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Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the
Frank Westbrook papers
1937-1990
(S)*MGZMD 309

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

Summary

Creator: Westbrook, Frank

Title: Frank Westbrook papers, 1937-1990

Size: 1.13 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: Unknown.

Abstract: The Frank Westbrook papers document the life and career of dancer and choreographer Frank Westbrook (1909-1992), who was an acting extra for Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre and an ensemble dancer on Broadway before creating choreography of his own. Westbrook also danced in works by prominent choreographers such as Agnes DeMille and Doris Humphrey, and participated in the creation of a choreographers' organization called Theater Dance, Inc. His papers include a scrapbook, a memoir, personal essays, ballet scenarios, ballet music scores, correspondence, and photographs.

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

Copyright information: Donor retains copyright of materials. Library policy on photocopying will apply. For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

Preferred citation: Frank Westbrook papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: The existing order of the papers has been maintained.

Creator history

Frank Westbrook was born in Mississippi in 1909, and raised in Washington D.C. where he later attended George Washington University to study theater. In 1937, he moved to New York City to pursue an acting career, although he would eventually make his way as a dancer and a choreographer. He first worked as an extra in plays (appearing in Orson Welles' productions at the Mercury Theatre from 1937-1938), and then transitioned to dancing on Broadway as a chorus boy. Westbrook danced in works by prominent choreographers such as Agnes DeMille and Doris Humphrey, in addition to creating choreography of his own both independently and for television variety shows. He also helped found a performance organization called Theater Dance, Inc., which provided a forum for emerging choreographers to present their work.

Scope and content note

The Frank Westbrook papers document Westbrook's life and career as a performing artist in New York City from the late 1930s to the early 1990s. The collection includes a scrapbook (with clippings, photographs, and programs from throughout his career), a memoir of his time with the Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre and subsequently as a dancer on Broadway, ballet scenarios, ballet music scores, and photographs demonstrating poses of the Pilates body conditioning system. The correspondence includes financial letters from Westbrook to his lawyer, bank, and landlord; letters to and from the United States Copyright Office regarding Westbrook's copyright questions; various correspondence to dancers and producers in preparation for dance and theatrical productions (including *The Play's The Thing*); and communication with the James N. Jarvie Commonwealth Service regarding Westbrook's application for financial assistance in his old age. Also present are miscellaneous personal items, including essays and recipes for such dishes as fried chicken with maple syrup and calf brains with spaghetti.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in alphabetical order by folder title.

Key terms

Subjects

Ballet -- 20th Century
Ballet -- United States
Choreographers -- United States
Modern Dance -- United States

Names

Westbrook, Frank

Special formats

Black-and-white negatives
Manuscripts for publication
Photographs
Scrapbooks

Container list

- b.1 f.1 General, 1951-1990
- b.1 f.2-4 Ballet Scenarios, undated
- b.1 f.5-6 Correspondence, 1976-1990
- b.1 f.7 Essays, undated
- b.1 f.8-11 *Memoirs of a Gypsy*, 1937-1949
 - b.2 f.1 *Memoirs of a Gypsy*, 1937-1949
- b.1 f.12 Notes--Musical Score, 1961
- b.1 f.13 Pilates Mat Exercises, undated
- b.3 f.1-7 Scrapbook, 1938 -1982
- b.4 f.1-6 Scrapbook, 1938 -1982