



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Charles Pierce papers

1954-1998

*T-Mss 1998-008

Processed by Francesca Pitaro.

Summary

Creator: Pierce, Charles, 1926-1999

Title: Charles Pierce papers

Date: 1954-1998

Source: Papers: Gift, Pierce, Charles, 03/25/1998

Abstract: The Charles Pierce Papers include correspondence, biographical information, writings, scripts, photographs, clippings, programs, and scrapbooks documenting his career from the 1960's through the 1990's.

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:

Photocopying prohibited.

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

Preferred citation: Charles Pierce Papers, *T-Mss 1998-008, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Processing note: Processed by Francesca Pitaro.

Separated Materials:

Charles Pierce's "make-up mouse" has been transferred to the Division's *T-Cabinet. The mouse is a stuffed animal about 4-inches high with a very long tail, sitting on a dark pink pillow, decorated with a faux diamond pin. The mouse is wearing pearls and holding a cane and straw hat.

Creator History

Charles Pierce, female impressionist and actor, was born on July 14, 1926 in Watertown, New York. He was educated in Watertown, and worked at the local radio station WWNY while still a high school student. After graduation, he moved to California to attend the Pasadena Playhouse drama school. From the Pasadena Playhouse, he moved on to stage work in Newport, Rhode Island, and New York City, eventually returning to the Pasadena Playhouse as an actor in the early 1950s. It was during this period that he began to develop his nightclub act. His Sunday afternoon engagements at Club La Vie in Altadena were so successful, that the Club created a stage for him. He began a long engagement there in September, 1954.

His early impressions were done with props and puppets, and it wasn't until he'd been performing for more than ten years that he began to don full female costumes for his act. This change reflects the evolution of Pierce's impressions, but also the changes in legislation which earlier made such an act illegal in many states. As a female impressionist (or male actress, as he referred to himself at one time), Pierce was best known for his roles as Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Tallulah Bankhead, Mae West, and Joan Collins. His career, which spanned over four decades, took him to clubs around the United States and also to London where he appeared at the Fortune Theatre and the Country Cousin Cabaret. He is particularly well-known in San Francisco where he has performed regularly over the past 35 years.

In addition to his nightclub act, Pierce appeared as Margo Channing in *Applause*. His television credits during the 1970's and 1980's include *Fame*, *Starsky & Hutch*, *Laverne and Shirley*, *Love*, *American Style*, and *Designing Women*. In 1988 he appeared in the screen adaptation of Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy*. Throughout his career, Charles Pierce has been recognized not only for his impressions, but also for his skill as an actor and performer.

Custodial History

The Charles Pierce Papers were given to the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library by Charles Pierce in 1998 and 1999.

Scope and Content Note

The Charles Pierce papers document Pierce's career from the late 1960s through the early 1990s. The papers reflect Pierce's professional life through a comprehensive collection of clippings, some publicity materials and programs, and also photographs of Pierce in some of his many roles. His personal correspondence includes letters and notes from friends and fans, many of them well-known personalities. The collection further contains some papers and photographs relating to female impersonators and their history in the performing arts.

Arrangement: Series I: Correspondence Series II: Personal Papers Series III: Scripts Series IV: Photographs Series V: Ephemera Series VI: Scrapbooks

Key Terms

Subjects

Actors -- United States
Entertainers -- United States -- 20th century
Female impersonators
Television actors and actresses

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Photographic prints
Scrapbooks
Scripts

Names

Pierce, Charles, 1926-1999
Harris, Julie, 1925-2013
Mowers, Bob
Russell, Kitt
Smith, Liz

Container List

Series I: Correspondence, . 1971-1998 (18 folders)

Correspondence is made up entirely of incoming letters, and is arranged alphabetically. The letters, notes, and cards are personal in nature, and include many congratulatory notes from friends written after seeing performances of his. Among the correspondents are Julie Harris, Hal Holbrook, Hildegard, Angela Lansbury, Anita Loos, Bob Mowers, Kitt Russell and Liz Smith.

- b. 1 f. 1-6 **Correspondence 1971-1997 (6 folders)**
Redgrave, Lynn, 1943-2010Ballard, KayeCaen, HerbFeinstein, MichaelFierstein, Harvey, 1954-Francine, AnneGreer, DabbsLuPone, PattiRose Marie, 1923-Nesbitt, Cathleen, 1888-1982Reilly, Charles NelsonShutta, Ethel, 1896-1976
Notes and letters (ca. 1971-1997), arranged alphabetically, to Charles Pierce from friends and colleagues. Includes correspondence from Kaye Ballard, Herb Caen, Dixie Carter, Michael Feinstein, Harvey Fierstein, Anne Francine, Dabbs Greer, Patti LuPone, Rose Marie, Cathleen Nesbitt, Lynn Redgrave, Charles Nelson Reilly, and Ethel Shutta. Also included is one folder of notes received back stage at Bimbo's during a 1971 performance.
- b. 1 f. 7 **Correspondence, . 1982 (1 folder)**
DeLuise, DomDeLuise, Carol
Notes and letters, ca. 1982 to Charles Pierce. Two letters to Charles Pierce from Dom DeLuise, and one note from Carol DeLuise.
- b. 1 f. 8 **Correspondence / Julie Harris, . 1986-1998 (1 folder)**
Correspondence, 1986-1998, from Julie Harris to Charles Pierce, including sixteen cards and one letter.
- b. 1 f. 9 **Correspondence, . 1985-1991 (1 folder)**
Hildegard, 1906-2005
Notes and letters, 1985-1991, from Hildegard to Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 10 **Correspondence / Hal Holbrook, . 1985-1990 (1 folder)**
Correspondence, 1985-1990, including three letters and one postcard from Hal Holbrook to Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 11 **Correspondence / Angela Lansbury 1968-1991 (1 folder)**
Correspondence, 1968-1991, including six letters and notes from Angela Lansbury to Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 12 **Correspondence / Anita Loos 1975-1980 (1 folder)**
Four short letters, 1975-1980, from Anita Loos to Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 13-14 **Correspondence 1992-1994 (2 folders)**
Mowers, Bob
Letters, 1992-1994, from Bob Mowers to Charles Pierce."Uncle Bob" Mowers is the radio announcer who worked with Charles Pierce in Watertown in the 1940's. The letters include many reminiscences of Mowers' radio days and of recordings from his collection of 78's.
- b. 1 f. 15 **Correspondence / Vincent Price 1988 (1 folder)**
Browne, Coral, 1913-1991
Two postcards and one note from Vincent Price and Coral Browne to Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 16 **Correspondence / Sally Rand 1974 (1 folder)**
Two notes from Sally Rand to Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 17 **Correspondence / Kitt Russell 1990-1994 (1 folder)**
Letters, 1990-1994 from Kitt Russell to Charles Pierce, including information on wigs, make-up, and other female impersonators.
- b. 1 f. 18 **Correspondence / Liz Smith 1981-1988 (1 folder)**
Correspondence, 1981-1988, from Liz Smith to Charles Pierce, including seven letters and one clipping with notes.

Series II: Personal Papers ca. 1974-1996 (13 folders)

These are made up of biographical files, Pierce's files on female impersonators, Charles Pierce greeting cards, and writings by Pierce. Biographical material includes the transcript of an oral history interview given by Pierce for Southern Methodist University in 1989. Material on female impersonators is made up mostly of clippings, and a copy of the book *Great Pretenders* by Anthony Slide, which includes a section on Pierce. (Photographs of female impersonators are in the Photographs series).

By form

- b. 1 f. 19 **Oral history interview with Charles Pierce 1989 (1 volume)**
Transcript of Southern Methodist University oral history interview with Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 20 **Biographical materials / Charles Pierce. (1 folder)**
Biographical notes on Charles Pierce.
- b. 1 f. 21 **Personal papers / Charles Pierce, . 1974 (1 folder)**
Fagis, Byron
Writings by Byron Fagis, ca. 1974, about Charles Pierce. Includes two short articles and a tribute book, with photographs from Gold Street in San Francisco, 1974.
- b. 1 f. 22 ***Great pretenders / Anthony Slide* 1986 (1 volume)**
A copy of *Great Pretenders* by Anthony Slide. Includes a segment on Charles Pierce.
- b. 2 f. 1 **Articles relating to female impersonators. (1 folder)**
Articles and memorabilia relating to female impersonators, collected by Charles Pierce.
- b. 2 f. 2 **Greeting cards / Charles Pierce. (1 folder)**
Ten greeting cards of Charles Pierce in various roles, from the 1980s. Nine of the cards are blank. One is written from Charles Pierce to Dave Crandell. Ten greeting cards of Charles Pierce in various roles, from the 1980s. Nine of the cards are blank. One is written from Charles Pierce to Dave Crandell.
- b. 2 f. 3-9 **Writings / Charles Pierce. (7 folders)**
Miscellaneous writings by Charles Pierce, most undated, including "Confessions of a Male Actress," "Is There Life after Drag," and "The Jock Strap Murders." These manuscripts are not published.

Series III: Scripts, . ca. 1971-1988 (14 folders)

Scripts include Charles Pierce's television and movie roles, as well as a small file on "The Charles Pierce Show."

Chronological

- b. 2 f. 10 **Headlines for Higgenbottom (Television script) / Arne Sultan 1971 (1 folder)**
The partners (Television program)Barret, Earl
Television script for The Partners, October 26, 1971.
- b. 2 f. 11 **Love and the baby derby (Television script) / Roy Kammerman, . 1972 (1 folder)**
Love American style (Television program)
Television script for Love, American Style, October 16, 1972.
- b. 2 f. 12 **The dress (Television script) / Ben Starr, . 1976 (1 folder)**
Chico and the man (Television program)Stewart, Charles
Television script for Chico and the Man.
- b. 2 f. 13 ***Rabbit test (Screenplay) / Joan Rivers, . 1977 (1 folder)***
Excerpt (2 pages) from the *Rabbit Test screenplay*.
- b. 2 f. 14 **Death in a different place (Television script) / Tom Bagen, . 1977 (1 folder)**
Starsky & Hutch (Television program)
Television script for Starsky and Hutch.

Series III: Scripts,. (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 15 **Death in disguise (Television script) / Tom Sawyer,. 1977 (1 folder)**
The new adventures of wonder woman (Television program)
Television script for The New Adventures of Wonder Woman.
- b. 2 f. 16 **Murder on the moose jaw express, part I / Richard Rosenstock,. 1980 (1 folder)**
Murder on the moose jaw express, part I (Television script)Laverne and Shirley (Television program)Lukes, Jack
Television script (part I) for Laverne and Shirley.
- b. 2 f. 17 **Murder on the moose jaw express, part II (Television script) / Jeff Franklin,. 1980 (1 folder)**
Laverne and Shirley (Television program)Dobbs, Charlotte
Television script (part II) for Laverne and Shirley.
- b. 2 f. 18 **Hail to the chief (Television script) / Ralph Farquhar,. 1983 (1 folder)**
Fame (Television program)
Television script for Fame.
- b. 2 f. 19 **Cruising (Television script) / Linda Bloodworth-Thomason,. 1987 (1 folder)**
Designing women (Television program)
Television script for Designing Women.
- b. 3 f. 1 **Nerds of a feather (Screenplay) / Mario Milano,. 1988 (1 folder)**
Nerds of a feather (Motion picture)
Screenplay for the motion picture Nerds of a Feather. Also includes crew list and call sheets for Charles Pierce.
- b. 3 f. 2 **The good muddahs (Cartoon script) / Ken Koonce,. 1988 (1 folder)**
Animated television programsDuck tales (Television program)Wiemers, David
Recording script for the television cartoon program, Duck Tales.
- b. 3 f. 3 **Torch song trilogy (Screenplay) / Harvey Fierstein,. 1988 (1 folder)**
Torch song trilogy (Motion picture)
Screenplay for the motion picture Torch Song Trilogy. Also includes a score for the Dames number from the movie.
- b. 3 f. 4 **Scripts / Charles Pierce. (1 folder)**
Miscellaneous scripts (undated) for the "Charles Pierce Show." Also includes stage manager's check list and dresser's cues.

Series IV: Photographs ca. 1954-1990 (13 folders)

These include photos, slides, and some photocopies of photographs not in the collection. The photographs are primarily of Charles Pierce, both as himself, and dressed in his various roles as Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Tallulah Bankhead, Mae West, etc. Also included are photographs of various female impersonators including Julian Eltinge, Ricky Renee, Kitt Russell, and Danny Windsor. The slides are outtakes from photo shoots to create the Charles Pierce greeting cards. Photocopies are of Pierce family photos and other miscellaneous shots of Pierce.

- b. 3 f. 5-15 **Photographs / Charles Pierce. (11 folders)**
Photographs of Charles Pierce, ca. 1954-1990, including head shots of Pierce as himself, also of Pierce in his roles as Bette Davis, Joan Collins, Katharine Hepburn, Tallulah Bankhead, Mae West and others. Also included are photocopies of many photographs which are not in the collection, including Pierce family photos, and other pictures of Pierce in costume, alone and with others. One folder of slides contains out takes from a greeting card photo shoot, ca. 1985. Photographs from 1954 include a group of early publicity shots of Pierce taken by Cy Jones.
- b. 3 f. 16-17 **Photographs / Female impersonators. (2 folders)**
Russell, KittEltinge, Julian, 1883-1941Renee, RickyWindsor, DannyGillespie, Dizzy, 1917-1993Russell, Craig
Photographs of female impersonators including Julian Eltinge, Ricky Renee, Craig Russell, Kitt Russell, and Danny Windsor. Kitt Russell photos date from the 1940s and 1950s and include two group shots of many (mostly identified) female impersonators. One photo shows Kitt Russell with Dizzy Gillespie.

Series V: Ephemera, . 1963-1998 (24 folders, 1 flat box)

This is arranged by genre and is made up of clippings, publicity, programs, oversize material and files relating to several performances by Charles Pierce. The clippings are arranged chronologically, and include reviews, interviews and articles documenting nearly 30 years of performance by Charles Pierce. The publicity and oversize items include flyers, posters, magazine covers and other public relations material. Mr. Pierce's "make-up mouse" has been transferred to the Division's *T-Cabinet.

- b. 4 f. 1-18 **Clippings / Charles Pierce. (1 box)**
Clippings (ca. 1969-1998 and undated), including reviews, interviews and articles documenting the work of Charles Pierce.
- b. 5 f. 1-2 **Publicity materials about Charles Pierce. (2 folders)**
Publicity materials (ca. 1963-1994) including flyers, mailings, press packets and magazine covers related to Charles Pierce.
- b. 5 f. 3-4 **Programs / Charles Pierce. (2 folders)**
Programs (ca. 1969-1990) for performances by Charles Pierce
- b. 5 f. 5-7 **Ephemera / Charles Pierce. (3 folders)**
Applause (Musical)Torch song trilogy (Motion picture)Alice's celebrity tea party (AIDS benefit)Strouse, Charles
Ephemera (1974-1993) relating to Charles Pierce performances in Torch Song Trilogy, Applause and Alice's Celebrity Tea Party (Aid for AIDS benefit).
- b. 6 **Publicity materials about Charles Pierce. (1 box)**
Publicity materials (ca. 1963-1994) including flyers, mailings, press packets and magazine covers related to Charles Pierce.

Series VI: Scrapbooks, . ca. 1969-1987 (2 volumes)

Two volumes of clippings, photographs and programs documenting Charles Pierce's career from 1969 to 1987.

- b. 7 **Scrapbooks / Charles Pierce. (2 volumes)**
Two scrapbooks (ca. 1969-1987) including clippings, photographs and programs documenting the performances of Charles Pierce.