



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Seymour M. Syna papers

1948-1983

*T-Mss 2000-049

Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2013

Summary

Creator: Syna, Seymour

Title: Seymour M. Syna papers

Date: 1948-1983

Size: 8.86 linear feet (22 boxes)

Source: Donated by Deborah R. Syna, 2012.

Abstract: Seymour Syna (1929-2000) was an American theater critic and educator. He wrote reviews for Backstage, New York Tribune, New York Theatre Review, East Village Other, and Wisdom's Child, and became the on-air theater critic for WNYC-TV. The Seymour Syna papers (1948-1983) document Syna's early career as a director of summer stock, regional, and school productions; and his later career as an educator and theater critic. The papers contain correspondence, posters, programs and press releases, scripts, and writings.

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Processing note: Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2013

Related Materials:

Seymour Syna papers, 1955-1994. Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

Creator History

Seymour Syna (1929-2000) was an American theater critic and educator. Syna was born in Ellenville, New York, in 1929. He attended the Bronx High School of Science and began his undergraduate studies at the University of Arkansas with the intention of studying medicine. He shifted his major to theater and became active with the theater group at the university. After college, Syna attended the

Pasadena Playhouse College of Theatre Arts and began directing summer stock and regional theater productions. In the 1960s, he obtained his doctorate in education from the Columbia University Teachers College. At the same time, he began his career as a theater critic. Syna taught theater at various high schools, colleges, and correctional facilities in New York City. He wrote reviews for *Backstage*, *New York Tribune*, *New York Theatre Review*, *East Village Other*, and *Wisdom's Child*, and became the on-air theater critic for WNYC-TV.

Custodial History

The collection was maintained by Syna prior to his death. The New York Public Library accepted a portion of the papers; the remainder was donated to Columbia University and are held by the University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Scope and Content Note

The Seymour Syna papers (1948-1983) document Syna's early career as a director of summer stock, regional, and school productions; and his later career as an educator and theater critic. The papers contain correspondence, posters, programs and press releases, scripts, and writings.

Correspondence in the collection includes letters from other critics, invitations to attend productions, memoranda regarding his appointments teaching theater at various high schools and colleges, and responses to reviews, both positive and negative. Of note are letters regarding a seminar that Syna taught at the Kingston and St. Andrew Parish Festival in Jamaica. Posters consist of a hand-drawn poster for *Detective Story*, *Death of Salesman* at the Flagg Court Playhouse in Brooklyn, New York, and *The Grouch* put on by The Whitney Players at the New York Institute of Technology.

The programs and press releases are in loose chronological order. Earlier programs (1948-1966) represent summer stock, regional, and school productions that Syna directed or stage managed, including those he directed while attending the Pasadena Playhouse College of Theatre Arts in the early 1950s. There are a few programs from the University of Arkansas where Syna also acted as an undergraduate theater major. Later programs and press releases (1968-1979) represent productions Syna attended as a critic. Most have annotations documenting his thoughts on the play or regarding specific performers.

The scripts primarily consist of clean copies of published and unpublished typescripts, including scripts by Joseph Caldwell, Sidney Kingsley, Easton Lee, Franklyn MacGregor, and Philip Aston Stone. The writings consist of typescript drafts. The bulk of the drafts are for reviews Syna wrote on productions as varied as Off-Broadway theater, mime, tap, and children's theater, but there are also a few interviews, most notably with Pat Carroll, Quentin Crisp, and Jose Ferrer. The drafts are undated though they were often printed on press releases that Syna repurposed as printer paper.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged by format.

Key Terms

Subjects

Off-Broadway theater

Theater critics

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-6 Correspondence 1949-1979
- b. 2 f. 1-3 Correspondence 1980-1983
 - b. 22 Posters undated
- b. 2 f. 4-5 Programs 1948-1966
 - b. 3 f. 1 Programs 1948-1966
- b. 3 f. 2-5 Programs and Press Releases 1968-1978
- b. 4 f. 1-5 Programs and Press Releases 1972-1978
- b. 5 f. 1-5 Programs and Press Releases 1974-1976
- b. 6 f. 1-5 Programs and Press Releases 1975-1977
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- b. 15 f. 2-6 Scripts 1949, 1961-1962
- b. 16 f. 1-4 Scripts undated
 - b. 16 f. 5 Writings 1975-1976
- b. 17 f. 1-6 Writings 1976-1983, undated
- b. 18 f. 1-5 Writings undated
- b. 19 f. 1-5 Writings undated
- b. 20 f. 1-6 Writings undated
- b. 21 f. 1-2 Writings undated