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Guide to the

John Epperson collection of Lypsinka ephemera

1994-2005

*T-Mss 2004-018

Compiled by Leslie Reyman, January 2013

Summary

Creator: Epperson, John, 1955-

Title: John Epperson collection of Lypsinka ephemera, 1994-2005

Size: .42 linear foot (1 box)

Source: Donated by John Epperson in 2004

Abstract: John Epperson (1955-) is a gender illusionist who created Lypsinka in 1984 and continues to entertain as her as of 2012. Lypsinka performs in shows that are elaborately created sound-plays with moods, themes and narrative threads culled from movie dialogue and old records. Lypsinka does not utter a sound, but instead uses lip-synching along with facial expressions and movement to set the tone of the show.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying and photography will apply. Advance notice may be required.

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Preferred citation: John Epperson collection of Lypsinka ephemera, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator history

John Epperson was born April 24, 1955 in Hazelhurst, Mississippi. His father, John Epperson, Sr., was a postal carrier; his mother, Joyce was a housewife and entrepreneur. Epperson has two older sisters. After high school, he attended Presbyterian-associated Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. He arrived in New York City in 1978 and got a job as a rehearsal pianist for the American Ballet Theater.

Epperson created parody musicals in which he wrote the book, music, and lyrics. Early productions were Ballet of the Dolls (1985) and Dial "M" for Model (1986). The shows were produced at the East Village's Pyramid Club and La Mama ETC (Experimental Theater Company).

Prior to this, Epperson first went on stage at the Show Club in 1984, lip-synching just a couple of songs. Lypsinka's theatrical career began in the show *I Could Go on Lip-Sinking!* an after-show addition for Charles Busch's *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*, at the Off-Broadway theater the Provincetown Playhouse on MacDougal Street (1985)—the show lasted a year. Also in 1985, Lypsinka made her debut at Wigstock, an outdoor drag festival in Tompkins Square Park in the East Village of New York City.

Epperson then went on to star in *The Many Moods of Lypsinka* (1988), *I Could Go On Lypsinking* (1988), In 2003, *I Could Go On Lip-Synching* premiered in Los Angeles, with Madonna financing the show, and *The Fabulous Lypsinka Show* (1991).

Other early shows include; *Lypsinka! Now It Can Be Lip-Synched* (1992) and *Lypsinka! A Day in the Life* (1993) which was performed at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City, after running as a New York Theatre Workshop the previous season. Then came the production *The Fabulous Lypsinka Show* (1994). *As I Lay Lip-Synching* was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Theater Festival (Scotland) in 1994 and in San Francisco (1995). In 2003 it premiered at the Minetta Lane Theatre in New York City. *Lypsinka Must Be Destroyed! (The First Farewell)* (1996) was only performed in San Francisco.

Lypsinka IS Harriet Craig, a musical drama of sorts, followed a ruthless wife and her quest for a clean house and a well-run life. The character Harriet Craig, was played on film by Joan Crawford in 1950, in the third version of a play by George Kelly, *Craig's Wife*. The New York Times said, "[Epperson's] Harriet Craig becomes a free-ranging commentary on perceptions of feminine identity, stardom and sexuality in the 1950s". Harriet Craig was Lypsinka's first non-lip-synching role. The show began in the summer of 1997, was extended twice, and then reappeared in February 1998, both times at Mother, a club in the Meat-Packing District in Manhattan.

Lypsinka Boxed Set premiered in 2000 in New York City. It was a greatest hits with new material. *The Passion of the Crawford* was a 2005 show in which Lypsinka portrayed Joan Crawford. The plot has Crawford being interviewed by John Springer (Steve Cuiffo in this role) in 1973 at Town Hall. The show was later seen in Washington, DC in 2007.

Lypsinka has had a varied career, which included modeling for Thierry Mugler, Valentino, Pauline Trigere, Barney's New York, and many others. She was a spokesperson for Gap and L.A. Eyeworks. Lypsinka was featured in George Michael's video *Too Funky* and two HBO specials: *On the Ledge* and *Sandra, After Dark*. She has also starred in the following movies: *Witch Hunt* (1994), *Another Gay Movie* (2006), and *Another Gay Sequel: Gays Gone Wild* (2008). Epperson has been featured as himself and as other characters in the following movies: *Red Ribbon Blues* (1996), *Angels in America* (2003), *Kinsey* (2004), *Black Swan* (2011). Epperson has also appeared in several documentaries, including: *Wigstock: The Movie* (1996), *Dragtime* (1997), and *Beauty in a Jar* (2003) among others.

My Deah, written by Epperson, is a play based upon the story of Medea, but set in the American South. The show had several readings and was produced as a benefit for the Whitman-Walker Clinic in 2004. In October 2006 it was presented as a full production at the June Havoc Theater in New York City. Epperson then turned his attention to *Legends!* (2010). The staged reading was re-written by Epperson, with more contemporary references and starred Lypsinka, Charles Busch and Whoopi Goldberg at a benefit reading for the Friends In Deed. Later in Washington DC it co-starred James Lecesne opposite Lypsinka.

John Epperson was a featured actor in *Show Trash* (2003) which premiered at Joe's Pub. *An Evening With Lypsinka's Maid*, another show created by and starring Epperson, premiered in 2012.

Source:

James Fisher, Editor, *We Will Be Citizens: New Essays on Gay and Lesbian Theatre*, 2008, p. 177

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Epperson

Scope and content note

The collection contains clippings from magazines (national and New York City) and newspapers. These clippings include interview/articles, reviews, and advertisements. Also included are contracts, one script and a few programs.

The collection DOES NOT include: sound cues, lighting scripts, photographs or anything that would show the process Epperson used in creating his shows. There are no personal items.

Arrangement

Alphabetical by name, title and subject.

Key terms

Subjects

Female impersonators

Names

Epperson, John, 1955-

Special formats

Clippings

Places

East Village (New York, N.Y.)

Events

Wigstock (Festival)

Container list

- b.1 f.1 Advertisements, 1994-2004
- b.1 f.2 Contracts, 1998-2003
- b.1 f.3 Correspondence, 1997-2005
- b.1 f.4 *Dial "M" for Model*, 1986
- b.1 f.5 Ephemera, undated
- b.1 f.6 Interviews, 1997-2005
- b.1 f.7 *Playbill*, 1993, 2003
- b.1 f.8 Programs, 2000-2004
- b.1 f.9 Reviews, 2001-2004
- b.1 f.10 *The Silver Screening Test*, undated
a short play that Epperson submitted to his college newspaper, The Brogue