

Sarah Bernhardt:

An Inventory of Her Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Bernhardt, Sarah 1844-1923
- Title:** Sarah Bernhardt Collection
- Dates:** circa 1860-1977 (bulk 1880-1920)
- Extent:** 8 document boxes, 1 scrapbook box, 3 oversize boxes (osb), 6 oversize folders (osf), 1 oversize portfolio (osp) (5.04 linear feet)
- Abstract:** The collection contains theatrical production materials, playscripts, translations, and theatrical performance photographs from over thirty of Bernhardt's productions, including *l'Aiglon*, *Camille*, and *Phedre*. Also present are personal photographs, postcards, clippings, a scrapbook, caricatures, advertisements, and artistic sketches of Bernhardt.
- Call Number:** Performing Arts Collection PA-00170
- Language:** English and
- Access:** Open for research. Special permission from the Curator of Performing Arts, plus advance notice, is required to access oversize posters. To make an appointment, please email [Reference](#). Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials.
- Use Policies:** Ransom Center collections may contain material with sensitive or confidential information that is protected under federal or state right to privacy laws and regulations. Researchers are advised that the disclosure of certain information pertaining to identifiable living individuals represented in the collections without the consent of those individuals may have legal ramifications (e.g., a cause of action under common law for invasion of privacy may arise if facts concerning an individual's private life are published that would be deemed highly offensive to a reasonable person) for which the Ransom Center and The University of Texas at Austin assume no responsibility.
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Administrative Information

Preferred Citation:	Sarah Bernhardt Collection (Performing Arts Collection PA-00170). Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.
Acquisition:	Compiled by staff from Albert Davis, Robert Downing, and Messmore Kendall Collections
Provenance	The Sarah Bernhardt Collection was compiled from materials previously organized within the Ransom Center's Theater Biography file and is now a discrete collection. A large portion of the materials are originally from the Albert Davis and Messmore Kendall Collections.
Processed by:	Nicolette Schneider, 2003
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Sarah Bernhardt, "The Divine Sarah," was born Henriette-Rosine Bernard in Paris, France, in 1844. She spent her life gracing the theatrical stages of the world with her interpretations of both classic and modern French drama. Following her education at the drama school of the Paris Conservatoire, Bernhardt made her theatrical debut on stage in an 1862 production of Racine's *Iphigénie en Aulide*. But it was not until her 1872 performance in Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas* that she was recognized and established as a great theatrical actress of her time.

In 1880, Bernhardt began her long series of tours throughout Europe and America. She delighted audiences with her interpretations of characters in productions such as *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Frou Frou*, *Hernani*, *Jeanne D'Arc*, *Phedre*, and *Theodora*, to name just a few. Bernhardt also became one of the few female actors of the time to portray a lead male character. She did so in *Hamlet* and again as the Duc de Reichstadt in Rostand's *l'Aiglon*. She continued to tour America for the rest of her career, even announcing three separate "farewell" tours between the years 1905-1912. Despite all of the time she spent outside her home country, Bernhardt remained a loyal Frenchwoman. In 1914, she was presented the Legion of Honor award for her continued support of her country and its servicemen. After battling a threatening infection in 1915, Bernhardt lost a leg to amputation, but she still continued to pursue her love of acting and traveling. Her final tour through America lasted from the years 1916 to 1918 and then she returned home to France. Bernhardt continued to practice her craft until her death in 1923.

In addition to her traditional stage work, Bernhardt starred in several silent movies, including two of her better-known films, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Camille* in 1911. Aside from acting, Bernhardt was also known to be a gifted artist, sculptor, and writer. She edited and translated many of the plays in which she performed and wrote several novels. Her memoir, *Ma double vie (My Double Life)*, originally published in 1907, is still being reprinted today.

Sources:

Gold, Arthur. *Divine Sarah: A Life of Sarah Bernhardt*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

"Sarah Henriette Rosine Bernhardt" in *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Skinner, Cornelia Otis. *Madame Sarah*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966.

Scope and Contents

The Sarah Bernhardt Collection, circa 1860-1977 (bulk 1880-1920), contains theatrical production photographs, personal photographs, publicity stills, postcards, theater programs and playbills, clippings, and a scrapbook. Also present are several prints, caricatures, advertisements, and artistic sketches of Bernhardt. The collection is arranged in three series: I. Theater Productions, 1872-1920; II. Clippings and Scrapbook, 1879-1977; and III. Other Materials, 1860-1920. Materials in Series I are arranged alphabetically by title of production and then chronologically within each production; materials in Series II and Series III are arranged chronologically where appropriate.

The Theater Production series comprises the bulk of the collection and contains production photographs and theater playbills and programs for over thirty Bernhardt productions. Although the bulk of the production photographs are portrait styled cabinet card photographs, this series contains several photographs of Bernhardt performing on stage. Bernhardt's famous productions of *l'Aiglon*, *Camille*, and *Phedre* are especially well represented. Among the playbills and programs, there are several playscripts, translations, and other versions of plays which are specific to Bernhardt and carry her identification as "the only correct version of my plays translated and printed from my own promptbooks." There are also souvenir programs which contain information on multiple productions.

The Clippings series, while comprehensive during the span of Bernhardt's career with reviews, is very extensive throughout 1923, the year of her death.

The Other Materials series chiefly comprises personal photographs, some family and ceremonial photographs and various portraits, caricatures, advertisements, prints, and artistic sketches. Personalities represented with Bernhardt in the photographs include actress Lillie Langtry, playwright Victorien Sardou, theater mogul Martin Beck, escape artist Harry Houdini, and her manager William Connors. Also in this series is an Alphonse Mucha sketch of Bernhardt as *Medea*, a copy of a letter from *Her Artistic Life*, and several advertisements in which Bernhardt used her notoriety to sell various products.

Related Material

Additional material by and about Sarah Bernhardt are located in the Ransome Center's Carlton Lake Collection of French Manuscripts, Carlton Lake Literary File Photography Collection, Carlton Lake Art Collection, John Gassner Papers, Frank Harris papers, Harry Houdini Papers, Harry Houdini Collection, Artine Artinian Collection of French Manuscripts, Artine Artinian Art Collection, Joanna Richardson Papers, B. J. Simmons and Co. Collection, Performing Arts Prints Collection, Ernest William Smith Collection, the Helmut and Alison Gernsheim Papers, the Al Hirschfeld Collection, the Edward Gordon Craig Collection, Literary File Photography Collection, Jed Mace Collection,

and the Ransom Center library.

The University of Pennsylvania Rare Book and Manuscript Library also offers a substantial collection of Sarah Bernhardt images in their Philip H. Ward Collection of Theatrical Images.

Index Terms

People

Nadar, Paul, 1856-1939.

Sarony, Napoleon, 1821-1896.

Mucha, Alphonse Marie, 1860-1939.

Subjects

Actors--France.

Theater--France.

Document Types

Cabinet photographs.

Cartoons.

Photographs.

Playbills.

Postcards.

Portraits.

Prints.

Scrapbooks.

Theatre programs.

Series I. Theater Productions, circa 1872-1920

Subseries A. Photographic Images and Prints, circa 1872-1920

Adrienne Lecouvreur

2 photos, circa 1880 **Container 1.1**

1 photo, 1 sketch, 1 clipping, circa 1906 **Container 1.2**

Agamemnon, 1 photo, undated **Container 1.3**

l'Aiglon

6 photos, 4 clippings, circa 1900 **Container 1.4-5**

2 photos, 1 clipping, circa 1900 **Container 8.1**

2 photos, circa 1900 **Container osb 10.1-2**

RESTRICTED--Alphonse Mucha posters of Bernhardt as the Duc de Reichstadt in *L'Aiglon* (2 items), 80.25 inches × 30 inches, 1900 **Container osp A**

Athalie, 1 photo circa 1920 **Container 1.6**

La Beffa, 1 photo, circa 1910 **Container 1.7**

Camille (La Dame aux Camelias)

Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, 13.5 inches × 5.25 inches, undated **Container osb 12.1**

15 photos, 1 postcard, circa 1880 **Container 1.8-10**

2 clippings, circa 1890 **Container 1.11**

1 postcard, circa 1906 **Container 1.12**

2 photos, circa 1910 **Container 1.13**

1 print, 1 clipping, circa 1913 **Container 8.2**

Cleopatra

7 photos, 2 prints, 1 postcard, 1 clipping, circa 1890 **Container 1.14-17**

Clarín, Georges, 3 prints, circa 1890 **Container 1.18**

Cyrano de Bergerac

3 photos, 3 clippings, circa 1900 **Container** 1.19-20

2 photos, circa 1900 **Container** 8.3

La Dame de Challant, 1 photo, circa 1892 **Container** 1.21

l'Etrangere (The Stranger)

2 clippings, circa 1876 **Container** 1.22

6 prints, circa 1876 **Container** 8.4

2 matted photos, circa 1876 **Container** osb 10.3

Fedora

1 photo, circa 1882 **Container** 1.23

"Description des Toilettes de Mme. Sarah Bernhardt," *Fedora*, print clipping, **Container**
1882 osb 12.4

Francesca da Rimini, clipping, circa 1902 **Container** 1.24

François le Champi, Berthaud, H./Helios Studio. Bernhardt as Mariette in **Container**
François le Champi, 1 photo, circa 1867 osb 12.2

Frou Frou, 13 photos, circa 1880 **Container** 1.25-28

Gismonda

1 photo, 3 clippings, circa 1894 **Container** 1.29

Mucha, Alphonse, 1 mini-poster, circa 1894 **Container** 10.4

Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt as Gismonda (American tour under the **Container**
direction of Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau), (2 items) 39.5 inches × 30 inches, osf 6
40.25 inches × 30 inches, undated

RESTRICTED--Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt as Gismonda, 77.75 **Container**
inches × 28.5 inches, undated osp A

Hamlet

1 photo, 2 clippings, circa 1900 **Container** 1.30

3 photos, circa 1900 **Container** 10.5

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RESTRICTED--Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt as Hamlet at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, 82.75 inches × 28.5 inches, 1899	Container osp A
RESTRICTED--Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt as Hamlet at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, 82.25 inches × 29.75 inches, 1899	
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6 photos, circa 1877	Container 2.1-2
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1 photo, 1 print, 1 clipping, undated	Container 2.3
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3 photos; 7 clippings, circa 1894	Container 2.4-5
1 photo, circa 1894	Container 8.6
1 clipping, circa 1894	Container 10.7
Color cover of "The Illustrated London News," 1894	Container osb 12.6
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<i>Leah</i>	
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<i>Lorenzaccio</i> , Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt as Lorenzaccio at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, 41.75 inches × 14.75 inches, circa 1896	Container osf 4
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Medea, circa 1898

RESTRICTED--Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt as Medee, 85 inches × 34.5 inches, 1898 **Container**
osp A

Alphonse Mucha sketch of Bernhardt as Medea **Container** 8.33

Une Nuit de Noel sous la Terreur

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1 clipping, circa 1913 **Container** osb 10.8

La Passant, 2 photos, 1 clipping, circa 1868 **Container** 2.13

Phedre

30 photos, circa 1880 **Container** 2.14-18

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2 photos, 1 negative photo, circa 1906 **Container** 8.9

1 photo, 2 clippings, circa 1916-1918 **Container** 2.20

La Princesse Lointaine

3 photos, 1 postcard, 2 clippings, circa 1895 **Container** 2.21

Berthon, Paul, 1 print, circa 1895 **Container** osf 2

Ruy Blas, 8 photos, 1 clipping, circa 1872 **Container** 2.22-23

RESTRICTED--*La samaritaine*, Alphonse Mucha poster of Bernhardt as Photine in *La samaritaine* at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, 69.5 inches × 23.5 inches, circa 1897 **Container**
osp A

Theodora

10 photos, 2 clippings, circa 1884 **Container** 3.1-2

1 photo, circa 1884 **Container** 8.10

RESTRICTED--Georges Clairin poster of Bernhardt as Theodora, 81 inches × 30.25 inches, undated **Container**
osp A

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<i>Gismonda</i> , undated	Container 3.26
<i>Hamlet</i> , 1899-1900	Container 3.27
<i>Hecube</i> , 1916-1917	Container 3.28-29
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<i>La Princesse Georges</i> , 1881	Container 8.17
<i>Du Theatre au Champ d'Honneur</i> , 1916	Container 4.7
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Bernhardt with Suzanne Seylor, 1 photo, circa 1896	Container 6.14
15 items (6 images, 9 duplicates), circa 1900	Container 6.15
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Bernhardt in front of tent, 1 photo, 1 negative photo, 1 photo, circa 1906	Container 7.2, osb 11.3
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Bernhardt with Martin Beck, 2 photos, circa 1913	Container 8.28

Bernhardt with company, 1 clipping, circa 1916	Container 7.6
Bernhardt with family, 2 photos, circa 1918,	Container 7.7
Bernhardt on tour train, 1 photo, undated	Container osb 11.4
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