



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Mac Wellman papers, Additions

1979-2008 [bulk 2000-2008]

*T-Mss 1999-027

Compiled by Weatherly Stephan, 2014

Summary

Creator: Wellman, Mac

Title: Mac Wellman papers, Additions

Date: 1979-2008 [bulk 2000-2008]

Size: 2.8 linear feet (7 boxes)

Source: Gift of Mac Wellman, 2008-2009.

Abstract: Mac Wellman is an American playwright and poet, known for his experimental work in theatre. He is the author of more than 60 plays, including *Cellophane*, *Terminal Hip*, and *Sincerity Forever*. The Mac Wellman papers, Additions date from 1979 to 2008 (bulk dates: 2000 to 2008) and contain manuscript drafts and revisions of plays, poetry, and fiction, as well as posters, reviews, a program, letters, photographs, and ephemera.

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>

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Preferred citation: Mac Wellman papers, Additions, *T-Mss 1999-027. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Weatherly Stephan, 2014 One zip disc in the collection was forensically imaged for preservation. Compiled by Weatherly Stephan, 2014.

Related Materials:

Mac Wellman papers, *T-Mss 1999-027. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator History

Playwright and poet Mac Wellman was born John McDowell Wellman on March 7, 1945 in Cleveland, Ohio. After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations from American University in 1967, Wellman studied poetry at the University of Wisconsin. After earning his Master's degree in English in 1968 he began teaching at colleges and universities in 1969.

Wellman's work is a merging of poetry and theatre, and he has written fiction, drama, and poetry throughout his career that blurs the lines between these genres. His first produced work was *Nobody*, a 1972 radio play that grew out of his poetry, and was the result of a collaboration with Dutch theatre director Annemarie Prins. In 1977, his first collection of poetry, *In Praise of Secrecy*, was published, and his first New York City theatrical production, *Starluster*, was staged in 1979. After experiencing a creative block in the early 1980s, Wellman started to explore more experimental forms of theatre, focusing on the rhythms and expressiveness of language rather than traditional narratives. He re-emerged and began writing under his nickname, Mac, and by the mid-1980s, his reputation as a "downtown" playwright in New York City was established. Wellman gained national exposure with productions like Soho Repertory's *Energumen* (1985) and BACA Downtown's *Cleveland* (1986), *Cellophane* (1988) and *Sincerity Forever* (1990). In addition to authoring over 60 plays, Wellman has published the play collection *Cellophane* (2001); poetry in *Strange Elegies* (2005); the novel *Q's Q: An Arboreal Narrative* (2006); short stories in *A Chronicle of the Madness of Small Worlds* (2008); and the play collection *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* (2008).

Wellman has received three Obie awards: a Best New American Play award in 1990 (a three-way tie between his plays *Terminal Hip*, *Bad Penny*, and *Crowbar*); a Best Playwriting award in 1991 for *Sincerity Forever*; and a Lifetime Achievement award in 2003 (citing *Antigone*, *Jennie Richee*, and *Bitter Bierce*). Among his honors are two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships in playwriting in 1990 and 1995, a Guggenheim fellowship in 1990, and over a dozen residencies at Yaddo artists' colony and the MacDowell Colony. Wellman was Playwright-in-Residence at New York University from 1981 to 1982, an associate professor of play writing at Brown University from 1999 to 2000, and has taught at the City University of New York's Brooklyn College since 1998. He was named Distinguished Professor of Play Writing at Brooklyn College in 2010.

Scope and Content Note

The Mac Wellman papers, Additions date from 1979 to 2008 (bulk dates: 2000 to 2008) and contain manuscript drafts and revisions of plays, poetry, and fiction, as well as posters, reviews, a program, letters, photographs, and ephemera. The Additions span Wellman's early career, when he published as John Wellman, into the 21st century. In addition to Wellman's published work, the collection holds manuscripts that are unpublished or unproduced.

The bulk of the collection consists of drafts and revisions of Wellman's plays, short stories, novels, and poetry. Many manuscripts in the collection originated during Wellman's frequent residencies at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony between 1995 and 2010. Revisions of manuscripts sometimes date several years prior to publication, or postdate first productions. Files for *Two September* and *Bellagio* also hold production calendars and articles used in the writing and production of the plays. Three of Wellman's play and short story collections—*The Difficulty of Crossing a Field*, *Cellophane*, and *A Chronicle of the Madness of Small Worlds*—are represented through edited typescripts of the books. Also included is a draft of "Criticism in Crisis," a critical essay delivered at the International Festival of Experimental Theatre. General notebooks filed in the writings contain fragments of works-in-progress along with addresses, to-do lists, and notes from events.

Promotional files hold small posters advertising Wellman's productions, including *Cat's Paw*, *Girl Gone*, *A Murder of Crows*, *The Hyacinth Macaw*, *Anything's Dream*, *Fnu Lnu*, and the 2000 Brown University New Plays Festival curated by Wellman. A program for *Cat's Paw*, reviews of *Girl Gone*, and a PDF of an Infrared print advertisement are also included.

The ephemera file contains an appointment calendar, a faculty identification card from Brown University, headshots, and incoming letters. Letters are from a member of the *Two September* production, and Philippe Loubat-Delranc, the French translator of Wellman's *The Fez*.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged into writings, promotional files, and ephemera.

Key Terms

Subjects

American poetry -- 20th century
Dramatists
Experimental poetry, American
Experimental theater -- New York (State) -- New York
Theater -- New York (State) -- New York -- 20th century

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Manuscripts for publication
Posters
Scripts (documents)

Container List

Writings

- b. 1 f. 1-2 General Notebooks 1998-2007
- b. 1 f. 3 3 2's 2004
- b. 1 f. 4 *Awe* 2005-2007
- b. 1 f. 5 *The Bad Infinity* 1985
- b. 1 f. 6 *A Ballad of Dreaming Empty* 1984
- b. 1 f. 7 *Big Cat Feet* 2007
- b. 1 f. 8 *Bitter Bierce* 1996-2003
- b. 2 f. 1 *Bellagio; or Of All Things Made of Metal* 2004-2005
- b. 2 f. 2 *Broken Sticks* 2005
- b. 2 f. 3 *Cellophane* 1988
- b. 2 f. 4-6 *Cellophane: 11 Plays* 2001
- b. 2 f. 7 *A Chronicle of the Madness of Small Worlds* 2000
See also: This Way and That.
- b. 2 f. 8 "Criticism in Crisis" 2003
- b. 2 f. 9 *The Cynics' Ball* 1981
- b. 3 f. 1 *Description Beggard; or The Allegory of Whiteness* 1999-2000
- b. 3 f. 2 *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* 2002
- b. 3 f. 3-5 *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field: Nine New Plays* 2008
- b. 3 f. 6 *Diseases of the Well-Dressed* 1980
- b. 3 f. 7 *The Dog in the Manger* 1982
- b. 4 f. 1 *Energumen* 1985
- b. 4 f. 2 *Forget Not or Oops* 2000-2001
- b. 4 f. 3 *Harm's Way* 1982
- b. 4 f. 4 *Henry J; An Epic in Miniature* 2003-2005
- b. 4 f. 5 *Howler and Mind Anew* 2001-2004
- b. 4 f. 6 *Infrared and Other New Things* 1997-2001
- b. 4 f. 7 *The Invention of Tragedy* 2004-2005
- b. 4 f. 8 *Jennie Richie* 1999
- b. 4 f. 9 *Land of Cockaigne* 1980
- b. 4 f. 10 *Left Glove* 2005
- b. 4 f. 11 *Morphology of Small Errors* 2005
- b. 5 f. 1 *Muazzez* 1998
- b. 5 f. 2 *The Nain Rouge, The Self Begotten, and Mister Original Bugg--One-Act Plays* 1982-1986
- b. 5 f. 3 *Nine Days Falling* 2005
- b. 5 f. 4 *Old Hat Musical* 1981
- b. 5 f. 5 *Private Party* 1998-2000
- b. 5 f. 6 *The Professional Frenchman* 1981
- b. 5 f. 7 *Q's Q: An Arboreal Narrative* 2000

Writings (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 8 *School for Devils; or 7 Flamelets Upon the Roof of the White House...* 2004
- b. 5 f. 9 *Sparrows Three* 2004
- b. 6 f. 1-2 *Speculations* 2002-2003
- b. 6 f. 3 *Starling; or The Revenant as a Radiant Light and White the King of the English Men...* 2000
- b. 6 f. 4 *Starluster* 1979
- b. 6 f. 5 *Strange Elegies* 2005
- b. 6 f. 6 *This Way and That; or A Chronicle of the Madness of Small Worlds* 1992-2000
See also: A Chronicle of the Madness of Small Worlds.
- b. 6 f. 7 *Two September* 2004-2006
- b. 6 f. 8 *Uh-Oh* 1998-2000
- b. 7 Promotional Files 1999-2008
 - Promotional Files 2000
 - er.1 (858.2 Kilobytes (3 computer files))
 - Infrared advertisement art.
- b. 6 f. 9 Ephemera 1998-2006