



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

The Springer Opera House collection of Abe Feder lighting designs

1932-2004

*T-Vim 2017-047

Processed by Heather Halliday, 2018.

Summary

Creator: Feder, Abe H.

Title: The Springer Opera House collection of Abe Feder lighting designs

Date: 1932-2004

Size: 30.93 linear feet (80 containers)

Source: Donated by Springer Opera House in 2018.

Abstract: Abe Feder (1909-1997) was an American lighting designer for theater, interior spaces, urban environments, and architecture. The Springer Opera House collection of Abe Feder lighting designs date from 1932 to 2004 and focus on the theatrical portion of Feder's career.

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>

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Creator History

Abraham Hyman Feder was born on July 27, 1909 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Feder's fascination with light dates back to a magic show he saw as a teen. The magician's dramatic use of colored lighting captivated young Feder, inspiring him to begin setting up the lights for his high school drama club's plays.

In 1926, Feder entered the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania majoring in

architecture, the closest thing he could find at that time to lighting design. He left after only two years, complaining that the architecture department did not recognize light as an architectural material.

After leaving Carnegie Institute, Feder briefly worked at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. In 1930 he moved to New York City, where his first job was setting up lighting for Yiddish theatre productions at the America Theatre in the Bronx. Feder quickly established his reputation as a gifted and innovative theatrical lighting expert on Broadway. He remained based in New York City for the duration of his career.

From 1935 until 1939, Feder designed lighting for the Federal Theatre Project, a Works Progress Administration (WPA) program, where he collaborated with Paul Bowles, Orson Welles, and John Houseman, among others. In 1943, during World War II, Feder joined the Army Air Forces (A.A.F.) and was able to continue practicing his craft there. Sergeant Feder designed the lighting for A.A.F.'s touring production of *Winged Victory*.

After the war, he established his own lighting design consultation firm, Lighting By Feder, and began taking on architectural clients in addition to theater projects. He lit Rockefeller Center, the United Nations Building, the lion and penguin houses of the Bronx Zoo, Buckminster Fuller's first geodesic dome at the 1964 World's Fair, as well as restaurants, stores, nightclubs, monuments, and special events. His hundreds of theatrical credits include Welles's *Dr. Faustus* and *Macbeth*; *The Cradle Will Rock*; *My Fair Lady*; *Camelot*; *The Boy Friend*; *The King and I*; *Carnival*, and James Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie*.

Feder is widely considered to be the founder of modern lighting design, having elevated the field from a pedestrian technical service to a distinct creative field. Feder thought of light as a tangible building material and his designs often substituted light and shadow for more elaborate sets and props. He sued and won a landmark case against Herman Levin, the producer of the 1957 touring production of *My Fair Lady*. Levin used Feder's Broadway designs of the previous year to stage the musical on the road, having an electrician execute them, but refused to pay Feder's fee. Winning this case helped to establish legal precedent for lighting design as unique artistic expression or intellectual property. Feder also held patents on a number of bulb and lamp types and wrote and lectured frequently on the topic of lighting.

Abe Feder died in New York City on April 24, 1997.

Custodial History

In the 1980s, at the urging of his friend, Springer Opera House trustee Glesca Marshall, Abe Feder donated his theatrical lighting designs and papers to Springer, where Marshall hoped they would form the basis of a theater lighting library. Springer Opera House held the Feder collection from 1987 until 2018, when Springer donated the collection to New York Public Library. Though Springer's in-house library project was never fully realized, there is evidence of the theater's efforts to organize, augment, and describe the Feder collection. The chronological order imposed upon the collection by Springer Opera House has been retained.

Scope and Content Note

The Springer Opera House collection of Abe Feder lighting designs dates from 1932 to 2004 and focus on the theatrical side of Feder's career.

The Projects series comprises the bulk of the collection. Feder kept "data books" for each play or project he worked on. These data books were most likely compiled as he worked on each production, while the projects were active or shortly thereafter. His earliest work including WPA/Federal Theatre projects, appear to be an exception to this, as many from this period consist of photocopied documents that were likely assembled in the 1950s or later. The Projects files include design sketches, blueprints, notes, and correspondence related to each play or event. They are arranged chronologically, except for a separate group of unsorted, laminated, photocopied designs.

Series II concerns Feder's involvement with the Springer Opera House in Columbus, Georgia. In the 1960s, Springer had been Feder's client when he redesigned their house lighting as part of a major renovation of the theater building. In the 1980s, Feder chose to house his theatrical lighting designs and papers at Springer Opera House. This series includes Feder's 1964 renovation project with Springer as well as materials about Feder compiled by Springer staff. Several bound volumes created by Springer staff include a chronological index of all of Feder's theatrical lighting design projects; performance photographs; and reviews of performances of Feder's productions.

Some administrative records of the "Lighting By Feder" company are present in the collection. They include biographical sketches of Feder, resumes, and a few photographs.

A few files document workshops and lectures conducted by Feder, consisting of detailed workshop notes and some promotional material for a lecture.

A file of his published professional writings holds copies of published essays and magazine or journal articles on the topic of light written by Feder.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Blueprints (reprographic copies)
Cue sheets
Design drawings
Diazotypes (copies)
Ground plans
Scripts

Subjects

Stage lighting
Theater -- Production and direction

Occupations

Stage lighting designers

Names

Feder, Abe H.
Swope, Martha
Federal Theatre Project (New York, N.Y.) -- New York, N.Y.

Container List

Series I: Projects 1933-1979 (70 containers 27.71 linear feet)

Feder's project "data books" typically contain correspondence relating to each production or event; sketches and notes; budgets; lighting plots; switch board diagrams; cue sheets; theater ground plans; elevation charts; and also occasionally scripts, reviews, and playbills. In addition to data books, the Projects files also include many oversize lighting plots, diagrams, and designs, which may be rolled, housed in flat boxes or in oversized folders. Most designs are photo-mechanically reproduced and a few are hand-drawn.

1930s

- b. 1 f. 1 *Hilda Cassidy* 1933 May
- b. 1 f. 2 *Four Saints in Three Acts* 1934 February
- t. 1 o. 5 Waldorf Astoria Ballroom 1936 February
- b. 1 f. 3 *Macbeth* 1936 April
Directed by Orson Welles. WPA, Federal Theatre production.
- b. 1 f. 7 Miniature Theatre 1937-1938
- b. 1 f. 4 t. 1 o. 5 *Dr. Faustus* 1937 January
Produced by Orson Welles. Music by Paul Bowles. WPA, Federal Theatre production.
- b. 1 f. 5 *Native Ground* 1937 March
WPA, Federal Theatre production.
- b. 1 f. 6 *One-Third of a Nation* 1937 July
WPA, Federal Theatre production.
- b. 1 f. 8 WPA Repertory 1938
Includes *Diff'rent*, *Pygmalion*, *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines*, *No More Peace*, and *Coriolanus*.
- b. 1 f. 9 *Prologue to Glory* 1938 March
WPA, Federal Theatre production.
- b. 1 f. 10 *The Big Blow* 1938 October
WPA, Federal Theatre production.
- b. 1 f. 11 *Androcles and the Lion* 1938 December
WPA, Federal Theatre production.

1940s

- b. 1 f. 12 American Ballet Theatre 1940 January
Premiere season.
- b. 2 f. 1 *A Passenger to Bali* 1940 March
- b. 2 f. 2 *Hold Onto Your Hats* 1940 September
- b. 2 f. 3 *Johnnie Belinda* 1940 September
- b. 2 f. 4 *Pygmalion* 1940 November
- b. 2 f. 5 *Angel Street* 1941 December
- b. 2 f. 6 t. 2 *The Walking Gentleman* 1942 May
- b. 2 f. 7 *Winged Victory* 1943 November
A.A.F. touring production.
- b. 2 f. 8 Jewish War Veterans Show 1946 March
- b. 2 f. 9 *A Century of Connecticut Fashion* 1947 March
- b. 3 f. 1-2 *New York Times Fashion Show* 1947 October
- b. 3 f. 3 National Lingerie and Negligee Show 1949 January

Series I: Projects (cont.)

1940s (cont.)

b. 3 f. 4 *Gayden* 1949 May

1950s

t. 5 *Ely Gallery* circa 1950s

o. 1 *The Little Theatre* circa 1950s

b. 3 f. 5-6 *The Gioconda Smile* 1950 October

b. 30 f. 1

b. 32 f. 1-2 t. 3 o. 5 Includes scenic sketches by Arthur Romano.

b. 4 f. 1-2 *New York Times Fashion Show* 1950 November

b. 29 f. 1-12

b. 30 f. 2-11 t. 4 o. 2 o. 3 o. 5 Includes scenic sketches by Arthur Romano.

b. 4 f. 3 *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* 1950 November

b. 4 f. 4 t. 4 *Out of This World* 1950 December

b. 4 f. 5 *A Sleep of Prisoners* 1951 October

b. 4 f. 6 *Dear Barbarians* 1952 February

b. 4 f. 6 t. 6 *Three Wishes for Jamie* 1952 March

b. 4 f. 7 t. 7 *Thunderland* 1952 Summer

b. 5 f. 1 *Sonia Henie Ice Show* 1952 August

b. 5 f. 2 t. 8 *A Pin to See Peep Show* 1953 September

b. 5 f. 3 *Immoralist* 1953-1954

b. 31 f. 1 t. 5 t. 9 o. 4

b. 5 f. 4 *Ford Show* 1954 May

b. 5 f. 5-6 *The Boy Friend* 1954 September

b. 30 f. 12 t. 10-13 Includes scenic sketches by Abe Feder.

b. 6 f. 1-2 t. 14 *The Flowering Peach* 1954 December

b. 6 f. 3 t. 14 *What Every Woman Knows* 1954 December

b. 6 f. 4 t. 14 *The Wisteria Trees* 1955 February

b. 6 f. 5 t. 14 *Inherit the Wind* 1955 April

b. 6 f. 6 t. 15 *Lamb's Gambols* 1955 April

b. 6 f. 7 *Seventh Heaven* 1955 May

b. 6 f. 8 t. 15 *The Skin of Our Teeth* 1955 June

b. 6 f. 9 *Maiden Voyage* 1955 October

b. 7 f. 1 *The Young and Beautiful* 1955 October

b. 7 f. 2 *The Boy Friend* 1955 November

b. 7 f. 3 *Command Performance / First Night Ball* 1955 December

b. 7 f. 4 t. 16 *My Fair Lady* 1956 March

b. 7 f. 5 *Adlai Stevenson Rally* 1956 October

t. 15 *Par 64* 1957

b. 7 f. 6-7 t. 15 *A Clearing in the Woods* 1957 January

b. 7 f. 8 *First Night Ball / Command Performance* 1957 January

b. 7 f. 9 *Porgy and Bess* 1957 January

b. 8 f. 1-2 t. 2 t. 37 *Visit to a Small Planet* 1957 February

Series I: Projects (cont.)
1950s (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 3-6
b. 31 f. 2 t. 16 t.
17
My Fair Lady (tour) 1957 March
- b. 9 f. 1-2 t. 18 t.
19
Orpheus Descending 1957 March
- b. 9 f. 3-4
b. 31 f. 3
Time Remembered 1957 November
- b. 9 f. 5-6
b. 19
At the Grand (Grand Hotel) 1958 July
- b. 10 f. 1-2 t. 19
Goldilocks 1958 October
- b. 10 f. 3 t. 20
The Cold Wind and the Warm 1958 December
- b. 10 f. 4 t. 20
Come Play With Me 1959 April
- b. 10 f. 5 t. 21
Henry Hudson Celebration (Theatre-in-the-Park) 1959 July
- b. 11 f. 1-2 t. 21
A Loss of Roses 1959 November
- 1960s
- b. 11 f. 3-4 t. 22
Greenwillow 1960 March
- b. 11 f. 5
b. 12 f. 1-2
b. 31 f. 4
Camelot 1960 December
- b. 12 f. 3 t. 23 o. 5
Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright 1962 December
- b. 12 f. 4
b. 31 f. 4 t. 23
Camelot (tours) 1962-1963
- b. 12 f. 5
The Diahann Carroll Show 1963 November
- b. 13 f. 1-3
b. 30 f. 13
b. 32 f. 3 t. 24 t.
25
Once for the Asking 1963 November
Includes scenic design sketches by Abe Feder.
- b. 13 f. 4-5
b. 31 f. 8 t. 26 t.
27
Blues for Mr. Charlie 1964 April
- b. 14 f. 1 t. 29 o. 5
My Fair Lady 1964 May
- b. 14 f. 2-4 t. 27 t.
28
The Three Sisters 1964-1965
- b. 14 f. 5 o. 5
b. 14 f. 6
Blues for Mr. Charlie (London Production) 1965 May
Actors Studio Theatre, London Tour 1965 Spring
- b. 15 f. 1-6
b. 31 f. 5 t. 30 o. 5
On a Clear Day You Can See Forever 1965 October
- b. 16 f. 1-2 t. 31
The Country Girl 1966 September
- b. 16 f. 3
The Chad Mitchell Show 1966 November
- b. 16 f. 4-9 t. 30 t.
32
Elizabeth the Queen 1966 November
- b. 17 f. 1-3 t. 33
Carousel 1966 December
- b. 17 f. 4
The Patricia Marand Show 1967 April
- b. 17 f. 5-7
Garden of Stars Theatre 1967 Spring
Part of Expo '67 in Montreal.
- b. 18 f. 1-3 t. 33 t.
34
A Salute to the American Musical Theatre 1967 Spring
New York City performance held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel Ballroom; Washington, D.C.
performance held at the White House.
- b. 18 f. 4 t. 33 t.
34
Beyond Desire 1967 October

Series I: Projects (cont.)
1960s (cont.)

- b. 18 f. 5-6 *The King and I* 1968 May
b. 19 f. 1
- b. 19 f. 2 t. 29 *My Fair Lady* 1968 June
- b. 19 f. 3-4 t. 35 *Carnival* 1968 December
- b. 19 f. 5 Alan Jay Lerner Testimonial Dinner 1969 February
- 1970s
- b. 20 f. 1-4 t. 35 t. 36 *Scratch* 1971 May
- b. 20 f. 5 Tribute of Stars to Israel's Maccabee's 1973 December
- b. 21 f. 1-4 t. 37 *Doctor Jazz* 1975 March
- b. 21 f. 5-6 *Goodtime Charley* 1975 March
b. 22 f. 1 Feder received a Tony nomination for his lighting design of this production. Includes
b. 29 f. 13 t. 37 photographs taken by Martha Swope of set designer's models.
- b. 22 f. 2-6 t. 37 *Carmelina* 1979 April

b. 33 Laminated Photocopied Drawings 1940-1979
b. 34

Loose, unsorted lighting designs, plans, and diagrams for theatrical projects. Productions include: *Johnnie Belinda*, *The Walking Gentleman*; *Out of This World*; *Three Wishes for Jamie*; *Thunderland*; *The Boy Friend*; *The Flowering Peach*; *Inherit the Wind*; *Lamb's Gambols*; *Seventh Heaven*; *Time Remembered*; *Blues for Mr. Charlie*; *What Every Woman Knows*; *The Wisteria Trees*; *The Skin of Our Teeth*; *My Fair Lady*; *Grand Hotel*; *Camelot*; *Once for the Asking*; *The Country Girl*; *Beyond Desire*; *Carnival*; and *Scratch*.

Series II: Springer Opera House 1932-2004 (9 containers 2.81 linear feet)

This series holds Feder's Springer Opera House project files; newspaper and magazine clippings, mostly relating to Feder's work with Springer; files of photographic negatives and contact sheets of cast members, sets, and exteriors of Springer from the late 1970s; and correspondence among Feder, Glesca Marshall, and others at the theater. Several bound volumes created by Springer staff contain original and photocopied performance photographs and reviews of performances of Feder's productions. Another bound volume, found in box 23, is a chronological index of all of Feder's theatrical lighting design projects, listing which types of documents are present in the collection for each title.

Bound Volumes

- b. 23 f. 1 Index of Theatrical Projects 1982
Lists all projects contained in collection and details which types of documents are present for each.
- b. 23 f. 2 *New York Times Reviews* 1932-1979
Photographically reproduced clippings of reviews of Feder's theatrical projects.
- Production Photographs
Includes photographic prints and photocopied images.
- b. 23 f. 3 Federal Theatre 1936-1939
- b. 24 f. 1 Fashion Shows 1947-1950
- b. 24 f. 2 1932-1957
- b. 24 f. 3 1958-1979
- b. 25 f. 1 Clippings 1964-1985
- b. 25 f. 2 Correspondence 1968-1997
- b. 25 f. 3 *Dialogue with Light* 1971
- b. 25 f. 4 *An Evening with the Playwrights* 1975-1976
- b. 25 f. 5-7 Glesca Marshall's Culbertson Manuscript 1982
- b. 26 f. 1 Invoices 1965-1977
- b. 26 f. 2 Library Project 1986-2004

Series II: Springer Opera House (cont.)

- b. 26 f. 3-4 **Photographic Negatives and Contact Sheets** circa 1979-1980s
 Theater Projects
- b. 26 f. 5-6 o. 6 **1965**
 Includes curtain and rigging designs and special lighting fixture specifications.
- b. 26 f. 7-9 t. 38 t.
 39 o. 6 o. 7 **1972-1973**
 Includes drawings and lighting designs.
- b. 26 f. 10 **1976**
 Drawings.
- t. 39 **1986**
- b. 26 f. 11 **Undated**
- b. 31 f. 9-11 Includes seating plan.

Series III: Administrative 1930-2004 (2 containers 0.67 linear feet)

- b. 27 f. 1 **Ads** 1970s-1994
- b. 27 f. 2 **Biographies of Abe Feder** 1970-2004
- b. 27 f. 3 **Clippings** 1956-1988
- b. 27 f. 4 **Miscellaneous** 1976-1985
- b. 27 f. 5 **Photographs** 1930-2001
- b. 30 f. 14-15
- b. 27 f. 6-10 **Works** 1963- circa 1979
- b. 27 f. 11 **Writings about Abe Feder** 1955-1997
- b. 28 f. 1-3 **Series IV: Lectures and Workshops** 1967-1980 (1 container 0.21 linear feet)
- b. 28 f. 4 **Series V: Writings** 1957-1973 (1 container 0.21 linear feet)

Articles and essays written by Abe Feder.