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Guide to the

Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records

1942-2003

(S) *MGZMD 295

Processed by Lea Jordan in 2012. Edits to finding aid made by Susan M. Kline, March 2017.

Summary

Creator: Cunningham, Merce

Title: Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records

Date: 1942-2003

Size: 9.17 linear feet (22 boxes, 1 oversized folder)

Source: Purchased from Merce Cunningham Dance Foundation, Inc., 1999.

Abstract: The Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records contain materials relating to over 100 of Cunningham's original works. These primarily reflect pieces created for the Company, but there are some notes relating to Cunningham's early compositions created between 1942 and 1952. Merce Cunningham (1919-2009) was a dancer, choreographer, and founder of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

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Creator History

Merce Cunningham (1919-2009) was a dancer, choreographer, and founder of the Merce Cunningham

Dance Company. He was born in Centralia, Washington and began his professional modern dance career at age 20, dancing as a soloist with the Martha Graham Dance Company for six years. Cunningham showed promise as a choreographer and presented his first solo show in 1944, acting as both dancer and choreographer.

He formed Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Black Mountain College in 1953. The company provided a platform for collaboration with John Cage, the musical advisor from its inception until his death in 1992. Together, Cunningham and Cage proposed a number of innovations; the most famous of these concerned the relationship between dance and music. While they conceded they should occur in the same time and space, they felt they should be created independently of one another. Cunningham also collaborated with Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, and many others. For Cunningham, the subject of his dances was always dance itself.

Invention and reinvention were a hallmark of the Merce Cunningham Company, and a new genre, the Event, rose from these experiments. Cunningham would splice together different elements from past compositions – solos, duets, costumes, décor, and music to create wholly new experiences – giving new meaning to each piece as it was removed from its original context. Over his career he created over 150 individual works and more than 800 Events.

During the 1970s, Cunningham began to explore filming dance as an art form. In 1989 he began experimenting with composing dances on the computer and *Trackers* (1991) became his first piece composed in this way. Cunningham danced with the company as he aged, and even after he began to use a wheelchair, continued to choreograph.

After Cunningham's death in 2009, the company embarked on its final, two-year world tour.

Scope and Content Note

The Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records contain materials relating to over 100 of Cunningham's original works. These primarily reflect pieces created for the Company, but there are some notes relating to Cunningham's early compositions created between 1942 and 1952. The materials consist of choreographic notebooks, both bound and loose, all in Cunningham's hand. There are charts, time outlines, sketches, and names of individual dancers. Most notebooks reflect several periods of change as the dances were premiered and then later pulled back in for use in "Events." There are some Event outlines and plans within the records, as well as choreographic notes for dance workshops given by Cunningham. Many of the notes are dated. Some folders contain a typed explanation of the work by Cunningham, describing what the focus of the specific piece was and ideas he was attempting to explore.

Arrangement: Alphabetical by title.

Key Terms

Subjects

Artistic collaboration

Choreographers

Dance companies -- United States

Dancers

Modern dance -- United States -- 20th century

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Notebooks

Names

Merce Cunningham Dance Company

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-2 *Aeon* 1961
- b. 1 f. 3-4 *Antic Meet* 1958
 - b. 1 f. 5 *Arcade* 1985
 - b. 1 f. 6 *Assemblage* 1968
- b. 1 f. 7-8 *August Pace* 1989-1991
- b. 18 f. 1 *August Pace* 1989-1991
 - b. 1 f. 9 *Beach Birds* 1991
- b. 18 f. 2-3 *Beach Birds* 1991
- b. 2 f. 1-2 *Biped* 1999
 - b. 2 f. 3 *Blue Studio* 1975
 - b. 2 f. 4 *Borst Park* 1972
- b. 18 f. 4 *Breakers* 1993
 - b. 2 f. 5 *Cargo X* 1989
 - b. 2 f. 6 *Camera III* 1979
 - b. 2 f. 7 *Canfield* 1969
- b. 18 f. 5 *Canfield* 1969
- b. 2 f. 8-9 *Carousal* 1987
- b. 2 f. 10 *Change of Address* 1992
- b. 3 f. 1-3 *Changing Steps* 1975
- b. 3 f. 4-5 *Channels/Inserts* 1981
 - b. 3 f. 6 *Coast Zone* 1983
 - o. 1 *Coast Zone* 1983
Dance cage - flat file #260
 - b. 3 f. 7 *Collage* 1952-1953
- b. 18 f. 6 *Collage* 1952-1953
- b. 3 f. 8 *Crises* 1960
- b. 3 f. 9-10 *CRWDSPCR* 1993
 - b. 4 f. 1 *Dance in America* 1976
 - b. 4 f. 2 *Deli Commedia* 1985
 - b. 4 f. 3 *Dime a Dance* 1953, 1994
 - b. 4 f. 4 *Doubles* 1984
- b. 4 f. 5-6 *Doubletoss* 1993
Also contains materials for Ocean
- b. 18 f. 7 *Doubletoss* 1993
- b. 4 f. 7 *Duets* 1982
- b. 4 f. 8-9 *Eleven* 1987-1988
- b. 5 f. 1 *Enter* 1992
- b. 18 f. 8 *Enter* 1992
- Events
- General

- Events (cont.)
General (cont.)
- b. 20 f. 12-14 Undated
 - b. 21 f. 1-3 Undated
 - b. 21 f. 4 1976
 - b. 21 f. 5 1978
 - b. 5 f. 2 1984
 - b. 21 f. 6 1984-1986
 - b. 21 f. 7-13 1990-1999
 - b. 22 f. 1-2 1990-1999
 - b. 22 f. 3 Amex Event 2002
 - b. 22 f. 4 Ann Arbor 1994
 - b. 22 f. 5 Battery Park Event 2005
 - b. 22 f. 6 Craneway Event 2008
 - b. 22 f. 7 Dances and Exerpts, Brooklyn College undated
 - b. 22 f. 8 India and Asia Events 1984
 - b. 22 f. 9 Jacobs Pillow Event 2003
 - b. 22 f. 10 Kronos Event 2008
 - b. 22 f. 11 Paris Event undated
 - b. 22 f. 12 Pennsylvania Event 1995
 - b. 22 f. 13 Slouch Event 1995
 - b. 22 f. 14 Union Event undated
 - b. 5 f. 3 *Exchange* 1978
 - b. 18 f. 9 *eyeSpace* undated
 - b. 5 f. 4-5 *Fabrications* 1987
 - b. 5 f. 6 *Falls* 1977
 - b. 18 f. 10 *Falls* 1977
 - b. 5 f. 7-8 *Field and Figures* 1989
 - b. 18 f. 11 *Field and Figures* 1989
 - b. 5 f. 9 *Field Dances* 1963
 - b. 6 f. 1 *Fielding Sixes* 1980
 - b. 6 f. 2 *50 Looks* undated
 - b. 6 f. 3-4 *Five Stone Wind* 1988
 - b. 6 f. 5 *Fluid Canvas* 2002
 - b. 18 f. 12 *Fluid Canvas* 2002
 - b. 6 f. 6 *Fractions* 1977
 - b. 6 f. 7 *Fragments* 1953
 - b. 6 f. 8 *Galaxy* 1956
 - b. 6 f. 9-10 *Gallopage* 1981
 - b. 6 f. 11-12 *Gambit for Dancers and Orchestra* 1959
 - b. 7 f. 1 *Grange Eve* 1986
 - b. 18 f. 13 *Grange Eve* 1986
 - b. 7 f. 2 *Ground Level Overlay* 1995

- b. 18 f. 14 *Ground Level Overlay* 1995
- b. 18 f. 15 *Holzaepfel* undated
 - b. 7 f. 3 *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* 1965
- b. 18 f. 16 *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* 1965
- b. 7 f. 4-5 *Inlets* 1977
 - b. 7 f. 6 *Installations* 1996
 - b. 7 f. 7 *Instant* undated
- b. 18 f. 17 *Interscape* undated
 - b. 7 f. 8 *Inventions* 1989
- b. 8 f. 1-3 *Un Jour ou Deux* 1973-1986
 - b. 8 f. 4 *Labyrinthian Dances* 1957
- b. 18 f. 18 *Landrover* undated
 - b. 8 f. 5 *Lavish Escapade* 1956
 - b. 8 f. 6 *Locale* 1979
 - b. 8 f. 7 *Loops* 1971
- b. 18 f. 19 *Loops* 1971
 - b. 8 f. 9 *Loose Time* 2002
- b. 18 f. 20 *Loose Time* 2002
 - b. 8 f. 8 *Loosestrife* 1991
- b. 9 f. 1 *Minutiae* 1954
- b. 18 f. 21 *Minutiae* 1954
 - b. 9 f. 2 *Music Walk With Dancers* 1960
 - b. 9 f. 3 *Native Green* 1985
- b. 18 f. 22-23 *Nearly Ninety* 2009
 - b. 9 f. 4 *Neighbors* 1991
 - b. 9 f. 5 *Night Wandering* 1958
- b. 19 f. 1 *Night Wandering* 1958
 - b. 9 f. 6 *Les Noces* 1952
 - b. 9 f. 7 *Nocturnes* 1956
 - b. 9 f. 8 *Numbers* 1981
 - b. 9 f. 9 *Objects* 1970
 - b. 9 f. 10 *Occasion Piece* 1999
 - b. 9 f. 11 *Ocean* 1994
- b. 10 f. 1 *Ocean* 1994
- b. 19 f. 2 *Ocean* 1994
 - b. 10 f. 2 *Paired* 1964
 - b. 10 f. 3 *Phrases* 1984
- b. 19 f. 3 *Picnic Polka* 1957
 - b. 10 f. 4 *Pictures* 1984
 - b. 10 f. 5 *Place* 1966
- b. 19 f. 4 *Place* 1966

- b. 10 f. 6-7 *Points in Space* 1986
- b. 10 f. 8 *The Princess Zoodilda and Her Entourage* 1946
- b. 11 f. 1 *Polarity* 1990
- b. 11 f. 2 *Pond Way* 1998
- b. 19 f. 5 *Pond Way* 1998
- b. 11 f. 3 *Quartet* 1982
- b. 11 f. 4 *RainForest* 1968
- b. 11 f. 5 *Rebus* 1975
- b. 11 f. 6 *Roadrunners* 1979
- b. 11 f. 7-10 *Roaratorio* 1983
- b. 12 f. 1 *Rondo* 1996
- b. 19 f. 6 *Rondo* 1996
- b. 12 f. 2 *Root of an Unfocus* 1944
- b. 12 f. 3 *Rune* 1959
- b. 12 f. 4 *Scenario* 1997
- b. 12 f. 5 *Scramble* 1967
- b. 19 f. 7 *Scramble* 1967
- b. 17 f. 1 *The Seasons* 1947
- b. 12 f. 6 *Second Hand* 1970
- b. 12 f. 7 *Septet* 1953
- b. 17 f. 2 *Septet* 1953
- b. 19 f. 8 *Septet* 1953
- b. 12 f. 8 *Shards* 1986-1987
- b. 19 f. 9 *Signals* 1981
- b. 19 f. 10 *Signals* undated
- b. 13 f. 1-3 *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three* 1951
- b. 13 f. 4 *Solos* 1970-1979
- b. 19 f. 11 *Sounddance* 1974
- b. 13 f. 5 *Split Sides* 2003
- b. 19 f. 12 *Split Sides* 2004
- b. 19 f. 13-15 *Springweather and People* 1954-1955
- b. 13 f. 6 *Squaregame* 1976
- b. 13 f. 7 *Story* 1963
- b. 19 f. 16 *Story* 1963
- b. 14 f. 1-2 *Suite for Five in Space and Time* 1952, 1981
- b. 14 f. 3 *Suite for Two* undated
- b. 14 f. 4-7 *Summerspace* 1958
- b. 19 f. 17 *Summerspace* 1958
- b. 14 f. 8 *Tango* 1976
- b. 14 f. 9 *Tav* 1974
- b. 14 f. 10 *Tens with Shoes* 1981

- b. 14 f. 11 *Theater Piece* 1961
- b. 15 f. 1 *Torse* 1976
- b. 15 f. 2 *Totem Ancestor* 1942
- b. 15 f. 3-4 *Touchbase* 1992
- b. 20 f. 1-4 *Trackers* 1990-1991, 1993
- b. 15 f. 5 *Trails* 1982
- b. 15 f. 6 *Travelogue* 1977
- b. 15 f. 7 *Tread* 1970
- b. 15 f. 8 *Tune In/ Spin Out* 1996
- b. 15 f. 9 *TV Rerun* 1971-1974
- b. 20 f. 5 *TV Rerun* 1971-1974
- b. 20 f. 6-7 *Unidentified Pieces* undated
- b. 15 f. 10 *Untitled Solo* 1952
- b. 15 f. 11 *Variation* 1951
- b. 16 f. 1 *Variations V* 1965
- b. 20 f. 8 *Views* undated
- b. 16 f. 2 *Virginia* 1947
- b. 16 f. 3 *Waka* 1960
- b. 16 f. 4 *Walkaround Time* 1968
- b. 20 f. 9 *Way Station* 2000
- b. 16 f. 5 *Westbeth* 1974
- b. 16 f. 6-7 *Windows* 1995
- b. 20 f. 10 *Windows* 1995
- b. 16 f. 8 *Winterbranch* 1964
- b. 20 f. 11 *Winterbranch* 1964
- b. 22 f. 15-20 *Workshops* 1970-1999