Guide to the
Zita Johann papers
1924-1954
*T-Mss 1999-008

Compiled by Lauren Dzura, Palmer School, 2012, April 2012

Summary

Creator: Johann, Zita, 1904-1993

Title: Zita Johann papers, 1924-1954

Size: 2.31 linear feet (6 boxes)

Source: Donated by Judith Leroux, 1999 and 2006.

Abstract: Zita Johann was a stage and film actress best known for her role in the 1932 film The Mummy with Boris Karloff. Johann debuted on Broadway in 1924 and made her first film appearance in 1931. After making seven films, Johann left Hollywood and returned to the theater. Documenting Johann's life from 1924-1954, the Zita Johann papers contain business, personal, and legal correspondence; fan mail; interview transcripts; photographs and prints; press clippings; programs; scripts; and treatments.

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

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Zita Johann papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Folders were created, as there was no original order. Proper handling should be used when viewing any of these paper materials, as much of the collection is in poor condition.

Related collections
John Houseman papers (Collection 816). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Creator history
Zita Johann was an American stage and film actress. Born Elisabeth Johann on July 14, 1904 near Temesvar, Hungary (now Timisoara, Romania), Johann immigrated to the United States with her family in 1911. Johann made her acting debut on Broadway in 1924 and her first film appearance in D.W. Griffith's last film, The Struggle (1931). In 1932, Johann starred in her best known role as Helen Grosvenor, the reincarnated Princess Ankh-es-en-amon, in The Mummy, opposite Boris Karloff.

Johann went on to make seven films including Tiger Shark (1932), Luxury Liner (1933), and Grand Canary (1934) before returning to stage acting in New York. Johann also wrote scripts using the pen names Joan Wolfe and Elizabeth Yorke. During World War II, Johann raised money for war-related charities and organized shows for troops departing overseas. Johann was married three times; her marriages to director John Houseman, agent John McCormick, and economist and publisher Bernard E. Shedd all ended in divorce.

Later in life, Johann taught acting lessons to children with special needs. Johann's last film appearance was in 1986 in Raiders of the Living Dead. Johann died of pneumonia on September 17, 1993 in Nyack, New York.

Scope and content note

This collection documents the acting career and personal life of actress Zita Johann. It consists of business, personal, and legal correspondence; fan mail; interview transcripts; photographs and prints; press clippings; programs; scripts; and treatments. The scripts make up the bulk of the collection.

Business correspondence includes copies of Johann's movie studio and agency contracts, as well as correspondence from Broadway director and producer, Arthur Hopkins; casting director Jane Broder; screenwriters Sidney Harmon, James Ullman, and Dorothy Parker; and playwright Martin Flavin. Fan mail sent to Johann includes requests for autographs, photographs, and praise for her performance in The Mummy, as well as other productions such as Luxury Liner and The Canary. Legal correspondence includes legal action Johann brought against Henry Bellows, legal issues between Johann and her father, and her Mexican divorce from John Houseman. Personal correspondence has love letters from Bernard Shedd while Shedd was stationed in California, as well as telegrams and press clippings from Johann's wedding to McCormick.

The collection contains three interviews written about Johann, providing insight into Johann's life as an actress at various stages in her career. Photographs and prints are black and white portraits of Johann; prints of Johann's husband, John McCormick; a signed photograph from ballet dancer Harriet Hoctor; and unidentified black and white portraits. Press clippings include performance reviews and reports of an automobile accident involving Johann in 1935. Programs are from various performances not related to Johann's work.

The bulk of this collection consists of scripts written for film, radio, and theater; it includes scripts written by both well-known playwrights and Johann. Many of the scripts contain several different drafts, some with handwritten notes, and screen adaptations. Notable scripts include Burning Secret by Stegan Zweig; Klabund's version of Chalk Circle; Green Mansions by William Henry Hudson; Panic by Archibald MacLeish; Rope by David Wallace and T.S. Stribling; The Thracian Horses by Maurice Valency; and the screenplay for Tiger Shark, written by Wells Root. The scripts Emily's Week and The Raw Deal were written by Johann under the pen name Joan Wolfe. Business correspondence between Johann and Dorothy Fletcher indicate that she also used the pen name Elizabeth Yorke. Additionally, there are several treatments included in this collection.

Additional photographs, video recordings, and a book related to Zita Johann can be found by conducting separate author and subject searches for "Johann, Zita" in the catalog (www.nypl.org/catalog).

Arrangement

Alphabetical by document type.

Key terms

Names
Johann, Zita, 1904-1993

Occupations
Actresses

Special formats
Photographs
Scripts

Container list

Scripts (cont.)

b.5 f.3   *Stolen April*, undated (Charles L. Buchanan)

b.5 f.4   *The Thracian Horses*, undated (Maurice J. Valency)

b.5 f.5   *Tiger Shark*, 1932 (Houston Branch, screenplay by Wells Root)

b.5 f.6   *Two Time*, 1929 (Philip Dunning and Buford Armitage)

b.5 f.7   *Under Glass*, undated (Eva Kay Flint and George Bradshaw)

b.5 f.8   *Useless Beaut*y, undated

b.5 f.9   *Vagabonds*, 1924 (Maurice V. Samuels)

b.5 f.10   *When Three Love One*, undated (Charles O'Brien Kennedy)

b.6 f.1-2   Miscellaneous, undated

Treatments

b.6 f.3   *Masked Law*, undated (Emil Forst)

b.6 f.4   *Rhapsodies*, undated (Lee Maidman)

b.6 f.5   Miscellaneous, undated