



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Maria Karnilova papers**

1840-2003 [bulk 1938-1993]

(S) \*MGZMD 516

Processed by Nathan Evans in 2020.

## Summary

**Creator:** Karnilova, Maria

**Title:** Maria Karnilova papers

**Date:** 1840-2003 [bulk 1938-1993]

**Size:** 5 linear feet (8 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Katie Irving in 2017.

**Abstract:** Maria Karnilova (1920-2001) was an American dancer and actress whose career spanned seven decades in ballet, opera, and Broadway. The Maria Karnilova papers contain materials from 1840 to 2003 (bulk 1938-1993) that document her career, including articles, correspondence, programs, photographs, scripts, sheet music, ballet slippers, audio and video recordings, and film.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: <https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

### Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audio and moving image materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division ([dance@nypl.org](mailto:dance@nypl.org)). Audio and moving image materials will be subject to preservation assessment and migration prior to access.

**Preferred citation:** Maria Karnilova papers, (S) \*MGZMD 516. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Language of the Material:** Multiple languages English, with some Russian and Spanish.

**Processing note:** Processed by Nathan Evans in 2020.

## Creator History

Maria Karnilova was an American dancer and actress whose career spanned seven decades in ballet, opera, and Broadway. Born in 1920, she began dancing professionally at seven years old and joined the Ballet Theatre at its inception in 1939. Karnilova performed as a chorus dancer and soloist in ballets such as *Bluebeard*, *Judgment of Paris*, *Helen of Troy*, and *Three Virgins and a Devil*. At the company, she also met Jerome Robbins and Donald Saddler with whom she collaborated throughout her career. Karnilova continued to perform as a ballerina after leaving the Ballet Theatre in 1946, notably for the Metropolitan Opera, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and Robbins' Ballets U.S.A., but her career thereafter largely focused on acting. She was known for her comedic presence in Broadway musicals such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, for which she won the Tony Award for Best Actress in the original 1964 production. Karnilova's other Broadway credits include *Call Me Mister*, *Gypsy*, *The Beggar's Opera*, *Bravo Giovanni*, *Zorba*, *Gigi*, *God's Favorite*, and the 1981 revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*. As a film actress, she starred in *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *Married to the Mob*.

Karnilova was married to fellow Broadway actor George S. Irving. She died in 2001.

## Scope and Content Note

The Maria Karnilova papers contain materials from 1840 to 2003 (bulk 1938-1993) that trace her career as a dancer and actress. The papers include articles, correspondence, photographs, programs, scripts, sheet music, and ballet slippers. There are also films and audio and video recordings of rehearsals, performances, and interviews.

Photographs and programs comprise the bulk of the collection. The photographs primarily feature Karnilova performing, as well as portraits of her and other dancers. Also included are personal photographs with family and friends; prominent subjects other than Karnilova include Donald Saddler, David Nillo, and Alicia Alonso. The programs are largely for productions featuring Karnilova.

Articles consist of reviews, essays, and profiles about Karnilova and her performances. The articles relate to both dancing and acting, with emphasis on her career from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Correspondence contains letters, cards, and telegrams to Karnilova. A large portion concerns the 1968-1969 production of *Zorba*, including fan mail and telegrams from friends and colleagues.

Notable scripts and sheet music include a script for *Gypsy* with Karnilova's annotations, and sheet music for "Sunrise, Sunset" from *Fiddler on the Roof*. There are also four Romantic era pieces of ballet sheet music.

Finally, the collection contains two pairs of Karnilova's ballet slippers, as well as various fliers and notes.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

Actors -- United States -- 20th century  
Ballet dancers  
Dancers -- United States

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Ballet slippers

Clippings (information artifacts)

Drama

Notated music

Photographs

Sound recordings

Theater programs

Video recordings

**Names**

Irving, Katie

Karnilova, Maria

Ballet Theatre (New York, N.Y.)

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-4 **Articles and Clippings 1938-1983**  
Includes news articles and profiles about Karnilova throughout her career at the Ballet Theatre, Metropolitan Opera, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Ballets U.S.A., on Broadway, and in film. Some articles are in Spanish and Russian.
- Correspondence 1937-2002**  
The majority of correspondence is in English, with some in Spanish.
- b. 1 f. 5 **1937-1968**  
Includes ticker tape with notes inscribed to Karnilova from the cast of *Fiddler on the Roof*.
- b. 1 f. 6-9 ***Zorba* 1968-1969**
- b. 1 f. 10 **1971-1979**
- b. 2 f. 1 **1980-2002**
- Photographs 1920-2003**
- Productions and Festivals 1940-1993**
- b. 2 f. 2 **Ballet Theatre 1940-1943**  
Includes photographs of Karnilova performing and rehearsing for various productions at the Ballet Theatre.
- b. 2 f. 3 ***The Beggar's Opera* 1957**
- b. 2 f. 4 ***Bluebeard* 1941**
- b. 2 f. 4 ***Bravo Giovanni* 1962**
- b. 2 f. 5 ***By the Beautiful Sea* 1953**
- b. 2 f. 6 ***Call Me Mister* 1946**
- b. 2 f. 7 ***Cinderella* 1993**
- b. 2 f. 8 **Dallas State Fair Musicals 1953-1956**  
Includes photographs of *Paint Your Wagon*, *New Moon*, and the Dallas Light Opera.
- b. 2 f. 9 ***Fiddler on the Roof* 1964-1981**
- b. 2 f. 10 ***Fille Mal Gardée, La* 1940**
- b. 2 f. 11 ***Gigi* 1973**
- b. 2 f. 12 ***God's Favorite* 1974**
- b. 2 f. 12 ***Gypsy* 1959**
- b. 2 f. 13 ***Helen of Troy* 1942**
- b. 2 f. 14 ***High Button Shoes* 1948**
- b. 3 f. 1-2 **Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival 1941-1958**  
Photographs mostly showcase Karnilova dancing with David Nillo or Donald Saddler.
- b. 3 f. 3 ***Judgment of Paris* 1941, 1975**
- b. 3 f. 4 **Metropolitan Opera 1951-1966**  
Primarily includes photographs of Karnilova rehearsing with Zachary Solov.
- b. 3 f. 5 ***Out of This World* 1950**
- b. 3 f. 5 ***Stars in Your Eyes* 1939**
- b. 3 f. 5 ***Three Virgins and a Devil* 1941**
- b. 3 f. 6 ***Two's Company* 1952**
- b. 3 f. 7 ***Winesburg, Ohio* 1957-1958**
- b. 3 f. 8 ***Zorba* 1968**  
Includes a photo album titled "*Zorba*, Christmas 1968."

Photographs (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 9 **General Dance and Acting 1930-1967**  
Includes photographs of Karnilova performing and rehearsing. There are early photographs of Karnilova with the Metropolitan Opera and the Salmaggi Opera. Also included are photographs of Karnilova dancing with Donald Saddler.
- b. 4 f. 1-2 **Portraits and Press Shots 1938-1988**  
Primarily includes headshots of Karnilova.
- b. 4 f. 3-5 **Family and Personal 1920-1990s**  
Includes photographs of Karnilova alone or with family, friends, and colleagues. A portion of the photographs feature Karnilova with Alicia Alonso.
- b. 4 f. 6  
b. 8 f. 1 **Others 1937-2003**  
Includes photographs of people other than Karnilova. Prominent subjects include Alicia Alonso, Irina Baronova, George S. Irving, and Donald Saddler. Some photographs are inscribed to Karnilova. Two large prints are housed in a separate box.
- b. 4 f. 7 **Film and Television 1964-1988**  
Includes photographs from *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and *Married to the Mob*.

Programs 1939-1993

Karnilova Performing 1939-1993

- b. 5 f. 1 *America Dances* 1961  
From the Boston Arts Festival.
- b. 5 f. 1-2 **Ballet Theatre 1940-1955**
- b. 5 f. 2 *The Beggar's Opera* 1956-1957
- b. 5 f. 2 *Bravo Giovanni* 1962
- b. 5 f. 2 *Call Me Mister* 1946
- b. 5 f. 2 *Cinderella* 1993
- b. 5 f. 2 *Fiddler on the Roof* 1964, 1981
- b. 5 f. 2 **Gala Performance to Save the Dance Collection of The New York Public Library 1972**
- b. 5 f. 2 *Gigi* 1973
- b. 5 f. 3 *God's Favorite* 1974
- b. 5 f. 3 *Gypsy* 1959
- b. 5 f. 3 **Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival 1955-1960**
- b. 5 f. 4 *Kaleidoscope* 1957
- b. 5 f. 4 **Metropolitan Opera 1951-1952**
- b. 5 f. 4 *On Your Toes* 1953
- b. 5 f. 4 *Stars in Your Eyes* 1939
- b. 5 f. 4 *Tribute to Joshua Logan, A* 1975
- b. 5 f. 4 *Zorba* 1968
- b. 6 f. 1-4 **Others 1939-1983**  
Includes programs for productions not starring Karnilova, as well as events for which she gives speeches or that are dedicated to her. A portion of the programs are from a 1976 Russian ballet tour that she attended. There are also several programs from the 1976 International Ballet Festival of Havana.

Scripts and Sheet Music 1840-1964

- b. 6 f. 5 **"Chanson" Sheet Music**  
By Roy Dawson Gubby. Inscribed to Karnilova.
- b. 6 f. 5 ***Gypsy Script* 1959**  
Features Karnilova's annotations.

Scripts and Sheet Music (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 5 **Romantic Era Sheet Music Pieces 1840**  
Includes four pieces of ballet sheet music: two of "La Cracovienne," "Quadrilles," and "The Cachucha." Each piece features an illustration of Austrian ballerina Fanny Elssler on the title page.
- b. 6 f. 5 ***Snapper's Grove Script* 1960**
- b. 6 f. 5 **"Sunrise, Sunset" Sheet Music 1964**
- b. 6 f. 5 ***Threepenny Opera, The Script Excerpt* 1964**
- Miscellaneous 1953-2001**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Actors' Fund of America Flier 1965**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Handwritten Notes**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Karnilova, Maria and George S. Irving -- Typescript Biographies**
- b. 6 f. 6 ***On Your Toes Invitation* 1953**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Karnilova, Maria -- Publicity Questionnaire**
- b. 6 f. 6 ***Remembering Marusha* 2001**  
Includes invitation, program, and handwritten speech by Irina Baranova.
- b. 6 f. 6 **Russian Ballet Tour Personnel List 1976**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Tony Award Nomination 1969**  
*For Zorba.*
- b. 6 f. 6 **Typescript Speech**
- b. 6 f. 6 **Walter Terry Film Series Flier**
- b. 7 **Ballet Slippers**  
Two pairs of ballet slippers. One pair is signed by numerous people.