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Nine Legendary Leading Ladies From Stage and Screen Donate Career Memorabilia to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History



At a special ceremony in the historic El Portal Theater in North Hollywood today, nine legendary leading ladies of American motion pictures, television and Broadway productions donated objects from their award-winning careers to the National Museum of American History. The objects will be preserved in the museum’s permanent entertainment collections. Highlights include Carol Channing’s diamond dress from the Broadway production “Lorelei”; Tippi Hedren’s script from the movie “The Birds”; Florence Henderson’s People’s Choice Award; Angela Lansbury’s costume from Broadway hit “Mame”; June Lockhart’s 1947 Tony Award; Julie Newmar’s original Catwoman suit from the TV show “Batman”; and a bequest of Esther William’s scrapbooks from her days as an MGM star. The ceremony also commemorated the recent donations from Phyllis Diller and Rose Marie.

“These ladies are a testament to the enduring value of the American dream” said museum director Brent D. Glass. “Anyone from any background can become a legend through hard work and perseverance. These objects reflect the importance of the performing arts in our culture, and we are honored to preserve them for future generations,” he added.

Carol Channing

Since her Broadway debut in “No For An Answer,” Channing has been a star of international acclaim. Her Broadway appearances included some of the most memorable characters in theatrical history, winning three Tony Awards, including one for her legendary portrayal of Dolly Levi in “Hello, Dolly!” and the Lifetime Achievement Tony Award. Channing wore what is known as the diamond dress when she played the signature character in the 1973 Broadway musical “Lorelei.” In addition to

the dress, her donation also includes the original 1964 Tony Award for the first Broadway production of “Hello, Dolly!”

Phyllis Diller

Comedian Diller combined wild costumes, untamed hair and a raucous laugh with self-deprecating monologues to create one of comedy’s most popular characters. In addition to her television, film and stage work, Diller made five records, wrote four best-selling books, performed at the piano with more than 100 symphony orchestras and appeared with Bob Hope before countless soldiers as part of USO tours. Her donation includes a joke file cataloging more than 50,000 index cards of jokes documenting her stand-up career, as well as costumes, scripts and other objects from her career.

Tippi Hedren

Tippi Hedren made her film debut in Hitchcock’s “The Birds” and worked with the director again in “Marnie.” Her contributions to cinema have been honored with Life Achievement awards. She was named “Woman of Vision” by Women of Film and Video in Washington, D.C., and received the Presidential Medal. The Hitchcock heroine’s donation includes her annotated scripts from “The Birds” and “Marnie” and Charlie Chaplin’s “A Countess from Hong Kong.”

Florence Henderson

Henderson, a multitalented actress, talk show host, performer, recording artist, author, Broadway veteran and philanthropist, has enjoyed one of the most outstanding careers on film, television and on stage. She is known worldwide to fans of all ages as America’s favorite mom Carol Brady from the classic hit TV series “The Brady Bunch.” Henderson was also the first woman ever to host “The Tonight Show,” and she starred in numerous Broadway hits, including the lead role in “Fanny,” as Maria in “The Sound of Music,” as Nellie Forbush in “South Pacific,” and as Anna opposite Ricardo Montalban in the production of “The King and I.” Today, she hosts her own national cable talk show, “The Florence Henderson Show,” on the RLTV Network. Henderson’s donation is her first “People’s Choice” award.

Angela Lansbury

Lansbury was unable to make her presentation in person and actor Bruce Davidson read a brief statement in her place. Never to be typecast, she has played an evil mother, innocent girl, witch, scheming maid, free-spirit, two popular detectives and even a singing teapot. Lansbury appeared in numerous Hollywood films, Broadway musicals, television productions, cartoons and even a video game. Her Broadway appearances were equally diverse and won her four Tony awards (“Mame,”

“Dear World,” “Gypsy” and “Sweeney Todd”). Between 1946 and 1995, she won six Golden Globes, 17 Emmy Awards and was nominated for an Academy Award for her part in “Gaslight.” Her donation includes the typewriter from the opening title of the long-running TV show “Murder She Wrote” and the bugle from the musical “Mame.” Private collector Stephanie Troulman donated the costume that Lansbury wore in the finale of that production.

June Lockhart

Lockhart made her screen debut in MGM’s version of “A Christmas Carol,” playing the daughter of stars and real-life parents Gene and Kathleen Lockhart. She had appeared in a dozen or more movies when, in 1947, she had her Broadway introduction as the ingénue in the comedy “For Love or Money.” The Tony—known then as The Antoinette Perry Award—she received in the category of Best Newcomer will join the museum’s collections. Lockhart went on to become one of TV’s most recognizable moms, co-starring in two popular series “Lassie” and “Lost in Space.”

Rose Marie

Rose Marie started her career at the age of 3 by starring in several of the earliest talking films, beginning with the 1929 short, “Baby Rose Marie the Child Wonder,” which theaters screened before feature films. Rose Marie had a brief Broadway career in “Top Banana.” When she joined the “The Dick Van Dyke Show” as an original cast member, Rose Marie became a household name. She is the only original member of the hit game show “Hollywood Squares” to have been part of all of its incarnations. As part of a singing and comedy act called “4 Girls 4,” she toured extensively with Rosemary Clooney, Helen O’Connell and Margaret Whiting and recently released her bestselling memoirs “Hold The Roses.” Rose Marie’s donation includes more than 40 objects, including her trade mark, black hair bow and shoes from her days as “Baby Rose Marie” on network radio and early talkies.

Julie Newmar

Newmar is known worldwide for her role as the sultry Catwoman in the hit TV series “Batman” from which she donated her costume. She also has played the original roles of Stupefyin Jones in “Lil Abner” and Vera in “Silk Stockings” and was awarded a Tony Award for her performance as Katrin Sveg in “The Marriage-Go-Round.” Newmar appeared in the sciencefiction series the “Twilight Zone” in 1963 as Miss Devlin and the actress established an enthusiastic cult following for her role as Rhoda the Robot in “My Living Doll.”

Esther Williams

Williams was a member of the U.S. Olympic team when World War II began and the games were cancelled. With her stunning looks and muscular frame, MGM executives soon spotted her in Billy Rose's San Francisco Aquacade. Possessing the quintessential combination of glamour and athleticism, Williams starred in motion pictures, including "Bathing Beauty," "Neptune's Daughter" and "Million Dollar Mermaid." Throughout her film career, she swam more than 1,250 miles in 25 aqua-musicals for MGM, proving that she was not only a champion in the pool but also at the box office. Throughout her years as an MGM star, the studio kept enormous scrapbooks, which she has bequeathed to the museum.

Since its opening in 1926, the Historic El Portal Theatre—first built as a Vaudeville house—became famous for its Silent Movies and then Academy Award-winning films. As the premier movie house in the valley, the El Portal Theatre has weathered the Jazz Age, the Depression, four wars and the great earthquake of 1994. Rebuilt in the late 90s and reopened in January, 2000, the once 1400-seat movie palace now houses three theatres: the 42-seat studio theatre, the 95-seat forum and the 360-seat main stage.

The production art (below) is by Glen Hanson, an internationally acclaimed designer and illustrator, generously created the program and production artwork for the donation ceremony. His work has appeared on MTV, Disney TV, in a variety of publications, (Entertainment Weekly, L'Uomo, Vogue, Variety, The New York Times), in ads for Sunsilk Shampoo and on the poster for off-Broadway hit "Altar Boyz." His Web site is at www.glenhanson.com

All of these donations will go into the National Museum of American History's entertainment collections. The collection includes contain a variety of dazzling artifacts that present the history of American life through the brightly-colored perspectives of theater, film, radio, television, puppetry, circuses, carnivals and popular music. Objects range from costumes to marionettes, theatrical scripts to commercial recordings, sheet music to carousel figures. The National Museum of American History collects, preserves and displays American heritage in the areas of social, political, cultural, scientific and military history. Documenting the American experience from Colonial times to the present, the museum looks at growth and change in the United States. The museum is closed for major renovations and will re-open in fall 2008. For information about the museum, please visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu> or call Smithsonian Information at (202) 633-1000, (202) 633-5285 (TTY).