Norman Liebmann Papers

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Norman Liebmann Papers
Dates: 1958-1996
Collection Number: WGF-MS-066
Creator/Collector: Liebmann, Norman, 1928-2010
Extent: 28.5 linear feet, 21 record boxes and 2 archival boxes
Repository: Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Los Angeles, California 90048

Abstract: The Norman Liebmann Collection consists of produced and unproduced television scripts, feature films, book manuscripts, short stories, and plays written by Liebmann. The highlight of the collection relates to development materials, drawings, notes, correspondence, contracts, synopses, outlines, scripts and press clippings for the television series The Munsters, which Liebman co-developed. In addition, the collection contains jokes, sketches and scripts for late-night and variety luminaries Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, Gene Rayburn, Gene Kelly and Johnny Carson and scripts for popular shows like Chico and the Man and Good Times. Additional materials include pitch documents, outlines and scripts for unproduced TV series and films. Additionally, this collection includes unpublished book manuscripts, short stories, and plays.

Language of Material: English

Access
Available by appointment only. Most materials stored offsite. One week advance notice required for retrieval.

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

Preferred Citation
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Acquisition Information
Donated by wife Shirley Liebmann on January 29, 2016.

Biography/Administrative History
Norman “Norm” Liebmann spent over 50 years as a comedy writer in the entertainment industry. He was born January 16, 1928 in New York City. His parents were Russian immigrants and owned a pharmacy in New York. Liebmann attended University of Miami, where he pursued a musical career much to his parents’ dismay. Throughout his college career, Liebmann played the saxophone and clarinet in various bands and after he graduated, started playing the saxophone at Miami nightclubs. In search of his musical break, Liebmann moved back to New York City. In this period, Liebmann transitioned from music to writing and began his career writing material for night club performers like Red Buttons. He met and befriended Edward Hass (1923-1994), who was a commercial artist and cartoonist at that time. They would collaborate throughout the 1960s In 1958, Liebmann’s TV break came in writing for Dough Re Mi, a music-based game show hosted by a young Gene Rayburn. In 1960, Liebmann joined the writing team of the ABC Radio show Flair! starring Dick Van Dyke. When Van Dyke moved to LA in 1962 for his titular sitcom The Dick Van Dyke Show, Liebmann followed shortly thereafter and he and Haas are credited with writing two episodes of the show. Liebmann went onto write for The Bob Newhart Show, which earned him and his co-writers an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Writing Achievement in Comedy in 1962. Haas & Liebmann developed many television and film ideas together, including the successful CBS Television series, The Munsters. Produced by Universal Television, The Munsters – with its titular family of recognizable monsters – made its series debut in September 1964, the same week as The Addams Family. In total, Haas & Liebmann received credit for writing seven episodes of the show’s two seasons. The idea of a show about a family of monsters circulated around Universal after the 1940s when it was suggested by animator Bob Clampett. Later in the 1960s, writers Allan Burns and Chris Hayward pitched a similar monster family concept. Without knowledge or consent from Burns or Hayward, executives at Universal sought out Norm Liebmann and Ed Haas to develop the idea, eventually bringing on additional writers to flesh out the concept and write episodes. After intervention by the WGA, it was determined that Burns and Hayward would receive credit for the creation of the show while Haas and Liebmann would receive credit for developing the idea into a TV series. The collaboration between Liebmann and Haas ended around 1969 and Liebmann went on to write for popular sitcoms such as Diff’rent Strokes, Chico and the Man, and Good Times. He developed many new series and feature ideas although many went unproduced. Later in his career, Liebmann took to writing books, short stories, and plays such as Melanie In August and An Evening with Quasimodo, in which the main character was played by Dick Gautier off Broadway. Towards the later part of his life Liebmann was active in writing political commentary on online platforms under the username “Firehat.” He passed away December 20, 2010 in Thousand Oaks, CA and is survived by his wife Shirley Liebmann.
Scope and Content of Collection

This collection is organized into six series. Series I: Produced Television Scripts, 1960-1984, is comprised of produced episodic television and is divided into four sub-series. Subseries A: Episodic Television, 1964-1984, contains scripts from television series that range from variety shows to sitcoms. Majority of this subseries consists of Bob Hope Presents: The Chrysler Theater, Dean Martin Celebrity Roasts, Chevrolet Presents: The Goldiggers, Dean Martin Presents: The Goldiggers, Good Times, and Chico and the Man. Noteworthy scripts in this collection are scripts from Dough Re Mi, a 1958 music-based game show, and Cantiflas, a short-lived children's animated show that features the famous Mexican comedian and actor Cantiflas, and Gene Kelly's Wonderful World of Girls, variety special starring Gene Kelly. Subseries B: Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson, 1975-1977, comprises opening monologues dating from 1975-1977, copious pages full of jokes, lists, and ideas for sketches, and scripts for sketches in the program such as Carnac, Aunt Blabby, Turbo, and many more. Subseries C: The Munsters, 1963-1965, is comprised of scripts and other production material from the two seasons that were produced. The scripts have multiple drafts of each episode, most of which have a shooting schedule attached. This collection also consists of early conceptions and pitch documents, character descriptions, visual renderings, many series and episode outlines and TV Guides and news clippings. Paperwork in the collection documents the settling of the arbitration with Burns and Hayward regarding creation of TV of the series. There are also studio notes, call sheets, production reports and a recorded radio interview, subsequently digitized, with Liebmann and Haas from August 1965. Subseries D: Material for Performers, 1964-1974, is comprised of scripts for sketches, jokes, and monologues for famous comedic performers. This consists of material for Rich Little, Flight 1313, which was a comedy sketch that features Burt Lancaster and Johnny Carson, and a monologue for Peter Lassally. Series II: Unproduced Projects, 1950-1986, is comprised of unproduced episodic television and is divided into two sub-series. Subseries A: Television Pilots, 1963-1967, is consists of pilot ideas, multiple drafts of scripts, and treatments generated throughout Liebmann's career. Some of these include The Clumbsys, a slapstick comedy about a clumsy family that was filmed but unsold, and a pilot for Mad, Mad Scientist starring Fred Gwynne that was also not sold. Others include Tammy, The Movers, Attorneys-In-Law, Klondike & Sons, and Little Old Lady from Pasadena, based on the popular song by Jan and Dean. Subseries B: Ideas and Treatments, 1950-1986, contains short ideas and treatments for perspective television shows. Titles include The Willies, Look Out Below, Bernie and Mush, and Hope in Wonderland. Series III: Radio, 1960-1961, is comprised of scripts and monologues from the popular ABC radio show Flair!, which was hosted by a young Dick Van Dyke before he rose to stardom. Series IV: Feature Films, 1963-1987, is comprised of multiple drafts of scripts, correspondence, and research for feature films written by Liebmann. Majority of these scripts are unproduced. Titles include Big Man on Campus, Uncle Sex Wants You!, The Man Who Tried to Shoot His Way to Heaven, Stokes, and Yokozuna. The only produced film in this series is The Disorderly Orderly, which starred the famous comedian Jerry Lewis. Liebmann and Ed Haas have a story credit on the film and Frank Tashlin is credited with the screenplay. Series V: Other Writings, 1984-1996, is separated into three subseries. Subseries A: Book Manuscripts, 1988-1996, is comprised of Liebmann's unpublished manuscripts and majority of these works have multiple drafts. Some titles are The Do-Gooders of the Apocalypse, The Great Show Business Conspiracy, and It Was A Doctor Who Delivered Hitler. Subseries B: Short Stories and Editorials, undated-1992, is comprised of Liebmann's short stories and editorials throughout his career, many of which were unpublished. Titles include The Prize, Can Love Survive the Twentieth Century, and Promises '92. Subseries C: Plays and Musicals, 1984-1992, consists of several scripts for plays and musicals and majority of these projects have multiple drafts, correspondence, and research. Some of these plays and musicals were produced. Titles include An Evening with Quasimodo, a comedic play that takes on the beloved story "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," and Melanie in August, a play about Sigmund Freud. Series VI: Notes, Correspondence, and Research, 1958-1996, is comprised of Liebmann's correspondence with production studios, notes, ideas for sketches, research, and a joke file with index cards organized by subject. It also includes photographs, and Writers Guild correspondence related to the Munsters and the Jean Arthur Show.

Indexing Terms

Writers Guild of America, West
Television scripts
Munsters (Television program)
Television writers
Television producers and directors