Guide to the Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective Collection

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Guide to the Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective Collection

Collection number: 1999-44

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society
San Francisco, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Guide to the Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective Collection

Dates: 1976-1999

Collection number: 1999-44

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

Collection Size: 6 linear feet 11 boxes, 1 oversize folder

Repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94105

Abstract: The Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective collection is composed of scripts, "Extra Pieces" (writing not included in scripts), newsletters, flyers, administrative files, photographs, and various audio-visual materials that reflect the activities of this women's theater group that began in 1976, and were still active when they donated the collection in 1999. Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective performed to promote feminist education and addressed such topics as women's roles in society, lesbianism, motherhood, and religion.

Physical location: Stored at the Archives of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society of San Francisco, California

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

Collection open for research.

Publication Rights

Mothertongue retains copyright on all scripts, GLBTHS holds copyright on the balance of the collection.

Preferred Citation


Acquisition Information

Ida VSW Red and Corinne Sue Wick donated the Mothertongue collection to the GLBTHS in July of 1999.

Biography / Administrative History

The Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective began out of the Women's Speaker's Bureau (now the Women's Speaker's Network). Lani Silver of the WSB spoke at a WSB-sponsored Women and Violence Conference in the fall of 1976; four other women performed a reader's theatre script at the event. Here, the women met and shared material; after the conference they began to develop other scripts to perform independently at women's coffee houses. The goals of the group (originally called Mothertongue Reader's Theatre) were feminist education and consciousness-raising. The group addressed such topics as sex roles, body image, lesbianism, motherhood, and spirituality. Over the next decade, the theater group grew, taking on public speaking engagements and performing at benefits. Despite the growing size of the collective (75 members by the mid-eighties), the group still remained non-hierarchical, developing scripts collectively and administrating through consensus. Disagreements were worked out through conflict resolution; the group was consistently committed to equality between members as opposed to hierarchical rank. A complete history of Mothertongue is included in the collection: "Me,
You, Them," by Judy Sanders, is a 200 page text documenting the collective from its inception in 1976 through the late eighties, when the text was written (file 5/4). It includes detailed history and political goals of the group, as well as extensive interviews with group members. Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective was still meeting and performing when the founding members donated this collection in 1999.

Scope and Content of Collection
The Mothertongue collection has 2 main parts. The first section in boxes 1 through 4 is comprised of original scripts; the scripts are compilations of short pieces, poems, monologues, and dialogues written both by women in the collective and by non-members in the community. The scripts document the personal lives and concerns of the writers, especially as relating to 1970s feminist politics; many pieces are deeply emotional, reflecting anger and personal pain, while others are humorous or erotic. Most scripts contain handwritten production notes. The scripts are filed in alphabetical order, with the date of production noted. Also included are "Extra Pieces," drafts of writing not included in any script. These pieces are organized alphabetically by the first word of the piece, although they are not alphabetized within each letter.

The remainder of the collection is comprised of the Mothertongue administrative files, flyers and newsletters, photographs of shows, and videotapes. The administrative files include contracts and funding sources, records of specific performance venues, and correspondence relating to the group. The correspondence section contains mostly business letters, but also letters from the community responding to Mothertongue's politics; the files contain both positive feedback and disapproval over lesbian content performed in public places. Also of interest in the administrative files is the detailed record of a conflict resolution meeting in 1990; as part of its commitment to non-hierarchy, the group hired a professional mediator to resolve a dispute between members. Because Ida VSW RED had already organized the collection before donating it to GLHS, the collection remains in nearly the same order as when donated; file headings and titles have been kept.

The collection also contains one oversize box of posters and paper props, as well as five display boards decorated with a collage of photographs, programs, and colorful flyers documenting the group's production history. There is one t-shirt with Mothertongue logo in the t-shirt collection.

Arrangement
This collection is organized in 11 series:

Series 1. Scripts
Series 2. Extra Pieces
Series 3. Newsletters and Flyers
Series 4. Notes
Series 5. Administrative Files
Series 6. Performance
Series 7. Other Political/Theater Groups
Series 8. Audio-Visual Items
Series 9. Photographs
Series 10. Posters (Oversize Materials)
Series 11. Artifacts

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Theater
Feminism
Lesbians

Related Material
Series 1. Scripts

Guide to the Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective Collection

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<td>Did You Say 'Mirth'? No! I Said Yashkerkahs! Women's Humor 1991</td>
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<td>Box/ Folder 1/8</td>
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<td>Box/ Folder 2/4</td>
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<td>MT Feminist Theater Collective: The First Twenty Years An Index by Ida VSW Red 1976-1996 1996</td>
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Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

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Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

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Box/ Folder 7/8 Letters to MT 1982-1996
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Box/ Folder 7/10 National Woman's Mailing List 1986
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Box/ Folder 7/13 Contracts 1986-1991
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Box 8

Series 6. Performance

Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

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Box/ Folder 8/8 Performance Technique 1985
Box/ Folder 8/9 Performance Venues
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Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

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Box/ Folder 9/2 Wry Crips 1991
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Series 7. Other Political/Theater Groups

Series 8. Audio-Visual Items
Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

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- Box/ Folder 9/13: Video: 20th Anniversary 1996
- Box/ Folder 9/14: Video: Virginia's Play 1999
- Box/ Folder 9/15: Video: Pot Pourri
- Box/ Folder 9/16: Video: Sampler From Four Scripts
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Series 9. Photographs
Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

- Box/ Folder 10/1: Performance at Women's Building (color snapshots)
- Box/ Folder 10/2: Performance at Women's Building (color snapshots)
- Box/ Folder 10/3: Formal Performance at La Pena
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- Box/ Folder 10/5: Negatives
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- Box/ Folder 10/7: Duplicate Prints

Series 10. Posters (Oversize Materials)
Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

- Box/ Folder 11/1: Publicity posters, paper cut outs
- Box/ Folder 11/2: Five display boards 1982-1996

Series 11. Artifacts
Creator: Mothertongue Feminist Theater Collective

- Box/ Carton 4: One t-shirt