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**Jerome Robbins Dance Division**

Guide to the

## **Lil Liandre papers**

1910-2003

(S) \*MGZMD 291

Compiled by Kate Jadwin, Pratt Institute, 2012, November 2011

### **Summary**

**Creator:** Liandre, Lil, 1910-2003

**Title:** Lil Liandre papers, 1910-2003

**Size:** .88 linear foot (3 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by Carolyn Slaughter, 2011

**Abstract:** Lil Liandre (1910-2003) was a professional dancer, choreographer, director and teacher. An integral part of the burgeoning New York City dance scene, Liandre contributed to the transformation of American dance in the period between World Wars I and II. Liandre's expansive career took her from collaborations with Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins and other modern dance luminaries to teaching and healing others through dance therapy. The Lil Liandre papers contain photographs, negatives and slides; correspondence; choreography notes; press clippings; programs and flyers; creative writing, including essays, plays, short stories and poetry; personal memorabilia; and a travel diary.

**Access:** To request materials, contact the Jerome Robbins Dance Division ([dance@nypl.org](mailto:dance@nypl.org)) in advance.

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**Preferred citation:** Lil Liandre papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

### **Custodial history**

The Lil Liandre papers were donated by Carolyn Slaughter, as stipulated by Lil Liandre in her will, to the Library for the Performing Arts Dance Division.

### **Processing note**

Portions of the collection have been removed for separate processing and cataloging. These include film/video, audio recordings, and a book.

### **Related collections**

George Balanchine archive. Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University

Sergei Denham records of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Thornton Wilder papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

## **Creator history**

Lillian Ray Goldblum was born in 1910 in Cleveland, Ohio where she received classical ballet training under Nikolai Semenov. She took the stage name Lil Liandre when she left home at 18 to pursue a career in dance. Liandre moved to New York City, bringing letters of recommendation from Semenov to New York City dance instructors such as Nicolai Tarasov, Luigi Albertieri and Mikhail Mordkin. In addition to studying American ballet, she also studied Russian and Italian ballet, and experimented with Spanish and Palestinian dancing. In 1931, Liandre's dance career began to unfold with the award of a three year scholarship from the Neighborhood Playhouse. At the Playhouse she studied under a number of famous instructors, including Martha Graham. In 1932, Liandre became a member of the Martha Graham Dance Company, dancing alongside Anita Alvarez, Dorothy Bird, Bonnie Bird, Ethel Butler, Marie Marchowsky, Sophie Maslow, Lily Mehlman, May O'Donnell, Florence Schneider, Gertrude Shurr and Anna Sokolow. In 1935, Liandre performed with the New Dance League, a progressive modern dance group.

Sometime in the mid to late 1930s, Liandre left modern dance to join the Radio City Music Hall Ballet as a performer and soloist in productions that travelled to major cities across the country. She also danced in nightclubs, posed in exotic costumes for painters and appeared in theatre productions. With the help of an agent, she put on solo concerts, sometimes dancing as many as fourteen pieces in an evening. Between shows she went to canteens and danced for soldiers. Liandre's travels also led to her landing a position as Director of the Guy Bates Post Academy's Dance Laboratory Theatre in Hollywood. From 1939 to 1944, Liandre worked for the American Theatre Wing, Broadway's wartime service organization, performing in and directing the "Lunchtime Follies" in American factories and shipyards across the country. Liandre's solo repertoire secured her an audition with the San Francisco Folies Bergere, which she joined in 1944. Later that year while working with Tamiment's summer theater in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains, Liandre sustained a leg injury that left her with permanent nerve damage and ended her career as a professional dancer.

In 1945, Liandre moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico where she met Edward Johnstone, an osteopath who helped her regain use of her leg. They married in 1950. To satisfy her fascination with the links between dance and healing, Johnstone taught Liandre the tenets of human physiology. She incorporated this new knowledge into the development of her own dance methods; this would eventually lead to her second career, lasting well into her 90s, as a dance teacher and choreographer.

After moving with Johnstone to Arizona in 1955, Liandre joined the Tucson artistic community by embarking on her new livelihood as a ballet instructor. At the YWCA, Liandre introduced her students to the "7-6-6-5" technique, her original osteopathic approach to ballet that focused on the conscious use of certain vertebrae to create a graceful and fluid motion. At some point during this period she met and developed a friendship with Kay Faick, a YWCA swimming instructor with whom Liandre would maintain a close personal and professional relationship until the end of her life.

Liandre soon established the Tucson Repertory Dance Company, where she served as the director and choreographer. Throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s she also choreographed for musicals with Peter Marroney, director of the University of Arizona's Drama Department, and performed in various venues. In 1991, Liandre was honored with a tribute (titled "Arizona Dance Treasures") by The Arizona Dance Arts Alliance for her work as a choreographer, dance instructor and director of the Tucson Repertory Dance Company. Liandre continued to teach ballet and the "7-6-6-5" technique in Tucson until May 2003 when her health took a downturn and she retired. She passed away in October 2003 at the age of 93.

### **Scope and content note**

Most notable in the collection are the photographs. There is a great variety of personal and professional photographs ranging from her youth to her final years. The majority of photographs are well preserved and in excellent condition. General photographs contain an assortment of images of Liandre modeling for other artists, posing in costume, or demonstrating dance poses. Professional photographs capture Liandre performing, rehearsing and teaching; headshots and full body shots are also taken by various professional photographers. Personal photographs consist of images of Liandre and her husband. Also included are photographic negatives and slides, representing an assortment of personal and professional images.

Inspired by Dr. William G. Sutherland's osteopathic work in the cranial field, Liandre wrote "The White Bowl" ballet as her expression of Sutherland's concepts and principles; these writings, notes, correspondence and documentation can be found in the "Cranial Concept" subject file. Personal Documents consist of a rehearsal space contract, medical pamphlets, Liandre's birth and marriage certificates, and Edward Johnstone's naturalization to the United States.

The Lil Liandre papers hold correspondence with friends, family and students, in addition to correspondence with Kay Faick and letters of condolence to Liandre after Faick's death. Liandre's writings from creative writing classes, including essays, plays, short stories, poetry are in the collection. There also are three small notebooks: the first two contain verses written later in life by Liandre; the third is Liandre's "Trip Book," a diary she kept while traveling through Europe with Kay Faick in the summer of 1967. The collection contains drawings and sketches by other artists that were inspired by Liandre, as well as typescripts of reviews, unidentified transcribed interviews, stories and draft articles by Geraldine Saltzberg (annotated by Liandre).

### **Arrangement**

This collection is arranged alphabetically by format

### **Key terms**

#### **Subjects**

Dance -- America -- History

#### **Names**

American Theatre Wing

Folies-Bergère

Liandre, Lil, 1910-2003

Martha Graham Dance Company

Neighborhood Playhouse (New York, N.Y.)

Radio City Music Hall (New York, N.Y.). Corps de ballet

## Container list

- b.1 f.1 Choreography Notes, 1951-1996, undated
  - Correspondence
- b.1 f.2 General, 1941-2000, undated
- b.1 f.3-4 Faick, Kay, 1959-2003, undated
- b.1 f.5 Cranial Concept, 1947-1979, undated
- b.1 f.7 Personal Documents, 1910-1989, undated
  - Photographs
- b.3 f.1 General, 1936-1991, undated
- b.3 f.2-3 Headshots, undated
- b.1 f.6 Negatives, 1963, undated
- b.3 f.4-5 Professional and Performance , 1937-1967, undated
- b.3 f.6 Rehearsals, 1962-1973, undated
- b.2 f.7 Slides, 1948, 1968, undated
- b.1 f.8 Press Clippings, 1933-2003, undated
  - Programs and Flyers
- b.2 f.1 General, 1933-1989
- b.2 f.2 California Shows and Musicals, 1939-1945, undated
- b.2 f.3 Marroney, [Peter] University of Arizona Musicals, 1951-1964
- b.2 f.4 Tucson Class Flyers, undated
- b.2 f.5 Tucson Dance Repertory Company, 1953-1977
- b.2 f.6 Sketches of Liandre, 1941, undated
- b.2 f.8 Typescripts, 1965-1971, undated
- b.2 f.9 Writings, 1967-1995, undated