

**The New York Public Library**  
**New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center**  
**Jerome Robbins Dance Division**

Guide to the  
**Lila Zali papers**

1898-2003

(S) \*MGZMD 256

Compiled by Veronica Garcia Rodriguez, Pratt Institute 2012, July 2011

## Summary

**Creator:** Zali, Lila, 1918-2003

**Title:** Lila Zali papers, 1898-2003

**Size:** 1.76 linear feet (5 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by the Estate of Lila Zali Levienne, 2003

**Abstract:** Lila Zali, born Elizaveta Borisova Zalipskaya (1918-2003), was a ballerina, educator, choreographer, and founder of Ballet Pacifica. The Lila Zali papers (1898-2003) document her life as a dancer from her childhood until retirement through photographs, memorabilia, and scrapbooks kept by Zali and her mother, Maria Zalipsky. The collection spans Zali's professional career, including her work with the Mordkin Ballet, the United Service Organizations (USO), and on the television programs *Balleretta* and *The Don Lewis Show*.

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

Inquiries regarding audio materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Audio materials may be subject to preservation and migration prior to access.

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**Preferred citation:** Lila Zali papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

## Processing note

A poster advertising the Mordkin Russian Ballet has been removed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division's collection of Mordkin Ballet posters.

## Related collections

Adolph Bolm collection. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

American Ballet Theatre records. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Eugene Loring papers. MS-P02. Special Collections and Archives, University of California at Irvine Libraries.

John Dougherty papers. MS-P3. Special Collections and Archives, University of California at Irvine Libraries.

## Creator history

Lila Zali was born Elizaveta Borisova Zalipskaya on July 22, 1918 in Tblisi, Georgia. A ballerina, educator, and choreographer, Zali is best known founding Ballet Pacifica in Laguna Beach, California in 1962.

The daughter of the opera singers Boris and Maria Zalipskaya (Zalipsky), Zali immigrated with her parents in 1921 to the United States as a consequence of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Her father had obtained a contract to sing with the Metropolitan Opera; however, he died of typhoid fever en route to America. Zali and her mother settled in Washington, D.C. where she studied ballet under Theodore Bekefi in the 1930s.

Zali attended the American School of Ballet and in the late 1930s and early 1940s went on to dance for the Mordkin Ballet, the American Ballet Theatre, and Colonel De Basil's Original Ballet Russe. During her dance career she toured with the United Service Organizations (USO) in the trio The Three Debs and appeared on the television shows *Balleretta* and *The Don Lewis Show*. Zali was also featured in many Hollywood movies, including *An American in Paris* and Charlie Chaplin's *Limelight*.

In 1945, Zali moved to Los Angeles and met her husband Nicolas Kolia Levienne, a successful cellist known for touring with the internationally famous ballerina Anna Pavlova. There Zali and Levienne founded Ballet Musicale, the forerunner for the Los Angeles City Ballet, with former Ballet Russe dancer Michel Panaieff.

The couple settled in Laguna Beach in 1959, where Levienne began a chamber music orchestra and Zali opened her first dance studio. This studio evolved into Ballet Pacifica, which became a prominent ballet company in Orange County. In the late 1960s, she served as the president and sat on the Board of Directors for the National Association for Regional Ballet, later known as Regional Dance America. An active community member, Zali participated in the Laguna Beach Arts Commission as well as the Soroptimist Club of Laguna Beach. Although Zali stepped down from her position as Artistic Director for Ballet Pacifica in 1988, she stayed on as an instructor until her death on January 4, 2003.

## Scope and content note

The Lila Zali papers (1898-2003) consist of photographs, press clippings, programs and memorabilia, diaries belonging to her mother, scrapbooks, and personal and professional correspondence. The collection documents Zali's personal and professional life from her childhood through the end of her tenure as Artistic Director for Ballet Pacifica. The scrapbooks and photographs provide a sense of Zali's youth and career development as well as images of family life in the early twentieth century.

The majority of the collection is made up of press clippings and programs, which provide a sense of Zali's professional life. Many of the photographs document time spent dancing for the USO and on the television series *Balleretta* and *The Don Lewis Show*.

There are four scrapbooks; Zali's scrapbook documents her career touring with the Mordkin Ballet, Colonel De Basil's Original Ballet Russe, and the USO. Maria Zalipsky compiled the other three scrapbooks, which trace Zali's career as well as some family history. The diaries kept by Zalipsky are written in Russian and include press clippings and photographs of Zali, friends, and family.

The music books in the collection, which are in English, Russian, German and French, have the earliest dates and were kept by Zali and Zalipsky.

Audio material removed from this collection contains recordings of Zali singing opera. Inquiries regarding audio materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division ([dance@nypl.org](mailto:dance@nypl.org)). Audio materials may be subject to preservation and migration prior to access.

## **Arrangement**

Alphabetical by subject.

## **Key terms**

### **Subjects**

Ballerinas  
Ballet companies -- United States  
Ballet dancing

### **Occupations**

Ballerinas  
Ballet dancers  
Choreographers  
Dance teachers

### **Names**

Zali, Lila, 1918-2003

### **Special formats**

Photographs  
Scrapbooks

## Container list

- b.1 f.1 Awards, 1951-2001, undated
- b.1 f.2 Ballet Pacifica, 1971-1988, undated
- b.1 f.3 Commemorative Medal, 1922
- b.1 f.4 Contracts, 1937-1940
- b.1 f.5 Correspondence, 1943-1969, undated
- b.1 f.6-7 Diaries--Zalipsky, Maria, circa 1960, undated
- b.1 f.8 Diploma--Zalipsky, Maria, 1937
- b.1 f.9 Ephemera, 2003, undated
- b.1 f.10-12 Music Books, 1898-1950, undated
- b.2 f.1-2 Music Books, 1898-1950, undated
- b.5 f.3-5 Music Books, 1898-1950, undated
- Photographs
  - b.2 f.3 Head Shots and Performances, circa 1920-1990
  - b.5 f.1 Head Shots and Performances, circa 1920-1990
  - b.2 f.4 Performances, circa 1940-1960
  - b.2 f.5 Relatives and Friends, circa 1900-1960
  - b.5 f.2 Relatives and Friends, circa 1900-1960
- b.2 f.6-7 Press Clippings, 1938-1999, undated
- Programs
  - b.2 f.8 Levienne, Nicolas Kolia, 1953, 1969, undated
  - b.2 f.9 Mordkin, Mikhail, 1939-1940, undated
  - b.2 f.10 Pavlova, Anna, 1924-1925, undated
- b.3 f.1-2 Zali, Lila, 1924-2003, undated
- b.3 f.3 Regional Dance Association, 1990-1995
- Scrapbooks
  - b.4 f.1-20 1908-1960 (Compiled by Maria Zalipsky.)
  - b.3 f.4-5 1927-circa 1940 (Compiled by Lila Zali.)
  - b.3 f.6 1929-1946 (Compiled by Maria Zalipsky.)
  - b.3 f.7-8 1940-1960 (Compiled by Maria Zalipsky.)