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MUSIC DIVISION

THE RICK BESOYAN PAPERS
1940-1986

2.5 Linear feet (3 boxes)
Bulk 1959-1964

Call No.: JPB 03 - 18

Contact Information:
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Abstract Rick Besoyan was a California-born librettist, composer, director and lyricist. He is best known for his musicals *Little Mary Sunshine*, (1959), *The Student Gypsy or "The Prince of Liederkrantz"*, (1963), and *Babes in the Woods*, (1964). The Rick Besoyan papers include correspondence, scripts, scores, photographs, newspaper clippings, programs and posters.

Administrative Information:

Acquisition: The Rick Besoyan Papers were donated to the Music Division of The New York Public Library in 1970, 1971, and 1972 by Madie Besoyan

Access: Collection is open to the public. Advance notice required.

Restrictions on Use: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Preferred Citation: Rick Besoyan Collection, JPB 03 – 18, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Biography

Richard Besoyan was born July 2, 1924, to Amos and Mabel (Madie) Besoyan, in Reedly, California. In 1928, the family, including older sister Martha, moved to Alameda, California. Besoyan attended Lincoln School, writing his first song at age twelve. He graduated from Alameda High School in 1942. While in High School, Besoyan and a few friends wrote and produced a musical, *High and Dry*, which was warmly received. He briefly attended the University of California at Berkeley. In 1942 he volunteered for the army, and served in Europe for three years in the Special Services Division. While overseas, Besoyan attended the London School of Music, studying piano.

Upon his return, Besoyan joined the Bredon-Savoy Light Opera Company, where he performed the role of “Koko” in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Mikado* over 500 times. Besoyan left the company moving to New York to try his luck. He studied at the American Theater Wing, and then taught musical comedy at Stella Adler’s Theater School.

In 1957, he had mild success with a revival of Cole Porter’s *Out of this World* at Actors Playhouse. Then Jim Paul Eilers asked him to write a revue for his nightclub The Showplace. *In Your Hat* was the result. An Act II finale, titled “Gems from Little Mary Sunshine,” was the root from which *Little Mary Sunshine* sprouted into musical success.

Little Mary Sunshine was a takeoff of the kind of operetta that was a favorite in the early decades of the 20th Century. The show opened Off-Broadway in 1959, eventually playing 1,148 performances. The show made Eileen Brennan a star, and also starred Dom Deluise. Besoyan won the 1959-1960 Vernon Rice Memorial Award for outstanding theatrical achievement.

Besoyan wrote book, music and lyrics for two other shows. The 1963 Broadway production of *The Student Gypsy* or “*The Prince of Liederkrantz*” again starring Eileen Brennan and Dom Deluise. The *Student Gypsy* was performed 22 times. It opened during New York’s notorious musician’s strike, resulting in an all-to-brief run. Besoyan also wrote the 1964 off-Broadway production of *Babes in the Wood* starring Ruth Buzzi. (56 performances). In 1966, William S. Godfrey, Mayor of Alameda, California, proclaimed September 16th, “Rick Besoyan Day”. In 1969 Besoyan was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

In 1970, Besoyan died of internal hemorrhages in Sayville, Long Island. At his death, he had just completed directing the Sayville Musical Workshop’s production of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and was writing lyrics and music for a dramatization of Paul Gallico’s *Mrs. ‘Arris Goes to Paris*.

Scope and Content Note

The Rick Besoyan Papers consists of correspondence, one script (*The Student Gypsy* or “*The Prince of Liederkrantz*”), one score (*Little Mary Sunshine*), numerous programs, several photographs, scrapbooks and extensive newspaper clippings.

The collection spans the years of 1940-1986, with a heavy concentration on the years 1959-1964. There is little personal correspondence. The majority of the collection is comprised of newspaper clippings gathered by Madie Besoyan about *Little Mary Sunshine*.

Organization:

Series I : Correspondence, 1942-1986

Series II : Production Material

Series III : Oversize Material, 1959

Series Descriptions:

Series I : Correspondence, 1942-1986

2 folders

This series consists of correspondence and personal papers. It includes letters to Besoyan about reviews, Actor’s Equity, royalties received, proclamation about “Rick Besoyan Day”, scholarship appointment, membership cards, library card, SS card, tickets, licenses, invitations, High School Diploma and programs. And also includes letters, postcards and greeting cards to Madie from Besoyan. Correspondence is also included from Howard Barker, from fans of *Little Mary Sunshine* written after Besoyan’s death, and invitations to events regarding Madie Besoyan’s son’s career. Correspondence between Madie Besoyan and the Wisconsin Center for Theatre Research in regards to the donation and return of the donation of Rick Besoyan’s manuscript collection. Correspondence between Madie Besoyan and NYPL’s Performing Arts Library and donations of Rick’s manuscript collection. Handwritten notes of what was donated to the Performing Arts Library.

Series II : Production Material, 1959-1986

8 folders and 1 box.

This series contains a bound copyrighted script of *The Student Gypsy* or “*The Prince of Liederkrantz*”. The title page lists it as the “Final Version”, with a copy of a typewritten list of notes by Besoyan. At the top of the page is a note written by Madie Besoyan.

There are also programs, playbills, and some handouts from the musical *Little Mary Sunshine*, covering the years 1959 – 1984. A small number of programs from the musical *The Student Gypsy* or “*The Prince of Liederkrantz*” and from the 1942 Alameda High School musical *High and Dry*, written by Besoyan.

There are newspaper clippings about Besoyan and his shows. Predominately of *Little Mary Sunshine* although there are some from *The Student Gypsy* or “*The Prince of Liederkrantz*”. There is also a group of obituary clippings with handwritten notes by Madie Besoyan and others.

There is one folder of photographs (head-shots of Besoyan, Besoyan with Eileen Brennan and with Madie Besoyan), color snapshots (of the 1979 Alameda Little Theater production of *Little Mary Sunshine*), and publicity stills (a later production of *Little Mary Sunshine* and the original production of *Babes in the Wood* with Ruth Buzzi),

There are two folders of material that Madie Besoyan used to create scrapbooks about her son’s musicals. It includes copies of newspaper clippings, and production programs.

1 box contains a bound copy of the score to *Little Mary Sunshine*, with a handwritten note Tommy Valando to Besoyan.

Series III : Oversize Material, 1959

1 box

This series contains the Vernon Rice Award from Drama Desk. And a poster from the London production of *Little Mary Sunshine*.

Box/Folder	Description
	<u>Series I: Correspondence, 1942-1986</u>
Box 1	
F. 1	Besoyan, Rick, 1942-1974, (Memberships, awards, royalties, HS Diploma, Invitations.)
F. 2	Besoyan, Madie, 1960-1986 (Mostly correspondence sent to Madie, Rick's mother, after Besoyan's death. Also includes requests and lists of material donated to NYPL.)
	<u>Series II: Production Material, 1940-1984</u>
F. 3	Script, <i>The Student Gypsy</i> or " <i>The Prince of Liederkrantz</i> ", 1963 (Bound copy. Final Version, copyright 1963, 1964. Includes notes page by Besoyan.)
F. 4	<i>Programs, Little Mary Sunshine</i> 1959-1969
F. 5	<i>Little Mary Sunshine</i> 1970-1979
F. 6	<i>Little Mary Sunshine</i> 1980-1984
F. 7	<i>Little Mary Sunshine</i> undated
F. 8	<i>High and Dry</i> 1942 and <i>The Student Gypsy</i> or " <i>The Prince of Liederkrantz</i> " 1963
F. 9	Clippings, 1940-1984
F. 10	Photographs, 1959-1979 Scrapbooks, 1959-1984
F. 11	<i>Little Mary Sunshine</i> , 1959-1976 (Created by Madie Besoyan, Rick's mother, after Besoyan's death. Includes: newspaper clippings, production programs.)
F. 12	<i>The Student Gypsy</i> or " <i>The Prince of Liederkrantz</i> " and <i>Babes in the Wood</i> , and <i>Little Mary Sunshine</i> . 1962-1984 (Created by Madie Besoyan. Includes newspaper clippings, programs, posters and cards.)
Box 2	Score, 1961 <i>Little Mary Sunshine</i> , 1961 (Bound copy. Inscribed first page.)
	<u>Series VIII: Oversize Material, 1959</u>
Box 3	Award, 1959-1960, (Vernon Rice Award from Drama Desk.) Poster, <i>Little Mary Sunshine</i> n.d. (London version.)