



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Mura Dehn notebooks

1965-1987

(S) *MGZMD 408

Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

Summary

Creator: Dehn, Mura

Title: Mura Dehn notebooks

Date: 1965-1987

Size: .42 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Donated by Lillian Morrison, 1994

Abstract: Mura Dehn (1902-1987) was a dancer and dance historian known for her study and documentation of black social dances in the United States. The Mura Dehn notebooks contain early drafts of Dehn's writings, as well as original poetry, song lyrics, and notes to self.

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Preferred citation: Mura Dehn notebooks, (S) *MGZMD 408. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

Related Materials:

Mura Dehn Papers on Afro-American Social Dance, ca. 1869-1987, (S) *MGZMD 72. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator History

Mura Dehn (1902-1987) was a dancer and dance historian known for her study and documentation of black social dances in the United States. Dehn was born in Russia and studied and performed modern dance in Paris in the 1920s. After being exposed to jazz dance, she moved to New York in 1930 where she performed, taught and choreographed works with her partner, Roger Pryor Dodge. In order to preserve different forms of jazz dance for future generations, she began filming dancers at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. This footage eventually would become part of her documentary film *The Spirit*

Moves (1987).

Dehn also formed the Traditional Jazz Dance Company (Jazz Dance Theatre) with James Berry in order to promote jazz dancing. The company toured widely in the United States, and in 1969 was sponsored by the State Department on a tour of Africa. Throughout her career, she wrote and spoke on the development of black social dance. *The Lion Tamer*, a book of her poetry was published in 1987. She retired in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

The Mura Dehn notebooks contain early drafts of Dehn's writings, as well as original poetry, song lyrics, and notes to self. Individual notebooks hold varied types of material, and writing often switches between front to back and back to front. Examples of writings include early drafts of a jazz dance history manuscript (also titled *The Spirit Moves*), her 1977 thoughts on the new dance style of disco, and drafts of letters. Most of the letter drafts are to grant-giving organizations and individuals who may have been in a position to help her finish her film. There is also original poetry, song lyrics, quotes, and short musings on old age.

Key Terms

Subjects

Dance -- United States -- History

Jazz dance

Poetry

Rock and roll dancing