

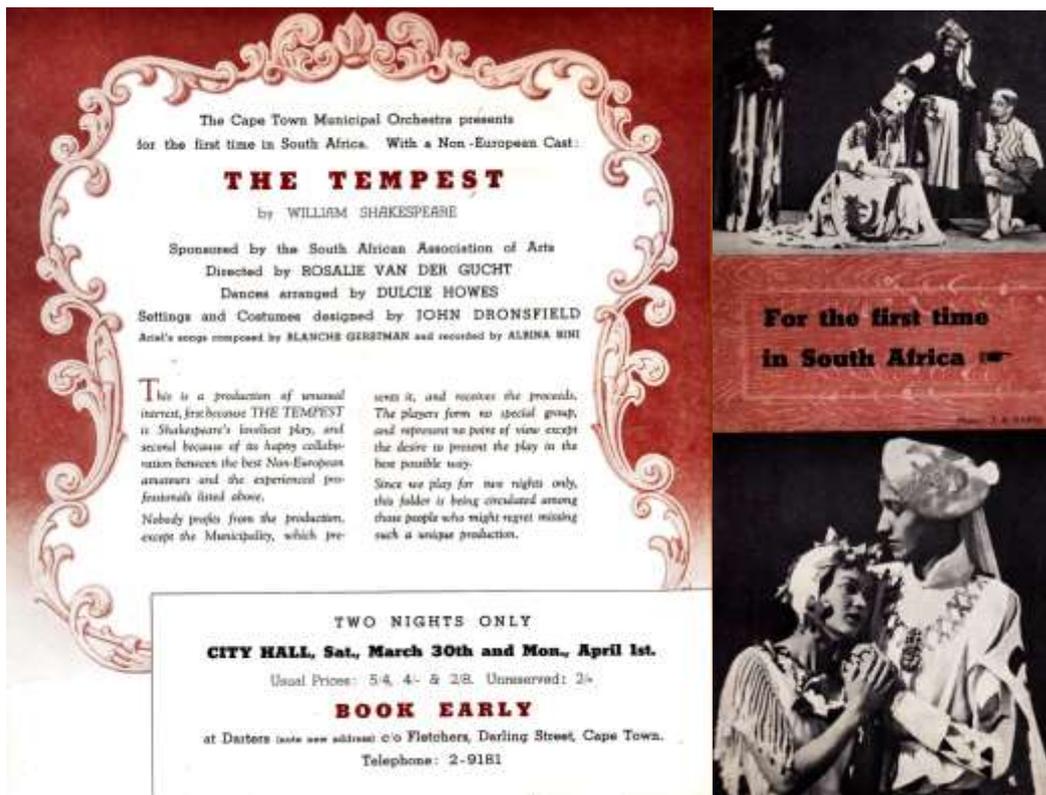
The Bill Curry collection

On 27 July, South Africa lost an icon of the stage and screen: Bill (William) Curry. GALA wishes to honour the memory of this remarkable actor by revisiting his personal collection, which was donated to the archive by Curry in 1999.

Featuring photos, press clippings, a personal scrapbook and local theatre ephemera, the Curry collection provides fascinating insights not only into the life of this much-loved figure, but also into the many changes that took place in the performing arts industry during his lifetime. These changes mirrored the social tensions of the times, and in this way the collection tells a much broader story of South Africa's transition towards democracy.

The collection also provides a touching glimpse into Curry's daily life through the large collection of correspondence between Curry and his life-partner, Denis Hatfield Boullogh.

Curry's career spanned almost six decades, beginning with a walk-on role in *The Tempest* in 1946 at the age of fifteen. This debut performance is represented in the collection through the original programme, which Curry carefully preserved in his scrapbook.



The programme for Curry's first theatre performance in 1946. This document points to the impact of racial segregation on all aspects of South African life, including the performing arts. Although the white director, choreographer and designer are named, none of the 'non-European' cast members are listed, not even the lead actors.

Curry kept a detailed record of his professional activities and this is reflected in the collection. In addition to Curry's personal scrapbook, the collection contains many files relating to his theatre, film and television work between 1975 and 1991. These files include press clippings, programmes, posters, tickets, good-luck cards, work contracts and more. The final production featured in the collection is *Kringe in 'n Bos*, in which Curry played the part of Hans Oukas.



Hannes Muller and Bill Curry in a scene from Post's new production of "Kringe in 'n Bos". Based on Dalene Matthee's novel, the play is currently at the Adcock-Ingram, Windybrow.

Two Blacks appear in 'Of Mice and Men'

ROBERT GREIG

Top Cape actor Bill Curry has been given permission by the Department of Community Development to appear as Moses, the stable-hand in "Of Mice and Men" at the Lake Theatre tomorrow night.

The cast includes two Blacks now: Ken Gamps and Bill Curry.

The Department approved Joe Stewardson's application yesterday.

"Strictly speaking, in terms of the letter of the law, there is no reason to apply for a permit to Government departments to have a Black actor on stage with White actors," Joe Stewardson said.

"But in terms of the spirit of the law, the Department does expect an application. Much as I admire what Das and Dawn Lindberg did, in having Blacks on stage in 'Pippin', I feel that lasting change can best be had by working through the proper channels.

"I had nothing but friendly co-operation from officials of the departments concerned."

Mr Curry has appeared in many Space plays in Cape Town. He has won the prestigious Three Leaf award for best supporting actor and a Space award for his performance in "Fortune and Men's Eyes" which was staged in 1974 at the Space.

● BILL CURRY has been given permission to play Moses, the stable-hand, in John Higgins's production "Of Mice and Men."

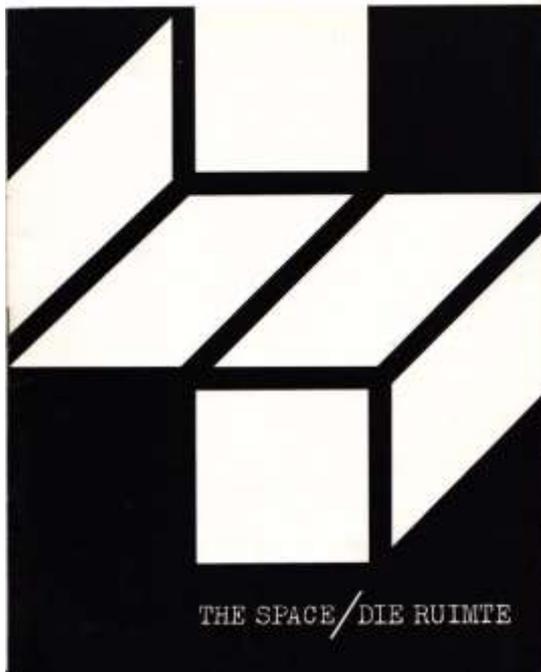
INSIDE

Cinema 2, 3
 Television 4, 7
 Reviews 5
 Theatre 5
 Music 6
 Art 8, 9, 15
 Radio 14
 Personality 16

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Curry was born in Cape Town in 1931 and, with the introduction of the *Population Registration Act*, was classified as 'Coloured'. Like all non-white South Africans, Curry's racial classification impacted on all aspects of his life, including his acting career.

In 1957, Curry moved to London to study at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama – a first for a 'Coloured' South African. He returned a few years later to find an increasingly segregated theatre scene. This led Curry and a few others to establish a variety of interracial theatre platforms, including the New Theatre and the Space Theatre (founded together with Athol Fugard in 1972).



Curry was a founding member of the Space Theatre and served as editor for the company's newsletter. The collection preserves many programmes and newsletters from the 1970s and early 1980s.



During the early 1980s, Curry served as director of children's theatre at the newly established Handspring Puppet Company.



Curry as Moliere in the 1986 Afrikaans production of Ketter (based on Mikhail Bulgakov's Moliere).

In 1986, as the political climate in South Africa began to shift, Curry moved to Johannesburg, where he joined the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT). He continued to perform in some of the country's largest theatre productions, but he also began to break into the white-dominated television and film industries, appearing in both English and Afrikaans productions.

Curry's acting career continued for another decade, and he is fondly remembered for his roles from this period, including Oom Frik in the long-running soap opera *Egoli* and Uncle Bill in the popular children's programme *Pumpkin Patch*.

Curry retired in 2002, bringing to an end a wide-ranging career that included opera, children's theatre, drama, comedy, directing, feature films and television.



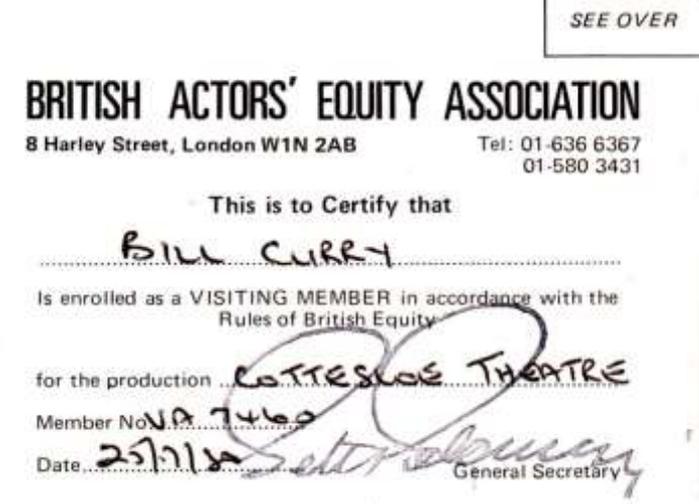
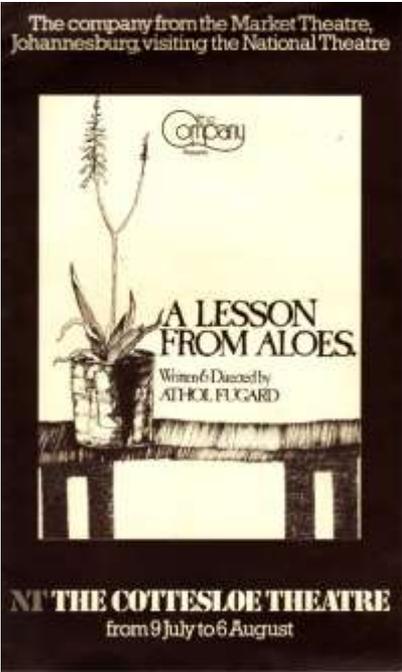
In addition to his theatre work, Curry appeared in several television and film productions, perhaps the best-known being the 1980s television epic Shaka Zulu.

Perhaps the most touching and revealing aspect of the Curry collection is the large amount of personal correspondence it preserves. Much of this correspondence is between Curry and his life-partner, Denis Hatfield Boullogh, a well-known theatre and film critic. Curry met Boullogh in Cape Town when he was twenty-one, and the couple remained together for the next forty years (until Boullogh's death in 1995 at the age of eighty-nine).



Curry donated the typewriter on which many of his letters were written, along with a substantial collection of personal correspondence.

Curry's career involved frequent travel, and the letters and telegrams between him and Boullogh are largely from these periods of separation (the correspondence spans the period 1975 to 1990). Curry's letters – many of which begin with 'My Dear Pet ...' – kept his partner up to speed on his daily life on set, the latest gossip of the theatre world and his political musings.



In 1981, Curry travelled to London to perform in Athol Fugard's production of A Lesson from Aloes. He also performed in various South African runs of the play.

While primarily focused on Curry's career, the collection also provides a significant glimpse into a gay life over a number of decades.

** The Bill Curry collection was donated to GALA by Curry in 1999 and comprises twelve archival boxes. The collection includes letters, programmes, press clippings, posters, photographs and more. The collection can be viewed by appointment only. To access the collection's inventory (AM 2788), please contact the GALA archivist, Linda Chernis (linda.chernis@wits.ac.za or phone: +27 1 1717 1797). Please note that GALA collections are stored off-site and so viewing appointments must be made three working days in advance.*

More information on GALA and its archival collection can be found on the website: www.gala.co.za.