

# **Guide to the Leon Danielian Papers, 1930-1994**

**(S) \*MGZMD 178**

## **Jerome Robbins Dance Division**

**The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts  
New York, New York**

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Processed by: Helice Koffler  
Date Completed: March 2007

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### Descriptive Summary

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Leon Danielian Papers</b>
<b>Collection ID:</b>	<b>(S) *MGZMD 178</b>
<b>Creator:</b>	<b>Danielian, Leon</b>
<b>Extent:</b>	<b>8.09 linear feet (9 boxes)</b>
<b>Repository:</b>	<b>Jerome Robbins Dance Division. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts</b>

**Abstract:** The Leon Danielian Papers document the career of the American ballet dancer and teacher through an extensive set of photographs, as well as a more limited selection of correspondence, clippings, financial records, and teaching materials. Danielian, a native New Yorker of Armenian ancestry, enjoyed an especially varied career as a performer, but is best known for his long association with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Following his retirement from the stage, Danielian taught ballet for nearly thirty years at the American Ballet Theatre School and the University of Texas at Austin.

### Administrative Information

#### Access

Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

#### Publication Rights

For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

#### Preferred Citation

Leon Danielian Papers, (S) \*MGZMD 178, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

#### Custodial History

The Leon Danielian Papers were donated to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division in 1997 by the Estate of Leon Danielian.

#### Related Materials

The Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts also holds Leon Danielian Scrapbooks, \*MGZRS 97-5189 and on microfilm in: \*ZBD-586.

**Processing Information**

The collection was processed and cataloged in March 2007.

## Biographical Note

American ballet dancer and teacher, Leon Danielian (1920-1997) enjoyed an especially varied career as a performer, but is best known for his long association with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Danielian was a native New Yorker of Armenian ancestry, who, with his sister Hercelia, studied ballet as a child with an influential teacher, Madame Seda. She later would send the Danielians to Mikhail Mordkin for additional training and both would join his troupe, the Mordkin Ballet, when it was formed in 1937 (Danielian's sister appeared under the name, Hercelia Danielova). The Mordkin Ballet, which had been partly sponsored by Lucia Chase, was refashioned into Ballet Theatre in late 1939 and Leon became an original member of the company, performing in such pieces as the revival of Michel Fokine's *Carnaval*, in which he appeared as the Harlequin. During this period, Danielian also would dance on Broadway, with Ballet Theatre, and Colonel Wassily de Basil's Ballet Russe company, before joining Sergei Denham's rival Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo as a principal dancer.

Danielian was active with the company from 1943 to 1961, appearing in a wide-ranging repertory, which displayed his versatility in both classical and character parts. Among his most constant and celebrated roles were the Bluebird in *The Sleeping Beauty* (generally performed as part of the excerpt, *Aurora's Wedding*), the comedic Peruvian tourist in Leonide Massine's *Gaîté Parisienne*, and El Bonito in Antonia Cobos' *Madroños*. Throughout his many years with the company, Danielian partnered all of its leading ballerinas, including Alexandra Danilova, Yvette Chauviré, and Nina Novak. Perhaps his most frequent partner, however, was fellow American, Ruthanna Boris, who also featured Danielian in her own original choreography, including *Cirque de Deux* (1947) and *Quelques Fleurs* (1948). Danielian toured extensively with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and also appeared as a guest artist and on tours with the San Francisco Ballet during the late 1950s and early 1960s, until worsening arthritis ended his performing career.

Following his retirement from the stage, Danielian taught ballet for nearly thirty years. He became co-director of the School of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in New York City for several years and served as director of the American Ballet Theatre School in that same city from 1967 to 1980. In 1983, Danielian succeeded Igor Youskevitch and joined the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin, where he taught in the Department of Theatre and Dance until his retirement in 1991, later becoming a professor emeritus. In 1993, a dance studio and endowed scholarship at the University of Texas were named in his honor.

## Scope and Content Note

The Leon Danielian Papers document the career of the American ballet dancer and teacher through an extensive set of photographs, as well as a more limited selection of correspondence, clippings, financial records, and teaching materials. The collection as a whole contains considerably more material relating to Danielian the performer than to his work as a teacher. Of particular interest are individual items relating to Danielian's earliest years as a dancer, including a few childhood photographs, a 1941 Ballet Theatre souvenir program autographed by many members of the company, and a typescript of a ballet scenario by William Saroyan, *A Theme in the Life of the Great American Goof* (1939), which was choreographed by Eugene Loring for Ballet Theatre. Aside from a few letters and some diary entries on loose leaves found in a ring binder, there is very little material of a personal nature in this collection.

## Organization

The collection is organized into 3 series. They are:

Series I: Personal and Professional Papers, 1938-1994 and undated

Series II: Photographs, 1930-1983 and undated

Series III: Oversized Materials, 1942-1958 and undated

## Series Descriptions

### **Series I: Personal and Professional Papers, 1938-1994 and undated**                      **3 boxes**

Arranged: Alphabetical

The Personal and Professional Papers series is comprised primarily of clippings, correspondence, and financial records that document Danielian's career as a dancer and a teacher. The limited correspondence consists chiefly of routine business letters, but also contains a few personal items, as well as an extensive set of congratulatory telegrams. Of special interest is an early Ballet Theatre program, signed by numerous members of the company, and a set of loose leaves belonging to a journal that includes Danielian's notes on books and choreography, as well as some diary entries relating to the period shortly before he joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

**Series II: Photographs, 1930-1983 and undated**

**2 boxes**

Arranged: Alphabetical

The Photographs series contains numerous prints of Danielian in both formal studio portraits and candid snapshots taken backstage, in performance, and on tour. Many of the images are by leading photographers, including Fred Fehl, Irving Penn, and Wallace Seawall. In addition to portraits of Danielian with his dancing partners and colleagues, there is a small set of autographed photographs, which includes pictures of Lucia Chase, Alexandra Danilova, Mikhail Mordkin, and Jocelyn Vollmar. Also of interest are numerous travel photographs of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries, probably taken on tour with the San Francisco Ballet. Additional prints of some of the same photographs in this series, as well as other subjects can be found in the Oversized Materials series.

**Series III: Oversized Materials, 1942-1958 and undated**

**4 boxes**

Arranged: Alphabetical

The Oversized Materials series consists mainly of artwork and larger format photographic prints. In addition to several reproductions of Italian Renaissance drawings collected by Danielian, the series contains a few original pieces, including an Andy Warhol poster advertising an early gallery show of the artist's.

Box/Folder      Description

**Series I. Personal and Professional Papers, 1938-1994 and undated**

**Box 1**

- F. 1                      Business cards, undated  
F. 2                      Certificates, 1944-1958  
F. 3                      Clippings, 1938-1975 and undated  
                            Correspondence  
                            1949-1958 (Includes 1949 letter from Irving Penn, 1954 letter from Ted  
F. 4                      Shawn, and 1966 letter from S. Hurok.)  
F. 5                      1972-1974  
F. 6                      1975-1976 (Includes a 1975 note and postcard from Agnes De Mille.)  
F. 7                      1977  
F. 8                      1978  
F. 9                      1979 (Includes note from Alexandra Danilova.)  
                            1980-1993 (Includes 1985 letter from Daniel Nagrin and 1990 letter from Liz  
F. 10                     Smith.)  
F. 11                     Undated (Includes three items from Liz Smith.)  
                            Christmas cards, 1948-1952 and undated (Includes 1949 wedding  
                            announcement/holiday card from Nora Kaye and Isaac Sterne, as well as  
                            undated, handmade card with photograph of young Richard Earl  
F. 12                     Thomas.)  
                            Greeting cards, 1983-1994 and undated (Includes card from Alexandra  
F. 13                     Danilova.)  
F. 14                     Postcards, 1940 and undated (Includes card probably in Armenian.)

**Box 2**

- Telegrams  
F. 1                      1940-1943  
F. 2                      1944-1946  
F. 3                      1947  
F. 4                      1948  
F. 5                      1949  
F. 6                      1950  
F. 7                      1951-1953  
F. 8                      1954-1956  
F. 9                      1957  
F. 10                     1962-1967  
F. 11                     Undated

**Box 3**

- Financial records  
F. 1                      Checkbooks, 1977-1978  
                            Receipts  
F. 2                      1957-1959 (Primarily from South American tours.)  
F. 3                      1975-1989 and undated

Box/Folder	Description
F. 4	Identification cards, 1958 and undated
F. 5	Invitations, 1938-1971 and undated Journal, 1943 and undated (Leaves formerly in ring binder, contain notes on books, ballets, and diary entries, 1943 Jan. 13 - Sept. 13, in one of which it is described as a journal.)
F. 6	
F. 7	Leon Danielian Barre, undated (Advertising proof.) Press notices, undated (Includes typescript in Spanish and manuscript summary of career, probably in Danielian's hand.)
F. 8	
F. 9	Souvenir program, 1941 (Ballet Theatre, 1941 season; contains numerous autographs of company members.)
	Teaching materials
F. 10	American Ballet Theatre School, 1977
F. 11	Ballet Repertory Company, 1977
F. 12	Competitions, 1980 and undated
F. 13	Dance Masters of America, 1973-1980 and undated Staging notes for <i>Les Sylphides</i> , undated (Manuscript in pencil, with diagrams.)
F. 14	
F. 15	Student resumes and photographs, 1976-1980 and undated <i>A Theme in the Life of the Great American Goof</i> , 1939 (Typescript scenario of ballet by William Saroyan.)
F. 16	
F. 17	Travel ephemera, 1985 and undated

## **Series II: Photographs, 1930-1983 and undated**

### **Box 4**

Danielian portraits (Primarily black and white studio photography.)

General (By photographer, where given.)

F. 1	Associated Press, undated
F. 2	Constantine, undated
F. 3	Frank Derbas, undated Kenn Duncan, 1981 (Color and black and white prints of same set of photographs.)
F. 4	
F. 5	Sigrid Estrada, undated
F. 6	Leon Izmirlian, undated
F. 7	John Lindquist, undated
F. 8	Jack Mitchell, undated
F. 9	Moss Photo, undated (Includes one autographed by Danielian.) Walter E. Owen, undated (In costume for <i>L'après-midi d'un faune</i> and as Harlequin.)
F. 10	
F. 11	Myron Papiz, undated Irving Penn, undated (Proofs for <i>Vogue</i> and group portrait with other members of Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, including George Balanchine, Alexandra Danilova, Maria Tallchief, Frederic Franklin, Sergei Denham, Agnes de Mille, and Barbara Karinska.)
F. 12	
F. 13	Charles Ray, 1971
F. 14	Reinthal Studios, undated

Box/Folder	Description
F. 15	Wallace Seawell, undated (Paul Hesse Studio.)
F. 16	Maurice Seymour, undated
F. 17	Studio Liseg, undated
F. 18	Weissberger, undated (Color portrait, formerly in frame.) Unidentified photographers
F. 19	8 x 10 prints, undated
F. 20	Various sizes, 1943 and undated (Snapshots and studio prints.)
F. 21	Childhood, 1930-1931 Companies
F. 22	Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, 1959-1960 (Includes program for December 1959, January 1960 Chicago Opera House engagement with Danielian as guest artist)
F. 23	San Francisco Ballet, undated
	Contact sheets
F. 24	Otto Fenn, undated (Some with unidentified man, posing with scales and tea set.) Unidentified, undated (Some sheets include performance shots with other dancers, most likely from Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.)
F. 25	Groups, 1949-1983 and undated (Danielian with groups, some subjects or photographers identified.)
F. 26	Headshots (By photographer.)
F. 27	Charm, undated
F. 28	Frank Derbas, undated
F. 29	Rollie Dobson, undated (Staff photographer, <i>The Oregonian</i> .)
F. 30	Earle Forbes, undated
F. 31	Harcourt, undated
F. 32	Elli Marcus, undated
F. 33	Nishiyama, undated
F. 34	Walter E. Owen, undated
F. 35	Fernando Pamplona, undated (Teatro Municipal, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.)
F. 36	Maurice Seymour, undated
F. 37	Unidentified photographers, undated
<b>Box 5</b>	
	Partners (Danielian with female dancing partner and/or one or more colleagues.)
F. 1	Ruthanna Boris, undated (Also includes image from <i>Cirque de Deux</i> with Boris, Frank Hobi, and Patricia Wilde.)
F. 2	Irina Borowksa, undated Alexandra Danilova, 1957 and undated (Includes one Jack Mitchell print of Metropolitan Opera House curtain call, also with Frederic Franklin, probably for <i>Gaîté Parisienne</i> .)
F. 3	Mary Ellen Moylan, undated (Fred Fehl prints of Boris' <i>Quelques fleurs</i> .)
F. 4	

Box/Folder	Description
F. 5	Nina Novak, undated
F. 6	Mia Slavenska, circa 1951 (Black Swan pas de deux.)
F. 7	Unidentified partners, undated (Not identified, but recognizable dancers include Boris, Danilova, and Tallchief.)
F. 8	Publicity, undated (Includes two shots with Frederic Franklin and Maria Tallchief, apparently taken outside of United Nations building; also two images with Ronald Reagan, young Maureen Reagan, and other dancers, possibly on movie set.)
	Family and friends
	Autographed
F. 9	Men, 1938-1960 and undated (Includes Anton Dolin, Paul Haakon, Alan Howard, Eugene Loring, Mikhail Mordkin, Dimitri Romanoff, Igor Youskevitch, and George Zoritch.)
F. 10	Women, 1936-1959 and undated (Includes Irina Baronova, Lucia Chase, Yvette Chauviré, Alexandra Danilova, Viola Essen, Mary Ellen Moylan, Yvonne Mounsey, Nina Novak, Tatiana Riabouchinska, Mia Slavenska, Tamara Toumanova, and Jocelyn Vollmar.)
F. 11	Parents and sister, 1930 and undated rehearsal (Group portrait with Leon, as well as individual photos of parents and sister.)
F. 12	Katya (Katherine) Sergava, 1941 (In Toronto with Ballet Russe.)
F. 13	Ted Shawn, 1951 and undated (Daytona Beach, Florida.)
	Unsigned or unidentified
	Black and white prints
F. 14	6.5 x 9.75 prints, undated (11 prints of Danielian and unidentified woman posing with clown wig and boa.)
F. 15	8 x 10 prints, undated (Includes Duncan Noble, Tyrone Power, Rouben Ter-Arutunian, Maria Tallchief, Tamara Toumanova, and Jocelyn Vollmar.)
F. 16	Various sizes, undated (Mainly snapshots, many include Danielian with another individual or groups.)
F. 17	Color prints, undated (Includes one snapshot with Frederic Franklin and Alexandra Danilova.)
F. 18	Negatives, undated
	Performance and rehearsal (Candid shots from the wings or the audience.)
F. 19	<i>L'après-midi d'un faune</i> , 1945
F. 20	Closing night, 1945 (Includes photographs with no identification that appear to be from same 1945 Mar. 25 performance; probably the Black Swan pas de deux with Tamara Toumanova.)
F. 21	<i>Swan Lake</i> , 1945 (With Nathalie Krassovska.)
F. 22	Unidentified, undated (Includes Danielian and others onstage in <i>L'après-midi d'un faune</i> , <i>Giselle</i> , and <i>Swan Lake</i> ; other identifiable dancers include Ruthanna Boris.)
	Teaching
F. 23	Black and white prints, 1958 and undated
F. 24	Color prints, 1982-1983 and undated
	Travel and tours

Box/Folder	Description
	Canada, undated (14 small black and white prints enclosed with letter, sent from Montreal, of "photos made Monday Eve. at Alvarez & Vanbois's studio," showing Danielian and other dancers.)
F. 25	
F. 26	Greece, 1959
	Egypt, 1959
F. 27	Alexandria
F. 28	Cairo
F. 29	New York, 1942 (Identified variously as Copake or Craryville, New York.)
F. 30	San Luis, Pitoni, 1958 (Danielian on street in front of church.)
	Syria
F. 31	Damascus, 1959
	Unidentified, undated (All prints are stamped on back: Ets. Photographiques Azad, Damas, Syrie.)
F. 32	
F. 33	Turkey, 1959
	Unidentified
	Royaltone album, undated (Danielian and others at what appears to be a college campus.)
F. 34	
	Various prints, undated (Many appear to be from same 1959 tour of the Middle East and the Mediterranean, showing locations in Greece and Egypt, as well as many of the same dancers; one print shows poster, in Arabic and English, advertising San Francisco Ballet.)
F. 35	
F. 36	Y Club, undated (Probably from 1959 tour of Middle East, all prints stamped Y Club.)

**Series III: Oversized Materials, 1942-1958 and undated**

**Box 6**

Artwork

Original

F. 1	<i>The Ballet</i> , 1947 (Number 136 of a limited edition portfolio of lithographs by Russell Hartley; Danielian is plate 9.)
F. 2	Chalk sketch, undated (Figure of man, possibly Danielian, on black paper, signature and date illegible.)
F. 3	Pencil drawing, 1958 (Portrait of unidentified man, signed, H.F.S., 21.8.58.)
F. 4	<i>Studies for a Boy Book by Andy Warhol</i> , circa 1956 (Lithograph poster advertising exhibit at Bodley Gallery and Bookshop, Feb. 14 to Mar. 3.)
F. 5	Watercolor caricature, 1953 (Signed Braswell '53; damaged newspaper clipping pasted on surface.)

Reproductions (Prints of drawings, primarily Italian Renaissance artists.)

Artists, 1942 and undated

F. 6	A-T (Includes Degas print inscribed: To my dear Leonchik, Merry Christmas and Happy 1942, with much love, Katya.)
F. 7	Unidentified
F. 8	Fashion illustrations, undated (Berley Studios.)

**Box 7**

Photographs, undated

Box/Folder	Description
	Danielian solo portraits (By photographer.)
F. 1	Peter Basch
F. 2	Larry Cowell (Includes one with Ruthanna Boris.)
F. 3	Otto Fenn (Most in costume for <i>Quelques fleurs</i> .)
F. 4	Earle Forbes (Includes hand colored print.)
F. 5	G. Maillaird Kessler
F. 6	Stanley McDonald
<b>Box 8</b>	
F. 1	Irving Penn
F. 2	Wallace Seawell
F. 3	Unidentified photographers
<b>Box 9</b>	
F. 1	Danielian with partner (Most of the images appear to be from the same session, with the same partner, probably Boris.)
	Friends
F. 2	Alexandra Danilova, undated (Signed by Danilova; photograph by Jutaro Kenemoto.)
F. 3	Emmett, Kelly, 1947 (Inscribed by its photographer, Irving Penn.)
F. 4	Mikhail Mordkin, undated (Inscribed to Danielian by Mordkin, in Russian.)
F. 5	Groups (Probably an American Ballet Theatre anniversary gala curtain call.)
F. 6	Performances (Includes images of what may be outdoor performance of Danielian's <i>Sombreros</i> .)
F. 7	Teaching