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Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Irene Gilbert and Stella Adler papers

circa 1959-1998 (bulk 1970-1992)

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Compiled by Tess Hartman, May 2011

Summary

Creator: Gilbert, Irene

Title: Irene Gilbert and Stella Adler papers, circa 1959-1998 (bulk 1970-1992)

Size: 9.5 linear feet (23 boxes)

Source: This collection was donated to the New York Public Library by Irene Gilbert in 2007.

Abstract: Stella Adler (1901-1992) was a renowned American actress of stage and screen, but is perhaps best known as one of the most influential teachers of acting in the United States. The Irene Gilbert and Stella Adler Papers were collected by Irene Gilbert during her time serving as the director of Stella Adler's Los Angeles school, currently known as The Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatre. The papers document many of Adler's classes taught between the years 1959 to 1990, the writing of Adler's book *The Technique of Acting*, and some of the duties Irene Gilbert performed while serving as director of the school. Types of materials in this collection include personal and professional correspondence, transcripts, manuscripts, business files, programs, newspaper and magazine clippings, and photographs.

Access: Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

Copyright information: Copyright retained by any document's creator.

Preferred citation: Irene Gilbert and Stella Adler Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Custodial history

The Irene Gilbert and Stella Adler papers were donated to the New York Public Library in 2007 by Irene Gilbert. Although many items in the collection were created by Stella Adler, they were in the possession of Irene Gilbert due to her professional role as the director of Stella Adler's Los Angeles conservatory, the Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatre and her close association with Stella Adler of over 30 years.

Related collections

Eunice Stoddard papers. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Gene Feist papers. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Harold Clurman Papers. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Stella Adler and Harold Clurman Papers. Harry Ransom Humanities Research

Creator history

Stella Adler (1901-1992) was a renowned American actress of stage and screen, but is perhaps best known as one of the most influential teachers of acting in the United States.

Adler was born on February 10, 1901 to Jacob and Sara Adler, celebrated members of the New York Yiddish theater. She made her stage debut at the age of 4 in her father's production of *Broken Hearts* and spent the early part of her life performing throughout the United States, Europe and South America. She made her Broadway debut in 1922 in *The World We Live In*.

In 1925, Adler began taking classes at the American Laboratory Theater with the Russian teachers Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya. It was under their instruction that she first became aware of the acting techniques of Constantin Stanislavski, whose system of training actors eventually became known as "The Method". She went on to become a member of the Group Theater in 1931 through Harold Clurman, whom she eventually married in 1943. The Group was founded by Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford with the intention of creating a repertory of actors that worked together as an ensemble. The Group was also dedicated to the teachings of Stanislavski and pioneered the American derivative of his technique, largely through the direction and teaching of Group founder, Lee Strasberg. The Group was responsible for launching the careers of some of the most talented playwrights, directors and actors of their time including the likes of Elia Kazan, Sanford Meisner and Clifford Odets. Adler received great acclaim for her work with the Group, most notably for her portrayal of Bessie Berger in Clifford Odet's *Awake and Sing*, but was generally troubled by their approach to acting. Strasberg's interpretation of Stanislavski's teaching relied heavily on the use of "affective memory". Adler felt that this approach relied too much on an actor's personal experience and this often put her and Strasberg at odds.

In 1934, Adler traveled to Paris and met Stanislavski. She told him that she was troubled by his teaching and he invited her to study with him. She did this for the next five weeks, taking extensive notes. When she returned to the United States, she began to pass on her new knowledge of Stanislavski's methods to other members of The Group and criticized Strasberg for relying too heavily on the actor's personal experience. Adler preferred to emphasize imagination and the study of text and character. This split between Strasberg and Adler continued after the demise of The Group in 1941. Strasberg continued to teach his technique through classes at the Actor's Studio, while Adler went on to found two schools of her own. Adler made her last stage appearance with the Group in 1935 as Clara in *Paradise Lost*.

Between the years of 1937 and 1961, Adler continued to act, direct and teach. She appeared in several films, under the name of Stella Ardler. They are *Love on Toast*, *Shadow of a Thin Man* and *My Girl Tisa*. She began to teach classes at the New School for Social Research and eventually opened her own studio in 1949. Students of the Stella Adler Acting Studio include Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro and Warren Beatty. Brando credited his career to Stella Adler and wrote the forward to her book *The Technique of Acting*. This is the only book Adler published during her life, although other books

containing her lectures have been published posthumously.

Her last stage appearance was in 1961 in a London production of *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad*. Bad reviews kept her from acting again, but she never stopped teaching. Her New York studio was renamed the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting in 1960 and continues to exist today. Adler also served as adjunct professor of acting at Yale University's School of Drama for several years and opened a second school in Los Angeles in 1986. This school was incorporated in 1985 as the Conservatory of Acting West and is now known as the Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatres. Stella Adler remained active in teaching up until her death. She died of heart failure in her sleep on December 21, 1992.

Irene Gilbert was the creator and founder of the Conservatory of Acting West, Stella Adler's acting school in Los Angeles, California. This school is still in existence and is currently known as the Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatre. She worked with Stella Adler for over 31 years, producing all her Master Classes. Ms. Gilbert also worked for over 25 years in the entertainment industry as an actor and producer and served on the board of the Screen Actors Guild for 11 years.

Scope and content note

The Irene Gilbert and Stella Adler Papers were collected by Irene Gilbert during her time serving as the director of Stella Adler's Los Angeles conservatory, currently known as The Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatre. The papers document many of Adler's classes taught between the years 1959-1990, the writing of Adler's book *The Technique of Acting*, and some of the duties Irene Gilbert performed while serving as director of the conservatory. The documents relating to the conservatory in no way represent a complete record of the activities of the school, but rather give some insight into the role Irene Gilbert played in her professional and personal relationship with Stella Adler. Types of materials in this collection include personal and professional correspondence, transcripts, manuscripts, business files, programs, newspaper and magazine clippings, and photographs. Audio and video tapes of Stella Adler's classes as well as the ceremony honoring her with a doctorate from the University of Cincinnati in 1991 were also received but are not described in this guide. For further info, contact the Curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts..

Arrangement

The Irene Gilbert and Stella Adler papers are organized into the following series:

- I. Stella Adler, circa 1959-1992
 - Correspondence, circa 1976-1991
 - The Technique of Acting Manuscript Files, prior to 1988
 - Teaching Files, circa 1959-1990
 - Speeches and Interviews, circa 1960-1984
 - Honorary Doctorates, 1987-1991
 - Photographs, circa 1985-1992
- II. Irene Gilbert, circa 1960-1998
 - Correspondence, circa 1960-1998
 - Conservatory of Acting West Files, circa 1984-1996
 - The Adler/Clurman Letters, circa 1994
 - Photographs, circa 1988-1992

Clippings, circa 1970-1993

Key terms

Subjects

Acting -- Study and Teaching
Actresses -- United States -- 20th century

Names

Adler, Stella
Conservatory of Acting West
Gilbert, Irene
Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatre

Special formats

Manuscripts for publication
Photographs

Occupations

Actresses -- United States -- 20th Century
Authors, American -- United States -- 20th Century
Teachers -- United States. -- 20th Century

Container list

I. Stella Adler, circa 1959-1992

Series I: Stella Adler consists of materials largely generated by Stella Adler or relating to her teaching. This material includes personal letters received by Stella Adler from Irene Gilbert, correspondence to and from some of her students and a small amount of correspondence both generated and received by Stella Adler. For letters from Adler to Gilbert, see Series II.

The bulk of the Stella Adler series consists of drafts and revisions to her book *The Technique of Acting* and her teaching files. The teaching files consist of binders compiled over the years containing typed notes and transcripts of Adler's classes taught on different playwrights and plays, typed notes and transcripts compiled on her technique classes and transcripts of her master classes taught in Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. There are also several subject files on various topics relating to her teaching, including accents, realism, and monologue and scene lists. The teaching files cover a large span of years beginning in 1959 and ending in 1990. However, the bulk of the teaching materials date between the years 1970 and 1990. The teaching files contain valuable documentation of Adler's classes, technique, and her approach to the training of actors over her career.

The Stella Adler series also contains subject files with copies of speeches and interviews given by Stella Adler as well as a collection of materials relating to honorary doctorates received by Adler from Smith College, New York University, and University of Cincinnati. Finally, there are photographs documenting her work in theater and film as well as others highlighting the careers of her father, mother and brother.

Correspondence, circa 1976-1991

Some letters in this series are undated.

See also Box 16

- b.1 f.1 Letters from Irene Gilbert, 1987 and 1989
- b.1 f.2 Letters to and from students, 1981, 1989, 1991, undated
- b.1 f.3 Letters to others, 1976-1991
- b.1 f.4 Cards and notes , 1988-1989, undated

***The Technique of Acting* Manuscript Files, prior to 1988**

Many of the folder titles are taken from Irene Gilbert's original files. Although none of *The Technique of Acting* Manuscript files are dated, it can be assumed they were created prior to the first publication of the book in 1988

- b.1 f.5 1st Book and cover
- b.1 f.6 Introduction: initial drafts
- b.1 f.7 Chapter 1: initial drafts
- b.1 f.8 Chapter 2: initial drafts
- b.1 f.9 Chapter 3: initial drafts
- b.1 f.10 Chapter 4: initial drafts
- b.1 f.11 Chapter 5: many revisions
- b.2 f.1 Chapter 6: initial drafts
- b.2 f.2 Chapter 7:initial drafts
- b.2 f.3 Chapter 8: initial drafts
- b.2 f.4 Chapter 8: revisions
- b.2 f.5 Chapter 9: many revisions

I. Stella Adler (cont.)

xxThe Technique of Acting Manuscript F... (cont.)

- b.2 f.6 Chapter 10
- b.2 f.7 Chapter 11
- b.2 f.8 Chapter 12
- b.3 f.1-3 rough draft
- b.3 f.4-5 The book: originals
- b.3 f.6-7 Last manuscript
Edited by Bantam, corrected by Irene Gilbert
- b.3 f.8 Typescript 1 (Bound manuscript with notes)
- b.4 f.1 Typescript 2 (Bound manuscript with notes)
- b.4 f.2 Typescript 3 (Bound manuscript with notes)
- b.4 f.3 Miscellaneous papers (saves, etc.)
- b.4 f.4 Notes and corrections
- b.4 f.5 Various chapter samplers for book

Teaching Files, circa 1959-1990

Some of the teaching files are undated.

Master Classes, 1980-1990

- b.5 f.1 1980
- b.5 f.2 Los Angeles, 1985
- b.5 f.3 San Francisco, 1985
- b.5 f.4 1986
- b.5 f.5 San Francisco, 1987
- b.5 f.6 Summer, 1987
- b.6 f.1 Winter, 1987
- b.6 f.2 1988
- b.6 f.3 Los Angeles, 1988
- b.6 f.4 March, 1988
- b.6 f.5 New York, 1989
- b.6 f.6 Winter, 1990

Script Interpretation, circa 1959-1989

Many of these files are photocopies of original notes created by Stella Adler to use in her classes. These notes were then compiled into large binders and labeled according to their subject matter. The titles of those binders and the arrangement of their contents have been preserved in this sub-series. The creation date of the compilation of the binders is unknown. Some of the files in this sub-series are undated.

- b.7 f.1-2 Albee, Inge, Miller, Odets, O'Neill, Saroyan, 1960-1988
- b.7 f.3-4 Chekhov, 1959-1976
- b.7 f.5-7 Chekhov, 1981-1982
- b.8 f.1-3 Chekhov Plays, undated
- b.8 f.4-7 Ibsen - *A Doll's House*, 1973-1980
- b.8 f.8-9 Ibsen - *An Enemy of the People*, 1959-1981

I. Stella Adler (cont.)

Teaching Files (cont.)

Script Interpretation (cont.)

- b.9 f.1 Inge - *Come Back Little Sheba*, 1972-1980
- b.9 f.2 Miller, 1982 & 1988
- b.9 f.3 Miller, Saroyan, Odets, 1989
- b.9 f.4 Odets - *The Country Girl*, 1973-1980
- b.9 f.5 Odets - *The Country Girl*, undated
- b.9 f.6 Odets - *The Golden Boy*, undated
- b.9 f.7-10 O'Neill, 1959-1983
- b.10 f.1 Shaw, 1981
- b.10 f.2-3 Strindberg - *The Father*, 1975-1981
- b.10 f.4 Strindberg - *Miss Julie*, 1959-1960
- b.10 f.5-6 Strindberg - *Miss Julie*, 1980-1983
- b.11 f.1-5 Williams, 1982
- b.11 f.6 Williams, 1985
- b.11 f.7-8 Williams - various scenes, 1982 & 1988
- b.12 f.1-3 American playwrights - Wilder & Albee, 1983
- b.12 f.4 Great playwrights, 1988
- b.12 f.5 Great playwrights - Williams, 1988
- b.12 f.6 Los Angeles, 1978
- b.12 f.7 Texts, undated
- b.12 f.8 *The Philadelphia Story*, undated

Technique, circa 1969-1979

- b.12 f.9 I & II, 1969
- b.12 f.10 I & II, 1976-1977
- b.13 f.1 I & II, 1977-1978
- b.13 f.2 I & II, 1978
- b.13 f.3 I & II, 1978-1979
- b.13 f.4 Technique, undated

Miscellaneous, circa 1985-1990

Many of the files in this sub-series are undated, but can be assumed to have been created during the bulk of Adler's time teaching at the Conservatory of Acting West from 1985-1990.

- b.13 f.5 Accents, undated
- b.13 f.6 Acting realism, undated
- b.13 f.7 Great playwrights - scenes, undated
- b.13 f.8 Master class indexes, 1987-1990
- b.14 f.1 Monologue and scene lists, undated
- b.14 f.2 Opening lecture, undated
- b.14 f.3 Stanislavski notes, undated
- b.14 f.4 Stanislavski tribute, 1988
- b.14 f.5-9 Unsorted class notes and transcripts

I. Stella Adler (cont.)

Teaching Files (cont.)

Miscellaneous (cont.)

b.14 f.10 Unsorted scenes

Speeches and Interviews, circa 1960-1984

Some of the contents of these files are undated.

b.15 f.1 ANTA convention, 1960

b.15 f.2 Channel 13, undated

b.15 f.3 *Harold Clurman: A Life in the Theatre*, 1984

b.15 f.4 Jay Adler, undated

Honorary Doctorates, 1987-1991

b.15 f.5 Smith College, 1987

b.15 f.6 New York University, 1990

b.15 f.7 University of Cincinnati, 1991

There is an audio recording of this event. For access contact the Curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division, the New York Public Library.

b.15 f.8 Notes

Photographs, circa 1985-1992

Many photographs in this series are reproductions. The images of the original shots may date as far back as the late 1800's and early 1900's. The date of the reproductions is unknown, but most likely were made or obtained by Irene Gilbert in her role as director of Adler's Los Angeles conservatory.

b.15 f.9 Adler, Jacob P.

b.15 f.10 Adler, Luther and Stella

b.15 f.11 Adler, Sara

b.15 f.12 Stanislavski group shot

b.15 f.13-14 Stella candid

b.23 f.1 Stella candid

b.15 f.15 Stella film stills

b.23 f.1 Stella film stills

b.15 f.16 Stella theatre stills

b.23 f.1 Stella theatre stills

b.15 f.17 Negatives, proof sheets and slides

The slides may be copies of prints in this sub-series.

II. Irene Gilbert, circa 1960-1998

Series II: Irene Gilbert contains materials pertaining to Irene Gilbert's role as the director of Stella Adler's Los Angeles school, incorporated in 1985 as the Conservatory of Acting West but currently known as the Stella Adler Academy of Acting and Theatre. The bulk of the correspondence files contain personal letters and notes from Stella Adler to Irene Gilbert.

The Conservatory of Acting West files contain subject files and correspondence relating to Irene Gilbert's tenure serving as director of the school. These documents in no way represent a complete record of the activities of the school, but they do provide some insight into Irene Gilbert's role as director and to a selection of activities at the school between the years 1985 to 1996. Some of the subject files include correspondence relating to employees, the writing of Adler's book *The Technique of Acting*, letters in support of Stella Adler's nomination for an honorary Tony Award, various interviews, documentaries, and other projects involving Stella Adler, as well as records relating to the creation and incorporation of the school in 1985. There are also subject files on memorials and events honoring Adler after her death in 1992, including a large number of files on *The Adler/Clurman Letters*. This was a play created from letters written between Stella Adler and Harold Clurman, her husband from 1943 to 1960. The play was produced in 1994 as an opening production of the new theater attached to the school. The Irene Gilbert series also contains a large number of snapshots taken at events involving Stella Adler between the years 1988 to 1992 as well as newspaper and magazine clippings on Stella Adler, her book, and her teaching.

Correspondence, circa 1960-1998

Some of the letters in this sub-series are undated.

See Also Box 1.

- b.16 f.1-5 Letters from Stella Adler, 1960-1992, undated
- b.16 f.6 Letters from others, 1993, 1998, undated

Conservatory of Acting West Files, circa 1984-1996

Some folder titles in this sub-series are taken from Irene Gilbert's original files.

- b.16 f.7 American Masters, 1989
- b.16 f.8 Brando, Marlon, 1987
- b.16 f.9 Channel 13 Release, 1988
- b.16 f.10 Contracts, 1985
Contains versions of the Shareholder's Agreement and Articles of Incorporation for the Los Angeles School.
- b.16 f.11 Documentary Correspondence, 1989
- b.16 f.12 Elements of Stanislavski Method, undated
- b.16 f.13 Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, 1984-1987
- b.16 f.14 Gordon, Mel, 1986-1987
- b.16 f.15 Krich Chinoy, Helen, 1987
- b.16 f.16 KTLA, 1985
- b.16 f.17 Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, 1991

II. Irene Gilbert (cont.)

Conservatory of Acting West Files (cont.)

- b.16 f.18 Letters During the Making of the Book, 1988-1989
- b.16 f.19 Lurie, Jerome, 1984-1988
- b.16 f.20 Mark Taper Tribute, 1989
- b.16 f.21 Materials on Building, undated
- b.16 f.22 Model for Stella Adler home video , 1985
- b.16 f.23 National Museum of American Jewish History, 1988
- b.16 f.24 Payment book, 1988-1991
- b.17 f.1 *Platform: A Newsletter of the Stella Adler Theatre*, 1989
- b.17 f.2 Programs and invitations honoring Stella Adler, 1988-1993
- b.17 f.3 Programs and invitations for various events, 1980-1996
- b.17 f.4 Rosson, Henry, 1985
- b.17 f.5 Smeal, Dennis, 1992
- b.17 f.6 Stella Adler Theatre Foundation, 1986-1987
- b.17 f.7 *Stella Adler Tonight Forever*, 1993
- b.17 f.8 Stella biography, undated
- b.17 f.9 Stella birthday party, 1990
- b.17 f.10 Stella memorial, 1993
- b.17 f.11 Stella quotes, undated
- b.17 f.12 Stella's song to Dolly, undated
- b.17 f.13 Steve Allen poems and song lyrics, undated
- b.17 f.14 Summer Sessions pamphlet, undated
- b.17 f.15 Theater Hall of Fame, 1991
- b.17 f.16 Tony Awards, 1975
- b.17 f.17 Typesetting for pictures in theater lobby, undated
- b.17 f.18 Vilga, Edward, 1996
- b.17 f.19 Weinbaum, Eddie, 1987
- b.17 f.20-21 Wilson, Vickie, undated
- b.17 f.22 Unsorted correspondence, memoranda and notes, 1977-1992

The Adler/Clurman Letters, circa 1994

The manuscript in this sub-series is a play made up of letters written between Stella Adler and Harold Clurman, her husband from 1943 to 1960. The correspondence in the manuscript dates before their marriage. The play was produced in 1994 as an opening production of the new theater attached to Adler's conservatory.

- b.18 f.1 Theatre Opening, 1994
- b.18 f.2 Programs, 1994
- b.18 f.3-7 Typescript 1-5, circa 1994

II. Irene Gilbert (cont.)

Photographs, circa 1988-1992

The majority of the photographs in this series are candid snapshots taken at various events or gatherings attended by Stella Adler or involving the activities of Adler's Los Angeles conservatory. There are also snapshots taken at several awards ceremonies or tributes honoring Adler. Negatives and slides of a similar nature are included in this sub-series.

- b.18 f.8 Allen, Todd, undated
- b.18 f.9 Dedication evening, undated
- b.18 f.10 Feist, Gene, 1991
- b.18 f.11 Gilbert, Irene: headshot, undated
- b.18 f.12 Mark Taper Tribute, 1989
- b.18 f.13 Stella Adler Awards, 2002
- b.18 f.14 Stella Adler Theatre model and negatives, undated
- b.18 f.15 Stella at theatre, 1988
- b.19 f.1-7 Snapshots, 1988-1992, undated
- b.20 f.1-9 Snapshots , 1988-1992, undated
- b.21 f.1-8 Snapshots , 1988-1992, undated
- b.22 f.1-4 Snapshots, 1988-1992, undated
- b.22 f.5 Stills autographed to Irene, undated
- b.22 f.6 Yivo Tribute, 1989

Clippings, circa 1970-1993

The clippings in this series were collected by Irene Gilbert. The files contain general press on Adler, her career and her teaching, articles on Adler's death and reviews and press on the publication of her book, *the Technique of Acting* in 1988.

- b.22 f.7 General press, circa 1970-1992
- b.23 f.2 General press, circa 1970-1992
- b.22 f.8 Obituaries and memorial notices, 1992-1993
- b.22 f.9 *The Technique of Acting* reviews and press, 1988