



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**National Repertory Theatre records**

1958-1992

\*T-Mss 1994-021

Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2014

## Summary

**Creator:** National Repertory Theatre Foundation

**Title:** National Repertory Theatre records

**Date:** 1958-1992

**Size:** 23.87 linear feet (48 boxes, 18 volumes, 1 oversized folder)

**Source:** Donated by Michael Dewell in 1994.

**Abstract:** The National Repertory Theatre was an American theatre company founded by Michael Dewell and Frances Ann Hersey, which produced touring productions of classic and modern plays. This collection consists of the records of the National Repertory Theatre, and other companies run by producer Michael Dewell, including the Phoenix Theatre, the American Festival, and the Los Angeles Free Shakespeare Festival. Materials in this collection include photographs, scripts, scrapbooks, publicity materials, and administrative files.

**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 Use:** The author/creator retains copyright of materials. For information on obtaining permission to publish, contact the Theatre Division at [theatrediv@nypl.org](mailto:theatrediv@nypl.org).

**Preferred citation:** National Repertory Theatre records, \*T-Mss 1994-021. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2014

## Creator History

The National Repertory Theatre's history dates back to 1957 when Tyron Guthrie directed a revival of Frederick Schiller's *Mary Stuart* at New York's Phoenix Theatre, starring Eva Le Gallienne and Irene

Worth. In 1959, producers Michael Dewell and Frances Ann Hersey sent the production on the road with Le Gallienne and Signe Hasso. The success of this production inspired Dewell and Hersey to found the National Repertory Theatre (NRT) in 1961. NRT was intended to be a touring company of actors, employing local technicians in each city it visited.

Michael Dewell was born in New Haven, Connecticut on March 21, 1931. He attended Yale University, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and the University of London. Before becoming a theatrical producer he worked briefly as an actor and a radio producer. His collaboration with Frances Ann Hersey began when they formed the Phoenix Theatre in 1958, which produced the tour of *Mary Stuart* that inspired the founding of the National Repertory Theatre, as well as two touring companies of the musical *Once Upon a Mattress*. In 1960 Dewell and Hersey produced several plays as part of the American Festival in Boston, Massachusetts.

Eva Le Gallienne would become the unofficial lead actor of the NRT and many actors, such as Farley Granger, joined the company in order to work with her. In its early years, NRT only played major cities, but as its productions became more well-known, a demand arose for it to tour smaller cities as well. Steady advertising and the careful building of relationships with local organizations and schools also brought audiences in. NRT's repertoire consisted entirely of well-known classic and modern plays.

President John F. Kennedy, who had once been engaged to NRT co-founder Frances Ann Hersey, expressed his intent to make NRT the official National Theatre. This intention died with Kennedy and was deeply disheartening for the NRT company and administration.

The company toured regularly from 1961 to 1967. A few times during those years NRT stopped in New York, winning a Tony Award in 1965. However, their 1967 engagement at the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA) Theatre was neither commercially successful nor well received by critics. That same year NRT moved to Washington D.C., where it was briefly the resident theatre company at the historic Ford's Theatre, which had recently been renovated. Unfortunately, a bitter financial controversy between NRT and the President of Ford's Theatre ended their professional association and spawned extensive litigation.

In 1970 NRT moved to Los Angeles as the National Repertory Theatre Foundation (NRTF). From that point on, NRTF focused on developing, sponsoring, and consulting on projects like the Los Angeles Free Shakespeare Festival, The Company Theatre workshop, The Bilingual Foundation for the Arts, the National Play Award, and an initiative to translate Federico Garcia Lorca's plays.

Michael Dewell died of lung cancer in Los Angeles, California on March 5, 1994. Frances Ann Dougherty Hersey died in East Hampton, New York on April 25th, 2001.

## **Scope and Content Note**

This collection consists of the records of the National Repertory Theatre, and other companies run by producer Michael Dewell, including the Phoenix Theatre, the American Festival, and the Los Angeles Free Shakespeare Festival. Materials in this collection include photographs, scripts, scrapbooks, publicity materials, and administrative files.

There is an incomplete run of administrative files, containing the company's records, arranged alphabetically by city name, or by subject. These materials cover all aspects of running a theatrical company and date from 1958 to 1979. Items found in the alphabetical files include signs, flyers, banners, advertisements, photographs, and other publicity materials; information on prominent local

individuals and organizations; contacts with and technical specifics for the theatres NRT played; and information on schools and study guides for school groups. Also included are letters from company and crew members to Michael Dewell describing production issues. There are business letters negotiating the rental of theatres, and arranging for publicity for the NRT tours. Also held here are tour schedules, budgets, box office statements, and programs. A small amount of other administrative files, include NRT meeting minutes, programs, progress reports, and business correspondence are also included in Administrative Files.

This collection includes an extensive photograph component, containing numerous production shots from NRT's 1960s tours. They are arranged by season. There are also rehearsal shots, photographs of actors in costume, and posed publicity photographs of NRT administrators, actors, and productions. Also held here are photographs of other productions produced by Michael Dewell and Frances Ann Hersey, including the 1960 national tour of *Once Upon A Mattress*, and productions of the Los Angeles Free Shakespeare Festival and The American Festival.

Scripts document the touring productions produced by the NRT during the 1960s. Some of the scripts present are from the Los Angeles Free Shakespeare Festival. Though all the plays produced by NRT were well-known works, in some cases new adaptations or translations were written specifically for the NRT production, sometime by Eva Le Gallienne or Michael Dewell. Many of the scripts are annotated with stage managers' notes, documenting technical and blocking cues, as well as directorial choices.

Production books are binders usually maintained by the stage manager, containing extensive prop lists, study guides, stage maps, business correspondence, rehearsal call sheets, lighting cues, sound cues, photographs of set design models, and costume inventories. The critical response to NRT's touring productions is documented with clipping books, arranged by city, within each season. There are also copies of articles on NRT productions in the Printed Materials, which contain full cast and creative team lists and information, as well as memos, letters, tour schedules, progress reports, and budgets. Scrapbooks contain clippings, programs, press releases and photographs from NRT's 1960s tours and the touring productions produced by the Phoenix Theatre.

This collection also contains files on various special projects developed by NRT, as well as other production companies run by Michael Dewell. Materials pertaining to the re-opening of Ford's Theatre include commemorative programs, flyers, official proclamations, clippings, reports, and correspondence. The class action suit NRT brought against Ford's Theatre is documented with transcripts of court proceedings, depositions, and legal opinions. There are also photographs, including publicity shots of the NRT founders and production shots from the 1967-1968 season.

The Los Angeles workshop Dewell started in 1969, The Company Theatre, is also represented here with such materials as board meeting minutes, box office statements and projections, business correspondence notes, programs, photographs, and clippings. The National Play Awards, started by NRT in 1980, are represented with publicity materials, press releases, articles, letters soliciting donations, letters discussing the merits of nominated plays, and lists of contributors. Materials covering the Los Angeles Free Shakespeare Festival, The Bilingual Foundation for the Arts, La Celebration, and other NRT projects include clippings, feature articles, brochures, flyers, programs, and press releases.

**Arrangement:** This collection is arranged in the following groups: Administrative Files, Photographs, Scripts, Production Books, Clippings, Printed Materials, Scrapbooks, and Specific Projects and Companies.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Musical theater  
Repertory theater  
Theater -- 20th century  
Theater -- History -- 20th century  
Theater -- Marketing  
Theater -- Production and direction  
Theater -- Washington (D.C.) -- History -- 20th century  
Theater management  
Theatrical companies -- United States -- History -- 20th century

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Photographs  
Programs (documents)  
Scrapbooks  
Scripts

### **Names**

Dewell, Michael

## Container List

### Administrative Files 1958-1982

#### Alphabetical Run 1958-1982

- b. 1 f. 1-18 East Lansing, Michigan-Greensboro, North Carolina 1959-1968
- b. 2 f. 1-16 Greensboro, North Carolina-Itineraries: All Tours 1959-1967
- b. 3 f. 1-18 Kansas City, Missouri-Loans 1958-1967
- b. 4 f. 1-13 Los Angeles, California-Louisville, Kentucky 1959-1968
- b. 5 f. 1-15 Louisville, Kentucky-Meeting Minutes 1960-1967
- b. 6 f. 1-12 Meeting Minutes-Montreal, Quebec 1959-1981
- b. 7 f. 1-12 N-New York, New York 1959-1967
- b. 8 f. 1-15 New York, New York-Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1959-1967
- b. 9 f. 1-10 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania-Princeton, New Jersey 1959-1967
- b. 10 f. 1-14 Programs-Rights 1959-1982
- b. 11 f. 1-17 Rights-St. Louis, Missouri 1959-1967
- b. 12 f. 1-16 St. Louis, Missouri-San Francisco, California 1959-1967
- b. 13 f. 1-11 San Francisco, California-Shreveport, Louisiana 1959-1966
- b. 14 f. 1-18 Shyre, Paul-Study Guides 1960-1968
- b. 15 f. 1-16 Sydow, Jack-Tuscaloosa, Alabama 1959-1968
- b. 16 f. 1-15 Tulsa, Oklahoma-Washington, D. C 1959-1968
- b. 17 f. 1-15 Washington, D. C.-Youngstown, Ohio 1959-1967
- b. 36 f. 1-6 Progress Reports 1961-1968

#### Photographs 1960-1974

- b. 35 f. 1-3 The American Festival 1960  
Productions: Dance Festival, *Anatol*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*

#### National Repertory Theatre 1960-1974

- b. 18 f. 1-3 Season One 1960-1962  
Productions: *Mary Stuart*, *Elizabeth the Queen*  
Season Two  
Productions: *The Crucible*, *Ring Round the Moon*, *The Seagull*
  - b. 18 f. 4 1963-1964
- b. 19 f. 1-3 1963-1964  
Season Three  
Productions: *Hedda Gabler*, *Lilliom*, *She Stoops to Conquer*
  - b. 20 f. 1-3 1964-1965
  - b. 21 f. 1-3 1964-1965
- Season Four  
Productions: *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, *The Rivals*, *The Trojan Women*
  - b. 22 f. 1-4 1965-1966
  - b. 23 f. 1-4 1965-1966
  - b. 24 f. 1-4 1965-1966
- Season Five  
Productions: *The Imaginary Invalid*, *Tonight at 8:30*, *A Touch of the Poet*

Photographs (cont.)  
National Repertory Theatre (cont.)  
Season Five (cont.)

- b. 25 f. 1-4 1966-1967
- b. 26 f. 1-5 1966-1967
- b. 27 f. 1-2 1966-1967

Season Six

Productions: *The Comedy of Errors*, *John Brown's Body*, *She Stoops to Conquer*

- b. 27 f. 3-4 1967-1968
- b. 28 f. 1-5 1967-1968
- b. 29 f. 1-4 1967-1968
- b. 29 f. 5-6 Various Seasons 1963-1967  
Color photographs
- b. 35 f. 4 Los Angeles Free Shakespeare Festival 1974
- b. 30 f. 1-4 *Once Upon a Mattress* 1960

Scripts 1959-1974

- b. 31 f. 1 *Anatol* 1960
- b. 31 f. 2 *As You Like it* undated
- b. 31 f. 3-4 *The Comedy of Errors* 1967
- b. 31 f. 5 *The Crucible* 1963-1964
- b. 31 f. 6-7 *Elizabeth The Queen* 1960-1962
- b. 31 f. 8 *The Gay Life* undated  
An adaptation of *Anatol*.
- b. 32 f. 1 *Hedda Gabler* 1964
- b. 32 f. 2 *The Imaginary Invalid* 1966-1967
- b. 32 f. 3-4 *John Brown's Body* 1967
- b. 32 f. 5 *The Kid from Philly* 1962
- b. 32 f. 6 *Lilliom* 1964
- b. 33 f. 1 *Macbeth* 1974
- b. 33 f. 2-3 *The Madwoman of Chailot* 1964
- b. 33 f. 4-6 *Mary Stuart* 1959-1962
- b. 33 f. 7 *A Mask for Elizabeth* undated
- b. 34 f. 1 *Ring Round the Moon* 1963-1964
- b. 34 f. 2 *The Rivals* 1965
- b. 34 f. 3 *The Seagull* 1963
- b. 34 f. 4 *She Stoops to Conquer* 1964
- b. 34 f. 5 *Tonight at 8:30* 1966-1967
- b. 34 f. 6 *A Touch of the Poet* 1966-1967
- b. 34 f. 7 *The Trojan Women* 1966

Production Books 1964-1968

- b. 37 f. 1-3 Season Three-Season Five 1964-1967
- b. 38 f. 1-3 Season Five-Season Six 1966-1968

Clippings 1963-1992

- b. 38 f. 4 Season Two 1963-1964
- b. 38 f. 5 General Clippings and Reviews 1963-1966, 1992

Clippings (cont.)

- b. 39 f. 1-4 Season Three-Season Four 1964-1966
- b. 40 f. 1-2 Season Five-Season Six 1966-1968
- b. 40 f. 3 General Clippings 1974-1984  
Also contains correspondence and proposals.

Printed Materials 1961-1967

- b. 40 f. 4-5 Season One-Season Two 1961-1964
- b. 41 f. 1-3 Season Three-Season Five 1964-1967

Scrapbooks 1959-1968

- v. 48 *Mary Stuart* 1959
- v. 49 *Mary Stuart* 1959
- v. 50 *Mary Stuart* 1959
- v. 52 *Once Upon a Mattress* 1960
- v. 53 *Once Upon a Mattress* 1960
- b. 51 National Phoenix Theatre and Other Companies 1961  
Includes Sheet Music from *The Kid from Philly*.
- v. 54 NRT Season One 1961-1962
- v. 55 NRT Season One 1961-1962
- v. 56 NRT Season One 1961-1962
- v. 57 NRT Season Two 1963-1964
- v. 58 NRT Season Two 1963-1964
- v. 59 NRT Season Three 1964-1965
- v. 60 NRT Season Three 1964-1965
- v. 61 NRT Season Four 1965-1966
- v. 62 NRT Season Four 1965-1966
- v. 63 NRT Season Five 1966-1967
- v. 64 NRT Season Five 1966-1967
- v. 65 NRT Season Six 1967-1968
- v. 66 NRT Season Six 1967-1968

Special Projects and Companies 1958-1986

- b. 41 f. 4 Academy of Stage and Cinema Arts 1976
- b. 41 f. 5 Bilingual Foundation of the Arts 1978-1986
- b. 42 f. 1 La Celebration 1976-1983
- b. 42 f. 2-5 Company Theatre 1970  
Ford's Theatre 1963-1976
- b. 42 f. 6 Clippings and Correspondence 1967-1969
- b. 42 f. 7 Historic Structures Report 1963
- b. 43 f. 1 Inaugural Program Report 1967
- b. 43 f. 2-6 Lawsuit 1968-1971
- b. 44 f. 1-4 Lawsuit 1971-1974
- b. 45 f. 1-2 Lawsuit 1974-1976
- b. 45 f. 3 Photographs 1967-1968
- b. 45 f. 4 Proclamations 1968

Special Projects and Companies (cont.)  
Ford's Theatre (cont.)

- b. 45 f. 5      **Programs 1968**
  - o. 1      **Programs**  
Location: LPA Mapcase C12 Dwr# 31  
**Los Angeles 1973-1979**
- b. 46 f. 1-2      **Free Shakespeare Festival 1973-1974**
- b. 46 f. 3-6      **Various Projects 1978-1979**
- b. 45 f. 6      **National Endowment for the Arts 1980**
- b. 46 f. 7-8      **National Phoenix Theatre 1958-1959**
- b. 47 f. 1-6      **National Play Award 1977-1985**