

**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS**  
**THE BILLY ROSE THEATRE COLLECTION**

**Robert Klein, 1892-1958**  
**Papers, 1909-1957**

\*T-Mss 1958-001  
MER/RCC : 2/1995

**MAIN ENTRY:** Robert Klein, 1892-1958

**TITLE:** Robert Klein Papers, 1909-1957

**SIZE:** 3.13 lf. (8 boxes)

**ACCESS:** Unrestricted

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:** Robert Klein, stage director and professor, was born in Germany in 1892. He left Germany in 1932 finding the intellectual and political climate of Hitler's regime too oppressive. In 1939 he emigrated to the United States from London . In the United States he worked as a director and professor and teacher of drama in American colleges and universities until his death in 1958.

**DESCRIPTION:** The Robert Klein Papers consist of correspondence, writings, personal papers and ephemera documenting his career in the theater both in Europe and in the United States. The papers span the years 1909-1957 and are in German, English and some in French. Much of the materials are from before Klein left Germany and concern his business relationship with Max and Edmund Reinhardt.

**ROBERT KLEIN PAPERS**

## INTRODUCTION

The Robert Klein Papers were donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Collection by the estate of Robert Klein. They arrived ca. 1958, although the exact date is unknown. The papers are in German, English and some French. Some of the papers were fragile and brittle and in need of conservation. Archival photocopying was necessary in these cases to preserve the materials. Other items were encapsulated in mylar since they had many handwritten notes and annotations. The papers were reprocessed according to archival standards in 1994.

## ARRANGEMENT NOTE

The Robert Klein Papers are arranged in seven series:

- Series I - Personal Papers
- Series II - Correspondence
- Series III - Organizations
- Series IV - Projects
- Series V - Writings
- Series VI - Ephemera
- Series VII - Scrapbooks

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Robert Klein, director, professor and writer was born in Mannheim, Germany in 1892. He received his Ph.D. at the University of Munich by writing a history of the theater. During the 1920's he was well-known in Germany as the owner of theatres in Berlin. In the late 1920's he worked with Max and Edmund Reinhardt on theatrical productions. Finding the intellectual climate of Germany too stifling for his artistic personality, he left Germany for Switzerland in 1932. After a short respite there, he went to London in 1933 where he worked as a writer, director and producer for 6 years. While in London he wrote the play *Scandal in Assyria* with Gerald Bullett and Walter Hasenclever under the pseudonym, Axel Kjellstrom. This play was produced in 1939 and directed by John Gielgud.

In 1939 he emigrated to the United States, arriving in New York City. One of his first accomplishments in America was the organization of the studio theater of the New School of Social Research with Erwin Piscator. During the studio's early years Klein worked directing and producing plays with Piscator and others. 1943 was the beginning of a number of positions on the faculty of various colleges in the eastern part of the United States. Among these were Rollins College, Connecticut College, Goddard College and Cooper Union. It is evident that despite Klein's credentials, he often augmented his salary by directing amateur high school drama groups in their annual productions.

Klein was a Shavian enthusiast and also a friend of George Bernard Shaw. Many of the plays which he produced and directed throughout his career were Shaw plays. Other project ideas of Robert Klein were often based on his love of Shaw's works. For example, the papers document an idea of Klein's to create a Shaw Festival which would produce all the works of George Bernard Shaw using a repertory company of actors chosen by Robert Klein.

In 1954, while producing *Time for a Change* a play based on Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, Klein drew the notice of the anti-communists. He ran into problems concerning dialogue contained in the play that was felt to be communistic in its philosophy. After much discussion and editorial license from the president of Cooper Union and Lawrence Langner, one of the board members, the play went on. Klein and other theater professionals were incensed with the changes claiming that the dialogue, written by Aristophanes, was inappropriately labeled.

Robert Klein died in 1958 in Forest Hills, New York.

## CHRONOLOGY

1892	Robert Klein born in Mannheim, Germany
1914	Received Ph.D. from the University of Munich
1926?-1929?	General manager for the Max Reinhardt theatres
1932	Left Germany because of political climate, emigrated to Switzerland
1933	Moved to London
1933-1939	Spent these years writing, producing and directing plays in London
1935	Began working on a project to create a Shaw Festival
1937	Produced <i>What Should a Husband Do?</i> at the Brighton Theatre Royal in England.
1939	<i>Scandal in Assyria</i> written by Klein, Hasenclever and Bullet under the pseudonym Axel Kjellstrom was produced in London, directed by John Gielgud.
1939	Came to New York City
1939	Helped to organize and direct the studio theater at the New School for Social Research
June 1940	Directed the senior class of Wells College in the production of <i>The Family Reunion</i>
Dec. 1940	Part of the production staff for <i>King Lear</i> by the studio theater at the New School for Social Research.
June 1941	Directed <i>Any Day Now</i> by Philip Yordan for the Studio Theatre
1943	Appointed to the staff of the drama department at Rollins College Directed Rollins College drama group.
1943-1944	Directed plays and the glee club of Cheshire Academy (Cheshire, Connecticut)
1944	Visiting professor at Connecticut College summer session.

July 1944	Directed <i>Pygmalion</i> with the Palmer Players of Connecticut College.
Sept. 1944	Produced <i>The Swan</i> with the Palmer Players of Connecticut College
1944-1945	Limited partnership with Cheryl Crawford for her production of <i>The Tempest</i>
1945	Directed <i>You Can't Take it With You</i> with the Kimberly School and the Montclair Academy.
1946-1950	On faculty at Goddard College. Directed the Goddard Players productions
August 1951	Planned stage production of the screenplay <i>Ninotchka</i>
March 1952	Directed the play <i>Stage Door</i> for the Berkeley Institute Dramatic Club
1952-1954	On faculty at Cooper Union.
1954	Directed <i>Time for a Change</i> , based on Aristophanes' play, <i>Ecclesiazusae</i> at the Forum Theatre at Cooper Union.
June 1954	Led roundtable discussion on theater at the annual Friendship Week of the American-European Friendship Association
1957	Negotiations for rights for European production of <i>Scandal in Assyria</i>
1958	Robert Klein died in Forest Hills, Queens, New York.

#### SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Robert Klein papers consist of both personal and professional correspondence, papers from organizational affiliations both in the United States and Europe, materials regarding projects which were completed, as well as ideas for projects which never materialized, articles written by Robert Klein and ephemera documenting his career both in the United States and in Europe. The materials are both in English and German and there is much in the collection from the 1930's when Robert Klein worked for Max and Edmund Reinhardt. The collection spans the years 1909-1957 and documents his full career and varied interests. After emigrating to the United States it is apparent from the papers that Klein contained much of his work to the college and university level. Whether this was by choice or need was not readily found in the papers, though there is some sense that he often solicited employment. Of special note are the papers in the projects series documenting the controversy over the play *Ecclesiazusae* by Aristophanes which was produced at Cooper Union under the title *Time for a Change*. The fear of the academic and theatrical community over possible misinterpretation of communist overtones in the play created problems for Klein in the production of this work.

#### SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I - Personal Papers [ca.1910-1939] .21 lf. (1 box)

This series contains family correspondence, a biographical sketch of Robert Klein and some business related papers including contracts and other theatrical documents. There are also some unsigned drawings.

Series II - Correspondence [1909-1957] .84 lf. (2 boxes)

This series contains correspondence to Robert Klein from friends and business associates throughout his life. Included is much correspondence dealing with his years in the German theater with Max and Edmund Reinhardt. Of special note is the correspondence with Erwin Piscator and the Dramatic Workshop. There is some correspondence with George Bernard Shaw due to his extensive work with Shaw plays. Other correspondents include: Elisabeth Bergner, Howard Lindsay, Ferenc Molnar, Hans Rothe, Karl Voll Moeller, and Philip Jordan.

Series III - Organizations [1937-1956] .42 lf. (1 box)

This series contains correspondence, flyers, notes and newsletters pertaining to Robert Klein's association with various organizations. Included are membership groups and corporations, as well as universities where he was employed as a professor and theater director. Most of the papers are from universities where he was a member of the faculty. These include: Connecticut College, Cooper Union, Goddard College, Middlebury College and Rollins College. Also included are notes and correspondence dealing with the Dramatic Workshop and the Open Forum Speakers Bureau in Boston, Massachusetts.

Series IV - Projects [1936-1956] .84 lf. (2 boxes)

This series contains notes, production ideas, correspondence, clippings, scripts and programs for book projects, curriculum development ideas, ideas for plays, and plays produced by Robert Klein both professionally and at colleges in the United States. Of special note are the files on the play *Time For A Change* which was an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, and the files for *Scandal in Assyria*. *Time For A Change*, produced in 1953-1954, caused major controversy at Cooper Union when the president of the college and Lawrence Langner insisted upon censoring part of the text because it was thought to include communist ideology. *Scandal in Assyria* was written by Axel Kjellstrom ( the pseudonym for Robert Klein, Gerald Bullett and Walter Hasenclever) produced in London in 1939 and directed by John Gielgud. The play is a satire and parodies the political situation in Germany at the time. However, much of the correspondence is from 1957 and concerns a later European production. Quite a few of his projects are related to the playwright Bernard Shaw. A Shavian enthusiast, Klein not only produced many of Shaw's works but also planned a book on Shaw and a festival based on the plays of Shaw.

Series V - Writings [1938-1957] .42 lf. (1 box)

This series contains articles, notes and biographical writings by Robert Klein, both in English and in German. Most of his materials relate to theater although some writings of the thirties delve into European politics, England's policy of appeasement, the rise of Adolph Hitler and the nazi movement.

Series VI - Ephemera [1920-1957] .38 lf. (.75 box)

This series contains newsletters, clippings, programs, photographs and miscellaneous materials documenting Robert Klein's life and career. Most of the clippings are from German newspapers and are in German. English language clippings are in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection clipping files.

Series VII - Scrapbooks [1939-1946] .04 lf. (.25 box)

This series contains one scrapbook belonging to Robert Klein. The scrapbook has been disassembled and preservation photocopying has replaced the original materials when appropriate. Original sketches, by Robert Klein have been encapsulated, preserved in their original form.