



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Lavinia Williams papers

1940-1989

Sc MG 659

Summary

Creator: Yarborough, Lavinia Williams

Title: Lavinia Williams papers

Date: 1940-1989

Size: 7.75 linear feet (21 boxes)

Source: Gift of Lavinia Williams, 2001.

Abstract: Lavinia Williams was an African American dancer, teacher, and choreographer who played an influential role in the development of modern and folkloric dances in Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana, and the Bahamas. Organized into fifteen interrelated series, the collection documents Williams's career as a dance teacher and choreographer in Haiti from the mid-1950s to the end of her life.

Preferred citation: [Item], Lavinia Williams papers, Sc MG 659, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English Some material in French.

Processing note: Accessioned by Andre Elizee, May 2002.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio and moving image materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Related Materials:

Lavinia Williams collection, Sc MG 659, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Creator History

Lavinia Williams was an African American dancer, teacher, and choreographer who played an influential role in the development of modern and folkloric dances in Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana, and the Bahamas. She was a member of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company between 1940 and 1945. Her daughter, Sara Yarborough, was a star dancer with the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater. Williams died in Haiti in 1989.

Custodial History

Collection willed to the Schomburg Center by Lavinia Williams but impounded by the Haitian government until 2001.

Scope and Content Note

This collection documents Williams's career as a dance teacher and choreographer in Haiti from the mid-1950s to the end of her life. Additional materials pertain to her early career in the United States; the world of Caribbean dance; her daughter Sara Yarborough's professional achievements; and Katherine Dunham.

Arrangement: Arranged into 14 series: I. Personal; II. Correspondence; III. Early career; IV. Haiti; V. Caribbean dance; VI. Writing; VII. Scrapbooks; VIII. Newspaper clippings; IX. Dunham, Katherine; X. Yarborough, Sara; XI. Programs; XII. Dance notes and teaching material; XIII. Printed and research matter; and XIV. Publications (that mention Williams, Sara Yarborough, and Dunham).

Key Terms

Subjects

Ballet -- Haiti
Choreographers -- Haiti
Dance -- Bahamas
Dance -- Guyana
Dance -- Jamaica
Dance -- Religious aspects
Dance -- Study and teaching -- Haiti
Dance -- Trinidad and Tobago
Dance companies -- Haiti
Dance schools -- Haiti
Dance teachers -- Caribbean Area
Dance teachers -- Haiti
Folk dancing, Haitian
John Canoe (Dance)
Modern dance -- Technique -- Dunham
Religious dance
Tourism -- Haiti
Vodou

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings

Diaries
Programs
Scrapbooks

Names

Destiné, Jean Léon
Dunham, Katherine
Maximilien, Régine
Montrosier-Trouillot, Regine
Nettleford, Rex.
Piquion, René
Romero, Carmencita, 1914- 2001
Yarborough, Lavinia Williams
Yarborough, Sara
Club des femmes de carrières libérales et commerciales de Port-au-Prince
Guyana National School of Dance
Haitian Institute for Folklore and Classic Dance
Katherine Dunham Company
National Dance Theater Company of Jamaica
National Folkloric Troupe of Haiti
World Festival of Negro Arts

Container List

Personal 1944-1984

The Personal series includes biographical material, several interviews with Williams, a private 1969 diary, and a detailed index of activities and writings about Williams.

- b. 1 f. 1 Yarborough, Sharon
- b. 1 f. 2 Certificates and letters of appointment
- b. 1 f. 3 Financial
- b. 1 f. 4 Appointment books 1982-1984
- b. 1 f. 5 Honors and awards
- b. 1 f. 6 Invitations
- b. 1 f. 7 Copyright registration for Williams's recorded dance Instruction in Haitian folklore
- b. 1 f. 8 Letter from "Helmut" 1944
- b. 1 f. 9 Diary 1969
- Interviews
- b. 1 f. 10 *Nouvelliste Newspaper*
- b. 1 f. 11 McDonald, Annette
- b. 1 f. 12 Other
- b. 1 f. 13 Flanigan, Joanne. "Lavinia Williams Dance Technique"
- b. 1 f. 14 Biographical data
Includes index of activities.
- b. 1 f. 15 Articles about Williams
- b. 1 f. 16 Publications that mention Williams
- b. 1 f. 17-18 Promotional material and course listings
- b. 1 f. 19 Clippings and publicity material

Correspondence 1952-1989

The Correspondence series consists of incoming letters, arranged chronologically, and individual files for fellow dancers and choreographers Jean-Leon Destiné, Rex Nettleford, and Carmencita Romero. The 1952-1971 file is an informative sample of letters from Haitian government officials, managers of performance spaces in Port-au-Prince, and foreign visitors seeking Williams's mediation or expertise for their research projects.

- b. 2 f. 1 Destiné, Jean-Léon
- b. 2 f. 2 Nettleford, Rex
- b. 2 f. 3 Romero, Carmencita
- b. 2 f. 4 Letters from former students
- b. 2 f. 5 New York Public Library
- b. 2 f. 6 Miscellaneous letters sent
- Letters received
- b. 2 f. 7 1952-1971
- b. 2 f. 8 1980-1984
- b. 2 f. 8 1985
- b. 2 f. 10-11 1986
- b. 2 f. 12 1987

Correspondence (cont.)
Letters received (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 13 1988
- b. 2 f. 14 1989
- b. 2 f. 15 undated

Early career 1939-1952

Williams's early career is sketchily documented with reviews and promotional material about Eugene von Grona's 1939 festival, "The Dance"; Agnes de Mille's recreation of a West Indian ritual, "Obeah" (1940); and the Broadway productions of *Finian's Rainbow* (1947) and *My Darling Aida* (1952). Other memorabilia include a scrapbook and a travel diary of the artist's USO tour in Europe in 1945-1946, and a 1942-1945 notebook containing drawings, sketches, and notes on the Katherine Dunham dance technique.

- b. 3 f. 1 von Grona, Eugene 1939
- b. 3 f. 2 Agnes de Mille's Negro Ballet Group 1940
- b. 3 f. 3 Notebook 1942-1945
- b. 3 f. 4 U.S.O. European Tour 1945-1946
- b. 3 f. 5 Travel diary 1945-1946
- b. 3 f. 6 Nijinsky, Kira and Sacha Sarkoff material
- b. 3 f. 7 *Finian's Rainbow* 1947
- b. 3 f. 8 *My Darlin' Aida* 1952
- b. 3 f. 9 Dance notes 1951-1952

Haiti 1954-1987

The largest in the collection, the Haiti series includes material related to Williams's work as a dance teacher and choreographer at the National School for the Arts (ENARTS) from 1984 to 1989. Earlier materials include a 1954 proposal for a dance studio-theater, and a later proposal for a National Opera House (1972). Williams maintained individual files on the career of her students who later became professional dancers and choreographers, most notably Regine Maximilien, Regine Montrosier, and her own daughter, Sara Yarborough. Williams's work was strongly influenced by Vodou (voodoo) dances and rituals, and there is a fair amount of documentation that she collected on that religion, as well as on Haitian music and folklore.

- b. 4 f. 1 Articles and essays on Haiti by Williams
- Ecole Nationale des Arts (ENARTS)
- b. 4 f. 2 Correspondence
- b. 4 f. 3 Administrative
- b. 4 f. 4 Theatre de Verdure - Theatre National
- b. 4 f. 5 "Plan for a Studio-Theater" 1954
- b. 4 f. 6 Proposal for a National Opera House 1972
- b. 4 f. 7 National School of Dance tentative program 1984
- b. 4 f. 8 Flag Day Parade
- b. 4 f. 9 Haiti at Carifesta
- b. 4 f. 10 School of Ballet of Ethno-Folklore and Jazz
- b. 4 f. 11 Institut Haitien de Danses Classique et Folklorique
- b. 4 f. 12-13 Dance classes (attendance and bookkeeping) 1986
- Students
- b. 4 f. 15 David, Gertie (Miss Haiti) 1975
- b. 4 f. 16 Jean-Louis, Rachel
- b. 4 f. 17 Maximilien, Regine
- b. 4 f. 18 Montrosier, Regine

Haiti (cont.)

Students (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 19 Toussaint, Edy
- Choreography
- b. 5 f. 1 *Choucounne (ballet)*
- b. 5 f. 2 *Bamboche Creole*
- b. 5 f. 3 *La Passion Selon St. Jean*
- b. 5 f. 4 *The Nutcracker*
- b. 5 f. 5 *South Pacific*
- b. 5 f. 6 Folklore workshop 1983
- b. 5 f. 7 Ethno-gym television program 1985
- b. 5 f. 8 Dance Teachers' Association of Haiti
- b. 5 f. 9 Dance schools in Haiti
- b. 5 f. 10 Centre Haitien de Théâtre
- b. 5 f. 11 Club des Femmes de Carrière
- b. 5 f. 12 Rotary Club of Port-au-Prince
- b. 5 f. 13 de Pradines, Emarante
- b. 5 f. 14 Piquion, René
- b. 5 f. 15 Family of President Paul Magloire
- b. 5 f. 16 The Duvaliers
- b. 5 f. 17-18 "Haiti", CBS religious unit 1982
- b. 5 f. 19 "The Open Gate", CBS program on Vodun
- b. 5 f. 20 Narcisse, Andre. "Macaya, Roi"
- b. 6 f. 1 Notes and research material on Haitian dance
- b. 6 f. 2 Daniel, Yvonne. M.A. thesis on Haitian dance
- b. 6 f. 3 Philippe, Jeanne. Haitian discography
- b. 6 f. 4 Influences of Haitian dance
- b. 6 f. 5 Deren, Maya. Article on Haitian dance
- b. 6 f. 6 Haitian music and songs
- b. 6 f. 7 Printed matter on Haitian dance
- b. 6 f. 8 Haitian folklore
- b. 6 f. 9 Salaam, Abdel. "Ebony Magic: Choreodrama on the Life of Marie Laveau"
- Vodou
- b. 6 f. 10 General
- b. 6 f. 11 Printed matter
- b. 6 f. 12 Choreography
- b. 6 f. 13 Sigurd, Jacques. "The Voodoo Tragedy" 1975
- b. 6 f. 14 Tourism promotion
- b. 6 f. 15 Political situation 1987
- b. 6 f. 16-17 Printed matter

Caribbean dance 1970-1988

The Caribbean dance series documents Williams's contribution to the development of modern dance in Guyana, the Bahamas, and Jamaica. Included are lecture notes; printed matter; reviews of performances choreographed by Williams; research material on the Bahamian festival of Junkanoo and Trinidadian dance; and programs and promotional material of the Jamaica School of Dance and the National Dance Theater of Jamaica.

Arranged into 5 subseries: (1) Guyana; (2) Bahamas; (3) Jamaica; (4) Trinidad and Tobago; and (5) General.

Guyana

- b. 7 f. 1 Notes and research material
- b. 7 f. 2-3 Carifesta 1973-1976
- b. 7 f. 4 Articles in Guyanese newspapers, French translations 1972
- b. 7 f. 5 Printed matter

Bahamas

- b. 7 f. 6 Junkanoo
- b. 7 f. 7 Newspaper articles 1970-1977
- b. 7 f. 8 "Bahamian Migration to Key West", New York University Diaspora Conference 1980

Jamaica

- b. 7 f. 9 Baxter, Ivy. "Dance We Dance" 1988
- b. 7 f. 10 Jamaica National School of Dance
- b. 7 f. 11 University of the West Indies Summer Dance Program
- b. 7 f. 12 Bethel, Clement memorial
- b. 7 f. 13 "One Love" reggae ballet 1983
- b. 7 f. 14 Printed matter
- b. 7 f. 15 Trinidad and Tobago
- b. 7 f. 16 General

Writing 1979-1984

The Writing series consists, for the most part, of handwritten notes, a few finished essays, and conference papers on Haitian, Caribbean, and African American dance.

- b. 8 f. 1 "Caribbean Dance Defined, a Reality in Jamaica"
- b. 8 f. 2 "Haiti: Dance"
- b. 8 f. 3 *"Katherine Dunham Method and Technique," in Katherine Dunham: Reflections on the Social and Political Contexts of Afro-American Dance, edited by Joyce Aschenbrenner*
- b. 8 f. 4 "The World of the Caribbean"
- b. 8 f. 5-6 "Origins of Black Dance in America" 1983-1984
- b. 8 f. 7 "La Contre Danse" - choreography
- b. 8 f. 8 Articles (various)
- Lectures and notes
 - b. 8 f. 9 Haiti 1982-1983
 - b. 8 f. 10 Black dance
 - b. 8 f. 11 Haitian dance

Writing (cont.)

Lectures and notes (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 12 Haitian Carnival
- b. 8 f. 13 Caribbean Cultural Center 1979
- b. 8 f. 14 Choreography
- b. 8 f. 15-16 Miscellaneous notes and lectures
- b. 8 f. 17 Miscellaneous notes and printed matter in Russian

Scrapbooks 1940-1973

Ranging from 1940 to 1973, and bearing the title "Née pour la danse" ("Born to Dance"), is a series of scrapbooks elaborately organized by Williams herself. The scrapbooks are arranged chronologically and document Williams's successes in Haiti and her role in the valorization of the island's African-derived folklore as a tourist attraction and as a new vista for the local elite. They consist, for the most part, of newspaper and magazine articles, with occasional photographs, performance programs, and other memorabilia. The focus varies on Haiti to Jamaica and the dates overlap, in some cases, as a result. The 1953-1954 volume includes some memorabilia of Haitian President Paul Eugene Magloire's family. The three scrapbooks from the First World Festival of Negro Arts (Dakar, Senegal, 1966) include several photographs with President Francois Duvalier, including a portrait with Williams, and photographs of performances by the participating Haitian Troupe Nationale Folklorique in Dakar.

- b. 9 f. 1 1940-1969
- b. 9 f. 2 1953-1954
- b. 9 f. 3 1955-1960
- b. 9 f. 4 1961-1966
- b. 9 f. 5 1967-1969
- b. 9 f. 6 Guyana 1973
- b. 10 First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar 1966

Clippings 1953-1987

The scrapbook series is complemented by this Clipping file, ranging from 1953 to 1987. Most of the articles are in French. There is also a selection of articles in English after 1972, documenting Williams's contribution to the development of Caribbean dance.

Some material in French.

- b. 11 f. 1 1951-1955
Includes index.
- b. 11 f. 2 1955-1959
- b. 11 f. 3 1960-1966
- b. 11 f. 4 1962
- b. 11 f. 5 1968-1970
- b. 11 f. 6 1971-1975
- b. 11 f. 7 1972-1974
- b. 11 f. 8 1973-1976
- b. 11 f. 9 1980-1987

Dunham, Katherine 1942-1979

The Dunham files include a six-page incomplete letter that Williams wrote about Dunham; a carbon copy of Dunham's 1938 master's thesis on Haitian dance; and a prospectus for the Institute for Caribbean Research, a project of the Katherine Dunham School of Arts and Research. Also included are newspaper clippings and promotional material about Dunham's celebrated tourist resort, Habitation Leclerc, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, and an incident involving missing snakes from her zoological garden.

- b. 12 f. 1 Biographical

Dunham, Katherine (cont.)

- b. 12 f. 2 Williams letter re Dunham
- b. 12 f. 3 Dunham letters to Williams
- b. 12 f. 4 "The Dances of Haiti" by Dunham
- b. 12 f. 5 Articles and essays by Dunham
- b. 12 f. 6 Dunham Dance Company 1942-1944
- b. 12 f. 7 Notes on Dunham technique
- b. 12 f. 8 Institute for Caribbean Research
- b. 12 f. 9 Leaflets and souvenir programs
- b. 12 f. 10 The Dunham Dancers
- b. 12 f. 11 Newspaper clippings
- b. 12 f. 12 Katherine Dunham Gala 1979
- b. 12 f. 13 Habitation Leclerc
- b. 12 f. 14 Fontaine, Donald on Dunham's work and school

Yarborough, Sara 1963

The Yarborough files include a twenty-page diary letter she wrote to her parents as an early teen in 1963 about her dance studies in New York. Also included are her dance notes from that period, as well as performance reviews in English and in French of her work in Haiti, with the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, and with the Atlanta Ballet.

- b. 13 f. 1 Letter to parents 1963
- b. 13 f. 2 Ballet classes
- b. 13 f. 3 Programs
- b. 13 f. 4 Newspaper and magazine articles
- b. 13 f. 5 Printed matter
- b. 14 Programs

The Programs series consists mostly of souvenir programs of performances on the Haitian stage, including Williams's association with the Indian dancing couple Pratap and Priya Pawar, whom she met in Guyana.

Dance notes and teaching material

This series contains mostly dance notations and props used in Williams's dance classes and choreography of various ballet productions in Haiti.

- b. 15 f. 1-2 Costumes
- b. 15 f. 3 Manual of dance technique
- b. 15 f. 4 "Handbook of Modern Dance"
- b. 15 f. 5 "Modern Jazz and Primitive Technique"
- b. 15 f. 6 *Stone, Art. Advanced Jazz*
- b. 15 f. 7 Notebook on "danses classiques et modernes"
- Ballet
 - b. 15 f. 8 Technique and combinations
 - b. 15 f. 9 Syllabi and teaching notes
 - b. 15 f. 10 Teaching aids
 - b. 15 f. 11 Routines
 - b. 15 f. 12 Croquis de Plastique Théâtrale
 - b. 15 f. 13 "Second Steps in Ballet"

Dance notes and teaching material (cont.)

- b. 15 f. 14 "The Art of Choreography"
- b. 15 f. 15-16 Danses folkloriques
- b. 15 f. 17 *Coppelia*
- b. 15 f. 18 *La Mort du Cygne*
- b. 15 f. 19 *Raymonda*
- b. 15 f. 20 *Swan Lake*
- b. 16 f. 1 *Casse Noisettes*
- b. 16 f. 2 *Sylvia*
- b. 16 f. 3 *Sleeping Beauty*
- b. 16 f. 4 *Walpurgis Night*
- b. 16 f. 5 *Carnaval, choreography by Michel Kacharoff*
- b. 16 f. 6 *La Belle au Bois Dormant*
- b. 16 f. 7 Ballet routines
- b. 16 f. 8 Danses exotiques
- b. 16 f. 9 Pas de quatre
- b. 16 f. 10 Danses folkloriques
- b. 16 f. 11 Ballet routines, I
- b. 16 f. 12 Ballet routines, II
- b. 16 f. 13 Short ballet variations
- b. 16 f. 14 *Swan Lake*
- b. 16 f. 15 "Modern Dance and Primitive Technique"
- b. 16 f. 17 Ballet technique
- b. 16 f. 18 Ballet technique for male dancer
- b. 16 f. 19 Danses folkloriques variées
- b. 16 f. 20 *Hansel and Gretel*
- b. 16 f. 21 *La Fille Mal Gardée*

Printed and research matter

This series features performance programs and essays on the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater; African, African American, and Caribbean dance; and some reference material on Haitian folklore and dance in general. Two flat boxes of oversized documents include certificates, performance posters, promotional material for Haitian tourism, early articles from *Ebony* and *Life* magazines, a series of Vèvè drawings annotated by Williams, and another set of Vèvè embroideries.

- b. 17 f. 1 Certificates
- b. 17 f. 2 Newspaper and magazine articles
- b. 17 f. 3 Vèvè drawings, with annotations by Williams
- b. 17 f. 4 Vèvè embroidery
- b. 18 f. 1-2 Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
- b. 18 f. 2 African American dance
- b. 18 f. 5 Breakdance and hip hop
- b. 18 f. 6 Black Dance Development Trust, England 1987
- b. 18 f. 7 Ko-Thi Dance Company
- b. 18 f. 8-9 Dance in Africa

Printed and research matter (cont.)

- b. 19 f. 1 Haiti
- b. 19 f. 2 Caribbean dance
- b. 19 f. 3-4 Dance, general
- b. 20 Posters and promotional material
- b. 21 Publications that mention Lavinia Williams, Sara Yarborough, and Katherine Dunham

This series includes a sampling of such material. The titles in this series are also available in the General Research and Reference Division at the Schomburg Center.