

Martin Manulis Collection

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Writers Guild Foundation Archive

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Martin Manulis Collection

Dates: 1956-1985 (bulk 1956-1958)

Collection Number: WGF-MS-002

Creator/Collector: Manulis, Martin, 1915-2007

Extent: 4 linear feet

Repository: Writers Guild Foundation Archive

Los Angeles, California 90048

Abstract: The Martin Manulis collection, 1954-1985 contains scripts and production materials from television programs produced by Manulis. Seasons 1 and 2 of Playhouse 90 (1956-1958) represent the bulk of the collection, which also includes development materials for the anthology series Climax! (1955-1956) and scripts for The Day Christ Died (1980 TV movie), Chiefs (1983 mini-series), and Space (1985 mini-series).

Language of Material: English

Access

Available by appointment only.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Martin Manulis Collection. Writers Guild Foundation Archive

Acquisition Information

Gift of John Bard Manulis, Laurie M. Harmon, and Karen Manulis, April 24, 2012

Biography/Administrative History

Martin Manulis was a film, television, and theater producer best known as the creator of the critically acclaimed anthology series Playhouse 90 – the first weekly 90-minute live drama on American television. Born on May 30, 1915 in Brooklyn, New York, Manulis graduated from Columbia University in 1935 and served in the Navy during World War II. Following the war, Manulis became managing director of the Westport County Playhouse in Connecticut, producing and directing stage shows for prominent Broadway producer John C. Wilson. After joining CBS as a staff producer in 1951, Manulis produced episodes for Best of Broadway (1954-1955) and the dramatic anthology series Studio One (1952), Suspense (1952-1954), and Climax! (1955-1956). CBS vice president Hubbell Robinson approached Manulis to produce Playhouse 90 alongside two additional producers. Manulis initially turned down the project, expressing a desire to head the production on his own. “Then [Robinson] came back to me and asked me if I could do it alone,” Mr. Manulis said in an interview with The Orange County Register in 1996. “I said yes. I felt from a programming point of view, it would work better this way”—from The New York Times October 10, 2007 [accessed June 25, 2012]. The series’ first season began in the fall of 1956 with live broadcasts bringing the theater experience into homes across the country. Often considered the benchmark of high-quality dramatic programming, Playhouse 90 received ample praise in the early-going. In 1957, the program’s second installment, “Requiem for a Heavyweight,” (written by Rod Serling) won five Emmys, and the series was awarded the Emmy for Best New Program Series. Manulis was also named “Producer of the Year” for the program’s first two seasons. Despite the switch from live broadcasts to taped recordings in 1957 due to the demands of production, Playhouse 90 maintained a high standard throughout its run into 1960, with repeat airings in 1961. By 1958, Manulis had moved west to Los Angeles and became the head of production at 20th Century Fox Television where he produced Adventures in Paradise (1959-1962) and The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis (1959-1963). Manulis also produced the espionage series Five Fingers which was broadcasted on NBC from 1959-1960. Branching out into feature film production, Manulis produced Days of Wine and Roses in 1962 (which received five Oscar nominations), based on the original 1958 Playhouse 90 teleplay of the same title. Manulis also served as West Coast director of the American Film Institute from the summer of 1974 through the fall of 1977. He died in Los Angeles on September 28, 2007.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Martin Manulis collection is organized into three series. Series I is comprised of television scripts dating from 1956-1985. The first two seasons of Playhouse 90 (1956-1958) represent the core of the script collection and contain landmark productions from several prominent writers. Rod Serling penned seven scripts in the collection, including the notable “Requiem for a Heavyweight” and “The Comedian.” Other distinguished writers featured in the collection are William Gibson (“The Miracle Worker”), Paul Monash & Leonard Spigelgass (“The Helen Morgan Story”) Garson Kanin (“The Right-Hand Man”), and Aaron Spelling (“The Last Man”). Several episodes are adapted from source material by writers such

as F. Scott Fitzgerald (“The Last Tycoon,” “Winter Dreams,” “The Great Gatsby”), Clifford Odets (“Clash by Night”), Cornell Woolrich (“Rendezvous in Black”), and Brandon Thomas (“Charley’s Aunt”). Of the 79 episodes from the first two seasons, 10 are missing from Season 1 and 9 are missing from Season 2. The Playhouse 90 scripts are bound in their original MARTIN MANULIS PRODUCTIONS covers and most include both typed and hand-written revisions, closing credits, sneak previews, and commercial break advertisement inserts. The remainder of Series I consists of a script for The Day Christ Died (a television movie of the week from 1980 written by Edward Anhalt and James Lee Barrett) and complete sets of teleplays for Chiefs, a 1983 mini-series written by Robert W. Lenski based on Stuart Woods’ novel and Space, a 1985 mini-series adapted by Stirling Silliphant from the book by James A. Michener, all produced by Manulis. Series II contains development and production materials from the anthology series Climax! (1955-1956) and Playhouse 90 (1956-1958), including reader reports, synopses, and cast lists bound in original CBS Television binders. Series III consists of electronic records, including digital versions of several Playhouse 90 scripts, production materials from Series II, and a show “bible” for Playhouse 90 that lists summaries of principle cast and crew credits for all episodes from 1956-1960.

Indexing Terms

Golden age of television

Playhouse 90 (Television program)

Television writers

Television producers and directors
