

The New York Public Library
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Alexandra Danilova papers

1954-1989 (bulk 1955-1979)

(S) *MGZMD 280

Compiled by Philip Heslip, September 2011

Summary

Creator: Danilova, Alexandra, 1903-1997

Title: Alexandra Danilova papers, 1954-1989 (bulk 1955-1979)

Size: .42 linear foot (1 box)

Source: Donated by Holly Brubach (2005) and William Manning (2006).

Abstract: Russian ballerina and dance educator Aleksandra Danilova (1903-1997) was one of the premier dancers of the 20th century, and a collaborator with such icons as George Balanchine, Sergey Diaghilev and Leonide Massine. This collection contains letters, biographical notes, photographs, and other miscellaneous material related to Danilova's personal and professional life.

Access: To request materials, please contact the Jerome Robbins Dance Division (dance@nypl.org) in advance.

Copyright information: Donor retains copyright of materials. Library policy on photocopying will apply. For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins, Dance Division.

Preferred citation: Alexandra Danilova papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Custodial history

The incoming letters were kept by Danilova, and given to Holly Brubach. Brubach, who helped write Danilova's memoir, donated these materials to the New York Public Library. The outgoing letters and the photographs were donated by William Manning.

Processing note

Letters were ordered chronologically with undated items placed at the end.

Related collections

Alexandra Danilova collection. Library of Congress

American Ballet Theatre records, 1936-ca. 1967. New York Public Library, Library of the Performing Arts, Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Gilbert W. Chapman collection of sound recordings. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Sergei Denham records of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, ca. 1936-1978. New York Public Library, Library of the Performing Arts, Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Valerie Bettis papers, ca. 1942-1982, ca. 1942-1982. New York Public Library, Library of the Performing Arts, Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Creator history

Ballerina and dance educator Aleksandra Dionisyevna Danilova (1903-1997) was born in Petergof, Russia. In 1911, she began studying dance at the Russian Imperial Ballet School in Leningrad. There she met George Balanchine, with whom she would maintain a life-long friendship. In 1920, Danilova danced with the Maryinsky Ballet. She joined Balanchine's Soviet State Dancers for a tour of Western Europe in 1924. In December of that year, Sergey Diaghilev brought both her and Balanchine into his acclaimed Ballets Russes. She stayed with Diaghilev's troop until his death in 1929. Danilova continued to perform in prominent venues around Europe, and in 1933 made her American debut with Les Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo. Choreographer Leonide Massine hired her as his prima ballerina from 1938 to 1952 and her fame grew in the United States and abroad. Danilova married twice, first to Giuseppe Massera from ca. 1933 to 1935, and then to Kazimir Kokich from 1941 to 1948. In 1946 she became an American citizen. Danilova toured the world with various dance company between 1952 and 1956, and visited the Caribbean Islands, England, Japan, the Philippines, South Africa, Spain, and the United States. After 1957, she struggled to find work, though in 1958 she had a acclaimed dance number with Tony Randall in the Broadway musical *Oh, Captain!* In 1964, Balanchine secured Danilova a faculty position at his School of American Ballet in New York City. She remained on the faculty there until retiring in 1989. During that time, she was involved with staging productions for the New York City Ballet, had a roll in the film *The Turning Point* (1977), and published her memoir *Choura* (the title is taken from her nickname) with the help of writer Holly Brubach. Danilova died in New York City on July 13, 1997.

Scope and content note

The Aleksandra Danilova papers contain letters, biographical notes, photographs, and other miscellaneous material related to Danilova's personal and professional life.

The biographical documents consist of multiple timelines documenting important events and accomplishments in Danilova's life, which she created while working on her memoir.

General documents include miscellaneous items, such as copies of programs for performances given in Manila, Philippines (1955); a travel document with details on Danilova's visit to Columbia (1954); a poem celebrating Danilova composed by a fan (1944); and an unpublished review of Danilova's debut as a choreographer (1958); among other items.

The clippings consist of Danilova mentions in newspaper fashion sections and obituaries for Danilova.

The bulk of the approximately 100 letters are items sent to Danilova between 1954 and 1979 from friends, colleagues, and fans. Topics discussed include Danilova's ballet performances, such as her final performance with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo (1957); her personal life, work, and travel; and memories of past performances with Diaghilev, Balanchine, and others. Senders include Karl Christopher Allen, Rupert Allen, Sergie J. Denham, Anton Dolin, Lincoln Kirstein, Mildred E. Neff, Tony Randall, Olga J. Rosenthal, Olga Spessivtzeva, and Paul Strauss. Several letters are addressed to "Choura" and "Butch," two nicknames for Danilova. Also present are four letters from Danilova to her

friends William and Margaret Manning in the late 1980s. In these she discussed her health, working on her memoir, and the death of a mutual friend.

Images include 8 photographs depicting Danilova as a dancer and with friends on a trip visiting Diaghilev's grave in Italy, and a painting on paper of dancers in the moonlight inscribed "For Mme. Alexandra Danilova...J. Aseltine."

Arrangement

This collection is organized by document type. Correspondence is ordered chronologically with undated items at the end.

Key terms

Occupations

Dancers.

Names

Danilova, Alexandra, 1903-1997

Denham, Sergei, 1896-1970.

Dolin, Anton, 1904-1983.

Kirstein, Lincoln, 1907-1996.

Randall, Tony.

School of American Ballet.

Strauss, Paul, 1920-

Special formats

Clippings (information artifacts)

Letters(correspondence)

Paintings.

Photographs.

Container list

- b.1 f.1 Biographical Documents
- b.1 f.2 General Documents
- b.1 f.3 Clippings, 1987-1997
- b.1 f.4-15 Correspondence, 1954-1989, undated
- b.1 f.16 Images