Vern Martelle scrapbooks

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2020
Descriptive Summary
Title: Vern Martelle scrapbooks
Dates: circa 1910-1970
Collection Number: 2003-25
Creator/Collector:
Extent: .25 linear feet
Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103
Abstract: Vern Martelle was a female impersonator whose fifty-year career began in vaudeville; his act was built around lip-synching, which he claimed to have invented, as well as up to twenty-five costume changes per performance. This collection is composed of two of Martelle's scrapbooks, which contain clippings, photographs and ephemera.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Vern Martelle scrapbooks. GLBT Historical Society
Acquisition Information
The collection was donated to the GLBT Historical Society by David Peckman in 2003.
Biography/Administrative History
Vern Martelle (sometimes Verne Martell) was a female impersonator who performed in Europe, North Africa (USO during World War II), Las Vegas, Seattle (Garden of Allah Club), San Francisco (Finocchio's), and other locales. He enjoyed a fifty-year career – which began in vaudeville, and incorporated occasional modeling and Hollywood stunt work – and claimed to have been the first drag performer to lip-synch on stage. His act featured lip-synch and up to twenty-five costume changes per performance. In 1951, he was billed as "The man with a thousand voices and a thousand gowns."
Scope and Content of Collection
This collection is composed of two of Martelle's scrapbooks, which contain clippings, photographs and ephemera. He collected material relating to his performances, to camp icons such as Tallulah Bankhead, to cross-dressing in the theater and society, and to transgender people. The collection also includes a 1951 Northern California Players Directory in which Martelle is listed as a variety act and a letter from the San Francisco Chronicle's columnist, Millie. Most material appears to date to the 1940s-1960s, with some photos and an early review of Martelle's act appearing to date to the 1910s or 1920s.
Indexing Terms
Drag
Guide to the Vern Martelle scrapbooks