



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Srimathi Gina papers**

1935-1980

(S)\*MGZMD 307

Compiled by Katie Daniels, St. John's University, 2013, 2013.

## Summary

**Creator:** Gina, Srimathi

**Title:** Srimathi Gina papers

**Date:** 1935-1980

**Size:** 1.93 linear feet (5 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Ann Aviles, April 1998.

**Abstract:** The Srimathi Gina papers document Srimathi Gina's studies, choreography, performances, and teachings in Indian classical dance from approximately 1935 to 1980. One of two women to graduate from St. John's Law School in New York City in 1929, Jewish-American Gina Blau left her law practice to study Indian classical dance in the 1930s, eventually becoming a master performer and teacher in the United States, performing under the name of Srimathi Gina. Materials include in-depth notes on Indian classical dance and Indian culture; programs; costume and scenic directions; casting notes; professional correspondence; a typed memoir of travels to India; and photographs, prints, and other images.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: <https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

### Conditions Governing Access:

To request materials, contact the Jerome Robbins Dance Division ([dance@nypl.org](mailto:dance@nypl.org)) in advance. Inquiries regarding audio materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Audio/visual materials may be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

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**Preferred citation:** Srimathi Gina papers, (S)\*MGZMD 307. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Processing note:** Compiled by Katie Daniels, St. John's University, 2013, 2013. At the time of processing there was no significant order to the papers. The documents have been placed into new folders, and then grouped alphabetically by genre. In 1980, Gina Blau donated photographs, programs, scrapbooks, and other materials to the Dance Division, The New York Public Library. These materials are cataloged separately.

## **Creator History**

Srimathi Gina was the performance name of Gina Blau (1906-1998), a Jewish-American dancer who was an early exponent of Indian Classical Dance in the United States. Earlier in her life, Gina had studied modern dance under Pearl Primus, Jean Erdman, and Eleanor King. She was also one of two women to graduate from St. John's Law School in New York City in 1929, but left her law practice in the 1930s to study Indian Classical Dance with Phupesh Guha. During the 1940s, she performed first with the dance troupe of the American dance ethnologist La Meri, and then with the Indian classical dancer Ragani Devi in New York.

From 1954 to 1955, Gina traveled to India to study Indian Classical Dance as well as the Tamil language. She first studied Bharatya Natyam with Guru Chockalingam Pillai in Madras, and then Kathakali with Guru Ravunni Nair in Malabar.

Gina then toured and performed around the United States as Srimathi Gina, and taught Indian Classical Dance in New York and elsewhere, including at colleges, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and the Eugene O'Neill National Theater for the Deaf. Gina was given the title of Natyakala Bushanam (Jewel of the Dance) by the Indian Institute of Fine Arts in Madras; she was the first non-Indian to receive the title.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Srimathi Gina papers consist of materials created and collected by Srimathi Gina during the course of her studies, performances, and teachings of Indian Classical Dance, from approximately 1935 to 1980. Materials include in-depth notes on different styles of Indian classical dance (with illustrations and descriptions of dance movements and rhythms); definitions of Hindu and Buddhist terms; Indian stories and myths; performance and lecture-demonstration notes; programs; costume and scenic directions; casting notes; professional correspondence; a typed memoir of her travels to India; and photographs, prints, and other images.

The collection also contains a reel-to-reel tape labeled "Interview Nala [Najam] with Gina re: Bombay." Inquiries regarding audio materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Audio/visual materials may be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

**Arrangement:** Folders are arranged alphabetically by genre.

## **Key Terms**

## **Subjects**

Bharata natyam  
Buddhism  
Dance -- India  
Folklore -- India  
Hinduism  
Kathakali

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Drawings (visual works)  
Notebooks  
Photographs

## Container List

- Biographical
  - b. 1 f. 1 Artistic Statement and Resume
  - b. 1 f. 2 Notes--Personal
  - b. 1 f. 3 Typed Memoir--Indian Journal 1954-1955
  - b. 1 f. 4 Correspondence
- Indian Dance Performance Pieces
  - b. 1 f. 5 Ashta Nayika
  - b. 1 f. 6 Bima Slays Dushsana
  - b. 1 f. 7 The Boastful Hunter
  - b. 1 f. 8 Creation of Woman
  - b. 1 f. 9 Makeup and Costume Changes Timing
  - b. 1 f. 10 Peacock
  - b. 1 f. 11 Prayer to Lakshmi
  - b. 1 f. 12 Savitvi
  - b. 1 f. 13 Shri Venu Gopala
  - b. 1 f. 14 Shringara La Hari--Krishna Rao Choreography
  - b. 1 f. 15 Works in Progress
- Indian Dance Technique Notebooks
  - b. 1 f. 16 General
  - b. 2 f. 1-2 General
  - b. 2 f. 3-4 Kathakali and Bharata Natyam
    - b. 2 f. 5 Manipuri
    - b. 2 f. 6 Manipuri and Padams
  - b. 5 Notes and Lessons  
Illustrated
  - b. 3 f. 1 Photographs
- Reference
  - b. 3 f. 2 Background--Indian Dance
  - b. 3 f. 3-4 Indian Ballets
  - b. 3 f. 5-6 Ragini Devi--Hindu Dance Technique Dictionary
  - b. 3 f. 7 Ragini Devi--Hindu Dance Technique Dictionary--Mudras
- Teaching Notes
  - b. 3 f. 8 Dance of India
  - b. 3 f. 9 Lecture Demonstration
  - b. 3 f. 10-11 Research Notes for Lectures
- Technique
  - b. 4 f. 1 Bharata Natyam
  - b. 4 f. 2 Bharata Natyam--Tillana
  - b. 4 f. 3 Indian Dance--Mudras
  - b. 4 f. 4 Indian Music

Technique (cont.)

Kathakali

- b. 4 f. 5 General
- b. 4 f. 6 Costumes and Mudra
- b. 4 f. 7 Kamsa Vadham
- b. 4 f. 8 Puttana
- b. 4 f. 9 Urvasi
- b. 4 f. 10 Mudras--Typewritten
- b. 4 f. 11 Pen and Ink Drawings--Buddhist Mudras
- b. 4 f. 12 Routines--Pre-India
- b. 4 f. 13 Warm-up Charts
- b. 4 f. 14 Uday Shankar and Company--Photos and Program
- b. 4 f. 15 Visual Materials