



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

New York School of Ballet/U.S. Terpsichore records

1975-1985 [bulk 1975-1977]

(S)* MGZMD 325

Compiled by Brynn White, CUNY Queens College 2014, 2013

Summary

Creator: New York School of Ballet

Title: New York School of Ballet/U.S. Terpsichore records

Date: 1975-1985 [bulk 1975-1977]

Size: .63 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Unknown.

Abstract: The New York School of Ballet (incorporated name: American Dance Foundation) and its touring troupe U.S. Terpsichore were founded by married dancers and teachers Richard S. Thomas and Barbara Fallis. The New York School of Ballet/U.S. Terpsichore records (1975-1985) document the various activities and operations of the two organizations. The collection holds correspondence, contracts, legal agreements, financial invoices and receipts, pay stubs, class schedules, press releases, venue reports, ticket order forms, programs, posters, and press clippings.

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>

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Processing note: Compiled by Brynn White, CUNY Queens College 2014, 2013

Creator History

The New York School of Ballet (1963-1985) and U.S. Terpsichore (1975-1985) were founded by American dancers and teachers Richard Thomas and Barbara Fallis. Thomas was born on December

3, 1925 in Kentucky. Following his first exposure to a performance by the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo he entered the tutelage of Russian ballet dancer and choreographer Bronislava Nijinska in Los Angeles, and Vincenzo Celli and Anatole Vilzak in New York.

During his early career with the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo and Ballet Theatre, Thomas met Fallis, whom he married in Cuba in 1950 while both were on tour with the Company Alicia Alonso. Thomas's first teaching experience also occurred there, when Fernando Alonso, in developing a dance school with pupils from a local orphanage, asked Thomas to assist.

Thomas and Fallis returned to Manhattan and danced with the New York City Ballet from 1953 to 1958. During this time Thomas was a frequent soloist and member of the premiere casts of Todd Bolender's *Souvenirs*, Balanchine's *Jeux*, and Jerome Robbins's *The Concert* (or *The Perils of Everybody*). Thomas left the New York City Ballet in 1958 to join the circus but soon returned to the city.

Thomas first joined Harry Asmus at a school on Broadway and 54th Street, chiefly working with students from the High School of the Performing Arts. He later was employed at the schools of June Taylor and Robert Joffrey, whose company he escorted to Russia. In 1963 he left a position at the Ballet Theatre to open what would become the New York School of Ballet on West 56th Street. Thomas and Fallis alternated shifts at the Pennsylvania Ballet in Philadelphia to fund their fledgling school.

In 1969, George Balanchine and Lincoln Kerstein offered the couple the former studios of the School of American Ballet, at 2291 Broadway between 82nd and 83rd Street. There, Thomas taught well-established and up-and-coming students in his daily classes, including Cynthia Gregory, Debbie Allen, Christine Sarry, Twyla Tharp, Sean Lavery, and Eliot Feld.

In 1975, the couple formed U.S. Terpsichore as a touring showcase of the most advanced New York School of Ballet students. Daniel Levans served as co-artistic director and choreographer of the troupe, which was composed of approximately 25 to 40 members, mostly teenagers - including Thomas's and Fallis's children Bronwyn, often the featured ballerina, and Richard, already well-known for his role as John-Boy on television show *The Waltons*. Their repertory of over 30 ballets included both the classic and the contemporary.

Thomas was one of the first ballet directors to arrange performances for schools. The troupe originally appeared in New York City and Kentucky venues, until a 1976-1977 series of nationwide performances contracted with Columbia Artists Management, Inc., which led to further extensive traveling throughout the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Columbia insisted the ten-member troupe appear under the title of "Richard Thomas Theatre Ballet." The revenue from sold-out houses helped fund the school. In 1984, he raised \$370,000 to organize and host the first New York International Ballet Competition with co-founder Ilona Copen; the competition still continues to this day.

After Fallis's death in 1980, Thomas directed the troupe and operated the School until he was evicted from the Broadway facilities in 1985. He continued to teach children until his retirement in Kentucky, where he remained until his death in summer 2013.

Scope and Content Note

The collection documents the various activities and operations of Richard S. Thomas and Barbara Fallis's New York School of Ballet and its performance troupe, U.S. Terpsichore.

The New York School of Ballet records consist of contracts, press clippings, and correspondence

concerning bookings, studio rentals, and fundraising - including monetary gift requests from Thomas to prominent actors Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Robert Redford, Herbert Ross, and Dustin Hoffman. Five notebooks document class schedules and attendees in 1979. Also of note are two flyers protesting the School's eviction and the gentrification of its Upper West Side neighborhood. Record creators are chiefly Thomas, Fallis, and the School Administrator Eleonore Triber.

The U.S. Terpsichore files document the bookings and performances of the dance troupe. These files contain publicity materials such as press releases, handouts and posters, ticket order forms, programs, press clippings, and correspondence with potential performance venues. The collection of programs are primarily from local events in New York City and the larger Northeastern region. There is a sign-up sheet of mailing list subscribers from the Marymount Manhattan Theatre [here](#).

The tour materials from the 1976-1977 "Richard Thomas Theatre Ballet" season hold contractual agreements with Columbia, tour schedules, financial invoices and receipts for costumes and other expenses, pay stubs, venue information surveys, stage technician instructions, local venue contracts, and hotel reservations.

There is a clippings and press release file documenting Thomas's founding of the New York International Ballet Competition in 1984.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged alphabetically into three organizational record groups: New York International Ballet Competition, New York School of Ballet, and U.S. Terpsichore. Within these groups, files are arranged alphabetically by file title.

Key Terms

Subjects

Ballet -- Study and teaching -- New York (State) -- New York
Ballet companies -- United States
Dance -- New York (State)
Dance -- Study and teaching

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings
Contracts
Financial records
Handbills
Theater programs

Names

Fallis, Barbara
Thomas, Richard, approximately 1925-

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