

**The New York Public Library
The Library for the Performing Arts
The Billy Rose Theatre Division**

**Nat Karson Designs
1931-1949
*T-VIM 2011-101**

Summary

- Main entry:** Karson, Nat
- Title:** Nat Karson Designs, 1931-1949
- Size:** 5 linear feet (6 boxes)
- Abstract:** Originals and copies of color costume and set designs; sketches and costume plots; technical drawings; and storyboards by Nat Karson, producer and designer of costumes, sets, and lighting in theatrical and television productions in New York. Materials in this collection date from 1931 to 1949. The collection also includes 2 sketchbooks of set designs, several cut-outs of stage models, 1 caricature, 2 posters, and some black & white photographs.
- Preferred citation:** Nat Karson Designs, *T-VIM 2011-101, The Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Biographical note

Nat Karson, producer and designer of costumes, sets, and lighting in theatrical and television productions in New York, was born in Zurich, Switzerland in 1908. He moved with his family to Chicago at an early age, where he received his education, including a scholarship at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Karson moved to New York in 1929 and soon began working in theatre productions at the Federal Theatre Project, most notably the all-black-cast production of *Macbeth* (1936) directed by Orson Welles. Karson also produced and created set, costume, and lighting designs for theatrical productions on Broadway and elsewhere, such as the 1939 New York World's Fair. During 1936-1943 he served as the art director of Radio City Music Hall, and in 1948 he became consultant producer at the Columbia Broadcasting Company. His credits include *The Hot Mikado* (1939), *Keep Off the Grass* (1940), and *Hamlet* at the Kronberg Festival in Denmark (1949).

Nat Karson died in New York City in 1954.

Scope and content note

Approximately 600 original color costume and set designs; sketches and costume plots; technical drawings; and storyboards on paper, tracing paper, board, and plastic sheets. Technical drawings are both originals and copies, and include elevations, electric layouts, and floor plans. The collection also includes 2 sketchbooks of set designs, several cut-outs of stage models, 1 caricature, 2 posters, and some black and white photographs. Many costume designs include swatches or notion samples, as well as notes with costume details on the margins or typed and attached to the design. Most of the set designs are unlabeled and unidentified. Many designs are signed.

Container list

| <u>Box</u> | <u>Fol</u> | |
|------------|------------|--|
| 1 | 1 | A.N.T.A. Benefit, undated 1 color set design on board, and copy of hanging plan. |
| 5 | 1 | <i>Break It Up</i> , undated Color set designs and sketches on tracing paper, graph paper and board. |
| | 2 | <i>A Connecticut Yankee</i> , 1943 Sketches and color set designs on tracing paper and board. |
| | 3 | <i>Dear Murderer</i> , undated Originals and copies of technical drawings, including elevations, cross sections, and door details. |
| | 4 | Caricature of Morris Gest, undated Color caricature, mounted. |
| 1 | 2 | <i>Fashions of the Times</i> , 1948 or 1949 1 color set design on board. |
| | 3 | <i>The Front Page</i> , 1946 2 cut-outs of stage models, electric layouts, property plots, and blueprint copies of stage plans. |
| 5 | 5 | <i>Hamlet</i> , 1949 Originals and copies of technical drawings, including elevations, floor plans, and statue designs. Also includes 2 posters from the show's performances in Helsinki and Copenhagen. |
| | 6-8 | <i>High Kickers</i> , 1941 Color costume designs on paper and board, some with swatches and costume notes attached. Folder 8 contains set designs. |
| 1 | 4-5 | <i>The Hot Mikado</i> , 1939 Color costume designs on board, some with swatches. Includes 2 black & white photographs of performers in costume. |
| 6 | 1-3 | <i>Keep Off the Grass</i> , 1940 Color costume designs on board. Many include swatches and notion samples. |
| 1 | 6 | <i>Liliom</i> , 1940 Color set designs on board. |
| | 7 | <i>Macbeth</i> , 1936 Color costume designs. |
| 2 | 1-7 | <i>Nellie Bly</i> , 1946 Notes, sketches and color costume designs on board and paper. Includes set designs and a cut-out of a stage model. |
| | 8 | <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , undated Color costume designs. |
| 2 | 8 | <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , undated Color costume designs. |
| 3 | 1-2 | <i>Skating Vanities</i> , 1948-1949 Color costume designs on tracing paper or board, some with swatches. Includes costume schedules, sketches, props and set pieces, and 1 black & white photograph of a stage model. |
| 6 | 4 | Stage plans, 1931 Blueprint photocopies of blank stage plans of various theatres, not modified for any particular show. |
| | 5 | Storyboards and written description of unidentified show, undated Originals and negative photostats. Main character is Andy Martin / Andre Martino. |

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| 6 | | <i>Sweet Bye and Bye</i> , 1946 |
| | | Costume plots, and blueprint photocopies of elevations and design details in large scale. |
| 3 | 3-6 | Unidentified shows, undated |
| | | 1 costume, and set designs. Folder 4 contains 4 color designs on plastic sheets, where color is flaking: HANDLE WITH CARE. |
| 4 | 1-7 | Unidentified shows, undated (Set designs.) |
| 6 | 7-9 | Unidentified shows, undated (Set designs.) |