



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

New York Street Theater Caravan records

1953-2005

*T-Mss 2008-004

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2014

Summary

Creator: New York Street Theater Caravan

Title: New York Street Theater Caravan records

Date: 1953-2005

Size: 10.62 linear feet (27 boxes)

Source: Donated by Rae C. Wright, 2008.

Abstract: The New York Street Theatre Caravan (1968-2000) was a New York City-based socialist theater collective that performed for underprivileged and geographically isolated communities in the United States and internationally. The collection dates from 1953 to 2005 and consists of production files; tour files; company files; publicity files; photographs; biographical files for Marketa Kimbrell, the collective's founder; and realia.

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 Access:

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

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Creator History

The New York Street Theatre Caravan (NYSTC), formerly the City Street Theater, was a New York City-based socialist theater collective. First conceived by Marketa Kimbrell and Richard Levy in 1967, the company was founded on the principle of bringing theater to underprivileged and geographically isolated communities. NYSTC performed plays, puppet shows, skits, and concerts with themes meaningful to their audiences, such as racial inequality, workers' rights, homelessness, and other sociopolitical issues.

In 1968, the company purchased an International Harvester flatbed truck, which they used as their stage, and began performing in the ghettos of Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx. Soon after, they began touring the country. They performed for migrant workers in camps in Texas, California, and Mexico; on Navajo, Sioux, Crow, and Cheyenne reservations; for rural southern farm towns; union halls; coal mining communities in Appalachia; schools, community centers, and churches; and prisons and detention centers, including Davidson County Prison in Tennessee, Attica, North Carolina's Central Prison, and other correctional facilities in New York, Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Georgia. In Nicaragua they performed at the Theater Popular in Managua, in barrios, prison camps, Salvadorian refugee camps, and for the Sandinista Popular Army. NYSTC held free drama workshops in schools, community centers, churches, universities, and prisons, including the Queens House of Detention for Men in New York City and NYSTC's rehearsal and performance spaces in Coney Island and St. Peter's Cathedral in Chelsea. NYSTC also played in professional theaters and festivals nationally and abroad, especially from the 1980s onward. The company toured internationally in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Italy, and in several countries in Central America.

Many of NYSTC's plays were written by Kimbrell, as well as other company members. The company's repertoire was thoroughly developed by the mid-1970s and remained relatively consistent throughout NYSTC's history. The plays were frequently readapted for different audiences and performance spaces, and sometimes to adhere with a particular actor's style. Production titles include *Lorca-Poems*, *Puppets, Plays and the Life of a Man*; *The Mother*; *Gold*; *Molly McGuire*; *Hard Time Blues*; *The Fugitives*; *Street Corner Cabaret*; *Blues in Rags in B Sharp*; and *Sacco & Vanzetti*, for which they won a 1977 Obie Award for sustained excellence. They also produced an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* and their version of *The Grapes of Wrath*, titled *Bitter Harvest*. Some of the themes in their plays included Irish struggle under British rule and in the United States (*Molly McGuire*), homelessness (*The Mother*, *Blues in Rags in B Sharp*), racial inequality (*Hard Time Blues*), and the mistreatment of animals (*The Fugitives*).

Scope and Content Note

The New York Street Theater Caravan (NYSTC) records date from 1953 to 2005 and consist of production files; tour files; company files; publicity files; photographs; biographical files for Marketa Kimbrell; and realia. Although NYSTC created separate files for publicity and photographs, researchers should also consult the production, tour, and company files for access to these document types. Correspondence is located throughout the production, tour, and company files.

Production files are arranged alphabetically by title and document the writing, performance, and reception of plays, skits, and concerts produced by NYSTC from 1968 to 1998. Files typically hold photographs, correspondence, programs, announcements, reviews, lighting plots, stage plans, scripts, and other writings. The majority of NYSTC's productions are well-represented, though document types

may vary for each production. Titles include *Gold*, *Molly McGuire*, *Hard Time Blues*, *Street Corner Cabaret*, *Sacco & Vanzetti*, *Blues in Rags in B Sharp*, and *The Grand Inquisitor*, among others.

Gold and *Molly McGuire* are among the better represented productions in the collection. *Gold* production files date from 1984 to 1989 and document the life of the production from the writing and planning stages, to performance and review. Files contain budget and ticket sale information, contracts, rehearsal schedules, technical requirements, scripts, lighting plots and cue sheets, synopses, thematic and analytical notes on the script, and photographs. There are many drafts and versions of the script, including sound and lighting scripts, manuscript and typescript drafts, and final versions. The files also include program and advertisement mock-ups, press releases, reviews, flyers, and business plans, notes, and correspondence. A small amount of the material concerns the distribution of the film version of *Gold*. *Molly McGuire* files date from 1977 to 1983 and document productions in the United States, Germany, and France through correspondence, photographs, stage plans, scripts, notes, and publicity material. The files contain plot synopses, press releases, and reviews in English, Spanish, and German. A small booklet containing abstract drawings of the actors from the German tour of *Molly McGuire* in 1980 is also present. Materials for *Blues in Rags in B Sharp* date from 1989 to 1991 and consist of German and American press releases and reviews; photographs of the actors spending the night on the street; and rehearsal, performance, and promotional photographs for their 1989 performance at the Schauspiel Köln in Cologne, Germany. Production files for *Sacco & Vanzetti* date from 1974, when the play was first written, to 1996, when Kimbrell was awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts Award for Playwriting. The files contain scripts, plot descriptions, publicity materials for various productions of the play, and a limited amount of background research on the Sacco and Vanzetti case. Scripts for several of NYSTC's smaller skits are also present in the production files, including *Sludge Skit*, *Superunion Man Skit*, and *Patriotism Skit*.

Tour files are arranged by place and precede the production files. They document NYSTC's national and international tours from 1970 to 1998. Multiple productions are typically represented through each tour file, as the company frequently toured more than one production at a time. The degree to which each tour (year) is represented varies, though typically the files contain reviews, notes, budget lists, and correspondence. Among the better represented tours is the company's 1982 trip to Nicaragua. The files contain Kimbrell's diary from the trip and other detailed accounts of their travels and performances, as well as grant agreements, press contact lists, press releases, reviews, programs, and correspondence. Correspondents include potential fundraisers, magazine editors, and the Ministerio de Cultura de Nicaragua.

Company files date from 1967 to 2001 and chiefly contain correspondence and grant applications. Contracts, schedules, planning and meeting notes, budgets, and information on the company's history, mission, and board of directors are also present. Correspondence discusses production planning, travel arrangements, and fundraising; and includes many letters of support and gratitude. A wide range of projects and productions are discussed in the letters, including funding for trips to theater festivals in Romania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria; the planning of the St. Peter's Performing Arts Center and NYSTC's eviction from the church; drama workshops; and contracts, schedules, and performance planning for many of their tours in the United States. Letters to editors, school boards, and other companies regarding the fair treatment of animals are also present. Correspondents include event planners and community leaders from schools, colleges, unions, and prisons, including The United Furniture Workers of America, The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, The United Automobile Workers, The Chinese American Arts Council, The Salvation Army, The Southern Appalachian Labor School Foundation, The Coal Miners Research Association, Long Island University, The New York City Housing Authority, and several prisons in New York, including Albion Correctional Facility, Woodbourne Correctional Facility, and the Eastern New York Correctional Facility. Among the prison correspondence are letters of appreciation from Attica inmates and employees, including a 1977

review of *Hard Time Blues* by Attica's inmate entertainment reviewer. Also present is a letter from a past inmate student describing Kimbrell's drama class at the Queens House of Detention; and a letter from Puerto Rican nationalist Lolita Lebrón, written from solitary confinement at the Federal Correctional Institution for Women.

Grant proposals, correspondence, and final reports for the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the North Star Fund, Ruth Mott, and the Puffin Foundation are present in the company files. The applications include descriptions of the NYSTC's projected goals, budgets, and travel plans. Final reports contain rich descriptions of the company's tours, commercial productions, workshops, and other business activities completed throughout the duration of a given grant. They discuss travel conditions; technical difficulties or problems with performance spaces; the atmosphere during performances; positive developments in the cast; and audience information, such as size, demographics, and overall reception. Letters to potential board members, contact lists, form letter drafts, and bylaws make up the material for the board of directors. The company files also hold the NYSTC manifesto, company rules, and multiple versions of the NYSTC's history and mission statement written at various points throughout the company's history.

Publicity files and programs were compiled over the course of NYSTC's existence and consist of original, working, and photocopied versions of fliers, brochures, press releases, reviews, press packets, posters, and tour schedules. Many of the materials were hand-drawn by the company, assembled into collages, and photocopied. These files showcase the wide range of performance venues and communities in which the company performed.

Photographs consist of rehearsal and production stills, travel photographs, cast portraits, publicity photographs, and images of audiences from NYSTC's performances. Many of the photographs are undated and not labeled. There are photographs of *The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal* performed in Resurrection City in Washington, D.C. in 1968. Other shows documented in the photographs include *The Brementown Musicians* (a version of *Hard Time Blues*), *Street Corner Cabaret*, *Calliope 5*, *Hard Time Blues*, *The Mother*, *Bitter Harvest*, *Sacco & Vanzetti*, and their performance at the 1972 Olympics in Germany. Many of the photographs depict performances on NYSTC's flatbed truck, which they used as a stage while touring. Travel photographs were taken primarily in the 1970s and depict small coal mining and farming towns, places they stayed during their trips, and candid shots of the cast rehearsing and talking with local residents. Among the many cast members in the photos are Amy Berkman, Phyllis Blanford, Ted Hannan, Doug Hudgins, Earl Imbert, Valerie Knight, Linda Segura, and Cynthia Wright. Audience members in the photographs include families, coal miners, factory workers, children, and many union members, including UAW174 (United Automobile Workers Union), located in the Detroit suburbs.

Marketa Kimbrell's files document her career as an actress before her artistic directorship of NYSTC and her work as an educator of drama and film direction at New York University. Files contain writings, correspondence, and scrapbooks. Writings discuss stage and film directing methods, drama theory, script and scene analyses, and other creative excerpts written by Kimbrell from the 1960s to the 1990s. Correspondence is both personal and professional in nature. Personal correspondence consists mostly of letters of support or general correspondence from friends. Professional correspondence discusses Kimbrell's application for tenure in 1985, letters of recommendation, and a teaching assignment she took in Cuba in 1998. Travel applications, correspondence, and her travel license for Cuba are also present. The scrapbooks hold reviews, programs, and photographs for Kimbrell's stage and film productions between 1953 and 1969, including *The Fortune Teller* (1953), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1966), *The East Wind* (1967), *Edith Stein* (1969), and the 1965 film *The Pawnbroker*.

Realia in the collection consists of three paper mache pig masks and masks used by NYSTC during their trip to Mexico in 1973.

The collection contains audiovisual material consisting of film reels, videocassettes, and audiocassettes of several of NYSTC's performances. Inquiries regarding audiovisual material may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatre@nypl.org). Audiovisual materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

The collection is primarily in English, with some materials in German, French, Danish, Spanish, and Norwegian.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged into the following categories: Company Files; Tour Files; Production Files; Photographs; Publicity and Programs; Marketa Kimbrell Files; and Realia. Production Files are arranged alphabetically by title. Company Files are arranged alphabetically by subject or document type, and Tour Files are arranged by place. Remaining groups are arranged chronologically.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Fliers (printed matter)
Grant proposals
Photographs
Posters
Reports
Scripts (documents)

Subjects

Social justice
Street theater
Theater -- Social aspects
Traveling theater

Names

Kimbrell, Marketa

Container List

Company Files

- b. 1 f. 1 Activism 1973-1984
- b. 26 f. 1 Activism 1971, 1979
Akwesansé Notes newspaper (published by the Mohawk Nation, circa 1971) Le Journal du Mineur: organe mensuel de la Fédération nationale des mineurs (1979).
- b. 1 f. 2-3 Awards 1975-1981
- b. 1 f. 4 Benefit Gala 1987
- b. 1 f. 5-7 Board of Directors 1970s-1996
- b. 1 f. 8 Budgets 1996
- b. 1 f. 9 Charities Registration 1995-1996
- b. 1 f. 10 Chelsea Organizations 1982-1983
- b. 1 f. 11 Contacts 1981-1985
- b. 1 f. 12 Contracts and Agreements 1980-1990
- b. 1 f. 13-32 Correspondence 1970-1999
 - b. 2 f. 1 Correspondence 1971-1977
Contains prison support letters.
 - b. 2 f. 2 C.W. Post College, Long Island University 1985
 - b. 2 f. 3 The Dramatists Guild -- Women Dramatists Conference 1987
 - b. 2 f. 4 Festival Lists 1995-1997
 - b. 2 f. 5-6 Funding Requests 1984-1997
- Grants
 - b. 2 f. 7 Ford Foundation 1998
 - b. 2 f. 8 Herman Goldman Foundation 1987
 - b. 2 f. 9-15 National Endowment for the Arts 1970-1997
 - b. 2 f. 16-21 New York State Council on the Arts 1977-1998
 - b. 2 f. 22-25 North Star Fund 1981-1997
 - b. 3 f. 1 Puffin Foundation 1995-1998
 - b. 3 f. 2 Queens Council on the Arts 1984-1985
 - b. 3 f. 3 Ruth Mott Fund 1985-1986
 - b. 3 f. 4-5 History 1974-1983
Company history, descriptions, and manifestos.
- b. 23 f. 4 Miscellaneous 1967-1994
 - b. 3 f. 6 Miscellaneous Itineraries 1984-1992
 - b. 3 f. 7 Newsletters 1992-1997
- b. 3 f. 8-11 Performance Reports 1970-1989
 - b. 3 f. 12 Project Planning and Proposals 1969-1973
 - b. 3 f. 13 Race for the Arts 1996
 - b. 3 f. 14 Saint Peter's Performing Arts Center 1983
- b. 4 f. 1 Southern Appalachian Labor School 1981-1984

Company Files (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 2-3 Tax Exempt Status 1968-2001
- b. 4 f. 4 Truck (Stage) 1980-1985
- b. 4 f. 5 Workshop -- Oslo, Norway 1985

Tour Files

- b. 4 f. 6-10 European Tours 1972-1998
Material on NYSTC's production at the 1972 Olympics is here.
- b. 4 f. 11-14 Nicaragua 1982
- b. 5 f. 1-3 Nicaragua 1982
- b. 5 f. 4 Mexico 1973
- b. 5 f. 5-15 United States 1970-1998
- b. 23 f. 3 United States 1998

Production Files

- b. 5 f. 16 *Androcles and the Lion* 1970s
- b. 5 f. 17-20 *Bitter Harvest* 1974
- b. 6 f. 1-3 *Bitter Harvest* 1974, 1997
- b. 6 f. 4-12 *Blues in Rags in B Sharp* 1989-1991
- b. 7 f. 1-9 *Blues in Rags in B Sharp* 1989-1991
- b. 8 f. 1 *Calliope 5* 1987
- b. 8 f. 2 *Crossing the Barricades* 1988-1989
- b. 8 f. 3 *The Exception and the Rule* 1968
- b. 8 f. 4-5 *The Fugitives* 1996, 1998
- Gold*
- b. 8 f. 6-12 1984-1985
- b. 9 f. 1-12 1985-1987
- b. 10 f. 1-10 1985-1989
- b. 10 f. 11-12 *The Grand Inquisitor* 1991-1992
- b. 11 f. 1-7 *The Grand Inquisitor* 1992-1995
- b. 11 f. 8-9 *Hard Time Blues* 1981
- b. 11 f. 10-12 *Liberty Road* 1986-1987
- b. 11 f. 13 Miscellaneous Script Excerpts and Synopses 1972-1980s
- b. 12 f. 1-4 Miscellaneous Script Excerpts and Synopses 1974-1988
- Molly McGuire*
- b. 12 f. 5-12 1977-1980
- b. 26 f. 2 1980
Stage plans.
- b. 13 f. 1-22 1980-1983
- b. 14 f. 1-5 *The Mother* 1973-1976
- b. 14 f. 6 Music 1961-1980s
- b. 14 f. 7 Notes 1988
- b. 14 f. 8 Puppet Shows circa 1970
- b. 14 f. 9 *Retrospectives: A Cabaret* 1987-1988

Production Files (cont.)

- b. 14 f. 10-17 **Sacco Vanzetti 1976-1994**
- b. 15 f. 1-10 **Shared Season Runs 1980-1982**
Documents NYSTC's activities during their shared seasons with The Labor Theater and Modern Times Theater at Saint Peter's Cathedral.
- b. 15 f. 11-16 **Skits 1978-1988**
- b. 16 f. 1-2 **Skits undated**
- b. 25 f. 1-4 **Street Corner Cabaret 1982**
Contains cartoon drawings by Danish cartoonist Claus Seidel.
- b. 16 f. 3-11 **Street Corner Cabaret 1982-1984**
- b. 16 f. 12 **"Wounded Knee" 1981**

Photographs

- b. 16 f. 13-16 **1968-1982**
Photographs here depict NYSTC protests and demonstrations and early performances, such as a puppet show in Resurrection City, The Exception and the Rule, and an improvisation show put on at Tompkins Square Park.
- b. 17 f. 1-6 **1968-1996**
Productions depicted include Bitter Harvest, Hard Time Blues (The Brementown Musicians), Sacco & Vanzetti, and Street Corner Cabaret, among others.
- b. 19 f. 1-9 **1968-2003**
Productions depicted include Calliope Five, Blues in Rags in B Sharp, and The Fugitives. A photograph album contains photographs of early productions and NYSTC's performance at the 1972 Olympics.
- b. 18 f. 1-7 **1974-1984**
Hard Time Blues, candid rehearsal, and travel photographs.
- b. 24 f. 1-3 **1974-1978**
Photographs here were taken by photographer Susan Meiselas of audience members at a union hall during an unidentified NYSTC performance.

Publicity and Programs

- b. 24 f. 4 **1968-1980**
- b. 19 f. 10-11 **1968-1983**
- b. 26 f. 3-4 **1969, 1974, 1980**
Posters.
- b. 25 f. 5-7 **1970-1986**
Posters.
- b. 20 f. 1-12 **1969-1990s**
- b. 21 f. 1-21 **1980-1996**
- b. 22 f. 1-10 **Marketa Kimbrell Files 1953-1995**
- b. 23 f. 1-2 **Marketa Kimbrell Files 1995-2001**
- b. 27 **Realia 1973**
Masks are located in the *T-Cabinet and are available by appointment only.