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Billy Rose Theatre Division**

Guide to the

Hobe Morrison papers

1943-1983

*T-Mss 2012-017

Compiled by Diana Bertolini, July 2013

Summary

Creator: Morrison, Hobe

Title: Hobe Morrison papers, 1943-1983

Size: 8.14 linear feet (18 boxes)

Source: Source unknown.

Abstract: Hobe Morrison (1904-2000) was a drama and film critic at *Variety Magazine* from 1941 to the 1970s. He was very active in The Players Club, of which he was made an honorary member, after he retired. The Hobe Morrison papers contain correspondence, and files on production companies and productions collected and created by him, in his position as a theatre critic for *Variety*, and as a member of the New York theatre community.

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

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

Preferred citation: Hobe Morrison papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Custodial history: This collection was partially processed and cataloged by Betty Wharton in 1972.

Creator history

Albert "Hobe" Morrison was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1905. He published under his nickname, Hobe Morrison, and eventually had his name legally changed. His career as a journalist began in 1932 at the *Philadelphia Record*, where he was the assistant to the drama critic and also served as drama editor himself. He moved to New York in 1937 when *Variety* editor Abel Green offered him a job reviewing films and vaudeville shows. He was shortly promoted to drama critic and legit (theatre) editor, the position he held there for the next forty years. His career took one brief detour from theatre criticism when he spent a few years as a writer and producer at the advertising firm Young & Rubicam during World War II.

Morrison's theatre reviews were distinguished by a flair for investigative journalism that led him to incorporate his extensive research on the financial status of each show into his reviews, often exposing discrepancies between actual and reported box office numbers. He protected his journalistic integrity by making a point of never allowing producers or production companies to flatter him with free lunches. For every theatre review he wrote for Variety's New York edition, he would write another for the West Coast edition which would consider the show from the point of view of a possible film adaptation.

He retired from Variety in the mid-1970s, but stayed active in the New York theatre community. He was particularly involved with the theatrical organization, The Players Club, of which he was an honorary member. Morrison was married and had two sons, Randy and Christopher. He died on January 22, 2000.

Scope and content note

The Hobe Morrison papers contain correspondence and files on production companies and productions collected and created by him, as a theatre critic for Variety, and as a member of the New York theatre community.

Correspondence covers a date range from 1943 to 1983 and documents Morrison's life and career as well as the history of New York theatre from the 1940s to the 1980s. Many of these letters concern Morrison's career as a theatre and film critic for Variety. In addition to Variety inter-office correspondence during the 1960s and 1970s, such as correspondence concerning Variety's staffing, there are complaints about Variety's coverage of financial reports from shows. There are letters discussing Morrison's pieces in Variety, such as letters from actors, writers, directors, and producers thanking Morrison for writing positive reviews, or pointing out mistakes in his articles.

Morrison's correspondence covers a wide range of topics concerning the theatre, including the logistics of putting on shows. The role of critics in general is a frequent topic in Morrison's correspondence, with a focus on critics making political jabs, and critics giving casual opinions on the night of performance, without the consideration they would give to a full review. There are letters discussing a company's choice of plays for a season; the process of becoming a director; discount ticket policies; letters recommending individuals for staff positions in theatre companies or productions; and various issues in the life of an actor, such as personal finance problems, artistic representation, and housing. More performance-oriented issues are also discussed, such as the use of sound in shows, performance tempos, casting, laugh lines in performances, and audience behavior, such as rudeness, laughter, and other reactions. Correspondence contains theatre anecdotes, debates on the merits of censorship; and discussions of recent theatre publications, museum and library collections of theatre memorabilia; therapeutic uses of drama; and the financial profits of shows. Specific artists, events and shows discussed in Morrison's correspondence include Kate Drain Lawson's costumes, the tryouts of *The Crucible*, and the 1966 writers strike. Some letters contain analysis and discussion of the Tony Awards, with specific focus on the 1970 nominating committee and awards broadcast. Morrison and his correspondents discuss international theatre, such as Italian theatre, Kabuki theatre, the English repertory system, and British productions in general, as well as performance rights in various other countries and continents.

Some theatrical organizations and companies whose members, policies, and activities are discussed in these letters are Actors' Equity Association, American Place Theatre, American Theatre Critics Association, American Theatre Wing, Antoinette Perry Memorial Awards, Brooks Atkinson, Oriana Atkinson, City Center, Mark Taper Forum Theatre, ANTA, Drama Desk Award, Federal Theatre Project, New York Drama Critics Circle, Philadelphia Drama Guild, Saratoga Spring Arts Fair, Schaffner Players,

Society of Stage Directors & Choreographers, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Times Square Theatre Center, and Yale Repertory Theatre. The organization most frequently discussed is the Players Club.

Some notable theatre personalities whose letters to Morrison are included here are George Abbott, Edward Albee, Robert Anderson, Pearl Bailey, Tallulah Bankhead, Clive Barnes, Anne Baxter, Constance Bennett, Eric Bentley, Jeanne Cagney, Carol Channing, Alexander Cohen, Ethel Barrymore Colt, Hume Cronyn, Morton Da Costa, Vic Damone, Kirk Douglas, Alfred Drake, Henry Ephron, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Jose Ferrer, Penny Fuller, Harold Gary, John Gavin, Larry Gelbart, William Inge, Jerome Kilty, Josh Logan, Jerome Lawrence, Herman Levin, Diana Lynn, Frank McHugh, David Merrick, Marry Orr, Harold Prince, Basil Rathbone, Arthur Schwartz, Swen Swenson, Studs Terkel, Rudy Vallee, and Meredith Wilson.

Morrison's personal correspondence with friends often documents his social activities with letters and notes setting up lunch and dinner dates and discussions of such topics as new books written by friends, bird-watching, and the deaths of friends and theater figures. Friends of Morrison's who sent him several letters contained in this collection include Harry Ackerman, Robert Ardrey, Jay Barney, John Beaufort, Peter Bridge, Peter Cotes, Toni Darnay, Reginald Denham, Jerry Devine, Anita Gillette, Abel Green, Otis Guernsey, Clay H. Harshberger, Henry Hewes, Alan Hewitt, Sol Jacobson, Howard Lindsay, Jo Mielziner, Daniel Petrie, Olga Petrova, Joel W. Schenker, Louis Sheaffer, Neil Simon, Ted Tiller, John F. Wharton, Eleanor D. Wilson, Audrey Wood, and Sam Zolotow.

Correspondence is arranged alphabetically, within each group. Groups are divided roughly by chronology. The correspondence arrived partially processed, cataloged and indexed, by author and/or subject. The card catalog in Box 12 contains cards corresponding to call numbers assigned to each volume of correspondence. These call numbers are indicated in notes appended to the corresponding folders. All researchers interested in this collection are encouraged to refer to the card catalog, which provides an itemized guide to the correspondence.

Files on productions and production companies were collected by Morrison as background research for the articles he wrote at Variety. These contain financial records, contracts, programs, press releases, and flyers. Financial records consist of copies of box office reports, budgets, weekly operating costs, investors' reports, and financial summaries. There are also newspaper and magazine articles, full magazines, press releases, programs, flyers, and other printed materials pertaining to productions and to subjects on theatre in general. Production and Subject Files are arranged in alphabetical order by title or subject.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged into the following two groups: Correspondence and Production and Subject Files.

Key terms

Subjects

Motion picture industry -- Periodicals

Motion pictures -- Periodicals

Motion pictures -- Reviews

Musicals

Theater -- Periodicals

Theater -- New York (State) -- New York -- 20th century

Occupations

Critics

Editors

Journalists

Titles

Variety -- (New York, N.Y.)

Theater -- Reviews

Names

Morrison, Hobe

Special formats

Clippings

Correspondence

Financial Reports

Programs

Container list

Correspondence, 1943-1983 (12 boxes)

- b.1 f.1-2 1943, 1967-1971 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 15,210A)
- b.1 f.3-4 1955-1975 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 1734A)
- b.2 f.1-2 1955-1975 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 18,207A)
- b.2 f.3-4 1956-1957, 1968-1971 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 15,211A)
- b.3 f.1-2 1960-1971 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 15,990A)
- b.3 f.3-5 1963-1981 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 24,587)
- b.4 f.1-2 1971-1976 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 21,343A)
- b.4 f.3-4 1971-1983 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 28,294)
- b.4 f.5 1972-1973
- b.5 f.1-2 1972-1976
- b.5 f.3-4 1973-1979 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 23,448)
- b.6 f.1-2 1973-1979 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 24,385)
- b.6 f.3-5 1973-1979 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 25,665)
- b.7 f.1-2 1974-1975
- b.7 f.3-4 1974-1976 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 23,867)
- b.8 f.1-2 1975-1976
- b.8 f.3-4 1975-1977 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 24,305/ 8-MWEZ + n.c. 906A)
- b.9 f.1 1975-1980 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 25,016)
- b.9 f.2-3 1976-1977 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 24,305)
- b.10 f.1-27 1976-1983 (8-MWEZ + n.c. 28,293)
- b.10 f.28 1980
- b.11 f.1-2 1980-1983
- b.12 Card Catalog Index

Production and Subject Files, 1950-1981 (6 boxes)

- b.13 f.1-26 *Adele-Build with One Hand*, 1950-1960
- b.14 f.1-22 *Burlesque-The Deep Blue Sea*, 1952-1960
- b.15 f.1-31 DeMille, Agness-*Happy Hunting*, 1952-1972
- b.16 f.1-33 *A Hat Full of Rain-The Shuberts*, 1955-1972
- b.17 f.1-32 *Silent Night, Lonely Night-A View from the Bridge*, 1954-1960
- b.18 f.1-16 *Vixa Madison Avenue*-Various Productions and Subjects, 1957-1981