



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Charles Busch papers**

1967-2015, 1984-2014

\*T-Mss 2015-031

Compiled by Heather Lember, 2015.

## Summary

**Creator:** Busch, Charles

**Title:** Charles Busch papers

**Date:** 1967-2015, 1984-2014

**Size:** 9.07 linear feet (22 boxes)

**Source:** Purchased from Charles Busch, 2015.

**Abstract:** Charles Busch (1954- ) is a playwright, screenwriter, novelist, actor, and drag performer best known for his Tony-nominated Broadway production, *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*. The Charles Busch papers date from 1967 to 2015 (bulk dates 1984-2014) and consists of correspondence, screenplays, scripts, and writings from Busch's career as a playwright, screenwriter, novelist, and performer.

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Heather Lember, 2015.

## Creator History

Charles Busch (1954- ) is a playwright, screenwriter, novelist, actor, and drag performer. He began his theatrical career at an early age, writing and performing his first play at Camp Lexington for the Performing Arts when he was twelve years old. He attended the High School of Music and Art in New

York City, and then Northwestern University, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in drama in 1976. As a college student Busch penned his first full length play, *Out-Takes of a "B" Movie* (1975), and made his inaugural appearance in a female role with his 1976 one-act play, *Sister Act*. Busch made his New York City debut in 1982 with *Before Our Mother's Eyes*, which was performed at Theater for the New City. His break came with the off-off Broadway show *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*, which premiered at the Limbo Lounge in the East Village in 1984. The show was picked up by the Provincetown Playhouse in 1985, where it ran for five years. Busch continued to write and perform with a group of collaborators known as Theatre-in-Limbo until 1991. These productions included, *Theodora She-Bitch of Byzantium* (1984), *Times Square Angel* (1984), *Gidget Goes Psychotic* (1986), *Pardon my Inquisition* (1986), *Psycho Beach Party* (1987), *The Lady in Question* (1989), and *Red Scare on Sunset* (1991). *Psycho Beach Party* ran for a year off-Broadway and was subsequently adapted into a film screenplay by Busch for the Robert Lee King directed film, which was released in 2000.

In 1993, Busch published an autobiographical novel, *Whores of Lost Atlantis*, which is based on his experiences with Theatre-in-Limbo. Busch continued to write and appear in Theatre productions, which include *You Should Be So Lucky* (1994), *Swingtime Canteen* (1995), *Flipping my Wig* (1996), *The Green Heart* (1997), *Queen Amarantha* (1997), *House of Flowers* (1998), and *Die! Mommy! Die!* (1999). In 1999, *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife* premiered at Manhattan Theatre Club before making its Broadway debut at the Barrymore Theatre in 2000. The play ran from 2000 to 2002, and Busch was awarded the Outer Circle Critics John L. Gassner Award for Outstanding Playwriting. *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife* received a Tony nomination for best play in 2001, and actresses Linda Lavin and Michelle Lee both received Tony nominations for their performances in the production. Busch's next play, *Shanghai Moon* (1999), earned him a Lucille Lortel best actor nomination in 2003. That same year he received a Drama Desk Award for career achievement as both a playwright and actor, was honored with a star on the Playwrights Walk outside the Lucille Lortel Theatre, and won the best performance award at the Sundance Film Festival for the film adaptation of *Die! Mommie! Die!* The Rosie O'Donnell produced, *Taboo*, debuted on Broadway in 2003, and featured music and lyrics by Boy George. This was followed by *Nina*, a comic monologue commissioned by the Lucille Lortel Awards in 2005, and *A Very Serious Person* (2006), which was Busch's directorial film debut. The film was awarded an honorable mention at the Tribeca Film Festival. Busch returned to theatre in 2007 with *Our Leading Lady* and a revived off-Broadway production of *Die! Mommie Die!*. His other theatre works include *The Third Story* (2008), *The Divine Sister* (2010), *Olive and the Bitter Herbs* (2011), *Judith of Bethulia* (2012), *Stars of David* (2012), *Bunnacula: A Rabbit Tale of Musical Mystery* (2013), and *The Tribute Artist* (2014).

Busch lives in New York City, where, as of 2015, he is writing his memoir and continues to perform in cabaret acts.

## Scope and Content Note

The Charles Busch papers date from 1967 to 2015 (bulk dates 1984-2014) and consist of materials chronicling Busch's career as a writer and performer in theatre and film. The collection encompasses the entirety of Busch's creative output, which also includes unpublished and unreleased works. Items are grouped together by format into the following categories: Correspondence; Theatre; Screenplays; Television Scripts; Cabaret; Writing; and Promotional Materials.

The correspondence dates from 1979 to 2012 and is mostly incoming communications. Included are letters written by individuals with whom Busch collaborated, as well as friends, colleagues, and fans of his work. Some of those who corresponded with Busch include Julie Andrews, Kathie Lee Gifford, Angela Lansbury, Paul Newman, Joan Rivers, and Stephen Sondheim. There are also letters of

recommendation written about Busch by Michael Feingold, Daryl Hine, Christopher Isherwood, and Charles Ludlam.

Items from Busch's theatrical career comprise the bulk of the collection, and feature works from solo performances, early student plays, his work with Theatre-in-Limbo, plays in which he was a performer, and scripts he wrote. There is an assortment of early work, the earliest of which is a play entitled *Lovely Lace*, that was written and performed by Busch at age twelve. The collection also holds scripts written by Busch as a student at Northwestern University, as well as his debut New York City performance, *Before Our Mother's Eyes*. Most of the theatre files contain various drafts, rewrites, and revisions of scripts, many of which include notes and annotations. Busch also retained photographs, flyers, reviews, and press clippings, which can be found among the theatre files.

The screenplays encompass script drafts and notes for Busch's four films that were produced and released: *Psycho Beach Party*, *Personal Assistant*, *Die! Mommie! Die!*, and *A Very Serious Person*. There are also a number of unproduced screenplay drafts including a commissioned film adaptation for *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, and notes for a 1992 Disney Animated feature called *Witches*.

Busch worked on television scripts for six programs, none of which were produced. Among the television scripts is a commissioned HBO adaptation of his novel, *Whores of Lost Atlantis*, and the script for *City of Bachelors*, which Busch wrote for the HBO anthology film, *If These Walls Could Talk II*. Each production includes the unproduced pilot script, and some also contain notes and revisions.

The cabaret materials are comprised of notes, song lyrics, and flyers dating from Busch's 2012 return to cabaret performing.

Books, journalistic pieces, a creative journal, a grant proposal, and some early short stories comprise Busch's writings. Most of the book material is for his novel, *Whores of Lost Atlantis*, and contains a treatment, proposal, sample chapters, notes, and reviews. There is also a draft of an unfinished novel called *Jeri*, and a collection of writings for his in-progress and untitled memoir. Also held with Busch's writings are transcripts of interviews he conducted with Julie Andrews, Carol Burnett, Zoe Caldwell, and Terence Stamp; remembrances he wrote about Joan Rivers; short stories and dramatic sketches he composed while in high school; and a cover story he wrote for *New York Magazine* about the drag scene in 1995.

There is a small collection of promotional materials consisting of seven headshots and portraits; theatre programs; and reviews of Busch's writing and acting.

**Arrangement:** Materials are arranged chronologically.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Actors

Journalists

Playwriting

Screenwriters

Theatrical producers and directors

### **Geographic Names**

Broadway (New York, N.Y.)  
New York (N.Y.)

**Subjects**

Camp (Style)  
Drag shows  
Gay actors -- United States  
Off Off-Broadway theater  
Off-Broadway theater  
Theater -- New York (State) -- New York

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings  
Correspondence  
Photographs  
Programs (documents)  
Screenplays  
Scripts (documents)  
Theatre programs

## Container List

- b. 1 Correspondence 1979-2010
  - Theatre
    - Solo Career Scripts
      - b. 2 f. 1 *That's Show Biz* 1978
      - b. 2 f. 2 *Hollywood Confidential* 1978
      - b. 2 f. 3 *Alone with a Cast of Thousands* 1978-1984
      - b. 2 f. 4 Solo Anthology 1980
      - b. 2 f. 5 Solo Anthology Two 1980
      - b. 2 f. 6-7 *After You've Gone* 1982
      - b. 2 f. 8 *The Dream* 1983
      - b. 2 f. 9 *Phantom Lovers* 1983
      - b. 2 f. 10 *Benjamin Harrison High School* 1984
    - b. 2 f. 11-19 Flyers, Photographs, and Clippings 1978-1984
  - Plays
    - b. 3 f. 1 Early Plays 1967-1977
      - Contains *Lovely Lace* (1967); *Call Boys* (1977); *Masquerade* (1970s); *Barging Down the Nile or Egypt Me!* (1977); *Travelogue* (1976); and *A Woman's Picture* (1975).
    - b. 3 f. 2 *Out-Takes of a "B" Movie* 1975
    - b. 3 f. 3 *Sister Act* 1976
    - b. 3 f. 4 *Old Coozies* 1976
    - b. 3 f. 5 *The Fall of the Theatre of Evil or Teeth Marks!* 1977
    - b. 3 f. 6 *Myrtle Pope, The Story of a Woman Possessed* 1978
    - b. 3 f. 7 *Before Our Mother's Eyes* 1982
    - b. 3 f. 8 *Farley and Suzanne* 1982
    - b. 3 f. 9-10 *Theodora She-Bitch of Byzantium* 1984-1989
    - b. 3 f. 11 *Follies! Vanities! Scandals! Of 1985* 1985
    - b. 3 f. 12-16 *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom and Sleeping Beauty or Coma* 1984-1990
      - Times Square Angel*
        - Contains Limbo Lounge script (1984); expanded Off-Broadway script (1985); annual staged reading scripts (1999-2011); flyers; programs; and clippings.
  - b. 3 f. 17-18 1984-1986
  - b. 4 f. 1-3 1984-2011
    - b. 4 f. 4-6 *Gidget Goes Psychotic* 1984-1986
    - b. 4 f. 7 *Pardon My Inquisition, Or Kiss the Blood off my Castanets* 1986
    - b. 4 f. 8-9 *Psycho Beach Party* 1987
    - b. 4 f. 10 *Ankles Aweigh* 1988
    - b. 4 f. 11-13 *The Lady in Question* 1989
    - b. 5 f. 1-3 *Red Scare on Sunset* 1991
    - b. 5 f. 4 *The Charles Busch Revue* 1993
    - b. 5 f. 5-11 *You Should Be So Lucky* 1992-1996

Theatre (cont.)

Plays (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 12-14     *Swingtime Canteen* 1993-1995
- b. 6 f. 1-2     *Flipping My Wig* 1996
- b. 6 f. 3-4     *The Green Heart* 1997
- b. 6 f. 5-6     *Queen Amarantha* 1997
- b. 6 f. 7     *House of Flowers* 1998
- b. 6 f. 8-10     *Die! Mommy! Die! Or The Fall of the House of Sussman* 1999  
*The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*  
Contains early drafts and notes; scripts; rewrites; programs; clippings; and reviews.
- b. 6 f. 11-14     1997-1999
- b. 7 f. 1-6     2001-2013
- b. 7 f. 7-12     *Shanghai Moon* 1999-2008
- b. 8 f. 1-3     *Ronni Adams* 2002-2007
- b. 8 f. 4-9     *Taboo* 2002-2003  
Contains original London version; early drafts; notes; and opening night script.
- b. 9 f. 1     *Nina* 2005
- b. 9 f. 2-9     *Our Leading Lady* 2003-2007
- b. 10 f. 1-3     *Die! Mommie! Die!* 2006-2007  
*The Third Story* 2006-2007  
Contains early drafts titled *Queen of Vice* and *Mob Play*; notes; and rehearsal scripts.
- b. 10 f. 4-8     2006-2007
- b. 11 f. 1-2     2008-2009
- b. 11 f. 3-9     *The Divine Sister* 2009-2012
- b. 12 f. 1-9     *Olive and the Bitter Herbs* 2010-2011  
Contains early drafts entitled *Mirror Within the Mirror*; edits and additions; and post production changes.
- b. 13 f. 1-4     *Judith and Bethulia* 2012
- b. 13 f. 5     *Stars of David* 2011-2012  
*Bunnacula: A Rabbit Tale of Musical Mystery*  
Contains notes; drafts of scripts; music and dialogue edits; and additional scenes.
- b. 13 f. 6-12     2011
- b. 14 f. 1-9     2011-2012
- b. 15 f. 1-2     2012  
*The Tribute Artist*  
Contains early drafts entitled *You Never Know Said the Widow*; edited scripts; notes; and final production script.
- b. 15 f. 3-6     2013
- b. 16 f. 1-4     2013-2014
- Screenplays
- Produced
- b. 16 f. 5-8     *Pyscho Beach Party* 1999-2000

Screenplays (cont.)

Produced (cont.)

b. 17 f. 1-2 *Personal Assistant* 2002

b. 17 f. 3-6 *Die! Mommie! Die!* 1999-2003

*A Very Serious Person*

Contains a first draft entitled *Male Nurse Movie*; an early draft called *Swim Type Drive*; subsequent drafts and rewrites; additional scenes; and a nearly finalized shooting script.

b. 17 f. 7-11 2004

b. 18 f. 1-5 2004-2005

Unproduced

b. 18 f. 6 *Blind Item* 1981

b. 18 f. 7 *Witches* 1992

*Tripping the Prom Queen*

This screenplay was written for a Lifetime TV movie and was based on the nonfiction book also titled *Tripping the Prom Queen*.

b. 18 f. 6-10 2008-2009

b. 19 f. 1-2 2009

b. 19 f. 3-5 *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife* 2005-2013

Contains a 2005 version commissioned by producer Robert Colt and a 2013 adaptation based on notes from director Susan Seidelman.

b. 19 f. 6 *Red Scare Sunset* 2013

b. 20 f. 1-3 *The Divine Sister* 2010-2014

Television Scripts

b. 20 f. 4 *Lillian* 1987

b. 20 f. 5 *Two in a Million* 1991

b. 20 f. 6 *City of Bachelors* 1998

b. 20 f. 7-9 *Broadway Series* 2001

Thirteen part mini-series commissioned by HBO.

b. 20 f. 10-12 *The Young Girls of Ravenscroft* 2004

b. 20 f. 13-15 *Whores of Lost Atlantis* 2009

b. 20 f. 16-17 *Cabaret* 2012-2015

Writing

b. 21 f. 1 *High School Short Stories* 1968-1972

Contains 13 short stories; 1 play; and dramatic sketches and notes.

b. 21 f. 2 *Theatre-in-Limbo Grant Proposal* 1984

b. 21 f. 3-11 *Journalism* 1989-2015

b. 21 f. 12-14 *Notes* 1990-2015

Contains notes for *Ruby Slippers of Oz*; Theatre-in-Limbo's trip to Japan; *Vampire Lesbians, The Musical*; Marie Antoinette play; *Unisex*; and a creative journal (1997-2015).

Books

b. 21 f. 15-18 *Whores of Lost Atlantis* 1993

b. 22 f. 1 *Jeri* 1994-2011

b. 22 f. 2-7 *Memoir* 2003-2014

b. 22 f. 8-17 Promotional Materials 1980-2011