

The Wilma Theater records

01

**Finding aid prepared by Sarah Leu and Anastasia Matijkiw
through the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden
Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories.**

Last updated on September 14, 2015.

The Wilma Theater

Table of Contents

Summary Information.....	3
Biography/History.....	4
Scope and Contents.....	5
Administrative Information.....	7
Controlled Access Headings.....	7

Summary Information

Repository	The Wilma Theater
Creator	Wilma Theater (Philadelphia, Pa.)
Title	The Wilma Theater records
Call number	01
Date [inclusive]	1978-2014
Extent	150 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>The Wilma Theater was established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1973 as the Wilma Project with the purpose of creating theatrical productions of original material and developing local artists. In 1981, the Theater's artistic leadership was taken over by Blanka (1954-) and Jiri (1953-2012) Zizka, natives of Czechoslovakia who had started their relationship with the Wilma as artists-in-residence in 1979. The Zizkas helped to establish the Wilma as a theater for provocative productions, both American and international. The Wilma Theater records, 1978-2014, consist of press and public relation files, marketing materials, production files, stage manager files, audiovisual materials, and other materials relating to The Wilma Theater, its staff, and its various productions.</p>

Biography/History

"Established in 1973 as The Wilma Project, the Wilma [Theater] challenged the Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] cultural community to create theatrical productions of original material and to develop local artists. From 1973 through 1979, the Wilma...present[ed] work with renowned avant-garde theater artists, including the Bread & Puppet Theatre, Mabou Mines, Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company, The Wooster Group, Ping Chong & the Fiji Company, and Spalding Gray.

"In 1979, Blanka [1954-] and Jiri [1953-2012] Zizka, natives of Czechoslovakia, forged a creative relationship with the Wilma as artists-in-residence, and gained acclaim for their bold, innovative productions. With a dynamic, physical production style and original music accompaniment, the Zizka's original adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* focused a new spotlight of attention on the Wilma. The Zizkas assumed artistic leadership of the organization in 1981, and moved the Wilma to a 100-seat theater on Sansom Street. Within five years, the Wilma's audience had grown dramatically and the Theater was operating at nearly 100% capacity. A decision was made to expand the theater to a new 296-seat home; and in 1989, a location was identified at the corner of Broad and Spruce Streets.

"In 1996, the Wilma opened its new facility on Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts. Designed by renowned theater architect Hugh Hardy, the new 296-seat theater retains the Wilma's intimate flavor while enhancing and expanding its performance space, establishing an ideal home for the Zizkas' artistic vision.

"During the Zizkas' tenure, The Wilma Theater has established a national reputation for provocative work ranging from the international drama of Bertolt Brecht, Athol Fugard, Eugene Ionesco, Joe Orton and Tom Stoppard to new American plays by Tina Howe, Romulus Linney, Quincy Long, Doug Wright, Amy Freed and many others, as well as premiering Jiri Zizka's original adaptations of classic novels. In 1995, Blanka Zizka's Barrymore Award-winning production of Jim Cartwright's *Road* was presented at the International Theater Festival in the Czech Republic, the first American company to be invited. CBS News called the Wilma 'one playhouse that has emerged from the shadow of the Great White Way to make history on its own.'

"...With each production, the Wilma offers free or low-cost discussions which address topics and themes relevant to the play. [Its] Student Sunday Program exposes students to live theater, providing tickets for as little as \$10. [Its] Fellowship and Internship Programs provide valuable training to students and recent graduates in all aspects of professional theater.

Bibliography:

Quoted text from: The Wilma Theater. "History." Last modified 2015. Accessed July 15, 2015. <https://www.wilmatheater.org/history>.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of press and public relation files, marketing materials, production files, stage manager files, literary department binders, a large amount of audiovisual materials, and other materials relating to The Wilma Theater, its staff, and its various productions.

The press and public relations files, 1979-2014, contain printed and published materials, photographs, and other materials relating to productions; workshops, symposiums, and other events at the Wilma; and other performing arts organizations. A large portion of the files are organized into three sections: productions, events, and other organizations.

- The files for productions are organized alphabetically by the production title and contain newspaper clippings, press releases, photocopies of reviews and articles relating to productions, and research related to productions. A majority of these files have photographs used for publicity purposes. A few files contain slides, negatives, and/or contact sheets, and some include a copy of the script of the production.
- The files for events at the Wilma are organized alphabetically by event name and contain newspaper clippings, photocopies of newspaper articles, brochures, and other materials associated with various symposia, workshops, and other events.
- The files for other organizations are organized alphabetically by the name of the organization and contain brochures, memos, letters, mailings, and other materials related to other theaters and performing arts organizations. The Theater Alliance of Greater Philadelphia is well represented in these files.

There is also a group of press release binders, 1989-1998 and 2003-2014, organized chronologically that document The Wilma Theater's productions through newspaper clippings, copies of newspaper articles that mention the production, press releases, and other materials.

The marketing materials, 1982-2015, include marketing binders, publications, and posters. The marketing binders, 2006-2014, have been compiled by the Wilma and are arranged chronologically and contain promotional mailings, postcards, flyers, and playbills for each production. There is also a binder compiled by R. J. Walner, containing playbills and programs from performances at The Wilma Theater between 1981 and 1994. A couple of the playbills in this binder are from performances of the Wilma Project, the previous name of The Wilma Theater before the Ziskas assumed leadership in 1981. Playbills from 1981 to 2015 have been digitized and are available online. Also in the marketing materials are some booklets and other printed matter published by the Wilma Theater for fundraising, productions, and other events. There is a box with several copies of a book published by the Wilma Theater in 2007 as part of its Galileo Project, which included the American premiere of David Edgar's adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, two symposia based on the themes of the play, and readings of three new plays dealing with scientific themes. The book includes transcripts of discussions, and other information relating to the production and Galileo Project events. There are also a number of posters from Wilma productions, a majority of which are framed, and some that are hung throughout the building. Some of the posters are signed by the playwright of the production.

The production files, circa 1978-2000s, consist of binders that served as the active working files kept by the director during productions, documenting the perspective of the director. Several dozen of the binders are from Jiri Zizka, circa 1978-2000s. There are also about twenty-five production binders from Blanka Zizka, circa 2000s. The binders contain sketches and notes relating to the design and staging of the production, including set locations and blocking diagrams; set information, including invoices, set lists, and specifications; notes on lighting, sound effects, and costumes and makeup; scene breakdowns; lines cut from the script; casting information and notes from auditions; performer contact sheets and schedules; and other materials. Some binders have photographs of the production and newspaper clippings and photocopies of newspaper clippings about the show. If the production traveled to another venue for a performance, there are contracts, programs, and other materials documentation that version of the production.

The stage manager files, circa 2000s, consist of binders that served as the active working files kept by the stage manager during productions, documenting the production from the perspective of the stage manager. The binders contain administrative materials related to the production, including rehearsal and performance schedules, incident reports, prop lists, cast lists, announcements, memos, emails, and correspondence. The binders also include lighting and sound cues, scene breakdowns, and notated librettos and vocal scores (if applicable).

There is a small section of binders, 1982-2005, from The Wilma Theater's Literary department that consist of copies of scripts for productions put on at the Wilma with script alterations noted.

The audiovisual materials, circa 1990s-2014, include various formats of photography, audio, and video materials relating to productions, events, and individuals at The Wilma Theater. There are several dozen CDs with digital photographs of productions in RAW, TIFF, and JPG formats, 2004-2014; photographic prints and negatives of productions and the theater's building; undeveloped rolls of film; and multiple binders and boxes of slides of publicity photographs from productions. There is also a small amount of mounted photographs from the exhibition "20 Years of Stoppard" on playwright Tom Stoppard and productions of his plays at The Wilma Theater. Audio materials consist primarily of audio reel-to-reels, floppy diskettes, digital audio tape, mini-discs, and audiocassettes with recordings of sounds used during performances. Video materials include recordings of performances, both unedited footage and edited copies, on DVD, mini-DV, VHS, Betamax, and mini-discs. There are a handful of reel-to-reel video films that were used as part of various productions. In addition, there are VHS cassettes and Betamax recordings produced by the Wilma Theater as advertisements and promotional materials, as well as recordings of instances where The Wilma Theater was featured on television in the news and local programming.

There are some materials from Jiri Zizka in the collection, including thank you letters and other letters of support for the Wilma, research and correspondence related to potential productions, contracts, a number of folders related to the production of Vaclav Havel's *Leaving* including correspondence, and materials relating to Jiri's memorial service held at the Wilma in 2012, including a guest book, programs, and photographs of Jiri at various ages.

Administrative Information

The Wilma Theater

Finding aid prepared by Sarah Leu and Anastasia Matijkiw through the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories.

Sponsor

This preliminary finding aid was created as part of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories. The HCI-PSAR project was made possible by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Access Restrictions

Contact The Wilma Theater for information about accessing this collection.

Processing Information Note

Summary descriptive information on this collection was compiled in 2014-2016 as part of a project conducted by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to make better known and more accessible the largely hidden collections of small, primarily volunteer run repositories in the Philadelphia area. The Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) was funded by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

This is a preliminary finding aid. No physical processing, rehousing, reorganizing, or folder listing was accomplished during the HCI-PSAR project.

In some cases, more detailed inventories or finding aids may be available on-site at the repository where this collection is held; please contact The Wilma Theater directly for more information.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Wilma Theater (Philadelphia, Pa.)

Geographic Name(s)

- Avenue of the Arts (Philadelphia, Pa.)
- Philadelphia (Pa.)

Personal Name(s)

- Zizka, Blanka
- Zizka, Jiri

Subject(s)

- Experimental theater
- Theater
- Theater--Production and direction