Summary

Creator: Friedman, Michael (Composer)

Title: Michael Friedman papers

Date: 1980-2018

Size: 3.87 linear feet (11 boxes)

Source: Donated by Marion Young, Friedman's sister and Executor, 2018.

Abstract: Michael Friedman (1975-2017) was an American theater composer and lyricist, best known for works such as Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson, Pretty Filthy, and The Fortress of Solitude. He was also a co-founder of The Civilians, a theatrical troupe. The Michael Friedman papers, dating from 1980 to 2018, document the composer's career and development, mainly from the late 1990s to his death in 2017. Friedman's life and work is revealed through project files, notes, scores, letters, cards, school papers, business records, clippings, programs, photographs, and sound and video recordings.

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:

Sound and video recordings are unavailable pending digitization. Electronic records are unavailable.


Language of the Material: English

Creator History

John Michael Friedman (1975-2017) was an American composer and lyricist, best known for theater works such as Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson, Pretty Filthy, and The Fortress of Solitude. Adept in multiple styles and genres of music, he was known for his interest in a wide array of subject matter, particularly politics and history.

Friedman was born in Boston but grew up in Philadelphia, where he attended the Germantown Friends School. He learned piano and cello as a child, and spent summers at the Kinhaven Music School in Weston, Vermont.

Friedman entered Harvard University majoring in history and literature, but his focus changed after taking a composition class with Elizabeth Swados, who became his mentor and prime influence. Swados helped him find work and make connections in the theater world, and Friedman moved to New York after his graduation. Swados also hired Friedman as music director for two projects, her piece Cantata 2000 (1997) and her music for a production of Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle (1998).

Friedman met the writer-director Steve Cosson, a frequent collaborator, in the late-1990s, and in 2001 the two were among the founding members of the theatrical troupe The Civilians, which became the home for many Friedman works. Among his musicals workshopped and performed by The Civilians were Canard Canard Goose, Gone Missing, Paris Commune, The Great Immensity, Pretty Filthy, (I Am) Nobody's Lunch, and This Beautiful City.

Friedman also had a long association with The Public Theater. In addition to commissioning music for several Shakespeare productions (including Cymbeline, Love's Labours Lost, The Tempest, and The Seagull for Shakespeare in the Park), The Public produced Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson (which also had a brief Broadway run in 2010) and The Fortress Of Solitude (based on the novel by Jonathan Lethem). Friedman was featured by The Public as an artist-in-residence and also curated the theater's Public Forum series. Other companies that presented Friedman's work included the New York Theatre Workshop, The Roundabout Theatre Co., Second Stage, Soho Rep, Theater for a New Audience, Signature, The Acting Company, The Williamstown Theatre Festival, and La Jolla Playhouse.

In 2017, Friedman was the artistic director of the New York City Center's Encores! Off-Center program, which presents concert performances of Off-Broadway musicals. Under Friedman's direction, the series presented Assassins, The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin, and Really Rosie.

Friedman wrote the scores for the 2008 Off-Broadway musical The Drunken City, the 2010 Signature Theatre revival of Angels in America, and the Broadway adaptation of Misery (2015-2016). Among Friedman's other works (as composer, composer/lyricist, or musical director) were Saved, Lysistrata, God Hates The Irish: The Ballad Of Armless Johnny, The Essential Alice In Wonderland, Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play, In The Bubble, Landscape Of The Body, The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade, State Of The Union, The Abominables, Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge, and In The Footprint. He also scored three films, On Common Ground (2001), Affair Game (2006) and Emile Norman: By His Own Design (2007).

Friedman died of complications from HIV/AIDS in 2017.

Scope and Content Note
The Michael Friedman papers, dating from 1980 to 2018, document the composer's career and development, mainly from the late 1990s to his death in 2017. Friedman's life and work is revealed through project files, notes, scores, letters, school papers, business records, programs, clippings, photographs, and sound and video recordings. Posthumous content was contributed by Friedman's sister, Marion Young.

The Project Files document some of Friedman's work and activities, mainly productions such as *The Fortress Of Solitude*, *In The Bubble*, and *Pretty Filthy*, but also including the City Center Encores series and a lectureship at Princeton University. The files hold varying content, such as notes, partial scores, scripts, clippings, contracts, and letters. Projects with the most content are *The Fortress Of Solitude, Landscape Of The Body, Post Office, Saved*, and *This Beautiful City*. Scores, notes, and business records elsewhere in the collection also contain project-related material.

Notes, in the form of loose pages and notebooks, are comprised of lyrics, meeting notes, plot ideas, rehearsal notes, performance notes, occasional journal entries, and phone contact lists. Among the projects discussed in the notes are *Pretty Filthy* (2010), *The Tempest* (2015), *The Fortress Of Solitude* (2014), *This Beautiful City* (2007-2008), and the City Center Encores presentation of *Assassins* (2017). Friedman used a few notebooks during the last few months of his life while he was in hospital. One (found with his memorial program in box 11, folder 2) outlines what he wanted for his memorial service.

Scores in paper form are not voluminous and do not represent a large portion of Friedman's work. They contain early exercises and instrumental works from the 1980s and 1990s; arrangements Friedman created for Elizabeth Swados's score for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *her Cantata 2000*; notes and sketches for Friedman's setting of the *Song Of Songs*; other notes, sketches, and song ideas; and, in some cases, finished untitled instrumental or vocal works. Most of Friedman's theater work here is in the form of lead sheets or arrangements for vocal, piano, and perhaps one or two other instruments. Some finished scores are printed from notation software, but most of the scores present are written lead sheets, full scores, and (in only a few cases) parts. Also present is published sheet and instrumental music collected by Friedman.

Letters and Cards consist primarily of brief congratulatory notes or greeting cards from friends and colleagues. There is also a set of printed emails from Friedman to his friend Rebecca Traister, written while he was working at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in the summer of 1999.

School Papers contain writings, drawings, and programs from Friedman's days at the Germantown Friends School, the Kinhaven Music School, and Harvard University. The Harvard file contains many programs for events and performances featuring Friedman as composer, performer, or both.

Business Records primarily contain contracts between Friedman, his co-creators, producers, and presenters. They also hold files regarding Friedman's work with The Civilians and The Public Theater; a small set of financial records including income reports, tax returns, and royalty statements; and contact lists of all names associated with productions Friedman worked on.

The Clippings and Programs files do not represent a comprehensive set of publicity or documentation of Friedman's career. It does, however, contain a review and articles Friedman wrote for the *London Review of Books* (2005), *Contemporary Theatre Review* (2006), and *Harvard Magazine* (2013). It also holds Friedman's memorial program.

The Photographs include production shots of *In The Bubble, Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson, and Marate/Sade*; a photo of Friedman with his colleague Steve Cosson; and a photo of students at the Kinhaven Music School, from around 1989.
Sound and video recordings consist of rehearsals and performances, as well as demonstrations and works-in-progress. Friedman works documented (mostly in sound recordings) are *In The Bubble*, *The Fortress Of Solitude*, *Gone Missing*, and *Paris Commune*, as well as plays or musicals for which Friedman served as musical director, such as *Falsettos*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Essential Alice In Wonderland*, *Romeo And Juliet*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Lysistrata*, and *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*. Also present is a working copy of the film *Affair Game*, as well as demos and final versions of Friedman's score for it; Friedman performances at the Kinhaven Music School and Harvard University; and a recording of holiday music by Elizabeth Swados on which Friedman may be present. All are audio recordings unless otherwise noted.

**Key Terms**

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**
- Business records
- Clippings (information artifacts)
- Contracts
- Correspondence
- Notes (documents)
- Photographs
- Programs (documents)
- Scores (documents for music)
- Sound recordings
- Video recordings (physical artifacts)

**Occupations**
- Composers
- Lyricists.

**Subjects**
- Musical theater -- United States
- Off-Broadway theater

**Names**
- Friedman, Michael (Composer)
- Civilians (Theater company)
Container List

Project Files 1999-2017

b. 1 f. 1 *Brand New Kid* 2006
Tracklist for a recording of songs from the show.

b. 1 f. 2 *City Center Encores* 2017
Notes.

b. 1 f. 3 *The Essential Alice In Wonderland* 2006

b. 1 f. 4 *The Fortress Of Solitude* 2006, 2012
Photographs, research material, notes, and scores.

b. 1 f. 5 *God Hates The Irish: The Ballad Of Armless Johnny* 2005-2006
Scores and greeting cards.

b. 1 f. 6 *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame* 2001
A production in Cuba.

b. 1 f. 7 *In The Bubble* 2005-2007

b. 1 f. 8 *Landscape Of The Body* 2003, 2005
Contains scores and the full script.

b. 2 f. 1 *Paris Commune* 2004
Clippings and research.

b. 1 f. 9 *Post Office* 2009-2010
Piano-vocal scores.

Lead sheets and research material.

b. 3 f. 2 *Princeton University Lapidus Lectureship* 2016
Class assignments on Irving Berlin, with Friedman's comments.

b. 3 f. 3 *Saved* 2007-2010

b. 3 f. 4 *The Seagull* 2001
For Shakespeare In The Park. Contains sketches and research.

b. 3 f. 5 *This Beautiful City* 2006-2010
Contracts and research.

Notes and Notebooks 2000-2017

b. 3 f. 6 2000-2017
Loose notes, ticket stubs, library receipts.

b. 3 f. 7-9 2002-2003, 2011

b. 4 f. 1-7 2003, 2005, 2010-2017

b. 5 f. 1 Undated

Scores 1980-2017

b. 5 f. 2 *Cantata 2000 by Elizabeth Swados* 1997
Arrangements by Friedman of music by Swados.
Lead sheets and notes.

b. 5 f. 3 *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* 1998
Music by Elizabeth Swados. Arrangements for clarinet, guitar, and piano by Friedman.

b. 5 f. 4 *Icarus* 1998
For mixed choir.

b. 6 f. 1 *Nocturne For Voice And Cello* 1995

b. 2 f. 2 *Oboe Quintet* - “Five Oboes!?” 1992
Scores (cont.)

b. 5 f. 5  
*Song Of Songs*  
Lead sheets and notes.

b. 5 f. 6  
*String Quartet #2*  
Full score and parts.

b. 6 f. 2  
*Suite For Brass*  
Full score and parts.

b. 5 f. 7-10  
Sketches and Song Ideas 1980s-2017
b. 6 f. 3-5  
Some in notebooks, some loose.

b. 8 f. 1  

b. 8 f. 2-3  
Sheet Music 1990s-2017  
For songs and instrumental music by other composers.

b. 8 f. 4-5  

b. 8 f. 6  
b. 9 f. 1  

b. 9 f. 2-3  
Harvard University 1993-1997

Business Records 1997-2017
b. 9 f. 4  
The Civilians 2009-2014  
Includes by-laws.

b. 9 f. 5  
Contact Sheets 1997-2006  
Lists of contacts for everyone associated with theatrical productions.

b. 9 f. 1-6  
Contracts 2004-2016
b. 10 f. 1-4  

b. 10 f. 5  
Financial Records 2003-2014  
Tax returns, royalty statements, income reports from management.

b. 10 f. 6  
The Public Theater 2016-2017
b. 11 f. 1-2  
Clippings and Programs 2005-2018
b. 11 f. 3  
Photographs Early 1990s - 2010

Sound and Video Recordings 1982-2012 (All are audio recordings unless noted otherwise.)