



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Fred Berk papers

1911-1980

(S) *MGZMD 41

Processed by Diane Coburn Brüning.

Summary

Creator: Berk, Fred, 1911-1980

Title: Fred Berk papers

Date: 1911-1980

Size: 273 Items in 75 folders

Source: Gift of Bernard Liebhaber. Received: October 1981.

Abstract: The Fred Berk Papers primarily document Berk's involvement in Jewish folk dance in the United States. Berk wrote extensively on the subject. He also made instructional notes on the folk dances and kept address lists of people involved in his teaching seminars and organizations throughout the years.

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>

Preferred citation: Fred Berk Papers, (S) * MGZMD 41, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Diane Coburn Brüning.

Creator History

Fred Berk was born Fritz Berger on January 25, 1911, in Vienna. In 1927, after having completed the ninth grade, he became a goldsmith's apprentice, at which he worked for five years. In Vienna Berger attended a concert by modern dancer Gertrude Kraus and at age 18 began to study dance with her. From 1930 to 1933 he performed with Kraus and in 1934 won the bronze medal at the Viennese International Dance Competition as the most promising solo dancer. Berger continued performing

throughout Western Europe and also began to teach. Growing anti-Semitism under the Nazi regime frightened him into leaving his parents and native Austria for a teaching position in Switzerland. Berger fled Europe entirely in 1939 for Cuba. In Havana he suffered from severe hip arthritis, which hospitalized him there for several months. In 1941 he entered the United States, where he resided for the remainder of his life. Berger married fellow Austrian dancer Katya Delakova on October 1, 1946, in West New York, New Jersey. Upon naturalization as a United States citizen in 1947, Berger changed his name to Fred Berk. Berk's first few years in the United States were spent studying and performing with Hanya Holm. From 1949 to 1954 he directed Stage for Dancers, a concert series he produced at the Brooklyn Museum featuring modern dance. It was in the early 1950s that Berk founded the Jewish Dance Division at the 92nd Street YMHA in New York, which he directed for 28 years. His involvement in Jewish Dance grew, and through the years he directed Hebraica Dancers and the Israeli Folk Dance Festival, while also conducting annual workshops in the 1960s and 1970s on Jewish Folk Dance for teachers at Blue Star Camps in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Berk was also involved in compiling and editing several publications on the subject including *The Jewish Dance* (1960), *New Israeli Folk Dances* (1962), and *Ha-rikud The Jewish Dance* (1972). With Lucy Venable, he wrote *Ten Folk Dances in Labanotation* (1959). Berk was the editor of "Hora," a newsletter devoted to Jewish Dance. At the time of his death, Berk was compiling an extensive bibliography on Jewish Dance based upon research he conducted at the Dance Collection of The New York Public Library. Berk continued to suffer from a hip ailment, which led him to an operation in 1957. The operation was not deemed successful by the doctors, and it took him two years to be able to walk with a cane. While he never curtailed his dancing or teaching, he was somewhat limited in his range of movement. Fred Berk came to be considered one of the foremost authorities on Jewish Dance in the United States. In 1977 while in Israel, Berk was diagnosed with cancer. He died in New York on February 26, 1980.

Scope and Content Note

The Fred Berk Papers primarily document Berk's involvement in Jewish folk dance in the United States. Berk wrote extensively on the subject. He also made instructional notes on the folk dances and kept address lists of people involved in his teaching seminars and organizations throughout the years. The largest series is that of "Notes on Folk Dances." It contains a choreographic notebook on the dances, and index and bibliography on Jewish folk dance, and a large body of descriptive notes on folk dances. The latter includes instructional notes and musical references in a form that appears to be in preparation for publication. Within the correspondence series, the family and related letters are from his parents and people who looked after his parents in their retirement in England. These letters are in German and English. The subject of the other correspondence is generally Berk's teaching activities and preparations for his publications. There is no substantial run of letters from any single correspondent. "Writings by Fred Berk" comprises eighteen titles predominantly on aspects of modern and Jewish folk dance, and several biographical sketches of Berk. "Seminars, Organizations, Publications," comprises address lists for his workshops and seminars, subscriber lists for "Hora" magazine, and some notes related to the organizations Berk was involved with. The Papers also includes essays written by other authors, which are almost exclusively on Jewish folk dance. Within the small series of papers, "Financial, Medical, and Legal Documents and Memorabilia," are Berk's birth, marriage, and naturalization certificates and passports along with other documents and medical records. Certain non-manuscript materials received with the original gift have been removed from the Fred Berk Papers. All books, clippings and magazine articles and photographs have been dispersed throughout the Dance Collection with phonograph records going to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Division. A separation list, located at the end of the folder list, indicates the nature and disposition of these items. Material is written in English and German

Arrangement: I. Correspondence A. Family and Related Correspondence, 1953-1973. B. General Correspondence, 1959, 1972-1980. C. Correspondence related to the The Jewish Dance. II. Writings by Fred Berk A. Addresses, Essays, and Lectures. B. Biographical Sketches of Fred Berk. III. Notes on

Folk Dances A. Choreographic Notebook. B. Index and Bibliography of Jewish Folk Dances. C. Descriptive Notes on Folk Dances including "Repertory of Dances." IV. Seminars, Organizations, Publications including Blue Star Camps and Israeli Folk Dance Institutes. V. Writings by Others VI. Financial, Medical, and Legal Documents and Memorabilia A. Financial Papers. B. Medical and Pension Papers. C. Legal Documents and Memorabilia.

Key Terms

Subjects

Folk dancing

Jewish dance

Manuscripts -- Collections

Titles

Gift of Bernard Liebhaber

Names

Berk, Fred, 1911-1980

Hebraica Dancers (Company)

Container List

I. Correspondence

Within the correspondence series, the family and related letters are from his parents and people who looked after his parents in their retirement in England. These letters are in German and English. The subject of the other correspondence is generally Berk's teaching activities and preparations for his publications. There is no substantial run of letters from any single correspondent.

A. Family and Related Correspondence 1953-1973 (26 Items)

- b. 1 f. 1 1953-1959 (4 Items)
- f. 2 1960 (9 Items)
- f. 3 1961-1964, 1973 (10 Items)
- f. 4 no date (3 Items)

B. General Correspondence 1959, 1972-1980 (30 Items)

- f. 5 1959, 1972-1977 (14 Items)
- f. 6 1978 (11 items)
- f. 7 1979-1980, no date (5 Items)

C. Correspondence Related to *The Jewish Dance* (8 Items)

- f. 8 1959-1960 (8 Items)

II. Writings by Fred Berk

"Writings by Fred Berk" comprises eighteen titles predominantly on aspects of modern and Jewish folk dance, and several biographical sketches of Berk.

A. Addresses, Essays, and Lectures (alphabetized by title or first line) (30 Items)

- f. 9 "American-Israeli and Israeli Folk Dance Summer 1979"
- f. 10 "Creative Modern Choreography"
- f. 11 "Creativity and Composition in the Development of a Dancer"
- f. 12 "Dance: A New Phase in a Time-Old Profession"
- f. 13 "Dance as Recreation"
- f. 14 "Folk Dance as a Means to Better Understanding Throughout the World"
- f. 15 "For twenty-six years I conducted the annual Israel Folk Dance Festival..."
- f. 16 "Jewish and Israeli Folk Dance in America"
- f. 17 "Jewish Dance Activities in America"
- f. 18 "The Jewish Dance Division of the 92nd Street Y"
- f. 19 "The Jews in Spain"
- f. 20 "Modern Dance and its Creative Aspect"
- f. 21 "Modern Dance between the years 1940-1955..."
- f. 22 "Movement as Therapy"
- f. 23 "My Victories"
- f. 24 "The Renaissance of the Jewish Dance"
- f. 25 "Suggestions for a Course of Choreography for Israeli Folk Dancers"
- f. 26 "What Makes a Good Folk Teacher"

B. Biographical Sketches of Fred Berk (7 Items)

- f. 27 Biographies and quotes on Berk (7 Items)

III. Notes on Folk Dances

The largest series is that of "Notes on Folk Dances." It contains a choreographic notebook on the dances, and index and bibliography on Jewish folk dance, and a large body of descriptive notes on folk dances. The latter includes instructional notes and musical references in a form that appears to be in preparation for publication.

A. Choreographic Notebook

- f. 28 Jewish Folk Dances

B. Index and Bibliography of Jewish Folk Dances

- f. 29 Index of Jewish Folk Dances
- f. 30-31 Bibliography on Jewish Dance Project

C. Descriptive Notes on Folk Dances including "Repertory of Dances"

- b. 2 Instructional notes

IV. Seminars, Organizations, Publication

"Seminars, Organizations, Publications," comprises address lists for his workshops and seminars, subscriber lists for "Hora" magazine, and some notes related to the organizations Berk was involved with.

- b. 3 f. 32-34 Blue Star Camps and Israeli Folk Dance Workshops, participant list 1961-1977 (23 Items)
- f. 35 "Fundraising" Israel Summer Institute, participant list 1969-1977 (7 Items)
- f. 36 Leadership Training Seminar, participant list 1965-1970 (13 Items)
- f. 37 Hebraica Dancers (3 Items)
- f. 38 "Hora" magazine subscriber lists (4 Items)
- f. 39-40 Israeli Folk Dance Institute - American Zionist Youth Foundation (16 Items)
- f. 41 Shalhevet: The Folk Dance Ensemble of the Jewish Community Center of Cleveland (2 Items)

V. Writings by Others

The Papers also includes essays written by other authors, which are almost exclusively on Jewish folk dance.

(alphabetized by title or first line)

- f. 42 "The Cercessionian" author unknown
- f. 43 "The Creation of Folkdances The Problem of Israeli Folkdances Created Abroad" by Tamar Aligor
- f. 44 "Hasidism and Hasidic Dance" by Rochelle Kravitz
- f. 45 "Hasidism is a religious movement..." author unknown
- f. 46 "A Heritage of Movement" by Joyce Mollov
- f. 47 "Israeli Dances - Made in the U.S.A." by Gil Ofer
- f. 48 "The Jews Always Love Dancing" author unknown
- f. 49 "Kurds" by Pamela Squire
- f. 50 "More on Hora Agadati" by Vicky Bogard
- f. 51 "The most essential ingredient for a successful class..." by Shulamite Kivel and class
- f. 52 "Rhythmic/Dynamics/Structure of Folk Dance" by Ruth Goodman
- f. 53 "Selected Lectures from Introduction to Folklore (Dance) of Israel - 1972" Pamela Squires, editor

V. Writings by Others (cont.)

- f. 54 "Statements on Jewish Dance"
- f. 55 "The Story of Jewish Dance" by Sherry Rosen
- f. 56 "The Value of Folk Dancing" by Richard Kraus
- f. 57 "What Jewish Dance Means to Me" by Rabbi Avraham Soltes
- f. 58 "Yemenite Dance" by Gurit Kadman

VI. Financial, Medical, and Legal Documents and Memorabilia

Within the small series of papers, "Financial, Medical, and Legal Documents and Memorabilia," are Berk's birth, marriage, and naturalization certificates and passports along with other documents and medical records.

A. Financial Papers

- f. 59 Bank statements 1958-1959 (3 Items)

B. Medical and Pension-Related Papers

- f. 60 Social Security and Medicare records (7 Items)
- f. 61 Pension-related documents (12 Items)
- f. 62-63 Medical Records 1976 Dec.- 1977 Dec (12 Items)

C. Legal Documents and Memorabilia (Berk's unless otherwise indicated), arranged chronologically

- f. 64 Copy of birth certificate (2 Items)
- f. 65 Certificates of goldsmithing apprenticeship 1930 (2 Items)
- f. 66 Certificate of Residency, Vienna 1932 (1 items)
- f. 67 License for operation of a private gymnastics school 1933 (1 items)
- f. 68 Emma Teltscher's will (2 Items)
(Fred Berk's aunt)
- f. 69 Marriage certificate, Fritz Berger and Katya Delakova 1946 (2 Items)
- f. 70 Copy of certificate of naturalization and name change 1947 (2 Items)
- f. 71 *Copyright certificate for The Jewish Dance* 1960 (1 items)
- f. 72 Papers related to Henrietta Berger's tombstone (Berk's mother) 1961 (6 Items)
- f. 73 Jacob Berger's death certificate and registry 1963 (2 Items)
- f. 74 Passports (7 Items)

V. Miscellaneous (13 Items)

- f. 75 family pictures, postcards, note, empty envelope (13 Items)