



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Richard Seff papers

1945-2003

*T-Mss 2004-021

Processed by Bonnie Marie Sauer.

Summary

Creator: Seff, Richard, 1927-

Title: Richard Seff papers

Date: 1945-2003

Size: 5.85 linear feet (3 boxes and 5 scrapbooks)

Source: Papers were donated by Richard Seff in 2004.

Abstract: In the course of his career, Richard Seff worked as an actor, agent, and playwright. The correspondence, photographs, scrapbooks, and clippings in this collection document his professional career and his friendship with many notable names of show business.

Conditions Governing Access:

Library policies on photocopying apply.

Conditions Governing Use: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Preferred citation: Richard Seff Papers, *T-Mss 2004-021. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by: Bonnie Marie Sauer; Machine-readable finding aid created by: Bonnie Marie Sauer. Processed by Bonnie Marie Sauer; Machine-readable finding aid created by Bonnie Marie Sauer.

Creator History

Actor, agent and playwright Richard Seff was born September 27, 1927 in Brooklyn, New York. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from New York University and studied acting with Stella Adler in

the early 1950's.

Seff's performing career began on radio. As a character actor, Seff appeared on stage and screen. Credits from his early acting career include the 1951 Broadway production of *Darkness at Noon* by Sidney Kingsley, and the television show *Charade Quiz*. Mr. Seff continued acting until 1952 when he left the profession to pursue a career as an agent.

Seff started at the Liebling-Wood Agency in the television department and later became a vice president at MCA (Music Corporation of America). In 1962, with Stark Hesseltine and Leo Bookman, Seff formed HBS, which merged with CMA (Creative Management Associates, Inc.) in 1969. Over the course of his twenty years as an agent, Mr. Seff represented such legends as composers John Kander and Fred Ebb, choreographer Ron Field, and performers Linda Lavin and Chita Rivera.

In 1975, Seff decided to return to the creative end of the business; he resumed acting and started writing for theatre. Film and television credits from the latter part of his acting career include: *Quiz Show*, *Kane & Abel*, *Being There*, *The Onion Field*, *Where the Buffalo Roam*, *Rage of Angels* and *Betrayal*. Broadway credits include *End of the World*, *Herzl*, *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940*, and, as assistant director to Eric Thompson, Alan Ayckbourn's trilogy *The Norman Conquests*. As a playwright, Seff wrote *Spotlight*, *The Whole Ninth Floor*, *Paris Is Out* and *Shine!* In 1970, *Paris Is Out* played at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre with Molly Picon and Sam Levine, followed by a national tour with Pat O'Brien and his wife Eloise. *Shine!* is a Horatio Alger inspired musical for which Mr. Seff wrote the libretto, collaborating with Roger Anderson (music) and Lee Goldsmith (lyrics).

In 2003, Mr. Seff endowed the Richard Seff Award through the Actors' Equity Foundation to honor one character actor and one character actress per year for best performance in a Broadway or Off-Broadway production.

Scope and Content Note

The Richard Seff Papers contain correspondence, contracts, photographs, programs, clippings and scrapbooks.

Arrangement: Series I: Correspondence Series II: Contracts Series III: Photographs Series IV: Programs and Clippings Series V: Scrapbooks

Key Terms

Subjects

Theater -- New York (State) -- New York

Names

Seff, Richard, 1927-

Container List

Series I: Correspondence 1976-2003 (44 folders)

The correspondence series contains material of both a personal and professional nature, with two subseries: one for general correspondence and the second for correspondence relating to production of the musical *Shine!*

Chronological

Subseries 1 - General Correspondence 1976-2003 (27 folders)

The General Correspondence subseries is composed of letters of a personal nature as well as some professional letters. Mr. Seff maintained extensive contact with his colleagues and kept two scrapbooks: one he labeled "Letters, Cards from Theatre Folk 1976-1998" and the second "Theatre Letters 1998-2000". These volumes contained letters from such notables as: Alan Ayckbourn, Kenneth Branagh, Dominick Dunne, Fred Ebb, Richard Eyre, Gerald Gutierrez, A. R. Gurney, Judd Hirsch, Polly Holliday, William Hurt, John Kander, Arthur Laurents, Linda Lavin, Phyllida Law, Craig Lucas, Terrence McNally, Hildy Parks, Harold Prince, Robert Redford, Tony Roberts, Paul Scofield, Emma Thompson, Eric Thompson, Sophie Thompson, Jill Eikenberry Tucker, Michael Tucker, Maury Yeston, and Jerry Zaks. The letters from these scrapbooks have been integrated into the chronological scheme.

- b. 1 f. 1 **General 1976** (1 folder)
Includes letters to and from Eric Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 2 **General 1978** (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 3 **General 1980** (1 folder)
Includes outgoing letters to Roger Anderson and Leo Goldsmith.
- b. 1 f. 4 **General 1981** (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 5 **General 1982** (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 6 **General 1983** (1 folder)
- b. 1 f. 7 **General 1984** (1 folder)
Includes letters from Judd Hirsch and Harold Prince.
- b. 1 f. 8 **General 1985** (1 folder)
Includes letters from John Kander and Maury Yeston.
- b. 1 f. 9 **General 1986** (1 folder)
Includes incoming and outgoing letters.
- b. 1 f. 10 **General 1987** (1 folder)
Includes letters from Alan Ayckbourn.
- b. 1 f. 11 **General 1988** (1 folder)
Includes letters from Arthur Laurent and Chita Rivera.
- b. 1 f. 12 **General 1989** (1 folder)
Includes letters from Judd Hirsch, William Hurt, John Kander, Terrence McNally, Keith Mitchell, Harold Prince and Michael Tucker.
- b. 1 f. 13 **General 1990** (1 folder)
Includes letters from Alan Ayckbourn and Craig Lucas.
- b. 1 f. 14 **General 1991** (1 folder)
Includes letters from Alan Ayckbourn, Kenneth Branagh, Judd Hirsch, Emma Thompson and Jill Eikenberry Tucker.
- b. 1 f. 15 **General 1992** (1 folder)
Includes copies of outgoing and incoming letters, including from A.R. Gurney and Emma Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 16 **General 1993** (1 folder)
Includes outgoing and incoming letters including from Richard Adler, Kenneth Branagh, Terrence McNally, Paul Scofield, Emma Thompson, and Sophie Thompson.

Series I: Correspondence (cont.)

Subseries 1 - General Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 17 **General** 1994 (1 folder)
Includes letters from Alan Ayckbourn, Judd Hirsch, Polly Holiday, Harold Prince and Emma Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 18 **General** 1995 (1 folder)
Includes letters from Richard Eyre, Harold Prince, Robert Redford, and Emma Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 19 **General** 1996 (1 folder)
Includes letter from Robert Redford, Emma Thompson, Phyllida Law Thompson and Sophie Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 20 **General** 1997 (1 folder)
Includes letters from Fred Ebb, Phyllida Law, Harold Prince, Richard Schilling, Emma Thompson, and Sophie Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 21 **General** 1998 (1 folder)
Includes letters from Roger Anderson, Dominick Dunne, Gerald Guitierrez, Michael Hayden, B.T. McNicholl, Harold Prince and Emma Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 22 **General** 1999 (1 folder)
Includes letters from Roger Anderson, Alan Ayckbourn, John Kander and Emma Thompson.
- b. 1 f. 23 **General** 2000 (1 folder)
Includes letters from Arthur Laurents, Hildy Parks, Harold Prince, Tony Roberts and Jerry Zaks.
- b. 1 f. 24 **General** 2001 (1 folder)
Includes printout of e-mail from Roger Anderson.
- b. 1 f. 25 **General** 2002 (1 folder)
Includes printout of journal entries from Emma Thompson's experiences as an ActionAid ambassador and outgoing letters.
- b. 1 f. 26 **General** 2003 (1 folder)
Includes incoming and outgoing letters.
- b. 1 f. 27 **General** undated (1 folder)
Includes letters from Fred Ebb and Linda Lavin.

Subseries 2 - *Shine!* Correspondence 1980-2003 (17 folders)

This subseries chronicles the efforts to produce Seff's Horatio Alger musical *Shine!* Included are agreements, memos and letters from such notables as Judd Hirsch, Galt MacDermott, and Mike Nichols. The correspondence follows the business and creative aspects of production. To follow the personal aspect of working on *Shine!* see the General Correspondence subseries.

- b. 1 f. 28 ***Shine!*** 1980 (1 folder)
Includes incoming and outgoing letters and notes on conversations.
- b. 1 f. 29 ***Shine!*** 1981 (1 folder)
Includes memos, an agreement, and incoming and outgoing letters.
- b. 1 f. 30 ***Shine!*** 1982 (1 folder)
Includes incoming and outgoing letters, among which is a letter addressed to Donald J. Trump.
- b. 1 f. 31 ***Shine!*** 1983 (1 folder)
Includes correspondence with the Virginia Museum Theatre and Ted Chapin of Rodgers and Hammerstein; also notes on the production.
- b. 1 f. 32 ***Shine!*** 1984 (1 folder)
Includes correspondence with Paula Xavier at the Shubert Theatre.
- b. 1 f. 33 ***Shine!*** 1985 (1 folder)
Includes letter from Galt MacDermot.
- b. 1 f. 34 ***Shine!*** 1986 (1 folder)
Includes letters between collaborators, lyrics, letters from Judd Hirsch, Ted Chapin of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and additional incoming and outgoing letters.
- b. 1 f. 35 ***Shine!*** 1988 (1 folder)

Series I: Correspondence (cont.)

Subseries 2 - Shine! Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 36 *Shine!* 1989 (1 folder)
Includes incoming letters from New Musicals and Jujamcyn Theaters and outgoing letters to the collaborators.
- b. 1 f. 37 *Shine!* 1990 (1 folder)
Includes incoming and outgoing correspondence.
- b. 1 f. 38 *Shine!* 1994 (1 folder)
Includes correspondence with the Nederlander Organization.
- b. 1 f. 39 *Shine!* 1998 (1 folder)
Includes notes on and costs for reading of *Shine!*
- b. 1 f. 40 *Shine!* 1999 (1 folder)
Includes incoming and outgoing letters.
- b. 1 f. 41 *Shine!* 2000 (1 folder)
Includes two evaluation reports from the National Music Theater Network and printouts of e-mails between the collaborators.
- b. 1 f. 42 *Shine!* 2001 (1 folder)
Includes invoices for CD production and advertising.
- b. 1 f. 43 *Shine!* 2002 (1 folder)
Includes correspondence with Samuel French, Inc.
- b. 1 f. 44 *Shine!* 2003 (1 folder)
Includes correspondence with Mike Nichols and letter to Julie Andrews.

Series II: Contracts 1950-1986 (15 folders)

The Contracts series is divided into three subseries which reflect Mr. Seff's professional roles of agent, actor and playwright.

Subseries 1 - Contracts as Agent 1957-1986 (4 folders)

Chronological by decade.

- b. 2 f. 1 Agent Contracts 1950-1959 (1 folder)
Includes loan agreement with Chita Rivera.
- b. 2 f. 2 Agent Contracts 1960-1969 (1 folder)
Includes Anna Maria Alberghetti's contract for *Carnival* and samples of business materials such as contract for a Broadway musical director, foreign rights distribution form, amateur licensing of a play, and letter for a motion picture option of a book.
- b. 2 f. 3 Agent Contracts 1970-1979 (1 folder)
Includes sample contracts and collaboration agreement, movie deal definitions, and 1970 minimums for directors and choreographers.
- b. 2 f. 4 Agent Contracts 1980-1989 (1 folder)
Includes unsigned contract with Oxford Productions, preliminary prospectus and limited partnership agreement for the Honky Tonk Nights Company.

Subseries 2 - Contracts as Playwright 1949-1980 (5 folders)

Chronological by decade.

- b. 2 f. 5 Playwright Contracts 1940-1949 (1 folder)
Includes freelance writers' contract for Radio City Playhouse.
- b. 2 f. 6 Playwright Contracts 1950-1959 (1 folder)
Includes license agreement with National Broadcasting Company (NBC).
- b. 2 f. 7 Playwright Contracts 1960-1969 (1 folder)
Includes agreement with The Dramatic Publishing Company and correspondence regarding dictionary of theatrical terms; and contracts and agreements regarding *The Whole Ninth Floor*.
- b. 2 f. 8 Playwright Contracts 1970-1979 (1 folder)
Includes contracts for *Paris Is Out*; agreements for *Shine! Autumn in New York* and *Spotlight*.

Series II: Contracts (cont.)

Subseries 2 - Contracts as Playwright (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 9 **Playwright Contracts 1980-1989** (1 folder)
Includes agreements with the William Morris Agency regarding *Shine!*

Subseries 3 - Contracts as Actor 1946-2000 (6 folders)

Chronological by decade.

- b. 2 f. 10 **Actor Contracts 1940-1949** (1 folder)
Includes contracts for television shows *Charade Quiz* and *Hollywood Screen Test* and play *Hippolytus*.
- b. 2 f. 11 **Actor Contracts 1950-1959** (1 folder)
Includes contracts for television and theatre.
- b. 2 f. 12 **Actor Contracts 1970-1979** (1 folder)
Includes contracts for film, television and theatre.
- b. 2 f. 13 **Actor Contracts 1980-1989** (1 folder)
Includes contracts for theatre, film, and television including *The Guiding Light*.
- b. 2 f. 14 **Actor Contracts 1990-1999** (1 folder)
Contains contracts for theatre, film, including *Quiz Show*, and television, including *As The World Turns*.
- b. 2 f. 15 **Actor Contracts 2000-2004** (1 folder)
Includes contracts for theatre and film.

Series III: Photographs 1948-1996, undated (1 box)

Seff named the collection of his portraits "An Actor's Life: Head Shots of Richard Seff 1948-1996." The portraits of other actors were given to Seff by various colleagues; some of these are signed. Images that span Seff's career through theatre, television, film and print advertisements are also included.

- b. 2 f. 16 **1948-1996** (1 folder)
Includes portraits of Richard Seff.
- b. 2 f. 17-18 **Stills from plays and films** (2 folders)
Includes images from plays, print advertisements, and television.
- b. 2 f. 19 **Actors undated** (1 folder)
Includes photographs of fellow actors, some signed, including: Oscar Braud, Louis Edmonds, John Forsythe, Bob Herget, Kenneth Nelson, Lois Nettleton, Jack Palance, Chita Rivera and Tony Tanner.

Series IV: Programs and Clippings 1966-2003 (32 folders)

This series contains the programs and clippings of plays in which Mr. Seff was involved, both as playwright and actor. Also included is publicity regarding the Richard Seff Award, given each year to one character actor and one character actress, over the age of fifty, for best performance in a Broadway or Off-Broadway production.

Alphabetical.

- b. 3 f. 1 ***Afternoon at the Seaside* 2003 Oct. 29** (1 folder)
Contains program for the performance at the Mid-Manhattan Library.
- b. 3 f. 2 ***Angels Fall* 1982** (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance June 19-25, 1982 at the New World Festival of the Arts and the August 13-15, 1982 performances at the White Barn Theatre.
- b. 3 f. 3 ***Bearclaw* 1982 Aug.** (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at the White Barn Theatre, Connecticut.

Series IV: Programs and Clippings (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 4 *Big Fish, Little Fish* 1974 Sept. (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at U.R.G.E.N.T.
- b. 3 f. 5 *Childe Byron* 1981 (1 folder)
Contains program for Childe Byron presented by the Circle Repertory Company.
- b. 3 f. 6 *The Cocktail Hour* 1992 Mar. 10 - Apr. 5 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at Indiana Repertory Theatre.
- b. 3 f. 7 *The Countess* 2000 Nov.-Dec (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at Lamb's Theater, New York.
- b. 3 f. 8 *Countess Mitzi* 1991 Feb. (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at the Pearl Theatre Company, Inc., New York.
- b. 3 f. 9 *A Delicate Balance* 1989 Oct. 19 - Nov. 5 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at the Emelin Theatre, Mamaroneck, New York.
- b. 3 f. 10 *End of the World* 1984 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performances at the Music Box, New York, and the Kennedy Center, Washington D.C. in addition to production costs.
- b. 3 f. 11 *Established Price* 1987 Oct. 20 - Nov. 7 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at the Annenberg Center, University of Pennsylvania.
- b. 3 f. 12 *Established Price* 1990 (1 folder)
Contains program from The Workshops at the Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut.
- b. 3 f. 13 *A Far Country* 1976 (1 folder)
Contains clipping from performance at the Elysian Playhouse.
- b. 3 f. 14 *Herzl* 1976 (1 folder)
Contains program from performance at the Palace Theatre, New York.
- b. 3 f. 15 *Lend Me A Tenor* 1991 Oct. 30 - Nov. 17 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at the Players Theatre.
- b. 3 f. 16 *Miscellaneous* 1966-1970 (1 folder)
Contains clippings regarding Mr. Seff on the radio program "This Is Broadway" and becoming a playwright..
- b. 3 f. 17 *Modigliani* 1977-1979 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performances at Grove Street Playhouse and Astor Place Theatre in 1977 and 1979 respectively.
- b. 3 f. 18 *Musical Comedy Murders of 1940* 1986-1987 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performances presented by the Circle Theatre Repertory and the Longacre Theatre.
- b. 3 f. 19 *My Fair Lady* 1990 June 19 - July 7 (1 folder)
Contains program and clippings from performance at the Candlewood Playhouse, New Fairfield, CT.
- b. 3 f. 20 *Off Key* 1993 (1 folder)
Contains program from performance at the Linhart Theatre, New York.

Series IV: Programs and Clippings (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 21 *On Borrowed Time* 1992 (1 folder)

Contains program and clippings from performance at The Birmingham Theatre, Birmingham, MI.
- b. 3 f. 22 *Only You* 1989 (1 folder)

Contains program and clippings from performance presented by the Circle Repertory Company, New York.
- b. 3 f. 23 *Paris Is Out!* 1970 (1 folder)

Contains program and clippings from performance at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre.
- b. 3 f. 24 *Paris Is Out!* 1971 (1 folder)

Contains program from performance at Drury Lane, Illinois starring Mr. and Mrs. Pat O'Brien.
- b. 3 f. 25 *Richard II* 1982 (1 folder)

Contains program from performance presented by the Circle Repertory Company.
- b. 3 f. 26 Richard Seff Award (1 folder)

Contains clippings regarding the creation of the award and its honorees.
- b. 3 f. 27 *The Sea Gull* 1983 (1 folder)

Contains program and clippings from performance presented by the Circle Theatre Company, New York.
- b. 3 f. 28 *The Sea Gull* 1983 (1 folder)

Contains clippings from performance at the American Place Theatre, New York.
- b. 3 f. 29 *Shine!* 1981-2003 (1 folder)

Contains programs and clippings from performances and readings of *Shine!*
- b. 3 f. 30 *Spotlight* 1978 (1 folder)

Contains program from performance starring Gene Barry at the National Theatre, Washington, D.C. and promotional program.
- b. 3 f. 31 *Summer and Smoke* 1988 (1 folder)

Contains program from performance of Center Theatre Group at the Ahmanson Theatre.
- b. 3 f. 32 *The Truth Tellers* 1995 (1 folder)

Contains program from performance presented by the Circle Repertory Company, New York.

Series V: Scrapbooks 1945-2001 (5 scrapbooks)

This series contains five volumes.

Chronological based on start dates of the scrapbooks.

- b. 4 1945-1969 (1 scrapbook)

Contains clippings, photographs, advertisements, playbills and programs, actor's sides with annotations, and statistics mostly for the play *Darkness at Noon*, but also some material for *Arms and the Man*, *Pygmalion*, *Overruled* and *The Whole Ninth Floor*. Also contains notes from Sidney Kingsley, Grayson Hall (signed Shirley Grossman), and William Fields, along with telegram messages from friends and family. Includes copy of *Television Week*, April 1951; an opinion piece by Mr. Seff published in *Variety* in 1951 regarding segregation in Baltimore theatre; and clippings regarding Mr. Seff's talent agency.

Series V: Scrapbooks (cont.)

b. 5 1969-1975 (1 scrapbook)

Scrapbook is titled "'Paris is Out!' by Richard Seff." Contains programs, clippings, photographs, for play *Paris is Out!* formerly named *Will It Last?* Also photographs and clippings for *A Far Country*, and program for *Big Fish, Little Fish*. Contains letters from family, friends and colleagues including Ross Alexander, Brooks Atkinson, James Goldman, Dorothy Sands, Eric Thompson and Gretchen Wyler. Includes invitation to reception by the Dramatists Guild. Letters from Jerry Zaks, Barbara Barrie, Alexander Cohen, Leo K. Cohen, Stephen Durbridge, Melvin Bernhardt, George Grizzard, and others regarding the plays *Consenting Adults* and *Loving Couples*.

b. 6 1974-1988 (1 scrapbook)

Contains business card from CMA and clippings regarding various aspects of Mr. Seff's professional careers; photographs, programs, clippings for *Consenting Adults*, *Herzl*, *Modigliani*, *The Norman Conquests*, *Only You* and *Spotlight* and original artwork for *Loving Couples*. Also contains correspondence and cards from Alan Alda, Alan Ayckbourn, Ann B. Davis, Bob Fosse, Paul Hecht and John Kander.

b. 7 1977-1985 (1 scrapbook)

Cover of scrapbook monogrammed "Spotlight Richard Seff." Label on side of volume reads "1977-1982." Contains clippings, brochures and other material for Mr. Seff's *Shine!* and *Spotlight* and *Angels Fall, End of the World, Modigliani, Richard III* and *The Sea Gull*. Additional items related to the following performances: *Being There*, *Child Byron*, *Established Price*, *Kane and Abel*, *The Onion Field* and *Where the Buffalo Roam*. Letters from Alan Ayckbourn, Arthur Bartow, Judd Hirsch, John Kander, Romulus Linney, Harold Prince, Peter Shaffer and Stephen Sondheim.

b. 8 2000-2001 (1 scrapbook)

Contains clippings, photographs, and programs from *Shine!* and *The Countess* and call sheet for *The Hours*. Also includes letters from Anne Jackson and Paul Newman.