



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Jeanne Button and MacDonald Eaton designs and papers

1950-2015

*T-Vim 2018-012

Processed by Matthew Snyder in 2019.

Summary

Creator: Button, Jeanne

Title: Jeanne Button and MacDonald Eaton designs and papers

Date: 1950-2015

Size: 14 linear feet (48 boxes, 7 oversize folders)

Source: Donated by Raphael Sbarge, 2018.

Abstract: Jeanne Button (1930-2017) designed costumes for Broadway and Off-Broadway productions, as well as for dance, opera, film, and television. Her second husband, MacDonald Eaton (1929-2013), was a set and production designer for television and stage, as well as a painter. The Jeanne Button and MacDonald Eaton designs and papers, dating from 1950 to 2015, document Button's and Eaton's designs, careers, and art, as well as the career of Button's son, actor Raphael Sbarge.

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Creator History

Jeanne Button (1930-2017) was a costume designer for Broadway, Off-Broadway, university, and regional theater productions, as well as for dance, opera, film, and television. Born in Cincinnati, she graduated at her parents' urging with a degree in home economics from the Carnegie Institute of Technology (later Carnegie Mellon University). Button decided instead that she wanted to learn costume design, and taught herself to draw, earning a scholarship at the Yale School of Drama.

She launched her career in 1967 with her designs for *Macbird!*, an Off-Broadway production which earned her the Henry Hewes Design Award from the American Theater Wing. Other Off-Broadway productions she worked on were *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth* for The Public Theater (1989); *The Crucible*; and many others.

Button's first job on Broadway was for *The Watering Place* (1969). Numerous productions for Broadway as well as regional theaters followed, including *Henry V* (1969), *The Robber Bridegroom* (1975-1976), *Wings* (1979), *Richard III* (1979), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1986), and *The Twilight of the Gods* (1993). Button worked with theater companies around the country, including The Acting Company, Yale Repertory Theatre, Roundabout Theatre, Great Lakes Theatre Festival, Alley Theatre (Houston), and the American Shakespeare Festival. Button also designed for opera (*La Bohème* and *The Ring*), and ballet, including Trey McIntyre's productions of *Aliss In Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* for the Houston Ballet in the early 2000s.

In later years, Button was a professor of costume design at Tulane University in New Orleans.

Button married Stephen SARGE, a playwright she met at Yale, but the couple divorced; they had a son named Raphael, who became an actor. Her second husband, MacDonald Eaton (1929-2013), whom she married in 1981, was a production designer and painter. After receiving his B.F.A. in drama from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1952, he served in the U.S. Army Pictorial Center before he began designing for Off-Broadway productions. From the mid-1950s to 1962, Eaton worked at ABC as a production designer before moving to CBS. He returned to ABC in 1975 to be the scenic artist for the soap opera *One Life To Live*, a job he held for 15 years. During this time he was an active painter and exhibited his work in group shows, as well as in three one-man shows. Eaton moved to New Orleans with Jeanne Button and was an adjunct professor of production design and scenic art at Tulane University. He also taught painting privately, and designed the sets for the Houston Ballet's production of *Aliss In Wonderland*.

Scope and Content Note

The Jeanne Button and MacDonald Eaton designs and papers, dating from 1950 to 2015, document Button's and Eaton's designs, careers, and art, as well as the career of Button's son, actor Raphael SARGE. They are arranged in two series.

Series I: Jeanne Button Files comprises the bulk of the collection. It represents her work for Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional theaters around the United States, ballet, film, and television. These files hold sketches, drawings, complete designs, fabric swatches, costume bibles, photographs, letters, programs, clippings, posters, and other documentation. Extensive material exists for productions such as *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Big River*, *La Bohème*, *Equus*, *Macbird!*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Robber Bridegroom*, and *Twelfth Night*. The files for the Trey McIntyre ballet *Peter Pan* include a video of

rehearsals.

Also present are Button's personal files of letters, resumes, family photographs, and clippings, including memorabilia of Raphael Sbarga's career.

Series II: MacDonald Eaton Files includes Eaton's stage and television designs; photographs and reproductions of his paintings; and a scrapbook containing a biography, clippings, and his writings.

Key Terms

Subjects

Ballet -- Costume
Costume design
Costume designers
Theater -- United States

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Blueprints (reprographic copies)
Clippings (information artifacts)
Drawings (visual works)
Letters (correspondence)
Photographs
Posters
Programs (documents)
Swatches

Occupations

Painters.
Set designers

Names

Button, Jeanne
Eaton, MacDonald
McIntyre, Trey
Sbarga, Raphael
Acting Company (Theatrical group)
Alley Theatre (Houston, Tex.)
American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy
Great Lakes Theater Festival (Cleveland, Oh.)
Houston Ballet
Roundabout Theatre Company
Yale Repertory Theatre

Container List

Series I: Jeanne Button Files 1952-2015 (46 boxes, 2 oversize folders 13.02 linear feet)

This series is in three divisions: Production Files, Personal Papers, and Raphael Sbarge Files.

The Production Files, which comprise the bulk of the collection, primarily document the projects on which Button worked as a costume designer. The content for each production varies, but most files contain at least sketches or drawings of costumes for characters in pencil, ink, chalk, or paint. Additional content includes fabric swatches; costume bibles; letters or correspondence with directors and producers; photographs of actors in costumes, or on stage; programs and season brochures; and clippings. The clippings contain images of research or inspiration for Button as well as reviews or articles about productions.

Notes in the container list specify the producer or the venue of the production, when known. (These are sometimes the same, for example, the Great Lakes Theater Festival and the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas). Some, particularly the Acting Company, were touring productions. In some cases, Button worked on multiple productions of plays with different producers. Productions with the most documentation are *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Big River*, *La Bohème*, *Broadway*, *The Crucible*, *Equus*, *Henry V*, *Inherit The Wind*, *Macbird!*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Robber Bridegroom*, and *Twelfth Night*, as well as the Trey McIntyre ballets *Aliss In Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*. The best-represented producers include The Acting Company, Yale Repertory Theatre, Great Lakes Theater Festival, and the Alley Theatre.

Three items or files contain material from multiple productions: Button compiled a portfolio of her work in the 1990s; a slidebook holds images of productions, as well as research photographs; and there are posters for 14 productions. See the container list for details on all three.

Personal Papers include a set of clippings about Button's career; programs for productions which may not be otherwise documented in the collection; resumes; diplomas and honors from stage unions; letters from colleagues, friends, and family; and family photographs.

The Raphael Sbarge Files, compiled by Button, document Sbarge's acting career through clippings, programs, photographs, and letters. The letters are from Sbarge to Button.

Production Files are arranged by title. The Personal Papers are arranged by format.

Production Files 1966-2004

- b. 1 f. 1-2 *Aliss in Wonderland* 1999
- b. 2 f. 1 A Trey McIntyre ballet performed by the Fort Worth Dallas Ballet.
- Arsenic and Old Lace*
- b. 1 f. 3-4 1986
- b. 3 f. 1-2 Great Lakes Theater Festival.
- b. 2 f. 2 2000
- b. 1 f. 5 *As Bees in Honey Drown* 2000
- b. 1 f. 6 *As You Like It* 1966-2004
- b. 3 f. 3
- b. 1 f. 7 Ballet Memphis 1998
- b. 2 f. 3 Unidentified production.
- b. 1 f. 8 *Big River* 1992
- b. 3 f. 4-5 Box 4 contains a costume bible and swatches.
- b. 4 o. 1
- b. 3 f. 6-7 *Blood Wedding* 1988
- b. 5 f. 1-2 Great Lakes Theater Festival.

Series I: Jeanne Button Files (cont.)
Production Files (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 1-4 *La Bohème* 1986-1988
b. 7 f. 1-4 San Francisco Opera and television film.
b. 8 f. 1-3
 b. 9 f. 1
 b. 5 f. 3
b. 2 f. 4-8
b. 10 f. 1-3
 b. 5 f. 4 *Booth is Back in Town* 1983
 b. 8 f. 4
 b. 9 f. 2-4
b. 8 f. 5-6 *Broadway* 1987
b. 11 f. 1-5 Great Lakes Theater Festival.
 b. 12 f. 1
 b. 5 f. 5-6
b. 10 f. 4-5
 b. 5 f. 7 *Camino Real* 1977
 b. 13 f. 1 The Acting Company.
b. 13 f. 2 *Coppélia* 1998
b. 12 f. 2-4 *The Crucible* 1989-1990
b. 13 f. 3-4 Roundabout Theatre Company.
b. 13 f. 5 *The Dresser* 1981
 b. 9 f. 5 *Donna Rosita the Spinster* 1966-2004
 b. 14 f. 1
b. 10 f. 6-7 *The Durango Flash* 1976
 Yale Repertory Theatre.
b. 12 f. 5 *Elvis: An American Musical* 1978
b. 13 f. 6-9 See also posters.
b. 15 f. 1-5
 b. 17 f. 1
b. 16 f. 1 *Equus* 2000-2001
 Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas.
b. 16 f. 2 *Eurydice* 1990
 b. 18 *A Flea in Her Ear* 2000-2001
 Alley Theatre, Houston.
 Contains a costume bible.
b. 17 f. 2-3 *The Freaking Out of Stephanie Blake* 1967
 See also posters.
b. 17 f. 4 *The Frogs* 1974
b. 19 f. 1 Yale Repertory Theatre.
 b. 9 f. 6 *General Gorgeous* 1976
b. 17 f. 5 Yale Repertory Theatre.
b. 16 f. 3 *Get Thee to Canterbury* 1968
 Sheridan Square Playhouse.
 See also posters.
b. 20 f. 1 *Harrison, Texas* 1966-2004
b. 9 f. 7 *Hay Fever* 2000
 Alley Theatre, Houston.
 Hedda Gabler
 Both productions at Alley Theatre, Houston.
b. 16 f. 4 1986
b. 17 f. 6 1998-1999

Series I: Jeanne Button Files (cont.)
Production Files (cont.)

Henry V

See also slides.

- b. 21 f. 1 1969
b. 22 f. 1-3 American Shakespeare Festival.
- b. 16 f. 5 1995
 The Acting Company.
- b. 22 f. 4 *Huckleberry Finn* 1971
 The Juilliard School.
- b. 19 f. 2 *In A Pig's Valise* 1988-1989
b. 21 f. 2-3
- b. 16 f. 6 *Inherit The Wind* 1991
b. 21 f. 4-7 Alabama Shakespeare Festival.
b. 22 f. 5 Box 21, folders 6-7 contain a costume bible.
b. 23 f. 1 See also portfolio.
b. 24 f. 1
- b. 22 f. 6 *The Isle is Full of Noises* 1982
- b. 22 f. 7 *Ivanov* 1976
 Yale Repertory Theatre.
- b. 23 f. 2 *Joan And Charles With Angels* 1984
b. 40 f. 4 o. 2
- b. 22 f. 8 *King Lear* 1966-2004
b. 23 f. 3
- b. 19 f. 3 *Kongi's Harvest* 1968
 Negro Ensemble Company.
 See also posters.
- b. 24 f. 2 *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* 1997
- b. 24 f. 3 *Long Day's Journey Into Night* 1998
 b. 42 Alley Theatre, Houston.
 See also slides.
- b. 20 f. 2-3 *The Losers* 1971
 The Juilliard School.
 See also portfolio.
- b. 23 f. 4 *Macbird!* 1967
b. 19 f. 4-6 The Village Gate.
b. 25 f. 1-2 See also posters.
b. 26 f. 1-5
- b. 27 f. 1-2 *Man of La Mancha* 1995
- b. 24 f. 4 *Marat/Sade* 1971
- b. 41 f. 1 *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1996
 Tulane Summer Shakespeare Festival.
- Mother Courage and Her Children*
 See also portfolio.
- b. 24 f. 5 1977
 The Acting Company.
- b. 23 f. 5 1989
b. 24 f. 6 Williamstown Theatre Festival and Great Lakes Theater Festival.
b. 27 f. 3
- b. 28 f. 1 *Much Ado About Nothing* 1966-2004
- b. 27 f. 4-5 *Othello* 1966-2004
 National Shakespeare Company.
 See also portfolio.

Series I: Jeanne Button Files (cont.)
Production Files (cont.)

Peter Pan

See also portfolio.

b. 23 f. 6
b. 28 f. 2-4
b. 29

1991-1993

Alabama Shakespeare Festival.
Box 29 contains a costume bible.

1997-2004

Houston Ballet.

These files include a video recording of rehearsals for a 2002 version of this production.

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Designs

Box 30 contains a costume bible.

b. 23 f. 6-7
b. 28 f. 5-6
b. 30
b. 31 f. 1
b. 32 f. 1-4

Richard III 1979

See also posters.

b. 25 f. 3-4
b. 31 f. 2-3
b. 33 f. 1

The Ring 1986-1987

Artpark, Buffalo, New York.

b. 31 f. 4
b. 32 f. 5
b. 33 f. 2-4

The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny early 1970s

Opera Society of Washington.

b. 31 f. 5
b. 33 f. 5

The Robber Bridegroom 1975-1976

The Acting Company.

See also portfolio.

b. 31 f. 6
b. 32 f. 6
b. 33 f. 6
b. 34 f. 1
b. 35 f. 1-2
b. 36 f. 1-3

Sand Dancing 1983

b. 40 f. 5

Sherlock's Last Case 1998

Alley Theatre, Houston.

b. 34 f. 2

The Skin of Our Teeth 1984

The Acting Company.

b. 31 f. 7
b. 35 f. 3
b. 36 f. 4

Terra Nova 1996

b. 34 f. 3

The Three Sisters 1966-2004

b. 34 f. 4

The Threepenny Opera

1972

b. 31 f. 8

1989-1990

Great Lakes Theater Festival.

b. 37 f. 1-2

Travesties 1999

Alley Theatre, Houston.

See also slides.

b. 34 f. 5-6
b. 37 f. 3-5

Twelfth Night

1978-1979

American Shakespeare Festival.

b. 14 f. 2-3
b. 37 f. 6

1984-1985

Great Lakes Theater Festival.

b. 36 f. 5-6
b. 37 f. 7

1989

New York Shakespeare Festival.

b. 35 f. 4-5
b. 38 f. 1-2

Series I: Jeanne Button Files (cont.)
Production Files (cont.)

- b. 37 f. 8 *The Twilight of the Golds* 1993
b. 39 f. 1
- b. 39 f. 2 *The Way of the World* 1966-2004
- b. 36 f. 7 *The Wild Duck* 1978
b. 39 f. 3 Yale Repertory Theatre.
- b. 34 f. 7 *Wings* 1978-1979
b. 39 f. 4 Yale Repertory Theatre.
See also portfolio and posters.
- b. 14 f. 4 Designs For Unidentified Productions 1966-2004
b. 34 f. 8-12
b. 40 f. 6-7
b. 41 f. 2-5
b. 43 f. 1
b. 44 f. 1-4
b. 45 f. 1-2
- b. 40 f. 1-3 Portfolio 1990s
Samples of designs from *Peter Pan*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *Elvis: A Musical Celebration*, *Inherit the Wind*, *The Robber Bridegroom*, *Broadway*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Wings*, *The Losers*, and *Macbird!*.
- b. 39 f. 5-7 Slidebook 1967-1988
Production photographs of *Peter Pan*, *Broadway*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *Macbird!*, *Twelfth Night*, *Elvis: A Musical Celebration*, *Joan And Charles With Angels*, and *Hamlet* (unidentified production). Also contains research images.
- b. 45 f. 3-5 Posters 1966-1994
Includes *Ivanov*, *Macbird!*, *Glad All Over*, *The Freaking Out of Stephanie Blake*, *The Only Game In Town*, *Wings*, *Othello*, *The Curse of an Aching Heart*, *Elvis: An American Musical*, *Richard III*, *Get Thee to Canterbury*, *Now Is the Time for All Good Men*, *Kong's Harvest*, and *1776*.
- Personal Papers 1952-2015
- b. 41 f. 6 Clippings and Programs 1973-2008
- b. 41 f. 7 Resumes 1980s
- b. 19 f. 7 Diplomas and Union Memberships 1952, 1996, 2015
b. 41 f. 8
- b. 41 f. 9 Letters 1998-2008
- b. 46 f. 1-2 Family Photographs 1960s-2007
- b. 46 f. 3-4 Raphael Sbargo Files 1970s-2000

Series II: MacDonald Eaton Files 1950s-2005 (4 boxes, 5 oversize folders 1.17 linear feet)

This series contains Eaton's set and stage designs and drawings; photographs of stages, sets, and Eaton's paintings; art created during Eaton's schooling at the Carnegie Institute of Technology; a scrapbook; and an annotated script for an unidentified production of *Death of a Salesman*.

The set and stage designs, in the form of drawings and blueprints, date mainly from the late 1950s and early 1960s, and are mostly for television. These include work for *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *American Bandstand*, *Directions*, and CBS News. Other work is for the U.S. Army Pictorial Center and the ballet *Aliss in Wonderland*.

Set photographs date from the same time period and include both stage and television productions. Among them, in box 44, folder 5, are shots of Helen Hayes on the set of *Directions* in 1961.

The Art Photographs and Reproductions contain prints and slides of Eaton's paintings.

The scrapbook, titled *The Life, Times, and Art of MacDonald Eaton*, holds a brief biography; art and set photographs; Eaton's writings on metaphysics and politics; and clippings.

Arranged by format.

- o. 3-6 **Set Designs 1956-1962, 2000**
- b. 44 f. 5 **Set Photographs late 1950s-early 1960s**
- b. 46 f. 5
- b. 47 f. 1
- b. 47 f. 2 *Death of a Salesman Annotated Script* 1950s-1960s
- b. 47 f. 3 **Art Photographs and Reproductions 1973-1987**
- o. 7 **Art Studies 1952**
Work done at the Carnegie Institute of Technology.
- b. 44 f. 6 **Scrapbook, Programs, and Clippings 1962-2005**
- b. 48