

Hal Kanter Collection

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Writers Guild Foundation Archive

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Hal Kanter Collection

Dates: 1943-2008

Collection Number: WGF-MS-038

Creator/Collector: Kanter, Hal, 1918-2011

Extent: 3 linear feet, 3 boxes

Repository: Writers Guild Foundation Archive
Los Angeles, California 90048

Abstract: The Hal Kanter Collection, 1943-2009, primarily consists of radio scripts produced during Kanter's work for the Armed Forces Radio Service during WWII. Also in this collection are other radio and television scripts, professional and personal correspondence and Writers Guild of America newsletters.

Language of Material: English

Access

Available by appointment only.

Publication Rights

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

Preferred Citation

Hal Kanter Collection. Writers Guild Foundation Archive

Acquisition Information

Donated by Hal Kanter on October 5, 2007 and June 10, 2008.

Biography/Administrative History

Hal Kanter was a prolific comedy writer whose career spanned six decades of radio, films television comedies and awards shows. Born in Savannah, Georgia on December 18, 1918, his family moved to Long Island when he was a child. His father, Albert, created Classics Illustrated, comic-book versions of classic books. From a young age, Kanter was interested in theater and creating cartoons and writing jokes. He sold his first cartoon in 1933 and for the following five years was a free-lance cartoonist for newspapers and magazines. In 1936 his work took him to Hollywood where he wrote for the Jack Oakie radio program. Kanter briefly wrote for Olsen and Johnson's Hellzapoppin' in New York, and then as a freelancer wrote 25 radio dramas before his March 1941 induction into the U.S. Army. Until his discharge in 1945, Kanter wrote, produced, and acted in Armed Forces Radio Service shows aired over stations KOA, KLZ, and other local stations in Colorado; built and ran radio stations in Eniwetok and Guam; and served as a combat correspondent on Iwo Jima. Kanter flourished in TV's Golden Age, beginning by co-creating and writing the innovative Ed Wynn Show in 1950. Making the leap to film the following year, Kanter co-wrote Two Tickets to Broadway for RKO. He landed a contract with Paramount Pictures soon after, where his assignments included several Bob Hope hit comedies, including My Favorite Spy (1951) and Casanova's Big Night (1953). In 1952, he co-wrote The Road to Bali for Hope and Bing Crosby. During this period, Kanter also wrote several screenplays that helped launch another comedy team, Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis, including Money from Home (1953) and Artists and Models (1955). Flexing his dramatic skills, Kanter adapted the 1954 screen version of Tennessee Williams' The Rose Tattoo. In 1955, Kanter co-wrote and made his TV directorial debut with the award-winning George Gobel Show (for which Kanter shared a Best Written Comedy Material Emmy in 1955). The following year, Kanter made his film directorial debut with I Married A Woman, starring Gobel. Kanter also directed pop icon Elvis Presley in his hit movie Loving You (1957), and Rowan & Martin in their western spoof Once Upon A Horse (1957). Over the next decade, Kanter wrote or co-wrote numerous screenplays, including Mardi Gras (1958), Let's Make Love (which earned a shared 1960 WGA nomination), Pocketful of Miracles (1961), and Blue Hawaii, which earned a 1962 WGA nomination. Returning to television in the mid-'60s, Kanter created Julia, starring Diahann Carroll, the first network television show with a female African-American lead, that shattered stereotypes in its portrayal of a professional, working woman of color. This earned Kanter an Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series in 1969. In 1976, Kanter was hired as Bob Hope's head writer. That same year, he was named Executive Producer of the seminal sitcom All in the Family (for which Kanter shared a 1976 Emmy nomination for Outstanding Comedy Series). Beginning in the early 1950s Kanter began writing for the annual Academy Awards telecast, often hosted by his friend Bob Hope. He contributed to the telecasts long after Hope had ceded hosting duties to others, and in all wrote for 34 Oscars ceremonies. He twice shared Emmy Awards, for the 63rd and 64th Oscar telecasts. In 1999, at the age of 80, Kanter published his candid autobiography, So Far, So Funny: My Life in Show Business. Hal Kanter was an active member of the Writers Guild of America, joining in 1950 and remaining for the rest of his life. He was also a founding member of the Writers Guild Foundation, and served on its board from 1979 to his death. "Perhaps one

of Kanter's most indelible contributions to the Guild has taken place outside the boardroom: contributing a wealth of material for many annual Writers Guild Awards shows, adding his signature comic sensibility as writer, host, presenter, and featured entertainer over the years." For all of his achievements and service, he received the WGA West's Valentine Davies Award for industry/community service in 1983, the WGA West's Paddy Chayefsky Laurel Award for Television in 1989, and the WGA West's Morgan Cox Award for service to the Guild in 2005. Kanter passed away on November 6, 2011 at his home in Encino at the age of 92. He was survived by his wife of 70 years, writer Doris Kanter (m. September 5, 1941); his daughters Donna Kanter, Lisa Kanter Shafer and Abigail Kanter Jaye; his sister, Saralea Emerson; and a granddaughter.—Adapted from a WGAw press release.

Scope and Content of Collection

Kanter donated many individual film and television scripts, which have been added to the Library's core collection and can be found by searching the catalog. Series I: Scripts, 1943-1948 and 1975-1976 contains scripts from various radio and television programs. Subseries A: Armed Forces Radio Service, 1943-1945, consists of programs and sketches that were rebroadcast on local stations for American service members abroad. Shows represented include Abbott and Costello, Bing Crosby, Burns and Allen, Charlie McCarthy, Mail Call and Red Skelton. Subseries B: Radio Scripts, 1944-1948 consists of scripts from the postwar era, presumably with Kanter as a writer. Titles include The Pepsodent Show, Amos 'n Andy, Maisie and Ozzie and Harriet. Subseries C: The Last of the Australians, 1975-1976, consists of twelve episodes of a short-lived Australian sitcom based on Alan Seymour's play The One Day Of The Year. Kanter, a respected TV comedy writer at that point, was brought on as a consultant for the show's pilot episode. Series II: Professional and Personal Papers, 1973-1995 consists of correspondence and project documents from the latter part of Kanter's career. Included are a thesis completed at Cal State San Diego with facts taken from an interview with Kanter, Arthritis Foundation documents, articles about the WGA, an unproduced Pinocchio screenplay by Francis Ford Coppola asking for Kanter's collaboration, and a stage show script and various sketches to be performed as a fundraiser for UCLA's University Elementary School. Series III: Periodicals and Publicity, 1961-2008 contains a myriad of promotional materials for feature films – press kits, posters, one sheets, cast and crew sheets. There are also several issues of Variety and the Hollywood Reporter.

Indexing Terms

Golden age of television
United States. Armed Forces Radio Service
Writers Guild of America, West
Writers Guild of America--awards
Radio plays
Television scripts
Screenwriters
Television writers
Motion picture producers and directors
Radio writers
