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**DOCUMENTING THE DIRECTOR: DELBERT MANN,  
HIS LIFE, HIS WORK, AND HIS PAPERS**

Sarah Harwell  
Vanderbilt University Library

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The Papers of Delbert Mann, which cover the period 1947-1993, consist of forty-five cubic feet of materials, and are primarily concerned with the professional life and career of the director. Major series in the papers include the Production Papers, General Correspondence, Script Reports, Writings, Personal and Biographical Material, Events and Activities, Theatre and Opera Collection, Photographs, Videotapes and other Special Media, and Scrapbooks.

The Production Papers form the heart of the collection. Most of the motion pictures, television films, and plays directed by Delbert Mann are well documented in the papers, although there is less material for the beginning of Mann's career, during which he directed live television drama. For later productions a Script is almost included. Cast Lists are quite common. Many of the Scripts are annotated by the director and reveal his views on character and action, as well as approaches to the technique of directing. Often included with the Script is a prose outline that provides a summary of the story, a description of the characters, and a delineation of the structure of the project. Cast Lists often include notes on interviews and auditions with people being considered for acting roles. Biographical details and physical characteristics may be part of the Cast Lists.

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The General Correspondence is located after the Production Papers. It is comprised of letters not directly related to any one production, though it often includes letters from people with whom Delbert Mann has worked. Prominent correspondents include Steve Allen, Carol Burnett, Frank Capra, Paddy Chayefsky, Doris Day, Greer Garson, Lillian Gish, Julie Harris, Angela Lansbury, Anthony Hopkins, Paul Newman, Gregory Peck, Tyrone Power, Lee Remick, and Eva Marie Saint, among many others.

The Script Reports, 1960-1992, written by Mann about scripts that he was asked to consider, offer another perspective on the director's insight into the process of motion picture production. Mann's thoughts on what makes a good story, comments on character, structure, plausibility of story line, and various nuances, are revealed through his comments on the script under consideration.

The major component of Mann's Writings is the autobiography, entitled *Looking Back*. Mann's memoirs are remarkable in their thoroughness, providing detail and analysis on his career as a director. Writing in a conversational and graceful style, Mann relates stories of how productions were made, provides substantive information on productions for which there is little or no material elsewhere in the papers, and reminisces affectionately about his family, friends, and associates. He recounts the excitement and challenges encountered in exotic and rugged locales, the many elements that must be orchestrated to bring fragments together into the whole cloth of a film, the technique of directing, and amusing anecdotes about famous people.

Personal and Biographical Materials, which follow Mann's memoirs, provide a wealth of information about his life and work. Included are summaries and lists of his directing activities, biographical sketches, and articles. Various awards and honors won are also in this series. The Events and Activities series is closely related to the Biographical Material in that this series documents Mann's participation, usually as a panelist, in film and theatre festivals all over the world, including the Cork International Film Festival in Ireland and the Manila International Film Festival. Also of interest will be materials for the recent contest in which Mann served as a judge--

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The Photographs, Videotapes, and Scrapbooks are placed at the end of the Papers because of their special storage requirements. Many of the photographs were taken from Mann's own productions; others are publicity pictures and informal shots of people with whom he has worked. Among the people represented in the photographs are Ernest Borgnine, Tony Curtis, Doris Day, Edith Evans, Grace Kelly, Charles Laughton, Raymond Massey, and David Niven. Videotapes of several Delbert Mann productions are in the collection, including *The Marriages*, *The Medea Cup*, *The Red Mill*, *Wish on the Moon*, and *Without Fear or Favor*. Finally, the Scrapbooks contain a treasure of information compiled over a career of some four and a half decades, include clippings, reviews, photographs, and correspondence about most of Delbert Mann's productions.

The hallmarks of Delbert Mann's directing style and philosophy are character development and realistic drama over plot and spectacle, the redeeming nature of personal relationships, an interest in portraying the lives of normal everyday people, and a naturalistic approach to directing. No director could have been better suited for bringing to life the human dramas of such writers as Paddy Chayefsky and Tad Mosel. Their work--*Marty*, *Middle of the Night*, *The Bachelor Party*, *Dear Heart*, *Ernie Barger Is 50*, *All the Way Home*--have as their themes various universal human concerns: loneliness, loyalty, redemption, acceptance, love, aging. They focus on small stories about the everyday lives of people and their relationships.

Delbert Mann has always made it easy for his actors to relate to these basic human issues. He recently said:

I've got to try to set an atmosphere of harmony and love and relaxation, as relaxed as one can make a set, because...there's going to be enough tension to go around, even under the best of circumstances....When, however, we have rehearsed the scenes and the actors are ready to work, I want discipline and I insist upon absolute silence...[I] prefer to work loosely and easily at first, letting the actors move rather freely and examining together with the actors the emotional content of the scenes and the physical movement that results therefrom...The good director...must make everything the actor does stay with in the framework of reality and truth for the characters in the script and their particular situation...Every move and position must be motivated truly.<sup>1</sup>

Delbert Mann is not a director known for imposing his world view or suffusing his productions with idiosyncrasies and flamboyant technique. As he points out: "I am not a great believer in the so-called 'Auteur' theory of film-making." Rather, he is a craftsman, imbuing his work with close attention to narrative, realism, balance, and continuity. As Tommy Lee Jones, who worked with Mann in *April Morning*, wrote:

He has a clear and open mind that leads him and his actors to the kind of preparations that will cause a story to propel itself rather than being laboriously pushed or pulled. As an example, I will cite his reconstruction of Lexington Green. The architecture, landscaping, armory, costumes, and blocking placed me in a quiet New England Commons staring squarely into the teeth of a drum-beating, red-coated, imperialist military force and left me with three choices: liberty, death, or flight. It took no work whatsoever on my part to experience the fear and humiliation of seeing my home overrun by a foreign army or to understand why people, again and again all over the world, have chosen liberty or death in the face of tyranny. Delbert's ability to prepare a day's work placed the sight and touch and smell of American patriotism all around us; it was real, deadly, and glorious--free of jingoism and sentimentality. The story told itself. This made my work as an actor easy and set the finest possible example, should I ever be lucky enough to direct a classical American story.<sup>2</sup>

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