



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Deena Burton papers

1927-2005 [bulk 1976-2003]

(S) *MGZMD 263

Compiled by Susan Malsbury in 2011.

Summary

Dancer: Burton, Deena

Title: Deena Burton papers

Date: 1927-2005 [bulk 1976-2003]

Size: 8.4 linear feet (21 boxes)

Source: Donated by Skip La Plante, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2017.

Revision History: Additional photographs processed by Susan M. Kline.

Abstract: Deena Burton (1948-2005) was an American dancer and expert in Indonesian dance who founded the non-profit Arts Indonesia. The Deena Burton papers document Burton's study and performance of Indonesian dance, both in the United States and in Indonesia.

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Preferred citation: Deena Burton papers, (S) *MGZMD 263. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: Multiple languages Materials in English and Indonesian.

Processing note: Compiled by Susan Malsbury in 2011. Susan Malsbury.

Creator History

Deena Burton (1948-2005), an American dancer and expert in Indonesian dance was born in Brooklyn

to Arthur and Beatrice Burton. As child and young adult, Burton studied dance with Marjory Mazia, at the Henry Street Settlement, and at the New Dance Group. She went on to study Asian theater at the University of Wisconsin under A. C. Scott, where she first discovered Javanese dance. After graduation, Burton continued to study Indonesian dance, first with Hardjjo Susilo in Hawaii and then with Ben Suharto and Theresa Suharti at the Center for World Music in California.

In 1976, Burton traveled to Java where she studied and researched dance-drama for four years, studying with masters like Sudji, a master of the topeng babakan dance form and Kandeg, a master of the wayang orange dance form. She danced with several Indonesian companies and was a member of the Ratna Budaya Dance Company from 1978-1980, appearing in the works of leading Indonesian choreographers such as Sardono, Endo Suanda, and S. Karjono. Burton's study of Indonesian dance was unique in that she studied a wide variety of dance styles including Monkey style, clown style, Gagah or strong male style, Alusan or refined male style, and the Putri style that was traditionally danced by women. Throughout her career, Burton would remain interested in both the classical Javanese court style of Yogyakarta, and the village oriented mask dance-drama from Cirebon area in West Java.

In addition to studying dance, Burton initiated and organized several projects in Indonesia. She produced traditional village performances for a series of cultural tours for Westerners, and in 1979, she coordinated a video dance documentation project sponsored by the Jakarta Department of Cultural Affairs.

In 1980, Burton moved back to New York City and began performing extensively. In 1981, she choreographed *Arabian Nights* with Chameleon Theatrix and in 1982 she co-choreographed *Red Snow* which was directed by Korean artist Du-Yee Change. Additionally, Burton performed with the Asian American Dance Theatre, the Asia Society, Hospital Audiences, and with Gamelan Son of Lion. Burton also founded the Bali-Java Dance Theatre in 1982. The following year, Burton convinced the Indonesian Consulate in New York to allow a Javanese gamelan that had been stored in the consulate's basement since the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair to be used. Initially called the New York Indonesian Consulate Gamelan, the ensemble was renamed Gamelan Kusuma Laras. Burton acted as the administrative director and often performed in the gamelan, playing the bonang panerus.

In 1984 and 1985, Burton co-organized the Artists Inspired by Asia festival, a festival of American performances of Asian music, theater, and dance. In 1986, Burton produced a similar festival focused solely on Indonesian art called Artists Inspired by Indonesia. She also began the process of turning Bali-Java Dance Theater and Gamelan Kusuma Laras into a not-for-profit arts organization, Arts Indonesian, of which she was the director until her death.

In 1984, she met composer Skip La Plante, who would become her husband in 1989. Together they created *The Ramayana* (1984), a solo dance piece where Burton portrayed a multitude of characters in traditional Javanese dance styles while La Plante played accompanying music. In 1985, Burton restaged *Ramayana* with a larger cast for the East-West Fusion Theatre. Burton and La Plante continued to collaborate with performances of the *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (1987), *Pak Kandeg's Story* (1988), *Arjuna Wiwaha* (1995), and *Panji Tales* (2000).

During this time, Burton continued her academic work. She graduated with a Master's degree in Arts Administration from Columbia University in 1982. The New York Public Library's Library of the Performing Arts hired Burton, in 1986, to edit ten hours of footage shot in the 1920s of Indonesian court rituals and performances by ethnographer Tassilo Adam. In 1990, Burton enrolled in the Performance Studies program at New York University, where she received her doctorate in 1997, writing her dissertation on the ethnologist Claire Holt.

Claire Holt was a Latvian-born, and Russian-educated American, who lived in New York City in the 1920s and the Dutch East Indies in the 1930s, where she met Margaret Mead and other prominent sociologists and archeologists, including Willem Stuttenheim who became her mentor and lover. Holt returned to the United States to work for government intelligence until she resigned that post in 1954 to take the position of Associate Researcher at Cornell University, a situation she held until her death. Holt's seminal work was *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, published in 1967.

Burton returned to Indonesia two more times. In 1989, she obtained a Fulbright Grant to bring the edited Adam's films to Indonesia where she screened and presented copies of the finished work to various educational institutions and dignitaries. During this trip, Burton studied dance with Rama Sasminto Marsadawa and gave birth to her son Roan. In 1996, Burton returned to Indonesia to research her dissertation on Holt, as well as perform with the Gamelan Kusuma Laras at the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival.

Following her graduation from New York University, Burton joined the faculty of Eugene Lang College, teaching courses on Asian theater and dance as well as working with Young Audiences New York, teaching dance workshops at various elementary and grammar schools. Burton died of cancer, in 2005, at the age of 56.

Scope and Content Note

The Deena Burton papers documents Burton's study and performance of Indonesian dance, both in the United States and in Indonesia. Included are research materials of Burton's dissertation of ethnologist Claire Holt, and files regarding the editing and cataloging the films of Tassilo Adam for the New York Public Library. The collection contains both personal and professional correspondence, sketches, lyrics, and choreographic notes, photographs of performances and her travels and studies in Indonesia, and notebooks from her graduate work at New York University. There is a small amount of material regarding Burton's work as an educator. The papers are in both English and Indonesian.

Key Terms

Subjects

Dance -- Indonesia
Dance -- Research
Dance -- Study and teaching
Gamelan
Kecak (Dance drama)

Occupations

Dancers

Geographic Names

Indonesia

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Negatives
Notebooks
Photograph albums

Photographs
Programs
Slides (photographs)

Names

Burton, Deena
Holt, Claire
La Plante, Skip
Bali-Java Dance Theatre

Container List

Series I: Correspondence 1965-2003

This series is composed of personal and professional correspondence, from correspondents in both the United States and Indonesia. It is arranged in chronological order by decade. Correspondence from 1976-1980 and 1989-1990 documents her travels in Indonesia and her study of dance there, particularly in long letters she wrote to her mother. Also documented is her work in the United States regarding her research projects, dance performances, and her work with Arts Indonesia, Artists Inspired by Asia, Artists Inspired by Indonesian, and Gamelan Son of Lion. The correspondence is in English and Indonesian.

- b. 1 f. 1 1965-1969
- b. 1 f. 2 1970-1979
- b. 1 f. 3-4 1980-1989
- b. 1 f. 5 1990-1999
- b. 1 f. 6 2000-2003
- b. 1 f. 7 Undated
- b. 2 f. 1 Cards and Postcards 1966-2002

Series II: Dance Scholarship and Performance 1927-2003

Series II contains material relating to Burton's study of dance and her career as a performer. It is arranged alphabetically by subject. Burton's academic studies, her performances, and her administrative work were interconnected and often informed each other. For example, the choreographic and research notes Burton collected in Indonesia contain her own notations and interpretations that later influenced her choreography for performances produced in the United States, like *Arabian Nights* and *The Ramayana*. Additionally, Burton wrote her dissertation on Claire Holt entitled *Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Ethnography of Claire Holt*, but also did a performance piece that incorporated dance with spoken word derived from Holt's correspondence and writings.

Files for *Sitting at the Feet of Gurus* hold incomplete drafts, primarily of the introduction and acknowledgments, correspondence regarding Burton's effort to have Holt included in the *American National Biography*, subject files, and photographs of Holt. The research files regarding Claire Holt are extensive and contain photocopies of primary documents obtained by Burton from various archives and from Holt's descendents. The date span for these files can be quite broad as they occasionally contain Burton's corresponding notes.

The Tassilo Adam film project includes notes on the pre-and-post edits of the film as well as notes detailing the dissection process. Burton's Fulbright Grant application details the scope and goals of Burton's trip to Indonesia to screen and distribute the completed work. Also included are photographs taken by Adam that were collected by Burton.

Choreographic and research notes reflect information collected by Burton in Indonesia and are rich with Javanese poetry and folk tales, dance and music notations, choreographic interpretations, and sketches of traditional costumes, masks, and staging. The earlier notebooks contain similar information. Later notebooks (1990-1997) regard coursework for Burton's doctorate in Performance Studies from New York University and are often interleaved with Burton's assignments and writing. Teaching materials include handouts, choreography, and thank you cards from Burton's Young Audience New York workshops.

- b. 2 f. 2 *Arabian Nights Playscript* undated
- b. 2 f. 3 Arts Indonesia--General 1985-1998
- b. 2 f. 4 Arts Indonesia--Business Plan 1985
- b. 2 f. 5-6 Choreographic and Research Notes 1976-2003
- b. 2 f. 7 Conference Materials 1989-1997
- Notebooks
 - b. 3 f. 1-2 1979-1989
 - b. 19 1979-1989

Series II: Dance Scholarship and Performance (cont.)
Notebooks (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 3-5 1990-1997
- b. 4 f. 1-4 1990-1997
- b. 5 f. 1-3 1990-1997
- Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Ethnography of Claire Holt Research Files*
- b. 5 f. 4 General 1997-2000
- b. 5 f. 5 *American National Biography* 1993-1996
- b. 5 f. 6 Bibliographic Notes undated
- b. 5 f. 7 Biographical Material 1960-1998
- b. 5 f. 8 Dja, Dewi--Clippings 1939-1945
- b. 5 f. 9 Drafts 1999-2000
- b. 6 f. 1 Holt, Anatol--Interviews 1998, undated
- b. 6 f. 2 Holt, Anatol--Writings 1995-1998
- b. 6 f. 3 Holt, Becky--Clippings 1959
- Holt, Claire 1927-1998
- b. 6 f. 4 Archives Internationale de la Danse (Paris) 1935-1939
- b. 6 f. 5 Art Associations 1956, undated
- b. 6 f. 6 Artist Biographies 1956, undated
- b. 6 f. 7 Asia Society--Art and Archeology Committee 1966-1967
- b. 6 f. 8 Asia Society--Lecture on Wayang Kulit 1964
- b. 6 f. 9 ASRI Yogya 1955
- b. 6 f. 10 Bali Cloth Painting--Notes 1963-1967
- b. 6 f. 11 Brochures 1940
- b. 6 f. 12 CIAP (Indonesian Arts Project) 1955-1962
- b. 6 f. 13 *Christian Science Monitor--Interview* 1943-1967
- b. 6 f. 14 Columbia--Navy School Administration undated
- Correspondence
- b. 6 f. 15-16 A-D
- b. 7 f. 1-7 F-S
- b. 8 f. 1-3 S-Z
- b. 8 f. 4-5 Unsorted
- b. 9 f. 1 Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Materials 1936-1955
- b. 9 f. 2 Cultural Change 1956
- b. 9 f. 3 Culture-Contact Mediation in American-Southeast Asian Relations Presentation 1951-1952
- b. 9 f. 4 Dance--Lectures and Notes 1936-1940
- b. 9 f. 5 Dance--Printed Material 1955-1960
- b. 9 f. 6 Dans Museet (Stockholm) 1981-1998
- b. 9 f. 7 Documents 1948-1951
- b. 9 f. 8 East Indies Institute 1944-1946
- b. 9 f. 9 Family Connections 1998-1999
- b. 9 f. 10 Government Work--Memoranda 1944-1953

Series II: Dance Scholarship and Performance (cont.)

Sitting at the Feet of Gurus: The Life and Ethnography of Claire Holt Research Files (cont.)
Holt, Claire (cont.)

- b. 9 f. 11 Harvard University, University of Michigan, University of California 1946-1959
- b. 9 f. 12 Hein-Geldern, Robert 1962-1967
- b. 9 f. 13 Historical Appendices undated
- b. 9 f. 14 Index to Research Files 1958
For Arts in Indonesia
- b. 9 f. 15 Indonesia Bibliographies undated
- b. 9 f. 16 Kinetics--Notes 1952-1967
- b. 9 f. 17 Kraton and Islamic Mysticism undated
- b. 9 f. 18 Larson, Bird--Clippings 1927-1998
- b. 9 f. 19 Latvian History 1971
- b. 9 f. 20 Lecture Engagements 1936-1948
- b. 9 f. 21-22 Memoriam 1967-1989
- b. 9 f. 23 Notes 1956-1958, undated
- b. 10 f. 1-3 Notes 1956-1958, undated
- b. 10 f. 4 Patrons 1939-1940
- b. 10 f. 5 *Pelukis Rakjat* 1955
- b. 10 f. 6 Poems 1925, undated
- b. 10 f. 7 Point Four 1938-1953
- b. 10 f. 8 Public Relations--Cornell University 1956-1957
- b. 10 f. 9 Reviews 1940-1968
- b. 10 f. 10 Wayang Stories 1944-1959
- b. 10 f. 11 White House Dinner 1968
- b. 10 f. 12 White Museum--Exhibition 1957
- b. 10 f. 13 Writings 1929
- b. 10 f. 14-15 Writings and Lectures 1939-1974
- b. 11 f. 1 Interview Transcripts 1996
- b. 11 f. 2 New York Public Library, Library for the Performing Arts 1998-1999
- b. 11 f. 3 Notes 1998-1999
- b. 11 f. 4 Photographs undated
- b. 11 f. 5 Proposal undated
- b. 11 f. 6 Publishers Responses 2001
- b. 11 f. 7 Spies, Walter 1980, undated
- b. 11 f. 8 Stutterheim, Willem--Biographical Material 1942
- b. 11 f. 9 Stutterheim, Willem--Writings 1956-1989
Tassilo Adam Film Project 1987-1989, undated
- b. 11 f. 10 Film Reel Times and Slicing Order undated
- b. 11 f. 11 Fulbright Grant Application 1987-1989
- b. 11 f. 12 Lectures Notes undated
- b. 11 f. 13-14 Notes undated
- b. 12 f. 1 Photographs undated
- b. 12 f. 2 Teaching Materials 1991-2001

Series III: Photographs 1976-2003

Photographs are arranged alphabetically by subject. The bulk of the material reflects Burton's first trip to Indonesia (1976-1980) and includes photographs of Indonesians, dancers, and performances that document various Javanese dancing styles, costumes and masks, and the day-to-day lifestyles of the Javanese. Notable subjects include Burton's teachers, Kandeg, Sudji, and Wayan Dibia. There is a large amount of photographs from Bali-Java Dance Theatre performances, and Kandeg's home and studio in Cirebon, West Java. Photographs of masks includes prints of Burton's own mask collection.

- b. 20 f. 1 Artists Inspired by ASA 1985
- b. 12 f. 3 Asian American Dance Theatre--Publicity Photographs undated
- b. 20 f. 2 Asian American Dance Theatre--Recital circa 1980s
- Bali-Java Dance Theatre
- b. 20 f. 3-4 1970s-1980s
- b. 20 f. 5 *Arabian Nights* 1981?
- b. 20 f. 6 Burton and David Simons 1982?
Outdoor performance.
- b. 20 f. 7 Clown Feather Boa Dance circa 1985 June
- b. 20 f. 8 Kecak 1984
- b. 20 f. 9 *The Ramayana* undated
World Trade Center.
- b. 20 f. 10 Dance Recitals 2003 June
- b. 20 f. 13 Gamelan Son of Lion undated
- Indonesia
- Prints
- b. 12 f. 4-6 Central Java 1976-1980
- b. 12 f. 7 Jakarta 1996
- West Java 1976-1980
- b. 13 f. 1-4 General 1976-1980
- b. 13 f. 5 Photo Album 1976-1980
- b. 13 f. 6 Photo Album 1976-1980
- b. 13 f. 7-8 Unidentified 1976-1997
- b. 14 f. 1-4 Slides 1976-1980
- b. 15 f. 2 Masks undated
see also: Series V: Personal Miscellany--Hammond Museum and Japanese Stroll Garden--Mask Loan
- Performances
- b. 20 f. 11 For Children 1995, 1998
- b. 14 f. 5 *Arabian Nights* 1981
- b. 20 f. 12 Deepavali Indian Festival of Lights 1993
South Street Seaport.
- b. 20 f. 14 International Gamelan Festival 1986
- b. 21 f. 1 Multicultural Day (New York City) 1980s
Appears to be a performance for college students.
- b. 21 f. 2 *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* circa 1987

Series III: Photographs (cont.)
Performances (cont.)

- b. 21 f. 3 *The Ramayana* 1986
East-West Fusion Theatre
- b. 21 f. 4 *The Ramayana* 1987
Performance with ESOL (children).
- b. 14 f. 6 *The Ramayana* undated
- b. 21 f. 5 Yogyakarta-Pujokusuman 1979
- b. 14 f. 7 Portraits--Deena Burton undated
- b. 19 Portraits--Deena Burton and Skip La Plante 1985
- b. 15 f. 1 Puppets (Wayang) undated
- b. 15 f. 3 Negatives 1976-1980
- b. 21 f. 6 Miscellaneous 1978, 1985, undated

Series IV: Printed Material 1974-2004

Series IV contains a large amount of printed material collected by Burton. The material was divided by Burton into material published in Indonesia and in the United States; material from Indonesia is arranged by region and material from the United States is arranged by organization. This series includes programs, clippings, fliers, conference materials, and organizational brochures. It was often assumed that audiences might be unfamiliar with Indonesian dance and the programs are quite rich with detailed historical narratives and plot and story synopses. While material from Indonesia reflects primarily dance, material from the United States also includes fliers and programs for art exhibits and musical performances. Additionally, the unsorted files contains documents from collaborations between Burton and La Plante. Most of the printed material from Indonesia is in Indonesian.

IV. A. Indonesia 1978-1996

- b. 15 f. 4 Bali 1981-1996, undated
- b. 15 f. 5 Jakarta--General 1978-1995
- b. 15 f. 6 Jakarta--Indonesian Dance Festival 1996
- b. 15 f. 7 Surakarta/Solo 1990-1996
- b. 15 f. 8 Yogyakarta 1989-1996
- b. 16 f. 1-3 Unsorted 1978-1996

IV. B. United States 1974-2004

- b. 16 f. 4 Artists Inspired by Asia/Artists Inspired by Indonesia 1984-1986
- b. 16 f. 5 Bali-Java Dance Theatre 1983-1986
- b. 16 f. 6 Gamelan Son of Lion 1982-2004
- b. 16 f. 7 New York Indonesian Consulate Gamelan/Gamelan Kusuma Laras 1989-2004
- b. 17 f. 1-5 Unsorted 1974-2004
- b. 18 f. 1 Unsorted 1974-2004

Series V: Personal Miscellany 1976-2005

This series is arranged alphabetically and includes a file containing biographical material for Burton, correspondence and forms regarding the loan of Burton's masks to the Hammond Museum and Japanese Stroll Garden, reviews of Burton's performances, and a small amount of writing that includes reminiscences of Indonesia and poetry.

- b. 18 f. 2 Applications--Visa 1976-1980
- b. 18 f. 3 Biographical Materials and Resumes 1981-2002
- b. 18 f. 4 Hammond Museum and Japanese Stroll Garden--Mask Loan 1998-1999
see also: Series III: Photographs--Masks
- b. 18 f. 5 Memorial Service 2005

Series V: Personal Miscellany (cont.)

- b. 18 f. 6 **Reviews** 1981-1997
- b. 19 **Sketches** undated
- b. 18 f. 7 **Writings** undated