



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Joe Layton papers**

1931-1992

\*T-Mss 2010-104

Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2011

## Summary

**Creator:** Layton, Joe, 1931-

**Title:** Joe Layton papers

**Date:** 1931-1992

**Size:** 12.7 linear feet (31 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Rhoda Dresken in 2009.

**Abstract:** Joe Layton (1931-1994) was an Emmy and Tony award-winning American choreographer, director, and producer of stage productions, television specials, and live concerts. The Joe Layton papers (1931-1992) document his professional career and his marriage to actress Evelyn Russell. The collection includes correspondence, photographs, production binders, scrapbooks, scripts, and sound and video recordings.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: <https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

### Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audio and video in the collection may be directed to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound ([rha@nypl.org](mailto:rha@nypl.org)). Audio and video materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

**Preferred citation:** Joe Layton papers, \*T-Mss 2010-104. Billy Rose Theater Division, The New York Public Library

**Processing note:** Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2011 The scrapbooks and photo albums were removed from their bindings though they remain in their original order. The scrapbooks are fragile and care should be used when examining them. Select scrapbooks are restricted pending conservation

treatment. Awards are closed due to damage.

**Related Materials:**

Higgins Family papers, 1923-1971. Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Tamiment Playhouse Alumni: Oral Histories and Shows, 1955-1988. Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Tamiment Playhouse Records, 1927-1987. Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

## **Creator History**

Joe Layton (1931-1994) was an Emmy and Tony award-winning American choreographer, director, and producer of stage productions, television specials, and live concerts. The Joe Layton papers (1931-1992) document his professional career and his marriage to actress Evelyn Russell. The collection includes correspondence, photographs, production binders, scrapbooks, and scripts.

Joe Layton (1931-1994) was born Joseph Lichtman in Brooklyn, New York to James and Sadie Lichtman. As a child, Layton took singing and dancing lessons, and performed in school plays, local theater productions, and at resorts in the Catskills. When Layton was sixteen, he had his first break as a dancer, appearing in *Oklahoma!* on Broadway. He went on to dance in *High Button Shoes* (1947), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949), *Miss Liberty* (1949), Michael Todd's *A Night in Venice* (1952), and *Wonderful Town* (1953).

In 1953, Layton joined an Army Special Services Unit in Colorado Springs, CO, where he choreographed and directed shows on the base. He was discharged in 1954 and went to Europe to work as choreographer, director, and dancer for George Reich's company *Les Ballet Ho* in Paris.

Layton returned to the United States in 1956 where he got a job at the renowned Tamiment Playhouse in the Poconos choreographing summer stock productions. He soon began directing as well, an activity he found naturally interconnected to choreography. In 1959, Layton received his first major choreographic debut, choreographing a revival of *Once Upon a Mattress*, starring Carol Burnett. That same year, he also choreographed *On the Town* and *The Sound of Music*, and married actress Evelyn Russell. In 1960, he choreographed *Tenderloin* and *Greenwillow*, receiving his first Tony Award nomination for the latter. In 1962, Layton had his Broadway directorial debut with the critically acclaimed *No Strings*, which he also choreographed. His choreography for *No Strings* won a Tony Award.

Layton became known as an innovative and imaginative choreographer and director, and went on to choreograph and direct numerous stage productions including *Drat! The Cat!* (1965), *George M!* (1968), for which he won a second Tony Award, *Dear World* (1969), Bette Midler's *Clams on the Half Shell Revue* (1975), and *Platinum* (1978). He directed *The Girl Who Came to Supper* (1963), *Peterpat* (1965), *Sherry!* (1967), *The National Theatre of the Deaf* (1969), *Two by Two* (1970), *An Evening with Diana Ross* (1976), *Barnum* (1980), for which he won two more Tony Awards, *Bring Back Birdie* (1981), *The Three Musketeers* (1984), *Harrigan n' Hart* (1985), and a re-staged, national tour of *Woman of the Year* (1983) with Lauren Bacall.

In 1964, Joe Layton began his first year as director of *The Lost Colony*, a symphonic outdoor drama performed yearly on Roanoke Island, North Carolina. Layton refreshed the production, which had been staged since 1937, improving light and staging techniques. He continued to direct the production for over twenty years, until the mid-1980s.

Layton traveled to Japan in 1969 to direct the Tokyo production of *Scarlett*, a musical adaptation of *Gone with the Wind*, in Japanese. In 1972, he directed a translation of *Scarlett* at the Theatre Royal in London and, in 1973, at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles. While the Tokyo production was a popular success, the London and Los Angeles shows garnered mostly negative reviews.

In addition to his work on stage musicals, Layton began doing work for television, first choreographing a Mary Martin Thanksgiving special (1960) and *The Gershwin Years* (1961), before directing four specials starring Barbra Streisand. He won an Emmy in 1965 for the first special *My Name is Barbra*. Subsequent shows were *Color Me Barbra* (1966), *Barbra Streisand...and Other Musical Instruments* (1973), and *The Belle of 14th Street* (1967). Layton went on to do television specials for Hal Linden (1968), Olivia Newton-John (1976), the Carpenters (1976), Paul Lynde (1977-1979), Cher (1979), and for a Dolly Parton and Carol Burnett show, *Dolly & Carol in Nashville* (1979). Layton also worked with feature films, doing the choreography for *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967) and producing the film version of *Annie* (1982).

Layton directed a live concert for Raquel Welch in Las Vegas called *Really, Raquel*, as well as concerts for Lionel Richie and Diahann Carroll. Additionally, he staged two *Commitment to Life* Benefits, raising funds for the Los Angeles AIDS Project.

Layton did not completely abandon his work in ballet. He choreographed *Double Exposure* (1972) for the Robert Joffrey Ballet Company, *O.W.* for the London Royal Ballet, and *Grand Tour* for the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Layton died in 1994. Russell died earlier, in 1976, from cancer. The couple had one son, Jeb Layton.

## **Custodial History**

The materials were maintained by Rhoda Dresken, Layton's longtime personal assistant and manager, following his death.

## **Scope and Content Note**

This collection includes production material used by Layton in his role as a director, choreographer, and producer for stage productions, television specials, and live concerts, as well as personal and business correspondence, photographs, and awards. Production material is arranged by chronological order followed by alphabetical order- chronological material is primarily scrapbooks, with each scrapbook representing multiple productions, while alphabetical material is arranged by production title.

The scrapbooks were compiled by Layton and his family members and demonstrate Layton's career from early dance and theater performances in public schools in Brooklyn to choreographing Broadway shows and producing major television productions. Additionally, the scrapbooks document his marriage to Evelyn Russell and Russell's career as a stage actress. The scrapbooks contain both personal and professional material. Personal material include photographs of Layton, Russell, and their son Jeb, correspondence and cards, and material relating to the death of Russell and both of Layton's parents. Professional material includes clippings, correspondence, legal contracts, opening night cards and telegrams, programs, and photographs including headshots, production stills, rehearsal photographs, and casual backstage snapshots of performers like the Carpenters, Carol Channing, Danny Kaye, and Barbra Streisand.

The correspondence in the collection is distributed throughout the scrapbooks and in one file of separated material. The correspondence is not extensive, often consisting of cards or notes in recognition of a significant occasion, such as a birthday or the opening of a show. Notable correspondents include Lauren Bacall, David Begelman, Carol Channing, Cy Coleman, Noel Coward, Lillian Hellman, Kenneth Jeffrey Feld, Betsy Friday, John Huston, James Kirkwood, Dorothy Lamour, Mary Martin, Bette Midler, Olivia Newton-John, William F. Paley, Lionel Richie, Joan Rivers, Jerome Robbins, Richard Rodgers, Mary Rodgers, Rosalind Russell, Mark Rydell, Kenny Sacha, Liz Smith, Ray Stark, Barbra Streisand, Jule Style, and Doreen Wells.

Production binders are composed of annotated scripts, cast lists and contact sheets, correspondence, photographs, rehearsal schedules, rundowns, sheet music, and storyboard sketches. Unsorted material contains loose programs and clippings. The small selection of separated photographs are primarily family photographs. Slides include family snapshots, rehearsal photographs, and production stills- many are duplicates of photographs found in the scrapbooks and would be a good place for a researcher to begin their research.

This collection contains sound and video recordings. Sound recordings include recordings of *Androcles and The Lion*, *The Case of the Dead Flamingo Dancer*, and *Grand Tour*, recordings of Noel Coward, Diahann Carroll, Diana Ross, Marianne Tatum, and an audio recording of Layton receiving his Tony Award for *George M!*.

Video recordings consist of recordings of the rehearsals of Carol Channing and *Her Ten Stout-Hearted Men* and performances of *George M!*, *National Theatre of the Deaf*, *No Strings*, *On the Town*, *Sail Away*, *Scarlett*, and *The Sound of Music*. Footage of Noel Coward in his home in Les Avants, Switzerland and England (1961-1962) and footage of Layton and Russell, most notably of Russell performing with the Smothers Brothers, is held here.

Inquiries regarding audio and video in the collection may be directed to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound ([rha@nypl.org](mailto:rha@nypl.org)). Audio and video materials will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged into two groupings: Production Material and Personal Miscellany. Production Material is arranged chronologically then alphabetically within. Personal Miscellany is arranged alphabetically. All the material is based upon productions. Note that the material in Personal Miscellany is similar to the correspondence and photographs found in the Production Material section, only these documents are loose and not affixed in a scrapbook.

## Key Terms

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Awards  
Photo albums  
Photographs  
Scrapbooks  
Slides

### Subjects

Broadway -- (New York, N.Y.)  
Choreography -- United States -- 20th century

Concerts  
Musical films  
Musical theater -- New York (State) -- New York  
Musicals  
Musicals -- Production and direction

**Names**

Russell, Evelyn, d. 1976

## Container List

### Production Material

- b. 1 1931-1957 (Scrapbook)

Contains photographs and programs of Layton's early performances in New York City and the Catskills, printed material from his time in the Army and his work at the Tamiment Playhouse, and materials regarding High Button Shoes, Michael Todd's A Night in Venice, Miss Liberty, and Oklahoma!.
- b. 2 1940-1971 (Photo Album)

Contains photographs of Layton's early performances, photographs of Layton, Russell, and their extended family, and rehearsals of the Tokyo production of Scarlett.
- b. 3 1959-1961 (Scrapbook)

Contains cards congratulating Layton and Russell on their marriage, and photographs, postcards, and mementos from their trip to Israel and Europe. Shows represented are The Gershwin Years, Greenwillow, Sail Away, The Sound of Music, South Pacific, Tenderloin, and Russell's performance in Petticoat Fever.
- b. 4 1959-1965 (Scrapbook)

Contains photographs of Layton and Russell, and cards and correspondence. Productions represented are Drat! The Cat!, The Girl Who Came to Supper, The Lost Colony, My name is Barbra, On the Town, Once Upon a Mattress, and Peterpat, as well as Russell's performances in Glad Tidings, Nobody Loves An Albatross, and That Thing At The Cherry Lane.
- b. 5 1961-1983 (Scrapbook)

Contains material regarding Color Me Barbra, George M!, The Girl Who Came to Supper, Greenwillow, the Lionel Richie concert, No Strings, On the Town, Platinum, Really, Raquel, Scarlett, The Sound of Music, A Special Olivia Newton-John, Theatre of the Deaf, Thoroughly Modern Millie, Two by Two, and Woman of the Year.
- b. 6 1966-1967 (Scrapbook)

Contains family snapshots of Layton and Russell with Jeb as a baby. Productions represented are The Belle of 14th Street, Color Me Barbra, The Lost Colony, No Strings, Sail Away, Sherry!, South Pacific, The Theatre of the Deaf, Thoroughly Modern Millie, and Russell's performances in Infancy and The Whole Ninth Floor. Restricted pending conservation treatment.
- b. 7 1968-1969 (1 of 2) (Scrapbook)

Contains photographs of Layton, Russell, and Jeb, and of vacations taken within the United States. Shows represented are Dear World, George M!, The Lost Colony, The Theatre of the Deaf, and Russell's performance in A Place for Polly. Restricted pending conservation treatment.
- b. 8 1968-1969 (2 of 2) (Scrapbook)

Restricted pending conservation treatment.
- b. 9 1969-1970 (Scrapbook)

Contains material regarding Carol Channing and Her Ten Stout-Hearted Men, The Lost Colony, the Tokyo production of Scarlett, Two by Two, and Russell's performance in A Place for Polly.
- b. 10 1971-1972 (Scrapbook)

Contains family snapshots of Russell, Layton, and Jeb, and cards and correspondence. Shows represented are The Lost Colony, Really, Raquel, the London production of Scarlett, Two By Two, and Russell's appearances in Lysistrata and Paris is Out.
- b. 11 1973-1976 (Scrapbook)

Contains cards and correspondence, including condolence cards regarding Russell's death. Shows represented are Bette Midler's Clams on the Half Shell Revue, Lorelei, The Lost Colony, and Really, Raquel.
- b. 12 1976-1979 (Scrapbook)

Contains condolence cards and correspondence responding to Russell's death and printed material regarding her memorial service. Shows represented include The Carpenters' Very First Television Special, Cher's Take Me Home Tour debut show, Dolly & Carol in Nashville, An Evening With Diana Ross, Platinum, The Hanna-Barbera Happy Hour, A Special Olivia Newton-John, and The Theatre of the Deaf.

Production Material (cont.)

- b. 13 1976-1983  
Contains correspondence and photographs of Layton, Russell, and Jeb. Shows represented are An Evening with Diana Ross, Barnum, and The Lost Colony.
- b. 14 1979-1981 (Scrapbook)  
Contains material regarding Barnum, Cher's Take Me Home Tour debut show, and The Lost Colony.
- b. 15 1981-1983 (Scrapbook)  
Contains material regarding Annie, Barnum, The Lost Colony, Richard Pryor's live show, and Woman of the Year.
- b. 16 1983-1988 (Scrapbook)  
Contains material regarding the AIDS benefit Commitment to Life, Aloha, Grand Tour, Harrigan n' Hart, the Lionel Richie concert, The Lost Colony, Pieces of Eight, Three Musketeers, and Ziegfeld.
- b. 21 f. 1 And Debbie Makes Six--Production Binder 1968 March
- b. 21 f. 2 Androcles and the Lion--Production Binder 1967 November
- b. 21 f. 3 Barbra Streisand and Other Musical Instruments--Production Binder 1973
- b. 21 f. 4 Belle of 14th Street--Production Binder 1967 April
- b. 21 f. 5 Color Me Barbra--Production Binder 1966 January
- b. 22 f. 1 Dolly & Carol in Nashville--Production Binder 1979
  - b. 17 Double Exposure--Photo Album 1972
- b. 22 f. 2 An Evening with Diana Ross--Production Binder 1976
- b. 22 f. 3 The Gershwin Years--Script 1961 January
- b. 22 f. 4 The Hal Linden Special--Production Binder 1968
- b. 22 f. 5 The Hanna-Barbera Happy Hour--Publicity Materials 1978
- b. 23 f. 1 Harrigan & Hart--Scripts 1984
- b. 23 f. 2 Jack Jones: On the Move--Production Binder 1965 December
- b. 23 f. 3 Little Me--Script undated
- b. 23 f. 4 The Littlest Angel--Script 1969 February
- b. 23 f. 5 Mac Davis: I Believe in Christmas--Production Binder undated
- b. 23 f. 6 Music with Mary Martin--Script 1959 March
- b. 23 f. 7 My Name is Barbra--Production Binder 1965 April
- b. 24 f. 1 No Strings--Bound Score 1962
  - b. 17 O.W.--Photo Album 1972
- b. 24 f. 2 On the Flip Side--Production Binder 1966
- b. 24 f. 3 Once Upon a Mattress--Photo Album undated
- b. 24 f. 4 Once Upon a Mattress--Production Binder 1964 March
- b. 24 f. 5 Paul Lynde at the Movies--Production Binder 1979
- b. 24 f. 6 Paul Lynde Comedy Hour--Production Binder 1978
- b. 25 f. 1 Paul Lynde: T'was the Night Before Christmas--Production Binder 1977
- b. 25 f. 2-3 Pieces of Eight--Scripts 1984-1986
- b. 25 f. 4 Really, Raquel--Production Binder undated
- b. 25 f. 5 Sail Away--Script undated
  - b. 18 Scarlett--Scrapbook 1969-1970
  - b. 19 Scarlett--Scrapbook 1972-1975

Production Material (cont.)

- b. 25 f. 6 A Special Olivia Newton-John--Production Binder 1976 November
- b. 25 f. 7 The Three Muskateers--Production Binder 1984
- b. 26 f. 1-4 Unsorted Printed Material 1986-1994

Personal Miscellany

- b. 20 Awards--Award in recognition of support for AIDS Project Los Angeles 1991  
October 20  
Restricted pending conservation treatment.
- b. 20 Awards--Morrison Award presented by the Roanoke Island Historical  
Association for Achievement in the Performing Arts 1970  
Restricted pending conservation treatment.
- b. 26 f. 5 Correspondence 1988-1992
- b. 27 f. 1 Photographs 1977-1990
- b. 27 f. 2-4 Slides 1969-1974