

## Guide to the Paul Lavern Cummings Papers

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
<b>Creator:</b>	Cummings, Paul Lavern, 1927-2018
<b>Contributor:</b>	McBride, Dennis
<b>Title:</b>	Paul Lavern Cummings Papers
<b>ID:</b>	MS-00971
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1927 to 2018
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4.54 Cubic Feet (9 boxes)
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5.92 Linear Feet
<b>Physical Description:</b>	220 Digital Files (2.156 GB) MP3, MP4
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Abstract:</b>	The Paul Lavern Cummings Papers are comprised of Cummings' personal papers, photographs, and audiovisual materials dating from 1927 to 2018. Cummings worked as an actor and performed as a female impersonator under the name Lavern Cummings. The majority of the collection documents his career working at Finnochio's, a nightclub in San Francisco, California. Materials in this collection includes correspondence, newspaper clippings, sheet music arrangements, photographs, digital audio files, and ephemera. The collection also includes interviews and biographical research material about Cummings and other female and male impersonators.

### Preferred Citation

Paul Lavern Cummings Papers, 1927-2018, MS-00971. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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## Biographical Note

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Paul Lavern Cummings was born on August 17, 1927 in Santa Ana, California. In the 1950s, Cummings began working as a female impersonator under the name Lavern Cummings and would sing as both soprano and baritone during her acts. From 1950 to 1956, Cummings performed with the Jewel Box Revue, a traveling troupe of female impersonators. In 1956, he began performing at Finnochio's, a nightclub in San Francisco, California, known for female impersonators. Cummings worked as a contract performer at Finnochio's for twenty-six years before retiring in 1982. Cummings also worked as an actor appearing in a 1979 television movie called *The Golden Gate Murders* playing a female impersonator named Lavern Smith. Cummings eventually moved to Las Vegas, Nevada where he continued working as an actor and appeared as an extra in a number of movies and television shows filmed in Las Vegas. In March 2018, Cummings passed away in Las Vegas after being hit by a car while crossing Charleston Boulevard near Decatur Boulevard.

Sources:

Corbin, April. "Keeping 'em guessing." *Las Vegas Sun*. March 10, 2011. <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2011/mar/10/keeping-em-guessing/>.

Flanagan, Michael. "Laverne, surely." *The Bay Area Reporter*. May 23, 2018. <https://www.ebar.com/bartab/nightlife//260270>

O'Neal, Nathan. "Pedestrian killed in crosswalk, a former female impersonator, trailblazer in entertainment." Channel 3 News Las Vegas. March 27, 2018. <https://news3lv.com/news/local/pedestrian-killed-in-crosswalk-a-former-female-impersonator-trailblazer-in-entertainment>.

Speegle, Troy. "#DragHerstory: The Incomprable, Lavern Cummings." The WOW Report. May 6, 2016. <https://worldofwonder.net/dragherstory-laverne-cummings/>.

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## Scope and Contents Note

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The Paul Lavern Cummings Papers are comprised of personal papers and photographs dating from 1927 to 2018. Cummings worked as an actor and a female impersonator under the name Lavern Cummings. The majority of this collection represents his career working at Finnochio's nightclub in San Francisco, California from 1956 to 1982. Materials in the collection include correspondence between Cummings and his friends and fans, newspaper clippings, photographs, and ephemera documenting his career. The collection includes copies of interviews and research material about Cummings and other female and male impersonators. The collection also documents Cummings' work as an actor including the script to television movie *The Golden Gate Murders*. The collection contains sheet music arrangements for songs performed by Cummings as

part of his act at Finnochio's. The collection also contains digital audio files of songs, commercials, and dialogue lines Cummings recorded.

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## Arrangement

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Materials remain as they were received.

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## Administrative Information

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### Access Note

Collection is open for research. Arrangements must be made in advance to access digital files; please contact UNLV Special Collections and Archives for additional information.

### Publication Rights

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### Acquisition Note

Materials were donated to the Nevada State Museum by Kathleen Blandini in 2018 and subsequently transferred to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives in 2019 and 2021; accession numbers 2019-098 and 2021-019.

### Additions

Further additions to this collection are anticipated.

### Processing Note

Material was arranged and described by Dennis McBride. In 2019, Tammi Kim wrote front matter descriptions and created a finding aid in ArchivesSpace. In 2021, Tammi Kim accessioned the 2021 addition and updated the finding aid. In 2021, Chrziel Childers created an item-level description for the photographs and negatives. Chrziel Childers transferred digital files off 25 optical discs, processed additional digital files transferred electronically, and created access copies.

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## Related Materials

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### Related Collections

The following resource may provide additional information related to the materials in this collection:

Cummings, Lavern & Midnite, Tony. Interview, 2000 August 29. OH-00456. Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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## Names and Subjects

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- Female impersonators
- Acting
- Nightclubs
- photographs
- Gays and the performing arts
- Gay community
- Finnochio's Club

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## Collection Inventory

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Title/Description	Containers
Biography	
Newspaper clippings, biographical information, 2018	box 01
Baby book, 1927	box 01
Interviews by David de Alba (printouts of webpages), approximately 2000 to 2018	box 01
Ken Spaulding interview-related notes and correspondence, 1998 to 1999	box 01
Copies of professional resumés, approximately 1980 to 2016	box 02

Acting and performing

Letter from 20th Century Fox and personal notes, approximately 1969 to 2004	box 01
<i>The Golden Gate Murders</i> , 1979	box 01
Note: Includes script and recording of TV movie on an optical disc.	
Personal notes, 2017	box 01
Studio Center Broadcast Productions, 2000	box 01
Notes and research on voice-over work, approximately 1974 to 1981	box 01
Correspondence	
American Literary Press, Inc., 2002	box 01
Dorrance Publishing Company, Inc., 1999	box 01
Fan letters, approximately 1960 to 2009	box 01
Fan letters from celebrities, approximately 1960 to 1990	box 01
Finocchio's (hiring telegram), 1956 October 14	box 01
Note: Cummings began work at Finnochio's on October 29, 1956.	
Long Ridge Writers Group, 1998	box 01
Turner Classic Movies, approximately 2017 to 2018	box 01
Vantage Press, Inc. publishing information packet to authors, approximately 1999	box 01
Humorous drawings and joke letter, approximately 1990	box 01
Newspaper clippings about Cummings, 1950 to 1979	box 01
Physical Description: 3 Files	
Newspaper clippings on <i>Amapola Presents Show</i> , 1978 August 20	box 01
Newspaper clippings about Cummings, 1980 to 2010	box 01
Physical Description: 3 Files	
Newspaper clippings about Cummings, approximately 2000 to 2010	box 02
Physical Description: 2 Files	
Research	
Female impersonation, approximately 1960 to 1980	box 02
<i>Female Impersonation</i> by Avery Willard photocopy, 1971	box 02
"Things and Places to Do (and) to Go ..." notes, approximately 1980 to 2000	box 02
Jewel Box Revue	
Photocopies of performer head shots, show programs, approximately 1959 to 1996	box 03
Newspaper clippings and photocopies of group photograph (reunion in Las Vegas), 2001 August 23	box 03

Finocchio's	
Ephemera, postcards, and tour guides, 1950 to 1989	box 03
Articles and webpages about Finnochio's, photocopies, approximately 2002 to 2018	box 03
History of Shepherd, Berisford "Shep", 1998	box 03
Newspaper clipping photocopies, approximately 1980 to 1989	box 03
Show programs, 1940 to 1989	box 03
Female/male impersonation research	
Scope and Contents Note: Files mainly include photocopies of newspaper clippings and webpages with information and interviews with female impersonators conducted by David de Alba for his website and female impersonation historian Ken Spaulding.	
Francis Blair, Ray Francis, and John Lonas, 2004	box 03
Note: Also known as "Two Old Bags from Oakland."	
Blue Turban Nightclub in Long Beach, California, approximately 1956 to 1970	box 03
Charles (Chuck) and Roy caricature, approximately 1970 to 1990	box 03
Club My-O-My program, New Orleans, Louisiana, approximately 1940 to 1959	box 03
David de Alba biographical information, 1998 to 2008	box 03
Stormé de Larverie, approximately 1994 to 2010	box 03
Angelica Foxx, 1998	box 03
Harvey Lee, 2014 to 2018	box 03
Note: Also known as Harvey Wilson Goodwin.	
Les-Lee, 2002	box 03
Tony Midnite, 2004	box 03
Lucian Phelps, 2002	box 03
Note: Also known as "The Male Sophie Tucker"	
Pictorial tributes, 2002 to 2004	box 03
Charles Pierce, 1999	box 03
Ricky René ephemera and letters to Cummings, 1973 to 2011	box 03
Aleshia Brevard, 2007	box 03
Note: Formerly known as a female impersonator by the name of Lee Shaw.	
Morgan Stevens, 2000	box 03
Franklin Townsend, 1979	box 03



Carroll Wallace, 2004	box 03
<i>Femme Mimics: A Pictorial Record Of Female Impersonation</i> by E. C. Winford, 1954	oversized box 04
<p>Photographs and negatives</p> <p>Scope and Contents Note: The visual materials date from 1928 to 2011 and contain photographic negatives and prints documenting Paul Lavern Cumming's time working at Finocchio's in San Francisco, California, and as a cast member in Jewel Box Revue. Notable figures present in this series include Elton Paris, David de Alba, Ricky Renee, Reggie Dahl, Caroll Wallace, Holly White, Florencia de los Santos, J. J. Van Dyke, and Stormé DeLarverie. Several professional headshots were photographed by Bill Cogan, Emilie Romaine, Marc Troy, Concetta Jorgensen, and Robert Eklund.</p>	
Scrapbooks of Lavern Cummings and Jewel Box Revue, 1951 to 1956 Physical Description: 2 Items	oversized box 05