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Guide to the Donald Oenslager Collection of Adolphe Appia

GEN MSS 81



by T. Michael Womack

September 1987

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 81

CREATOR: Appia, Adolphe, 1862-1928

TITLE: Donald Oenslager collection of Adolphe Appia

DATES: 1892–1971

BULK DATES: 1920–1926

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.75 linear feet (4 boxes) + 3 broadside folders

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence, manuscripts, articles, and miscellaneous papers, documenting the life and career of Adolphe Appia. The papers were collected by Donald Oenslager, professor at the Yale School of Drama.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.oenslag>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.oenslag>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Bequest of Donald Oenslager, 1976.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Donald Oenslager Collection of Adolphe Appia is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Donald Oenslager Collection of Adolphe Appia. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Adolphe Appia (1862-1928)

Adolphe François Appia was born in Geneva, the son of Louis Paul Amédée Appia, a successful surgeon and one of the founders of the Red Cross. While a youth, he became fascinated with the theater, but since his family considered it an inappropriate career choice, he studied music at Geneva, Paris, Leipzig, and Dresden.

In 1884 Appia met Houston Stewart Chamberlain and became devoted to the works of Richard Wagner. With the help and encouragement of Chamberlain, he decided to become a designer and stage director.

Although he received scant recognition during his lifetime, Appia is regarded today as the father of modern stage lighting and design. His reforms of the antiquated nineteenth-century practice of stage design emphasized the significance of time and space, the relation of stage and auditorium, and the contrast of light and shadow. He devoted much of his lifework in particular to creating new productions of the operas of Richard Wagner.

Appia died on February 29, 1928, in a nursing home near Nyon, Switzerland.

Appia set down his theories on stage set design in two books and several essays, but much of his writing was published only in the 1950s and 1960s. The Fondation Adolphe Appia has as its objective the publication of all his works and the furtherance of his ideas.

For further biographical information, see Walther R. Volbach's *Adolphe Appia, Prophet of the Modern Theatre: A Profile* (1968).

Scope and Contents

The Donald Oenslager Collection of Adolphe Appia contains correspondence, holograph and typescript manuscripts, articles, miscellaneous papers and drawings documenting the life and career of the author of *Die Musik und die Inszenierung* (1899). The material spans the years 1900 to 1971, with the bulk falling between 1920 and 1926. The papers were collected by Donald Oenslager, who wrote on stage and theater design and taught in the Yale School of Drama for over forty years.

The first section of the collection contains Oenslager's correspondence concerning Appia. Letters between Oenslager and Edmond Appia, distant cousin of Adolphe and representative of the Fondation Adolphe Appia, document the purchase of the typescript carbons of Appia's essays which are found in the second section of the collection. Correspondence between Oenslager and Samuel J. Hume, an author on the theater and dealer in rare books on the subject in Berkeley, California, relates in part to the purchase of Appia manuscripts. A third folder contains correspondence between Oenslager and Walther R. Volbach, a fellow Appia enthusiast and author of *Adolphe Appia, Prophet of the Modern Theatre: A Profile*.

The second section, Writings, includes over twenty essays by Appia, and an outline of *La musique et la mise en scène* together with an English translation of that work, based on the German version. Most examples are typescript drafts. The section begins with a list (folder 4) which provides a brief description of most of the writings. All the material in this section except the manuscripts in folders 8, 10, 23, and 24 were bought

by Oenslager from the Fondation Adolphe Appia in 1953 and bear the mark of the Fondation. They are third carbons (of six).

The third section, Writings about Appia, contains over a dozen articles by such writers as Carl Niessen, Edmund Stadler, Carl Van Vechten, Jessica Davis Van Wyck, and Walther R. Volbach. Included in this section are two issues of theater magazines dedicated to the memory of Appia.

The fourth section, Miscellaneous Papers, contains materials relating to Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, a Swiss education reformer with whom Appia collaborated, and photographs of Appia.

The fifth section, Drawings, contains three set design drawings for Wagner's *Ring Cycle*.

Collection Contents

Correspondence, 1953-1970

| | | |
|------------|---------------------|---------|
| b. 1, f. 1 | Appia, Edmond | 1953-61 |
| b. 1, f. 2 | Hume, Samuel J. | 1953 |
| b. 1, f. 3 | Volbach, Walther R. | 1961-70 |

Writings, 1900-1929

| | | |
|-------------|--|----------|
| b. 1, f. 4 | Liste de textes inédits importants d'Adolphe Appia: typescript, corrected | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 5 | "L'art dramatique vivant": typescript, carbon, corrected | 1925 |
| b. 1, f. 6 | "L'art est une attitude": typescript, carbon | 1920 |
| b. 1, f. 7 | "Art vivant ou nature morte": typescript, carbon | 1922 |
| b. 1, f. 8 | "Art vivant ou nature morte": printed version | 1923 |
| b. 1, f. 9 | "Avertissement pour l'édition de mes 'essais' en un volume": typescript, carbon | 1926 |
| b. 1, f. 10 | "Comment réformer notre mise en scène": holograph | 1900 |
| b. 1, f. 11 | "Comment réformer notre mise en scène": typescript, carbon | 1900 |
| b. 1, f. 12 | "Curriculum vitae d'Adolphe Appia, écrit par lui-même en 1927": typescript | 1927 |
| b. 1, f. 13 | "Devons-nous (ou pourrons-nous ???) réaliser l'idéal de Wagner?": typescript, carbon | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 14 | "Expériences de théâtre et recherches personnelles": typescript, carbon | 1922 |
| b. 1, f. 15 | "Formes nouvelles": typescript, carbon | 1921 |
| b. 1, f. 16 | "L'homme est la mesure de toutes choses (Protagoras), préface à un nouvel ouvrage": typescript, carbon | 1923 Aug |
| b. 1, f. 17 | "Introduction à mes notes personnelles": typescript, carbon | 1905 |
| b. 1, f. 18 | "Introduction aux représentations de <i>Tristan et Isolde</i> à la Scala de Milan (1923-24), direction A. Toscanini": typescript, carbon | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 19 | " <i>Lohengrin</i> ": typescript, carbon | 1926 |
| b. 1, f. 20 | "La mise en scène et son avenir, dédié aux élèves de l'institut Jaques-Dalcroze": typescript, carbon | 1921 Dec |
| b. 1, f. 21 | "Monumentalité": typescript, carbon | 1922 Jul |
| b. 1, f. 22 | <i>Die Musik und die Inszenierung</i> , seconde préface à l'ouvrage: typescript, carbon | 1918 |
| b. 1, f. 23 | <i>Die Musik und die Inszenierung</i> , English translation by Ulric Moore: bound typescript, carbon | 1929 |
| b. 1, f. 24 | <i>La musique et la mise en scène</i> , outline: typescript, photocopy | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 25 | "Notes de mise en scène für <i>Den Ring des Nibelungen</i> , 1891-1892": typescript, carbon | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 26 | "Notes sur le théâtre": typescript, carbon | 1908 |
| b. 1, f. 27 | "Réflexions sur l'espace et le temps": typescript, carbon | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 28 | "La réforme et le théâtre de Bâle": typescript, carbon | n.d. |
| b. 1, f. 29 | "Richard Wagner et la mise en scène": typescript, carbon, corrected | 1925 Mar |

| | | |
|-------------|--|----------|
| b. 1, f. 30 | "Le sujet": typescript, carbon | 1922 Jan |
| b. 6 | "Work of Living Art and Man Is the Measure of All Things": typescript, carbon, corrected (translated by Herbert J. Biberman) | n.d. |

Writings About Appia, 1911-1971

| | | |
|-------------|---|-------------|
| b. 2, f. 31 | "Adolphe Appia," exhibition pamphlet from the Victoria and Albert Museum, October 1970-January 1971: printed version | 1970-71 |
| b. 2, f. 32 | "Adolphe Appia: Über Ursprung und Anfang der rhythmischen Gymnastik": printed version | 1911 |
| b. 2, f. 33 | <i>Cahiers</i> , section IV contains three articles on Appia: printed version | 1955 Jul |
| b. 2, f. 34 | Niessen, Carl, "Adolphe Appia: Goethes <i>Faust</i> , erster Teil, als Dichtung dargestellt": printed version | 1929 |
| b. 2, f. 35 | Odier, Henri, "Adolphe Appia: in memoriam": printed version | 1929 Mar |
| b. 2, f. 36 | <i>Players Magazine</i> , Adolphe Appia, 1862-1962, centenary issue: printed version | 1962 Jan |
| b. 2, f. 37 | Simonson, Lee, "Aesthetic Principles: The Ideas of Adolphe Appia": printed version | 1937 Jul |
| b. 2, f. 38 | Stadler, Edmund, "Adolphe Appia": printed version [German] | 1959 |
| b. 2, f. 39 | Stadler, Edmund, "Adolphe Appia": printed version [Italian] | 1963 |
| b. 2, f. 40 | <i>Theatre Arts Monthly</i> , Adolphe Appia, a memorial issue: printed version | 1932 Aug |
| b. 2, f. 41 | Van Vechten, Carl, "Adolphe Appia et Gordon Craig," extract from <i>Musique après la Grande Guerre</i> : typescript, carbon | n.d. |
| b. 2, f. 42 | Van Wyck, Jessica Davis, "Designing <i>Hamlet</i> with Appia": typescript Volbach, Walther R. | n.d. |
| b. 2, f. 43 | "Adolphe Appia," biographical entry in <i>Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik</i> : printed version | n.d. |
| b. 2, f. 44 | "Appia's Productions and Contemporary Reaction": printed version | 1961 Mar |
| b. 2, f. 45 | "The Collaboration of Adolphe Appia and Emile Jaques-Dalcroze": printed version | n.d. |
| b. 2, f. 46 | "Jacques Copeau, Appia's Finest Disciple": printed version | 1965 Oct |
| b. 2, f. 47 | "A Profile of Adolphe Appia": printed version | 1963 Mar |
| b. 7 | "Adolphe Appia, Prophet of the Modern Theater": galley proof | 1968 Jun |
| b. 2, f. 48 | Wolkonsky, Serge, "Conférence sur A. Appia": typescript, carbon | 1911 Nov 11 |

Miscellaneous Papers, 1913-1924

| Jaques-Dalcroze, Emile | | |
|------------------------|---|----------|
| b. 2, f. 49 | Curriculum, institut Jaques- Dalcroze: brochure, printed version | n.d. |
| b. 2, f. 50 | "Der Rhythmus: Ein Jahrbuch her- ausgeg. von der Bildungsanstalt Jaques- Dalcroze, Dresden-Hellerau": pamphlet, printed version | 1913 |
| b. 2, f. 51 | "Le Rythme (méthode Jaques- Dalcroze)": pamphlet, printed version | 1924 Feb |
| b. 2, f. 52 | Miscellaneous Papers | n.d. |
| b. 2, f. 53 | Photographs of Appia: reproductions | n.d. |

Drawings, 1892-1896

| | | |
|------------------|---|------|
| b. 3 (Broadside) | "Valhalla," from <i>Das Rheingold</i> , scene 4 | 1892 |
| b. 4 (Broadside) | "Rock of the Walkyries" | 1892 |
| b. 5 (Broadside) | "Rock of the Walkyries" | 1896 |

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Opera -- Production and direction
Set designers -- United States
Theater -- Production and direction
Theaters -- Stage-setting and scenery

Genres / Formats

Drawings (visual works) -- Switzerland -- 19th century

Occupations

Opera producers and directors

Names

Appia, Adolphe, 1862-1928
Appia, Edmond, 1894-1961
Hume, Samuel J. (Samuel James), 1885-1962
Jaques-Dalcroze, Émile, 1865-1950
Oenslager, Donald, 1902-1975, collector
Volbach, Walther R. (Walther Richard),
1897-1996
Wagner, Richard, 1813-1883 (Performances)