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Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Desmond Heeley designs and production files**

circa 1880s-2016 [bulk 1955-2014]

\*T-Vim 2016-022

Compiled by Heather Halliday, 2016.

## Summary

**Creator:** Heeley, Desmond

**Title:** Desmond Heeley designs and production files

**Date:** circa 1880s-2016 [bulk 1955-2014]

**Size:** 5.81 linear feet (8 boxes, 1 oversized folder, 12 tubes)

**Source:** Donated by the Desmond Heeley Estate, 2016.

**Abstract:** Desmond Heeley (1931-2016) was a British-born costume and set designer for theater, ballet, and opera who worked internationally. Through original sketches, prints, production bibles, reference files, photographs, and correspondence, the Desmond Heeley designs and production files primarily document the North American portion of Heeley's career.

**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:** Desmond Heeley designs and production files, \*T-Vim 2016-022. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Processing note:** Compiled by Heather Halliday, 2016.

## Creator History

Desmond Heeley was born in England on June 1, 1931. He was adopted and raised in the English Midlands. As a child, he created displays for the windows of his family's store. In 1948, he became an apprentice designer at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company (now the Royal Shakespeare Theatre), where he worked with director Peter Brook. He went on to design sets and costumes at the

Sadler Wells Theatre in London, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, and England's National Theatre. Internationally, he has designed for the Vienna State Opera; Canada's Stratford Shakespeare Festival Theater; the National Ballet of Canada; the Australian Ballet; the Lyric Opera of Chicago; the Stuttgart Ballet; and La Scala in Milan. Heeley designed productions of *Brigadoon* and *South Pacific* for the New York Metropolitan Opera and *Theme and Variations* for the American Ballet Theatre. On Broadway, he won three Tony Awards for the 1968 production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (one award each for costume and set) and the 2011 production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Other Broadway productions he worked on include *Amadeus* and *The Snow Maiden*.

Heeley collaborated with playwrights, directors, and choreographers such as Tom Stoppard, Peter Hall, Brian Bedford, Joe Orton, John Cranko, Graham Greene, Gian Carlo Menotti, Michael Langham, and Tyrone Guthrie. His costumes have been worn by actors and dancers including Vivien Leigh, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Margot Fonteyn, Placido Domingo, Beverly Sills, Laurence Olivier, Maggie Smith, and Judi Dench. He was known as a skilled painter and an inventive, detail-oriented designer who transformed mundane materials and found objects into glitteringly ornate environments and lushly elegant costumes. Heeley often used lighting and reflective elements to great dramatic effect.

Apart from his paid performing arts work, Heeley also painted as a hobby throughout his life. Later in his career, Heeley taught theater design at New York University's Tisch School for the Arts. His partner, Lance Mulcahy (1931-1995), was an Australian-born musical theater composer who worked on Broadway. Heeley died on June 10, 2016 in New York City.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The bulk of the collection is comprised of Heeley's scenic and costume design drawings for theatrical, ballet, and opera productions. Though some of his productions were staged in Europe or Australia, many in this collection were staged in New York City, other cities in the United States, or Canada. Most scenic designs are graphite on tracing paper, Diazotype prints, or blueprints. The costume designs are primarily original drawings or paintings made with gouache, watercolor, graphite, or ink on paper. Costume and scenic designs are filed together in the case of productions for which Heeley designed both. Fabric swatches are occasionally attached to costume design sketches for some productions. A few drawings and sketches by other designers, most notably Oliver Messel, are also included in this section.

Production files include production bibles of *Brigadoon*, *Amadeus*, *La Sylphide*, *The Snow Maiden*, and *South Pacific*, which hold scripts, set plans, contracts, and costume designs. An album of 19th Century postcards Heeley likely used for reference and inspiration is present. Other production files include a few production photographs and portraits of Heeley; notes; clippings; correspondence; and a file on a Christmas window display Heeley created for Tiffany & Co.

Three publications about Heeley's work are included: a folio of *Amadeus* costume designs; *Dross into Gold*, a catalog of a gallery exhibition on Heeley; and a small folio of reproductions of Heeley's paintings of cats anthropomorphized as theatrical characters.

**Arrangement:** The collection is divided into three groups: Designs; Production Files; and Publications. Files are arranged alphabetically by title.

## **Key Terms**

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Blueprints (reprographic copies)  
Costume design drawings  
Design drawings  
Diazotypes (copies)  
Photographs  
Production materials  
Set design drawings  
Swatches  
Technical drawings

### **Subjects**

Costume design  
Theater -- Designs and plans  
Theater -- Production and direction  
Theaters -- Stage setting and scenery

### **Occupations**

Costume designers  
Set designers

### **Names**

Benson, Susan  
Messel, Oliver, 1904-1978

## Container List

### Designs

- b. 1 f. 1-7    **General 1969-2014**  
Files contain both costume and scenic designs for productions including *Brigadoon*, *Coppelia*, *Giselle*, *Lilac Garden*, *Norma*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

### Costume

#### General

- b. 2 f. 1-5    1950s-2010s  
b. 4 f. 1-2    1950s-2010s  
b. 4 f. 3    *Anya* circa 1965  
b. 2 f. 6    *Arms and the Man* 1982  
b. 2 f. 7    *As You Like It* 1983  
b. 3 f. 3    *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* 1965  
b. 2 f. 8    *Brigadoon* 1986  
b. 2 f. 9    *Camelot* 1996-1997  
b. 4 f. 4    *The Cherry Orchard* 1996  
b. 4 f. 5    *Cinderella* 1994  
b. 2 f. 10    *Coriolanus* 1981  
b. 4 f. 6    *Così Fan Tutte* 1967  
b. 2 f. 11    *The Country Wife* circa 1964  
b. 2 f. 12    *Cyrano de Bergerac* 1962-1963  
b. 4 f. 7    *The Devils* 1961  
b. 2 f. 13    *Don Quixote* 1985  
b. 2 f. 14    *Faust* 1974  
b. 3 f. 1    *Hamlet* circa 1957  
b. 4 f. 8    *Hansel and Gretel* 1994  
b. 3 f. 2    *Henry IV* 1965  
b. 4 f. 10    *The Importance of Being Earnest* 1965  
b. 3 f. 4    *Iolanthe* circa 1962  
b. 3 f. 5    *King Lear* 2007  
b. 4 f. 12    *London Assurance* 2007  
              *Manon Lescaut*  
b. 3 f. 7    1980  
b. 4 f. 13    1980  
b. 3 f. 8    *Maria Stuarda* 1977  
b. 4 f. 9    *Il Matrimonio Segreto* 1965  
b. 3 f. 9    *Measure for Measure* 1992  
b. 4 f. 14    *Much Ado About Nothing* 1960, 1983  
b. 3 f. 10    *The Nutcracker* 1987  
b. 3 f. 11    *Oedipus Rex* circa 1991  
b. 3 f. 6    *Les Oiseaux* 1987

Designs (cont.)

Costume (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 12 *Romeo and Juliet* 1961
- b. 4 f. 15 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* 1967
- b. 4 f. 16 *Scoundrel* undated
- The Sleeping Beauty*
- b. 3 f. 13 1976-1977
- b. 4 f. 17 2016
- b. 4 f. 18 *The Snow Maiden* 1997
- b. 3 f. 14 *Swan Lake* circa 1967
- b. 4 f. 11 *La Sylphide* 1984
- b. 3 f. 15 *The Taming of the Shrew* 1956-circa 1973
- b. 4 f. 19 *The Tempest* circa 1982
- b. 3 f. 16 *The Three Musketeers* circa 1968
- b. 3 f. 17 *Titus Andronicus* 1955
- b. 3 f. 18 *Troilus and Cressida* 1963
- b. 4 f. 20 *Tom Lacy* undated
- b. 4 f. 21 *Twelfth Night* 1958
- b. 3 f. 19 *Yugen* 1965
- b. 4 f. 22 *The Way of the World* circa 1969
- b. 3 f. 20 *William Tell* 1966

Scenic

General

- t. 8 undated
- b. 3 f. 21 1950s-2010s
- b. 1 f. 8 1970s-2010
- o. 1 1980-circa 1990s
- b. 4 f. 23 *Ariadne auf Naxos* undated
- b. 3 f. 22 *As You Like It* 1983
- t. 8 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* 1988
- t. 8 *Beauty and the Beast* 1992
- t. 1 *Brigadoon* 1986
- t. 9 *Camelot* 1996
- b. 4 f. 24 *The Cherry Orchard* 1996
- t. 4 *A Christmas Carol* circa 1995
- Copélia*
- b. 3 f. 23 circa 1992
- t. 9 1992
- b. 4 f. 25 *Così fan tutte* 1967
- Don Pasquale*
- b. 3 f. 25 1978
- b. 8 f. 1 circa 1978
- t. 4 *Don Quixote* 1985

Designs (cont.)

Scenic (cont.)

*Giselle*

- t. 10 1970
- o. 1 1991
- t. 4 *The Glass Menagerie* 1988
- b. 3 f. 26 *Henry IV* 1965
- t. 2 *The Importance of Being Earnest* 2010
- t. 11 *The Kirk* undated
- t. 11 *Lilac Garden* 1991
- b. 3 f. 27 *Manon Lescaut* 1980
- The Merry Widow*
- t. 3 1986
- b. 8 f. 2 circa 1986
- b. 3 f. 28 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* circa 1968-circa 1984
- b. 4 f. 26 *Mother Goose* undated
- t. 4 *Much Ado About Nothing* 1998
- t. 12 *No Time for Comedy* 1987
- t. 5 *The Nutcracker* 1981-1990
- b. 3 f. 23 *Pelléas et Mélisande* circa 1970-1972
- b. 4 f. 27 *Pelléas et Mélisande* circa 1970-1972
- b. 3 f. 29 *The Prince of the Pagodas* 1957
- Real Estate*
- b. 1 f. 9 1987
- t. 11 1987
- b. 3 f. 30 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* 1967
- The Sleeping Beauty*
- t. 6 2015-2016
- b. 3 f. 31 2016
- b. 3 f. 32 *The Snow Maiden* 1997-1998
- t. 10 *South Pacific* 1986-1987
- t. 3 *La Sylphide* 1984
- b. 3 f. 33 *The Tempest* 1962
- b. 1 f. 10 *Toad of Toad Hall* circa 1951
- b. 3 f. 34 *La Traviata* 1993
- t. 10 *Twelfth Night* 1959

Other Designers

- b. 8 f. 1 circa 1980s
- t. 7 Benson, Susan 1981
- t. 7 Brass Rubbings 1964
- b. 8 f. 2-5 Messel, Oliver circa 1950s

Production Files

- b. 5 f. 1-2 *Amadeus Production Bible* 1995

Production Files (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 3 *Brigadoon Production Bible* 1985-1986
- b. 5 f. 4 *Camelot* 1983-1987
- b. 5 f. 5 Clippings 1958, 2010
- b. 5 f. 6 Correspondence 1960-2014
- b. 5 f. 7 *La Sylphide Production Bible* 1982-1983, 1989
- b. 5 f. 8 Photographs 1990s-2010s
  - b. 6 Postcard Album circa 1880s-circa 1900
- b. 5 f. 9 *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* 1967
- b. 5 f. 10 *The Snow Maiden Production Bible* 1997
- b. 7 f. 1-2 *South Pacific Production Bible* 1956-1987
- b. 7 f. 3 Tiffany & Co. Christmas Window Display circa 2010

Publications

- b. 7 f. 4 *Amadeus Folio of Costume Designs* 1995  
With inscription by Heeley dated 2005.
- b. 7 f. 5 *A Collection of Six Frameable Felines by Desmond Heeley* 2000
- b. 7 f. 6 *Dross Into Gold: The Theatre Alchemy of Desmond Heeley* 1997  
Catalog of The Gallery/Stratford exhibition on Heeley.