Guide to the Living Theatre Records

Multiple call numbers

by Leigh Golden and Jennifer Meehan

2008

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY:  Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER:  Multiple call numbers

CREATOR:  Living Theatre (New York, N.Y.)

TITLE:  Living Theatre Records

DATES:  1815–2012

BULK DATES:  1947–2012

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:  529.85 linear feet (564 boxes) + 3 rolls, 6 broadside, and 4 art

LANGUAGE:  English

SUMMARY:  The collection consists of general files, correspondence, subject files, publicity files, scripts, journals, writings, personal papers, photographs, audiovisual material, and born digital materials relating to The Living Theatre, its founders, Julian Beck and Judith Malina, and its co-director, Hanon Reznikov. The collection documents the administration of the theater, its stage productions, and its relationship to other avant-garde and radical cultural and political movements in the United States and Europe during the time period from the 1960s to the present. Also included are extensive diaries and journals of Judith Malina and Julian Beck, as well as their personal papers and writings. The photographs and audio-visual material largely document specific productions.

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Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Conditions Governing Access

In-process material. This collection is closed to researchers until processing is completed. For further information, consult Access Services.

Uncat MSS 1006 Boxes 268-285, 297-298 (audiovisual material): Restricted fragile material. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.

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Preferred Citation

Living Theatre Records. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

This collection is closed during processing and a new finding aid will be published when processing is completed.

The Living Theatre

Founded in 1947 as an imaginative alternative to the commercial theater by Judith Malina, the German-born student of Erwin Piscator, and Julian Beck, an abstract expressionist painter of the New York School, The Living Theatre has staged nearly a hundred productions performed in eight languages in 28 countries on five continents - a unique body of work that has influenced theater the world over.

During the 1950’s and early 1960’s in New York, The Living Theatre pioneered the unconventional staging of poetic drama - the plays of American writers like Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Paul Goodman, Kenneth Rexroth and John Ashbery, as well as European writers rarely produced in America, including Cocteau, Lorca, Brecht and Pirandello. Best remembered among these productions, which marked the start of the Off-Broadway movement, were Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights, Tonight We Improvise, Many Loves, The Connection and The Brig.

In the mid-1960’s, the company began a new life as a nomadic touring ensemble. In Europe, they evolved into a collective, living and working together toward the creation of a new form of nonfictional acting based on the actor’s political and physical commitment to using the theater as a medium for furthering social change. The landmark achievements of this period include Mysteries and Smaller Pieces, Antigone, Frankenstein and Paradise Now.

In the 1970’s, The Living Theatre began to create The Legacy of Cain, a cycle of plays for non-traditional venues. From the prisons of Brazil to the gates of the Pittsburgh steel mills, and from the slums of Palermo to the schools of New York City, the company offered these plays, which include Six Public Acts, The Money Tower, Seven Meditations on Political Sado-Masochism, Turning the Earth and the Strike Support Oratorium free of charge to the broadest of all possible audiences.
The 1980’s saw the group return to the theater, where they developed new participatory techniques that enable the audience to first rehearse with the company and then join them on stage as fellow performers. These plays include *Prometheus at the Winter Palace*, *The Yellow Methuselah* and *The Archaeology of Sleep*.

Following the death of Julian Beck in 1985, co-founder Judith Malina and the company’s new director, veteran Hanon Reznikov, who first encountered The Living Theatre while a student at Yale in 1968, opened a new performing space in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, producing a steady stream of innovative works including *The Tablets, I and I, The Body of God, Humanity, Rules of Civility, Waste, Echoes of Justice*, and *The Zero Method*. After the closing of the Third Street space in 1993, the company went on to create *Anarchia, Utopia* and *Capital Changes* in other New York City venues.

In 1999, with funds from the European Union, they renovated a 1650 Palazzo Spinola in Rocchetta Ligure, Italy and reopened it as the Centro Living Europa, a residence and working space for the company’s European programs. There they created *Resistenza*, a dramatization of the local inhabitants’ historical resistance to the German occupation of 1943-45. In recent years, the company has also been performing *Resist Now!*, a play for anti-globalization demonstrations both in Europe and the U.S. A month-long collaboration with local theater artists in Lebanon in 2001 resulted in the creation of a site-specific play about the abuse of political detainees in the notorious former prison at Khiam.

The Living Theatre has opened a new theatre at 21 Clinton Street, presenting *The Brig*. They continue also to present *NO SIR!*, a play for the street against military recruitment.

Historical note comes from The Living Theatre website: [http://www.livingtheatre.org/history.html](http://www.livingtheatre.org/history.html).

**Scope and Contents**

The collection consists of general files, correspondence, subject files, publicity files, scripts, journals, writings, personal papers, photographs, audiovisual material, and born digital materials relating to The Living Theatre, its founders, Julian Beck and Judith Malina, and its co-director, Hanon Reznikov. The collection documents the administration of the theater, its stage productions, and its relationship to other avant-garde and radical cultural and political movements in the United States and Europe during the time period from the 1960s to the present. Also included are extensive diaries and journals of Judith Malina and Julian Beck, as well as their personal papers and writings. The photographs and audio-visual material largely document specific productions.

**Arrangement**

Organized into two groupings: March 2008 Acquisition; and August 2013 Acquisition.
Selected Search Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library’s online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects
Experimental theater -- United States -- 20th Century
Experimental theater -- United States -- 21st century
Theater -- New York (State) -- New York
Theater -- United States -- 20th Century
Theater -- United States -- 21st century

Genres / Formats
Audiovisual materials
Born digital

Names
Beck, Julian, 1925-1985
Malina, Judith, 1926-2015
Reznikov, Hanon

Corporate Body
Living Theatre (New York, N.Y.)