. Drafts of the script are organized by scene and are heavy with annotations. Programs and photographs representing *Hollow'd Ground* are also present. A file for Carreño, starring Pamela Ross, comprehensively documents the organization of the production. Reviews, stage manager resumes and applications, cast and crew contact lists, a press representative agreement, and budget estimates for the production set are included.

Material relating to *The Blacks: A Clown Show* includes clippings; multiple proofs and versions of printed and hand-drawn logos; programs and ephemera; and photographs. Photographs document performances, and group and individual images of cast members. Figures depicted in the photographs include actors James Earl Jones, Maya Angelou, and Cicely Tyson; members of the crew; and Martin Luther King, Jr. A first draft of a screenplay for television written by Howard Walzer is included. Several clippings and programs documenting the show's success in the United States and Europe are present. Also included is a file documenting Frankel's brief attempt to restage the show in 1992. Correspondence regarding the advisement on the rights of the play is present, as well as Frankel's written proposal.

Programs in this collection represent Broadway and Off-Broadway productions done by Frankel and others. Programs and clippings from the 1940s represent Frankel's early work with the Stage for Action Theater Group, The People's Drama Theater, the Provincetown Playhouse, and as part of Special Services in entertainment in World War II. The majority of the programs date from the 1960s to the 1990s, and represent Broadway, Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway, and regional theater productions.

This collection holds a significant amount of scripts. The majority of the scripts represent unproduced plays, and were sent to Frankel by aspiring playwrights or colleagues for his review. Scripts frequently contain correspondence, notes, edits, and comments by Frankel. Playwrights represented include James Baldwin, Jack Gelber, Bonnie Lee Moss Rattner, Frederick Feirstein, and Pamela Ross, among several others. Scripts for productions written and/or directed by Frankel are also present. Titles include *Volpone* (1960); *To be Young, Gifted, and Black* (1967); *A Cry of Players* (1968); *Mr. Tin Pan Alley* (1983); and Carreño (1988), among others. Some titles are represented through multiple drafts and

copies, such as Frankel's Mr. Tin Pan Alley and Hugh Wheeler's The Great Gatsby (1970).

Teaching material in this collection consists of a comprehensive file for Frankel's proposed acting video course, "In Quest of an Actor." The file contains a course description, preface, scripts, and Frankel's original proposal for investment into the project. The course descriptions and scripts within this file outline ten "programs" or exercises for students. Pamphlets and announcements advertise programs at the Gene Frankel Theatre Workshop. Acting notes and books are here. One book, Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage, is marked up with Frankel's annotations and various sections are bookmarked.

This collection holds one audio cassette tape for Brecht on Brecht, and records, including the original cast album for Lost in the Stars. Other records are Dick Charles Recording Service records, and are labeled with song titles only, such as "Fat Alice from Dallas," "What do we do Now," and "Natural Man." Inquiries regarding audio recordings in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatrediv@nypl.org). Audio recordings will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged into seven categories: biographical material; photographs; posters; programs; production files; scripts; and teaching material. Production files and scripts are arranged alphabetically by title of production. All other categories are arranged chronologically.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Biography files
Clippings (information artifacts)
Correspondence
Photographs
Scripts (documents)

Subjects

Off-Broadway theater
Theaters -- United States

Occupations

Theatrical producers and directors -- United States

Container List

Biographical Material

- b. 4 f. 4-6 1944-2003
- b. 11 f. 9 1944-2003
- b. 8 f. 2-7 1944-2004
- b. 5 f. 1-6 1951-1985
- b. 10 f. 1-6 1954-2003
- b. 9 f. 2-10 1956-2002
- b. 1 f. 1-3 1964-2001
- b. 7 f. 6-7 1969-2000
- b. 1 f. 5-10 1960s-2001
- b. 2 f. 1-6 1960s-2001
- b. 4 f. 8-9 1970s-1980s
- b. 5 f. 8-9 1970s-1997
- b. 6 f. 1-3 1970s-2001
 - b. 7 f. 1 1971-1997
- b. 39 f. 5-6 1980-1987
 - b. 3 f. 1 1991
- b. 15 f. 2 1995-2000
- b. 34 f. 4 2001

Photographs

- b. 3 f. 11-15 1950s-1997
- b. 36 f. 1-3 1950s-1970s, 2003
 - b. 37 f. 3 1960-2003
- b. 35 f. 1-2 1960s-1980s
- b. 3 f. 3-8 1960s-1990s
- b. 4 f. 1-3 1960s-1990s
- b. 7 f. 10-12 1990s, 1998

Posters

- b. 37 f. 4 1966-1997
 - The Blacks: A Clown Show*
- b. 15 f. 1 1961
- b. 37 f. 1 1961-1964
- b. 14 f. 1-10 1961-1965, 2003
- b. 13 f. 1-8 1961-1992
 - b. 6 f. 7 1961-1996
 - b. 5 f. 7 *Carreño* 1989
- b. 11 f. 1-2 *Carreño* 1989-1990

Production Files

- b. 7 f. 8 *An Enemy of the People* 1970s

Production Files (cont.)

- b. 10 f. 7-8 *Enrico IV* 1964-1965
Hallow'd Ground
- b. 6 f. 4-5 1997
- b. 7 f. 2-4 1997
- b. 11 f. 11-12 1997
- b. 12 f. 1-9 1997-1998
- b. 12 f. 11-14 1998
 - b. 7 f. 9 *Lost in the Stars* 1972
 - b. 29 f. 1 *Lost in the Stars* 1972
 - b. 8 f. 1 *Machinal* 1970s
- b. 11 f. 3-5 *Mr. Tin Pan Alley* 1983
 - b. 2 f. 8 *The Night That Made America Famous* 1973
- b. 12 f. 15 *No Riders* 1960s
Othello
- b. 7 f. 13-14 1968, 1997-1999
- b. 11 f. 6-8 1998-1999
 - b. 1 f. 11 1999
 - b. 9 f. 1 1999
 - b. 12 f. 10 1999
 - b. 1 f. 4 *The Strolling Players* 1960s
 - b. 37 f. 2 *Volpone* 1957
 - b. 4 f. 7 1941-1951
- b. 3 f. 9-10 1944-2004
- b. 17 f. 1-5 1945-1990s
- b. 15 f. 3-6 1950-1966

Programs

- b. 19 f. 1-6 1950-1990
- b. 18 f. 1-5 1963-1990s
- b. 16 f. 1-7 1964-1994
 - b. 6 f. 6 1988-2000
- b. 20 f. 3 *Abraham's Mask* 1972
- b. 22 f. 8 *The Academy of Desire* 1960
- b. 38 f. 5 *Anna* 1987
- b. 26 f. 3 *les Au Pair* 1986
- b. 28 f. 7 *Awry with Lardner (or Lardner on Rye)* 1960s

Scripts

- b. 26 f. 6 *Bang the Drum Slowly* 1956
- b. 38 f. 2 *The Bench* 1965
- b. 23 f. 6 *Blues for Mr. Charlie* 1964
- b. 29 f. 9 *Brecht on Brecht* 1963
- b. 26 f. 2 *Candles in the Rain* 1960s

Scripts (cont.)

- b. 29 f. 2-7 *Carreño* 1988
- b. 39 f. 4 *Carreño* 1988
- b. 25 f. 3 *The Chamber* 1969
- b. 20 f. 4 *The Character Against Himself* 1971
- b. 28 f. 4 *The Chosen Ones* 1961
- b. 24 f. 9 *Colloquy for Three* 1980
- b. 39 f. 3 *Cordoba!* 1989
- b. 26 f. 4 *The Country Parson* 1970
- b. 30 f. 1-5 *A Cry of Players* 1946-1968
- b. 31 f. 1 *A Cry of Players* 1968
- b. 28 f. 5 *David and Goliath* 1966
- b. 27 f. 3 *Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie* 1969
- b. 27 f. 6 *The Engagement Baby* 1970
- b. 2 f. 7 *The Fall of the House of Usher* 1998
- b. 2 f. 9 *The Firebugs* 1962-1963
- b. 39 f. 2 *The Frog Pond* 1961
- b. 38 f. 4 *Full Moon* 1986
- b. 26 f. 5 *Gandhi* 1959
- b. 22 f. 3 *Goa (or The Long Patio Walk)* 1968
- b. 20 f. 5-6 *The Great Gatsby* 1969 -1970
- b. 38 f. 1 *The Great Gatsby* 1970
- b. 38 f. 6 *Gun Play* 2002
- b. 25 f. 7 *He Who Must Die* 1960
- b. 28 f. 6 *Homer* 1979
- b. 23 f. 7 *Horay!* 1980s
- b. 3 f. 2 *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* 1997
- b. 29 f. 10-11 *Indians* 1969
- b. 38 f. 7 *Isn't Love Enough* 2002
- b. 23 f. 4 *A Knife in the Heart* 1982
- b. 24 f. 8 *Lesson Ten* 1970
- b. 28 f. 3 *Let's Face It* 1964
- b. 25 f. 2 *The Liberation of Doctor Einstein* 1960s
- b. 25 f. 5 *The Likeness of Liliانا* 1995
- b. 29 f. 8 *Lincoln* 1976
- b. 28 f. 9 *Lost in the Stars* 1950
vocal score
- b. 27 f. 5 *The Madonna in the Orchard* 1965
- b. 20 f. 7 *Magritte Skies* 1976
- b. 38 f. 9 *Michael Kohlhaas* 1980
- b. 25 f. 6 *Moxie Malone's 200 Days* 1969
- b. 22 f. 4-5 *Mr. Tin Pan Alley* 1983

Scripts (cont.)

- b. 28 f. 2 *Mr. Tin Pan Alley* 1983
 - b. 31 f. 5-6 *The Niggerlovers* 1966-1967
 - b. 25 f. 4 *NOA-NOA* 1972
 - b. 21 f. 6 *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean Paul-Marat* 1964
 - b. 21 f. 7 *Plato's Republic* 1969-1970
 - b. 31 f. 2-4 *Pueblo* 1970-1971
 - b. 26 f. 7 *Puntila and His Hired Men* 1960
 - b. 27 f. 1 *Puntila and His Hired Men* 1960
 - b. 22 f. 1 *PVT Wars* 1984
 - b. 28 f. 8 *Quoat-Quoat* 1965
 - b. 22 f. 2 *The Resistible Rise of Arturo UI* 1976
 - b. 28 f. 1 *The Scene Please, Mr. Tambo, Mr. Bones* 1967
 - b. 27 f. 7 *The Secret of the World* 1962
 - b. 24 f. 1 *Seniors* 1990s
 - b. 24 f. 3 *Simon* 1964
 - b. 22 f. 6 *Somebody!* 1988
 - b. 23 f. 1-3 *Sophie* 1962
 - b. 21 f. 1-3 *The Southpaw* 1969
 - b. 24 f. 2 *The Southpaw* 1969
 - b. 39 f. 1 *The Southpaw* 1969
 - b. 25 f. 1 *Split Lip* 1974
 - b. 21 f. 4 *The Strolling Players* 1974
 - b. 26 f. 1 *The Strolling Players* 1974
 - b. 38 f. 3 *Sublime Loss* 1999
 - b. 32 f. 1-3 *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* 1967
 - b. 23 f. 5 *To Glean it Around, To Show My Shine* 1988
 - b. 21 f. 5 *Unfinished Portrait* 1956
 - b. 38 f. 8 *Variations on the Same Theme* 1979
 - b. 24 f. 4-7 *Variations on the Same Theme* 1980
 - b. 27 f. 2 *Via Galactica* 1972
 - b. 31 f. 7 *Volpone* 1960
 - b. 27 f. 4 *Who Killed Anthony* 1963
 - b. 32 f. 4 1959-1977
 - b. 32 f. 5 1961
 - b. 33 f. 1 1962
 - b. 33 f. 2 1964-1965
 - b. 33 f. 3-6 1977
In Quest of an Actor
 - b. 33 f. 7 1980-1989
- Teaching Material
- b. 34 f. 1 1983, 1997

Teaching Material (cont.)

- b. 34 f. 2 1990-2004
- b. 11 f. 10 1999-2002
- b. 7 f. 5 2000
- b. 34 f. 3 2002