



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Dudley Williams papers

1938-2014 [bulk 1950-2003]

(S) *MGZMD 462

Compiled by Heather Halliday, 2017.

Summary

Creator: Williams, Dudley, 1938-2015

Title: Dudley Williams papers

Date: 1938-2014 [bulk 1950-2003]

Size: 17.79 linear feet (38 boxes, 6 oversized folders, 7 tubes)

Source: Donated by Lorri Williams, 2016.

Abstract: Dudley Williams (1938-2015) was an African American modern dancer who spent most of his long performance career with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. The Dudley Williams papers document his professional and personal life through correspondence, photographs, programs, posters, date books, travel records, artifacts, and other materials.

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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Creator History

Dudley Eugene Williams was born in 1938 in New York City and grew up in the East River Housing Project in Harlem. His father, Ivan Williams, was a carpenter. His mother, Austa (Beckles) Williams, bought the family a small spinet piano, which Dudley learned to play as a child. Initially drawn to instrumental music, Williams attended the High School of the Performing Arts where he shifted his focus to dance, graduating in 1958. While still in high school, he studied with May O'Donnell and performed with her dance company. He attended Juilliard School of Music and Dance on scholarship from 1957 through 1959.

His first professional dance performance was in *Show Boat* staged at Jones Beach in 1959. He joined the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1961. While working with Graham, Williams took a few classes with Alvin Ailey and in 1963 substituted for Ailey himself in a performance of the "Reflections in D" solo in *Revelations* with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, the preeminent Modern African American dance company. *Revelations* was inspired by the music of Duke Ellington, and choreographed by Ailey. Williams danced with both the Graham and the Ailey troupes from 1963 until 1968, when he left Graham to become the full-time principal dancer with the Ailey Company. Williams usually performed solos, the most famous of which was "I Wanna Be Ready," also from *Revelations*. Williams became the longest tenured dancer in the history of the company. He continued to dance with the company until 2005, working with Judith Jamison who succeeded Alvin Ailey as director after Ailey's death due to AIDS in 1989. After his retirement from Ailey, Williams cofounded with Gus Solomons, Jr. and Carmen de Lavallande the Paradigm Dance Company, which was made up entirely of dancers over the age of 40. In 2013, Williams performed one last time with the Ailey Company in "Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham," the finale of a special New Year's Eve performance of *Revelations*.

His career spanned over four decades, far longer than is typical in the field of dance. He also trained and taught multiple generations of younger dancers at the Martha Graham School of Dance and at the Ailey Company. He died at home in his apartment in the Westbeth Artists Community in New York City in 2015 at the age of 76.

Scope and Content Note

The collection documents Williams's professional and personal life through correspondence, photographs, programs, posters, date books, travel records, artifacts, and other materials.

Correspondence files occupy a significant share of the collection. Williams toured the world extensively with the Ailey Company and wrote frequently to other dancers, longtime friends and lovers, as well as casual acquaintances during his travels. Personal and professional letters are intermingled in these files. In particular, letters to and from Richard E. Jones, a lover of Williams's in the 1970s, offer a detailed account of Williams's experience of traveling and performing internationally. There is one folder of notes and letters from and about Alvin Ailey. Additional business correspondence can be found in the Employment files. Address Books document relationships Williams maintained all over the world and include the contact information of fellow dancers, dance critics, friends, lovers, and social hot spots.

Williams frequently attended dance performances and concerts, from which he retained nearly every ticket stub, programs, and playbill. Ticket stubs are filed with Artifacts, while Programs constitute their own sizable grouping. Programs and playbills for Williams's own performances and for other performances are intermingled among these files. Some other printed promotional material, such as invitation cards, are also filed in this grouping.

Photographs include professional studio portraits of Williams; action shots of Williams alone or with others in performance and rehearsals; and numerous candid snapshots of Williams alone, traveling, attending cultural events, or with friends. About a third of the photographs are 8 x 10 inch black and white prints, many others are small color or black and white snapshots, and a few oversize prints are also present.

Date Books contain detailed notes handwritten in small print about Williams's professional schedule and personal activities from the 1970s through the 1990s.

Williams toured Europe frequently and Africa at least once with the Ailey Company. Tours and Travel files document these trips and include itineraries, performance schedules, passports, and reference information about destinations. More detailed tour schedules are filed with Employment records.

Education files encompass Williams's elementary schooling through his role as a distinguished alumnus of both the High School of the Performing Arts and Juilliard and include autograph books, yearbooks, a felt pennant, piano recital programs, and alumni lists.

Numerous posters promoting Williams's performances, mostly with Ailey, are included in the collection as are a few pieces of original art for which Williams was apparently the model.

Newspaper and magazine clippings about Williams's performances are present. Some are arranged in scrapbooks and others are loose and filed in folders.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged alphabetically by subject or format.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American dancers
Modern dance

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Appointment books
Clippings (information artifacts)
Correspondence
Photographs
Posters
Programs (documents)

Occupations

Dancers

Names

Ailey, Alvin
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-5 Address Books 1960s-1980s
- Art
 - t. 2 Paintings circa 1970s
Paper. Unsigned. Brian Thompson may be the artist.
 - b. 2 f. 1 1978-1984, undated
 - b. 1 f. 6 circa 1985
 - b. 3 f. 1 Portrait of Williams circa 1990
Sketch Drawing
- Figure Drawings of Williams
 - o. 1 1995
Oil Pastel
 - t. 1 1985-2013, undated (5 Drawings)
Graphite
 - t. 2 undated (1 Drawing)
Graphite
- Artifacts
 - b. 1 f. 7-8 1966-2000s
 - b. 1 f. 9 "Ailey Is Coming" Sign 1960s
 - b. 1 f. 10 Backstage Passes 1987-2002
 - b. 1 f. 11 Buttons 1970s-1980s
 - b. 1 f. 12 Sewing Patterns 1960s-1970s
- Signs
 - o. 2 circa 1965
 - o. 6 14th Annual International Association of Blacks in Dance 2000
 - b. 4 f. 1 Ticket Stubs 1955-2002
 - b. 4 f. 2 Tote Bag circa 1980s
- Awards
 - b. 4 f. 3 1976-2006
 - b. 2 f. 2 Certificates 1962-1966
 - b. 4 f. 4 Thelma Hill Performing Arts Center Lifetime Achievement 2004
 - b. 4 f. 5 University of Oklahoma Visiting Artist 2009
- Calendars
 - Promotional items for Ailey Company.
 - b. 4 f. 6 1967
 - b. 5 f. 1-2 Dance, Including Ailey Company 1974, 1981
- Clippings
 - b. 4 f. 7 1960s
 - b. 4 f. 8 1962

Clippings (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 3 1970
- b. 6 f. 1-6 1970s-1990s
- b. 2 f. 3 1992
- b. 7 f. 1 2000s
- b. 7 f. 2 Alvin Ailey 1958-1983
- b. 7 f. 3 Current Events and Other Subjects 1960s-1990s
- b. 7 f. 4 Death of Alvin Ailey and Debut of Judith Jamison as Director 1989-1990
- b. 7 f. 5-6 From Scrapbook 1959-1961, 1987-1988
- b. 7 f. 7 *Showboat* 1957

Correspondence

- b. 7 f. 8-11 1950s-1980s
- b. 8 f. 1-4 1980s-2015, undated
 - b. 8 f. 5 Ailey, Alvin 1960s-1990
 - b. 8 f. 6 Ballew, Reginald 1960-1961
 - b. 8 f. 7 Benham, Bill 1978-1982
 - b. 8 f. 8 Brouckaert, Harm 1974-1976
 - b. 8 f. 9 Briant, Roger 1965
 - b. 8 f. 10 Burns, Alexander 1965
 - b. 9 f. 1 Cards 1965-2003
 - b. 9 f. 2 Chevius, Scott 1975
 - b. 9 f. 3 Cohen, Ronald 1963-1964
 - o. 2 Collage of Appreciation Letters 1972
 - b. 9 f. 4 Cosner, Bob 1970-1976
 - b. 9 f. 5 Crabtree, Robert 1983-1992
 - b. 9 f. 6 Cumat, Frank M 1982-1984
 - b. 9 f. 7 Dalmon, Liz 1961-1966
 - b. 9 f. 8 David (in Washington, D.C.) 1979
 - b. 9 f. 9 East River House 1987
 - b. 9 f. 10 Fan Mail 1961-2014
 - b. 9 f. 11 Frey, Russ 1978
 - b. 9 f. 12 Grobli, Erwin 1965-1969
 - b. 9 f. 13 Hansen, William 1977-1982
 - b. 9 f. 14 Hersley, Richard 1967-1968
 - b. 9 f. 15 Jamison, Judith circa 1995
 - Jones, Richard E
 - From
 - b. 9 f. 16-18 circa 1970-circa 1977
 - b. 10 f. 1-5 1972-1978
 - To
 - b. 10 f. 6-9 1970-1971
 - b. 11 f. 1-6 1973-1978, 1983, undated

Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 7 Kolb, Terry 1969-1970
- b. 11 f. 8 Liamos, George 1974
- b. 11 f. 9 Louthier, Bill 1965
- b. 11 f. 10 Merli, Dr. Carlo 1975-1977
- b. 11 f. 11 Mull, Peter 1977-1978
- b. 11 f. 12 Neal, Charles 1965
- b. 12 f. 1 Nutter, David 1964-1967
- b. 12 f. 2 Orchiconi, Lewis 1957
- b. 12 f. 3 Parkes, Ross 1966-1969
- b. 26 Post Cards 1950s-2000s
- b. 12 f. 4 Randazzo, Peter 1961-1968
- b. 12 f. 5 Roberts, Dave 1974
- b. 12 f. 6 Segarra, Romon 1961-1965, 1983-1984
- b. 12 f. 7 Sex Clubs, Classified Ads, and Pornography 1974-1997
- b. 12 f. 8 Smith, Brad 1971-1977
- b. 12 f. 9 Thompson, Brian 1967-1988
- b. 12 f. 10 Thompson, Clive 1965
- b. 12 f. 11 Thompson, John Lee 1971-1975
- b. 12 f. 12 Totic, Dragan 1968
- b. 12 f. 13 Townsend, Arthur, Jr 1978
- b. 12 f. 14 Tuitte, James 1965
- b. 13 f. 1 Waters, Sylvia 1965-1966, 1984
- b. 13 f. 2 Westbeth 1970-1995
- b. 13 f. 3 Williams, Austa 1960-1965
Williams's mother.
- b. 13 f. 4 Williams, Roy 1961
Williams's brother.
- b. 13 f. 5 Wroble, Georg 1963-1972

Date Books

- b. 13 f. 6-10 1974-1981
- b. 14 f. 1-7 1982-1988
- b. 15 f. 1-8 1989-1996
- b. 16 f. 1 1998

Education

- b. 16 f. 2 Elementary School 1943-1950
- b. 16 f. 3 Piano Recitals 1950-1954
- b. 16 f. 4 Junior High School 1953
- High School of the Performing Arts
- b. 16 f. 5 1954-1957
- b. 16 f. 6 Alumni 1958-2000
- b. 28 Dance Award Trophy 1957

Education (cont.)

High School of the Performing Arts (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 2 Pennant circa 1955
- Juilliard
- b. 16 f. 7 1957-1961
- b. 17 f. 1 Alumni 1986-1990
- b. 17 f. 2 Rebecca Harkness Foundation 1964-1967

Employment

- b. 17 f. 3-8 Business Correspondence 1960s-2000s
- b. 17 f. 9-13 Casting Sheets 1960s-2000s, undated
- Contracts
- b. 17 f. 14-15 1950s-1960s
- b. 18 f. 1 1970s-2000s
- b. 18 f. 2 Pay Stubs 1966-1990
- Schedules
- b. 18 f. 3 1973-2003
- b. 18 f. 4 Martha Graham Company 1962, undated
- b. 18 f. 5-9 United States and North America 1960s-2000s, undated

International

- b. 18 f. 10-11 1960s-1970s, undated
- b. 19 f. 1-2 1980s-2000s

Sheet Music

- b. 19 f. 3 1971-1997
- b. 5 f. 3 undated
- b. 19 f. 4 Scripts 1971-1997
- b. 19 f. 5 Taxes 1961-1972
- b. 19 f. 6 Horoscopes 1969, 1983
- b. 19 f. 7 Interviews 1988-1990s
- b. 19 f. 8 Memorial Services 1986-1997
- b. 19 f. 9-11 Miscellaneous 1938, 1970s-1996
- Includes files of Williams's medical information and a file on soap operas.

Notes

- b. 19 f. 12 1962-2001
- b. 20 f. 1 Notebooks circa 1970s

Photographs

- b. 20 f. 2-7 1950s-2000s
- Ailey, Alvin
- b. 27 f. 1 1960s-1970s
- b. 20 f. 8 1960s-1980s
- b. 20 f. 9 Architecture and Nature 1960s-1980s
- b. 20 f. 10 Crabtree, Robert
- b. 20 f. 10 1970s-2000s
- b. 26 f. 7-20 1970s-2000s

Photographs (cont.)

- b. 20 f. 11 Family 1960s-1970s
- b. 20 f. 12 Jamison, Judith 1970s
- b. 20 f. 13 London circa 1964, 1967
- b. 20 f. 14 Negatives 1978-2007
color

- Parties and Events
- b. 20 f. 15 1960s, 1980s
- b. 26 f. 1-6 1980s-2000s

- Performance
- b. 20 f. 16-17 1960s-2000s

- Williams Alone
- b. 20 f. 18 1960s
- b. 21 f. 1 1970s-1980s
- b. 27 f. 2 1970s-1980s
- o. 3 1980s
Photographer R. Falgant.

- Williams With Others
- b. 21 f. 2-3 1960s-1980s
- b. 5 f. 4 1970s
- b. 27 f. 3 1970s
- b. 21 f. 4 Others 1960s-1980s
- o. 2 At White House for President Jimmy Carter 1978
- b. 21 f. 5 Pin-Ups 1950s-1970s

- Portraits

- Groups
- b. 21 f. 6 1960s-1970s
- b. 27 f. 3 1960s-1970s

- Others
- b. 5 f. 5 1960s
- b. 21 f. 7 1960s-1970s

- Williams Alone
- b. 21 f. 8-10 1960s-2000s
- b. 3 f. 3 Nude circa 1970
- b. 3 f. 4 circa 1990s-2000s
- b. 27 f. 4-6 1960s-1980s
- b. 21 f. 11 Rehearsals 1960s-1990s

- School and Childhood
- b. 22 f. 1 1940s-1950s
- b. 28 Repro Block circa 1950

Photographs (cont.)

- b. 22 f. 2-3 **Scrapbook 1950s-1960s**
Some photographs are autographed by dancers, actors, and celebrities.
- Snapshots**
- b. 22 f. 4 **1960s-1970s**
- b. 23 f. 1-7 **circa 1965**
Includes candid shot of Muhammad Ali and trips to Berlin, Greece, and elsewhere in Europe.
- b. 23 f. 8-10 **1965**
Includes trip to London.
- b. 23 f. 11-13 **1970s**
- b. 23 f. 14-16 **Europe circa 1978**
- b. 23 f. 17-18 **San Francisco 1978, 1980**
- b. 23 f. 19 **Williams and Crabtree 1980s**
- b. 23 f. 20 **New York City 1980**
- b. 24 f. 1 **1983**
- b. 24 f. 2-7 **circa 1985**
Includes trips to the desert, the beach, and Berlin.
- b. 24 f. 7-18 **1986**
Includes tours with Ailey Dance Company; Halloween; trips to the beach, Paris and elsewhere in Europe.
- b. 24 f. 19-20 **Christmas and New Year's Eve 1986-1987**
- b. 24 f. 21-23 **1987**
Includes Christmas and trips to the beach.
- b. 24 f. 24-28 **1988**
Includes Halloween and the beach.
- b. 25 f. 1-5 **1989**
Includes trips to Paris, Rome, and elsewhere in Europe.
- b. 25 f. 6 **1990s**
- b. 25 f. 7-9 **circa 1990**
Includes 1990s.
- b. 25 f. 10 **Vacation House 1993**
- b. 25 f. 11 **circa 1995**
- b. 25 f. 12 **1996**
- b. 25 f. 13-14 **Fire Island circa 1998**
- b. 25 f. 15 **Abstract 1998-2002**
- b. 25 f. 16-17 **Italy 1999**
- b. 25 f. 18-20 **2000s**
Includes trips to Italy.

Photographs (cont.)
Snapshots (cont.)

- b. 25 f. 21-22 2000
Includes trip to Venice.
- b. 25 f. 23-24 2001
Includes trip to Venice.
- b. 25 f. 25 circa 2010
Travel
- b. 22 f. 5 1960s-1970s
- b. 22 f. 6 Bilbao 2007
- b. 22 f. 7 Truitte, James 1960s

Posters

Most promote performances with Alvin Ailey or Martha Graham companies.

- b. 3 f. 12 1958-1970s
- t. 4 1966-1981
Alvin Ailey Dance Company
- t. 5 1960s-1990s
- b. 2 f. 4 1962-1986
Includes small poster for a performance benefiting Birmingham, Alabama.
- b. 3 f. 5-11 circa 1964-1984
- o. 4 1966-1970
- t. 6 1971-1973
- t. 7 1974-1977
- t. 5 International 1960s-1990s
Includes posters for performances that took place in Moscow, Tehran, and Copenhagen.

Fetish

- t. 3 Fred's Knolle Leather Bar in Berlin circa 1980
- t. 3 "Piss On Big Brother" Golden Showers Association 1984
- o. 5 Martha Graham Dance Company circa 1960-1962
Includes a poster promoting a performance in Israel.
- o. 6 *Out of Time* 1999
- b. 2 f. 5 *Hearts of Men* 2014

Programs

Also includes invitations, playbills, and other promotional material.

- b. 22 f. 8-12 1946-1957
- b. 29 f. 1-6 1957-1961
- b. 30 f. 1-6 1962-1967
- b. 31 f. 1-10 1968-1996
- b. 32 f. 1-2 1997-2014
Alvin Ailey Dance Company
- b. 32 f. 3-10 1958-1977

Programs (cont.)

Alvin Ailey Dance Company (cont.)

b. 5 f. 6 1977-1980

b. 33 f. 1-6 1978-1989

b. 2 f. 6 1980-1991

b. 5 f. 7 1982-1991

b. 34 f. 1-5 1990-2012

b. 34 f. 6 Cooper Union 1958

b. 34 f. 7 Juilliard 1953-1963

Martha Graham Dance Company

b. 35 f. 1-9 1950s-2010s

b. 5 f. 8 1963

b. 35 f. 10 Paradigm Dance Company and Others 1996-2003

b. 35 f. 11 School of Performing Arts 1958-1962

b. 35 f. 12 *Showboat* 1957

b. 36 f. 1-4 Scrapbooks 1949-1964, 1985-1987

b. 36 f. 5-9 Teaching 1981-2015

Includes teaching work with Martha Graham School, Ailey School, Juilliard, and various visiting artist sessions outside of New York City.

Tours and Travel

b. 37 f. 1 1959-1969

b. 38 f. 1-4 1970s-2008

b. 38 f. 5 Passports 1960-1995