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Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Beatrice Seckler papers

1945-1977

(S) *MGZMD 284

Compiled by Kate Jadwin, Pratt Institute, 2012, October 2011

Summary

Creator: Seckler, Beatrice

Title: Beatrice Seckler papers, 1945-1977

Size: .63 linear foot (2 boxes)

Source: Donated by Beatrice Seckler, 1993.

Abstract: Beatrice Seckler (1911-2002) was a professional dancer with a performance and teaching career that spanned over 40 years. The Beatrice Seckler papers contain programs, clippings, correspondences photographs, scripts, letters and other personal records reflecting selected periods in Seckler's life and career. This collection also features documentation of Aaron Cohen's unfinished biography of Seckler, represented through interview transcripts and correspondences.

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

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Preferred citation: Beatrice Seckler papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Custodial history

Portions of the collection have been removed for separate cataloging and processing. These include three audiocassettes (to S. Kraft) and two 8 x 10 photographs (to R. Walton).

Related collections

José Limón and Pauline Lawrence Limón photograph files, 1910?-1972?.Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Reminiscences of Beatrice Seckler: oral history, 1979.Columbia Center for Oral History, Columbia University Libraries.Forms part of: Bennington Summer School of the Dance project: oral history, 1978 -1979.

Creator history

Beatrice Seckler (1911-2002) was a renowned modern dancer with a performance and teaching career that spanned over 40 years. Born in Brooklyn, Seckler studied dance with Michio Ito, Angel Cansino and Yeichi Nimura before joining Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman's dance company in 1935. Seckler was a lead dancer with Humphrey and Weidman through the early 1940s and remained a dedicated proponent of the Humphrey-Weidman modern dance technique throughout her life.

From 1935 to 1942, Seckler danced with Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman & Company (later known as the Humphrey-Weidman Troupe). Later, from 1942 to 1945, she went on to perform with Lee Sherman as a featured dancer in revues that accompanied movie screenings at the Roxy Theatre. From 1945 to 1963 Seckler intermittently performed as a guest artist with the Sophie Maslow and the Anna Sokolow companies. She also toured with José Limón and Dorothy Bird as a member of the original trio, which later became the José Limón Company.

A key member in the nascent modern dance scene of the time, Seckler created roles in signature works by Humphrey ("New Dance," "With My Red Fires," "Theatre Piece" and "Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor"), Weidman ("Flickers" and "Lynchtown") and Sokolow ("Lyric Suite" and "Rooms"). Occasionally Seckler choreographed works herself, including a series of solos for Humphrey.

Beginning in 1948 and continuing for years Seckler was a leading teacher of the Humphrey-Weidman technique at the New Dance Group in New York City. In 1965 Seckler was the Artistic Director for the Dancer's Theatre Company, a group that performed modern dance classics and representative compositions of leading contemporary choreographers. In 1966, Seckler directed the New Dance Group Studio's junior repertory class in a Weidman-choreographed performance. Just after Charles Weidman's death in 1975, Seckler served as Artistic Director for a commemorative performance by the Charles Weidman Theatre Dance Company. From 1976 to 1996, she was the co-director of the Deborah Carr Theatre Dance Ensemble, whose repertory included works by Humphrey and Weidman, where she coached the performers on the Humphrey-Weidman style and dances.

Scope and content note

The Beatrice Seckler papers provide an overview of select periods throughout Seckler's life and career. The collection is composed of programs, photographs, correspondence, interview transcripts, newspaper and magazine clippings and photocopies, rehearsal schedules, advertisements, a poster, missives, performance rosters/contact lists, annotated flashcards/note cards, scripts, resumes and employment contracts.

Memorable performances that Seckler danced, directed or attended are represented by the collected programs, employment contracts, press clippings and photocopies, rehearsal schedules, advertisements, a poster, letters and contact lists. This collection contains several loose, undated photographs; there is a photographic negative, some performance shots and some posed shots of Seckler in costume. Seckler's correspondence is mostly comprised of thank-you letters from performers or organizations acknowledging her attendance or participation. Three copies of Seckler's resume are included, noting her education, honors and the highlights of her career until 1964.

The collection's interview transcripts and corresponding materials are part of a biography/autobiography project Seckler was working on with close friend, Aaron Cohen. While started as part of Cohen's undergraduate requirements when attending New York University, he ended his work on the project upon receiving his degree. Cohen recorded and transcribed interviews with Seckler herself, friends of Seckler, fellow dancers and others who knew her throughout her career. Correspondence to and from Cohen are included; the subject matter ranges from requests for interviews or information on Seckler, thank-you letters to participants and requests for others to take over the biography/autobiography project. Cohen's annotated flashcards are also included; though they are clearly related to the project, the precise meaning of the notes is ambiguous.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged alphabetically.

Key terms

Subjects

Dance companies -- United States
Modern dance

Names

Bird, Dorothy, 1912-
Cohen, Aaron
Garnet, Eva Desca
Humphrey-Weidman Company
Humphrey, Doris, 1895-1958
Limón, José
Maslow, Sophie
Morginsky, Martin
Seckler, Beatrice
Sokolow, Anna
Weidman, Charles

Container list

- b.1 f.1 1940s Miscellaneous, 1948
- b.1 f.2 1950s Miscellaneous, 1951-1954
- b.1 f.3 Anna Sokolow, 1955-1956
- b.1 f.4 Dancers' Theatre Co. & The Charles Weidman Theatre Co., 1964-1975
- b.1 f.5 Doris Humphrey, 1947
- b.1 f.6 Family and Personal, 1948-1972?
- b.1 f.7 Humphrey and Weidman Company, 1935-1942
- b.1 f.8 John Martin Programs and Correspondence, 1946-1949
- b.1 f.9 José Limón Trio, 1945-1946
- b.1 f.10 New Dance Group, 1966
- b.1 f.11 Programs of Lee Sherman and the Roxy Theatre, 1941-1949
- b.1 f.12 Seckler Resumés, 1964
- b.1 f.13 Sophie Maslow, 1952-1964

Transcripts

Aaron Cohen

- b.2 Index Cards, 1970s
- b.1 f.14 Notes for Seckler Biography, 1974-1975?
- b.1 f.15 Seckler-Related Correspondence, 1974-1977
- b.1 f.16 Transcriptions of Conversations, 1974-1975
- b.1 f.17 Early Period and Origins up to Humphrey and Weidman, 1974
- b.1 f.18 Late Period After Humphrey and Weidman , 1974
- b.1 f.19 Middle Period Humphrey and Weidman and Contemporary, 1974
- b.1 f.20 Present, 1974