



The New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Grace Cornell and Kurt Graff papers

1910s-1992 [bulk 1920s-1950s]

(S) *MGZMD 549

Processed by Amy Lau in 2021.

Summary

Creator: Cornell, Grace

Title: Grace Cornell and Kurt Graff papers

Date: 1910s-1992 [bulk 1920s-1950s]

Size: 2.75 linear feet (10 boxes)

Source: Donated by Grace Cornell Graff in 1994.

Abstract: Grace Cornell and Kurt Graff were a professional dance duo based in Chicago, Illinois, who founded the Little Concert House, Graff Ballet, and Meadow Hearth Theatre Art Center. Their papers date from the 1910s to 1992 and chronicle the Graffs' professional careers.

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). Audio and moving image materials will be subject to preservation assessment and migration prior to access.

Preferred citation: Grace Cornell and Kurt Graff papers, (S) *MGZMD 549. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: Multiple languages Materials in English, French, and German.

Processing note: Processed by Amy Lau in 2021.

Creator History

Grace Cornell Graff (born Grace Cornell; 1906, Chicago, Illinois) began her dance career in Chicago, Illinois studying ballet with Adolph Bolm in 1923. She also studied ballet in Milan, Italy with Enrico Cecchetti. She gave her first solo dance concert at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, and toured around Western Europe in the spring of 1928. In the fall of that year, Cornell made her American debut at the Booth Theater in New York City where she appeared with Frank Parker, a dancer. Through the

fall and winter, Cornell toured with Parker to perform in Chicago, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri.

Cornell returned to Europe in 1929 to study modern dance with Rudolph von Laban in Berlin, Germany. While studying with Laban, Cornell met Kurt Graff but decided to return to America in 1930 to work with Martha Graham's modern dance group in New York City. She returned to Berlin, Germany in 1931 to continue studying modern dance with Laban and danced with Kurt Graff for the first time.

Kurt Graff (born in 1910, in Bonn, Germany) initially studied dance at the Folkwang School in Essen, Germany. Graff also studied modern dance with Laban and danced with Laban's group based in Berlin, Germany. In 1929, he taught dance for a year in Paris, France, and danced in Kurt Jooss' ballet company. In 1930, Kurt Graff left Kurt Jooss' company to become the principal dancer with the Staatsoper in Berlin, Germany. In 1932, Graff decided to leave the Staatsoper to perform and tour America with Grace Cornell.

From 1932 to 1933, Cornell and Graff toured America performing together in New York, Florida, and Illinois. They followed their American tour with a tour of Europe and Russia and were married in 1934. In 1935, the Graffs established Little Concert House, a dance theater, studio, and home, in Chicago, Illinois. The Graffs also created their own dance company, Graff Ballet, in 1936. The company's repertoire included ballet and modern dance pieces. When America entered World War II, Kurt Graff and all of the men in Graff Ballet served in the American armed forces.

In the late 1940s, the Graffs turned a colonial home in Hopkinton, New Hampshire into an artists' colony. The property, known as Meadow Hearth Theatre Art Center, had an outdoor theater, dance studios, and residential buildings. In addition to holding summer dance festivals at Meadow Hearth, the Graffs taught modern and square dance lessons, and produced concerts and plays during the 1950s.

Grace Cornell Graff died in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1992. Kurt Graff died in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1993.

Scope and Content Note

The Grace Cornell and Kurt Graff papers date from the 1910s to 1992, and recount mainly the Graffs' professional dance careers. The collection is composed of mostly scrapbooks which contain press clippings, photographs, programs, flyers, postcards, and correspondence. It also includes some piano sheet music, sound recordings, posters, notebooks, and notes. The bulk of the papers date from the 1920s to 1950s, and consist primarily of Grace Cornell's scrapbooks; material from the Graffs' international and national tours; and scrapbooks, press clippings, and programs from the Graffs' years running the Meadow Hearth Theatre Art Center and Little Concert House. A small portion of the collection features candid photographs of the Graffs, Grace Cornell's collection of piano sheet music, and sound recordings from Kurt Graff's vinyl record collection.

The International and National Performances grouping dates from the 1910s to the 1960s, and holds scrapbooks, programs, photographs, press clippings, and posters from the Graffs' years performing around the world. Present are scrapbooks, dating from the 1930s to the 1950s, about the Graffs' worldwide performances, along with programs, press kits, and photographs of Graff Ballet. Most of the Graffs' professionally-shot photographs were taken by Maurice Seymour.

The Little Concert House and Meadow Hearth Theatre Art Center Files date from 1931 to the 1950s, and record the Graffs' work establishing and producing dance, theater, and concert productions in Chicago, Illinois and Hopkinton, New Hampshire, respectively. The files are made up of ephemera and

photographs that the Graffs' used to promote the productions and dance classes that were run on the properties. The Graffs created scrapbooks for each property, which include press clippings and photographs that document the establishment of the artistic sites, and the productions and events held at each location.

The Personal Files span from the 1910s to 1992, and comprise personal material created and collected by the Graffs. The majority of the files feature Grace Cornell's scrapbooks, dating from 1924 to 1933, that reveal the pre-performance and early performance years of her dance career. Included in Cornell's scrapbooks are newspaper clippings, photographs, programs, and personal correspondence. Of note are commercial music recordings from Kurt Graff's vinyl record collection, which includes piano music by Heitor Villa-Lobos, symphonies by Aaron Copland and Halsey Stevens, and folk music by Abi and Esther Ofarim; published piano sheet music with inscriptions by Grace Cornell; drafts of poems about the Graffs' friends and dance teachers; notes about dance pieces; and play scripts with notes in them.

Arrangement: This collection is arranged alphabetically in the following three groupings: International and National Performances; Little Concert House and Meadow Hearth Theatre Art Center Files; and Personal Files.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Albums (books)
Dance programs
Fliers (Ephemera)
Newspapers
Notebooks
Photographs

Subjects

Ballet
Dance -- 20th century
Dance -- Study and teaching
Dance companies
Modern dance

Occupations

Dancers.
Theatrical directors.

Names

Bolm, Adolph, 1884-1951
Cornell, Grace
Graff, Kurt
Graff Ballet
Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

Container List

International and National Performances 1910s-1960s

- b. 1 f. 1 Flyers and Programs 1940s-1950s
- b. 1 f. 2-7 Photographs 1910s-1960s
 - b. 4 f. 1
 - b. 5 f. 1-2
- b. 1 f. 8 Posters 1942-1943
- b. 1 f. 9-16 Press Clippings 1928-1961
- b. 1 f. 17-18 Press Kits 1950s
- b. 2 f. 1-2 Programs 1928-1950
 - b. 5 f. 5
 - b. 7 f. 1
 - b. 8 f. 2
- b. 9 f. 1-2 Scrapbooks 1924-1953

Little Concert House and Meadow Hearth Theatre Art Center Files 1931-1950s

Little Concert House

- b. 2 f. 3 Newspaper Clippings 1952-1953
- b. 10 f. 2 Scrapbook 1931-1937

Meadow Hearth

- b. 2 f. 4 Flyers 1948-1950s
- b. 10 f. 3 Newspaper Clippings 1949
- b. 2 f. 5 Notes 1950s
- b. 2 f. 6-7 Photographs 1948-1953
- b. 2 f. 8 Postcards 1950s
- b. 2 f. 9 Press Clippings 1953
- b. 6 f. 1 Scrapbook 1948-1953
- b. 10 f. 4

Personal Files 1910s-1992

- b. 2 f. 10 Book Inscriptions 1950-1962
- Cornell, Grace
- b. 2 f. 11-14 Piano Sheet Music 1920s-1940s
 - b. 6 f. 2
 - b. 8 f. 1
 - b. 10 f. 1
- b. 2 f. 15-16 Correspondence 1941-1980s
- Graff, Kurt
- b. 2 f. 17 Certificate 1984
- b. 4 f. 2 Photographs 1930s
- Record Collection
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- b. 2 f. 18 Notebook 1950s
- b. 2 f. 19 Notebook and Notes 1950s

Personal Files (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 20-21 Photographs 1910s-1970s
 - b. 3 f. 1
 - b. 5 f. 3-4
- b. 3 f. 2 Poem Drafts 1980s-1992
- b. 3 f. 3-4 Programs 1937-1982
 - b. 9 f. 3
- b. 3 f. 5 Script Notes 1950s