Mel Shavelson Collection, 1946-2007

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2017
Descriptive Summary

Title: Mel Shavelson Collection, 1946-2007
Collection Number: WGF-MS-036
Creator/Collector: Shavelson, Melville, 1917-2007
Extent: 8 linear feet
Repository: Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Los Angeles, California 90048

Abstract: The Mel Shavelson Collection, 1946-2007, consists primarily of Shavelson’s produced film scripts along with production stills from those films. It also contains personal papers created while he served as Writers Guild of America, West, President, and during his involvement with the Writers Guild Foundation. The collection also includes ephemera from his films, and many awards and honors he received.

Language of Material: English

Access
Scripts available in the library; papers available by appointment only.

Publication Rights
The responsibility to secure copyright and publication permission rests with the researcher.

Preferred Citation
Mel Shavelson Collection, 1946-2007. Writers Guild Foundation Archive

Acquisition Information
Donated by Ruth Shavelson, September 6, 2007

Biography/Administrative History

Melville Shavelson was an American film director, producer, screenwriter, and author. He was born in Brooklyn on April 1, 1917, and earned a bachelor’s degree from Cornell in 1937. He began his entertainment career writing jokes for Milt Josefsberg. He came to Hollywood in 1938 to work as a gag writer for Bob Hope’s radio program, The Pepsodent Show. After five years writing for radio, he started a career as a screenwriter and director, with his first feature screenplays written for Bob Hope. Shavelson was nominated twice for Academy Awards for Best Original Screenplay—first for 1955’s The Seven Little Foys, starring Bob Hope, and then in 1958 for Houseboat, starring Sophia Loren and Carey Grant. He directed both films and shared both nominations with his writing partner, Jack Rose. Other films Shavelson wrote and directed include Beau James (1957), The Five Pennies (1959) for which he won a Writers Guild Award, It Started in Naples (1960), On the Double (1961), The Pigeon That Took Rome (1962), A New Kind of Love (1963), Cast a Giant Shadow (1966), and Yours, Mine and Ours (1968), which starred Henry Fonda and Lucille Ball. In addition to his film work, Shavelson created two Emmy award-winning television series, Make Room For Daddy and My World and Welcome To It. He also wrote, produced and co-directed the six-hour ABC teleplay for the 1979 television miniseries Ike based on the World War II exploits of Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, played by Robert Duvall. He also wrote teleplays for a dozen Academy Award shows.

Shavelson’s professional involvement with writers spanned five decades. He was elected President of the Writers Guild of America, West (WGAW) for three terms, from 1969 to 1971, 1979 to 1981, and 1985 to 1987. In 1984, he was the recipient of the organization’s highest honor, the Laurel Award for Screen Writing. He also helped found the Writers Guild Foundation in 1966, served as its second President for 21 years (1975-1996) and remained on the board for the rest of his life. The Shavelson-Webb Library, the repository for the Guild’s scripts and historical materials in Los Angeles, CA, is named in his honor as evidence of his dedication and work for the WGA and WGF. Shavelson wrote several books, including “How to Make a Jewish Movie,” about the making of the film Cast a Giant Shadow, “Don’t Shoot, It’s Only Me: Bob Hope’s Comedy History of the U.S.” (co-written with Hope) and an autobiography released on his 90th birthday, “How to Succeed in Hollywood Without Really Trying: P.S. -- You Can’t!” Shavelson was an instructor at USC’s Master of Professional Writing Program from 1998-2006. He taught screenwriting, and often cracked to his students, “I’m a writer by choice, a producer by necessity and a director in self-defense.” Shavelson was married to his first wife, Lucille, from 1938 until her death in 2000. He was survived by his two children from his first marriage, Lynne Joiner and Richard Shavelson, and his second wife, Ruth Florea (m.2001). Shavelson died on August 8, 2007 at age 90. The Shavelson Film Awards, given annually at Cornell University for promising filmmakers, were established and named in his honor.

Scope and Content of Collection

The bulk of this collection, Series I: Produced Works, 1943-1975, is a near complete assembly of leather bound shooting scripts written and/or directed by Mel Shavelson, interleaved with production stills, notes, and other production ephemera.
Series II: Honors and Awards, 1953-1998, contains many awards and honors given to Shavelson for his work directing, writing, his dedication to the craft, and his achievements and devotion to the Writer’s Guild of America west. Series III: Writers Guild of America, West Papers, 1985-2001, consists of Writers Guild leadership documents, with the bulk relating to the 1960’s writer’s strike, and the Karlovyvary Festival, a US and Czech Screenwriters gathering in Moscow. The remainder of the collection is contained in Series IV: Personal Papers and Photographs, 1952-2007. There are numerous drafts of Shavelson’s speeches, eulogies, and interview research, most notably for Billy Wilder and Julius Epstein. There are also some papers and correspondence from his screenwriting class at USC, and high school student reviews of his films. There are personal papers, including gifts, scrapbooks, and correspondence. The collection also contains personal copies of books he wrote, and source material for his scripts.

Indexing Terms
Writers Guild of America—Awards
Academy Awards (Motion pictures)
Writers Guild of America, West
Writers Guild Foundation
Screenwriters
Motion picture producers and directors