



RON TRAVIS UNITY THEATRE COLLECTION

(TRAVIS)

TRAVIS Ron Travis Unity Theatre Collection 1938-2021

Name of Creator: Unity Theatre; Ron Travis

Extent: 6 Boxes

Administrative/Biographical History: Unity Theatre grew out of the agitprop street theatre in the East End of London in the early 1930s lasting until it was destroyed by fire in 1975.

Once established, in a converted chapel in Kings Cross (built entirely with voluntary labour), Unity became the inspiration for a national upsurge in drama on social and political issues, since it was the only theatre in London throughout the 1930's, 1940's and early 1950's producing plays on these subjects.

Alongside shows specially created for Unity, it drew on the repertoire of world theatre, including innovative productions of works by Clifford Odets, Sean O'Casey, Lope de Vega, Jean Paul Sartre and Arthur Adamov. It was the first theatre in England to stage a play by Bertolt Brecht and it helped popularise the plays of Maxim Gorky.

Unity's strength lay with its audience drawn mainly from the trades unions and organised labour movements, but amongst its supporters were many eminent personalities e.g. Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Sybil Thorndike, Beatrix Lehmann and Paul Robeson whose appearance with Unity, followed by international acclaim for the political pantomime *Babes in the Wood*, marked the peak of the theatre's fame.

With the outbreak of war, Unity was the first theatre to open in London once the ban on public entertainment had been lifted and it maintained a permanent repertory of plays, satirical revues and musicals throughout the five years of hostilities. It also sent out small groups of performers who, often in hazardous conditions, provided valuable shelter and factory entertainment for those winning the war at home.

Unity emerged from the war at the head of a national drama movement that was concerned with the lives of working people. Soon however, many of the developments pioneered by Unity, such as vernacular drama, *Living Newspaper* and biting satirical shows, were accepted by the theatrical mainstream and television.

Many well-known theatre people - Lionel Bart, Alfie Bass, Michael Gambon, Bob Hoskins, David Kossoff, Warren Mitchell, Bill Owen and Ted Willis among them - learned their skills at this influential theatre which was the working people's most sustained and successful contribution to British drama and one of the most important and enduring initiatives in popular culture this century.

Custodial History: Deposited with Bishopsgate Institute by the Unity Theatre Trust and Harry Landis, October 2021.

Scope and Content: Papers regarding Unity Theatre. Includes programmes, press reviews and press releases, correspondence, management committee meeting minutes, production notes and photographs, playscripts, membership lists and newsletters, publicity materials for Unity and other theatres/companies, and research undertaken by Ron Travis towards a PhD in the history of Unity Theatre, [1938-2021]

System of Arrangement:

No further arrangement required.

Language/scripts of material:

English

Access conditions:

OPEN

Copying conditions:

Photocopying, scanning and digital photography (without flash) is permitted for research purposes on completion of the Library's Copyright Declaration form and with respect to current UK copyright law.

Finding Aids:

Copy of handlist available in researcher's area.

Rules and Conventions:

Compiled in compliance with General International Standard Archival Description, ISAD(G), second edition, 2000; National Council on Archives Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names, 1997.

TRAVIS/1	Unity Theatre Management Committee	1973-1978
	Meeting minutes (including Annual General Meetings) and other papers of the Unity Theatre's management committee, [1973-1978] OPEN	
TRAVIS/2	Unity Theatre Management Committee	1988-1992
	Meeting minutes (including Annual General Meetings) and other papers of the Unity Theatre's management committee, [1988-1992] OPEN	
TRAVIS/3	Unity Theatre: correspondence	1940-1978
	Correspondence regarding the running of the Unity Theatre, [1940-1978] OPEN	
TRAVIS/4	Unity Theatre: correspondence	1992
	Correspondence regarding productions and the day-to-day running of the Unity Theatre, [1992] OPEN	
TRAVIS/5	Unity Theatre Society	1989-1991
	Membership lists, forms, open letters and correspondence regarding the Unity Theatre Society, [1989-1991] APPLY TO ARCHIVIST	
TRAVIS/6	Unity Theatre School of Dramatic Studies	1939-1940
	Course list and report of the School Commission for the Unity Theatre School of Dramatic Studies (affiliated to the Marylebone Literary Institute), [1939-1940] OPEN	
TRAVIS/7	Newsletters	1975-1980
	Typescript (photocopied) Unity Theatre Newsletters (1975-1980) OPEN	

TRAVIS/8 History of the Unity Theatre 1946-1975

Papers and publications regarding the history of the Unity Theatre, [1946-1975]

Includes:

- booklet, Unity Theatre Society Rules (2 copies; 17pp; c.1950)
- leaflet with a short history of the Unity as 'a Theatre Club presenting a regular programme of plays, musical shows and revues' (4pp; c.1975)
- flyer, A People's Theatre (4pp; c.1946)
- typescript Unity Theatre Society Rules (11pp; 1991)
- booklet, Unity Theatre presents: The Story of a People's Movement (20pp; c.1947)
- leaflet, The Aim of Unity Theatre Club (4pp; c.1975)
- typescript document regarding the founding of Unity Theatre Folk Club (2pp; 1974)
- typescript Unity Theatre 1937-1975 (3 copies; 2pp)
- typescript list of Unity Theatre productions, 1936-1973

OPEN

TRAVIS/9 Publicity for other theatres 1949-1980

Publicity materials (chiefly flyers) for theatre productions by other companies/at other theatres, [1949-1980]

Includes:

- flyer, The S.T.G. Theatre from Gliwice, Poland and their production of Fabryka Absolutu (1974)
- leaflet, Merseyside Left Theatre Club
- programme for A Tribute to Bernard Shaw (St Pancras Town Hall, 1950)
- programme for The Philadelphia Orchestra tour (1949)
- programme for Paul Robeson recital tour (1949)
- booklet for Islington Festival (1974)
- booklet for Working Drama Association One Act Play Festival (1980)
- publicity for productions by Entertainment Machine; The Little Theatre Club (Soho Poly); Mayday Theatre Productions; Inter-Action Productions; Theatre 84; York Shoestring Theatre; Half Moon Theatre; The Overground

- The Tigers Are Coming, O.K.? (by Alan Plater)
- The Adventures of Jack Boot (Mayday Theatre Productions)
- Go West, Young Woman (Women's Company)
- We Hate to See You Go (by Michael McGrinder; directed by Ron Travis)
- The Poetry Reading (by Stanley Nelson; directed by Ron Travis)
- The Nuns (by Eduardo Manet) - includes poster and press review
- Tea Stall (by Sharon Thie; directed by Ron Travis)
- Case for a Rebel
- Ten Nights in a Bar Room
- Matchgirls
- Dockers Tanner
- The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists
- Stop Press (by Mihail Sebastian)
- The Bureaucracy Show

OPEN

TRAVIS/14 Programmes

c.1938-1977

Programmes for Unity Theatre productions, [c.1938-1977]

Includes programmes for:

- What's Left?
- Exhibition '51
- The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists
- The Matchgirls (1950)
- Occupations (by Trevor Griffiths)
- Plant in the Sun (by Ben Bengal)
- The Rosenbergs
- The Shadow of the Swastika
- Beer and Skittles
- Cousin Elwyn
- The Whole World Over (by Konstantin Simonov)
- Wally Pone: a new musical by Lionel Bart
- Hell Is What You Make It (by Ewan MacColl)
- Winkles and Champagne
- Six Men of Dorset (by Miles Malleon)
- Common Will Against the Giant
- Welcome to Buckhill (by Chris Allen)

OPEN

TRAVIS/15 Photographs

1973-1975

Rehearsal and production photographs from various plays staged by the Unity Theatre, [1973-1975]

Includes:

- colour photograph taken at the unveiling of a bronze plaque commemorating almost 40 years (1936-1975) of the Unity Theatre ('A Theatre Run by the People for the People') at its home in a former chapel on Goldington Street, Camden
- five black-and-white stills from a production of 'The Tigers Are Coming, O.K.?' (photographer: Rob Brimson)
- twenty-five black-and-white photographs from 'Tea Stall'
- five black-and-white photographs from 'Frost at Midnight'
- three black-and-white photographs from 'New Position'
- two unidentified black-and-white photographs taken by John Vickers
- four unidentified black-and-white photographs taken by Tim Hutcheson

OPEN

TRAVIS/17 Plays

**1957-
c.1975**

Typescript (and photocopies of published) plays, drafts and short performance pieces and revue material, [1957-c.1975]

Includes:

- Passion: a play for CND (Edward Bond)
- The Star Turns Red (Sean O'Casey)
- The Bridge (Mario Fratti)
- The Spoilsmen (Bernard Myers)
- The Ganzer Macher
- The Lost Letter (Ion Luca Caragiale)
- Armoured Train 14-69
- Aftermath
- Bill's Choice (William Shand)
- Pardon My Greek
- The Life of Kaggs (Arnold Hinchcliffe)
- Common Will Against the Giant (David Craig and Nigel Grey)
- Hold the Baby (Peter Collingwood)
- Bloomsday (Allan McLelland)

OPEN

TRAVIS/18 Plays 1950-1962

Typescript (and photocopies of published) plays, drafts and short performance pieces and revue material, [1940-1962]

Includes:

- The High Jinks of Canon Saull (Victor Jones, 1962)
- On Trial (Mark J Appleman)
- The Word of the King
- The Matchgirls
- The Germans (radio play)
- The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists by Robert Trussall: a new version adapted from the novel by Frank Rhodes
- The Tricolor Suite (Peter S Preston)
- Asia Awakes (Ali Sardar Jafri)
- The Battle of Cable Street (Simon Blumenfeld)

OPEN

TRAVIS/19 Playscripts 1932-1975

Typescript (and published) playscripts, [1932-1975]

Includes:

- booklet, 'Six Songs for Democracy' (1940)
- 'Love and How to Cure It' (Thornton Wilder; French's Acting Edition, 1932)
- 'Tony Draws a Horse' (Lesley Storm; Samuel French, 1939)
- photocopied article, 'The Workers' Theatre Movement in Britain in the Thirties' (13pp) (Leonard A Jones, 1975)
- draft playscript and amendments (typed), 'The High Jinks of Canon Saull' (73pp)

OPEN

TRAVIS/20 'The Police' and 'Saxon' (plays) 1974

Poster, programme, press reviews and production notes for the plays 'The Police' by Slavomir Mrozek and 'Saxon' by Dedwydd Jones, performed as a double bill at the Unity Theatre, [September 1974]

OPEN

TRAVIS/21 'Case for a Rebel' (play)

1974

Poster, programme, press reviews,
correspondence and production notes for the
play 'Case for a Rebel' by Emmanuel Robles
(translated from the original French by James
and Marie Kilker), performed at the Unity
Theatre, [May 1974]

OPEN