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**Jerome Robbins Dance Division**

Guide to the

**Merle Marsicano papers**

1955-1983

(S)\*MGZMD 308

Compiled by Lea Jordan, March 2013

## **Summary**

**Creator:** Marsicano, Merle

**Title:** Merle Marsicano papers, 1955-1983

**Size:** .42 linear foot (1 box)

**Source:** Donated by the estate of Merle Marsicano, 1988; Howard Billman, 1993; and Edwin Hymovitz, 1999.

**Abstract:** Merle Marsicano (1903-1983) was an avant-garde dancer and choreographer. The Merle Marsicano papers hold choreographic notes, correspondence, publicity materials, and writings that reflect her 30 year career.

**Access:** Collection is open to the public. Library policy on photography and photocopying will apply. Advance notice may be required.

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

## **Creator history**

Merle Marsicano (1903-1983) was an avant-garde dancer and choreographer. Born in Philadelphia, Marsicano began her education in dance under ballet teacher Ethel Phillips and then Mikhail Mordkin. After dancing in many local opera ballets, she moved to New York City to study Spanish dance under Angel Cansino. She also studied acting and dance at the Neighborhood Playhouse under Sanford Meisner and Martha Graham. After two years at the Playhouse, she went home to Philadelphia and began to give her own full length concerts there. In 1950, Marsicano returned to New York City to perform and teach.

Marsicano sought to reduce the authority of music over choreography by selecting low-key pieces that would not detract from the dance. She gave her first concert in New York in 1954. Because of her close association with painters (her husband was artist Nicholas Marsicano) her work was closely tied to abstract expressionists. In 20 years, she gave concerts using whatever theaters were available to her, including the Henry Street Settlement, the Kauffman Auditorium, Hunter College, and even Judson Church. Marsicano and her husband retired to Woodstock near the end of her life.

### **Scope and content note**

Marsicano's choreographic notes consist of charts, dancer lists, and sketches describing six of her works. Edits and cut materials are included, and one can discern how each work evolved. She does not always differentiate between drafts. Often pages hold one individual idea or movement for the dance in question, without noting where in the piece the idea appeared.

The bulk of her correspondence is with two friends - the composer Edwin Hymovitz and Philadelphia native Howard Billman. These folders hold letters written by Marsicano to Hymovitz and Billman. She discusses the difficulty and hardship in dealing with the creative process and her husband's struggles as an artist. The remainder of the letters are from various individuals to Marsicano, such as former dancers and her niece, Wendy Oser.

There are two notebooks filled with inspirational quotes and lists of books that Marsicano was interested in obtaining, as well as press clippings, a small selection of posters and programs, and writings.

### **Arrangement**

Alphabetical by subject, format, or title.

### **Key terms**

#### **Subjects**

Choreographers -- United States

Choreography

Dance -- History -- 20th century

#### **Names**

Marsicano, Merle

#### **Special formats**

Choreographic notes

Correspondence

Posters

Programs

## Container list

### Choreographic Notes

- b.1 f.1 *The Beauties*, undated
- b.1 f.2 *Carnival of Imagined Faces*, undated
- b.1 f.3 *Dance for Three and Dance for Four*, undated (Also called *Trio* and *Quartet*)
- b.1 f.4 *Formal Appearances*, undated
- b.1 f.5 *Images in the Open*, undated
- b.1 f.6 *Nocturne*, undated
- b.1 f.7 Unidentified, undated

### Correspondence

- b.1 f.8 General, 1955-1973
    - Billman, Howard (from Marsicano to Billman)
  - b.1 f.9 1964-1969
  - b.1 f.10 1970-1979
  - b.1 f.11 1980-1983
  - b.1 f.12 Dancers, 1959-1973
  - b.1 f.13 Hymovitz, Edwin, 1965-1979 (from Marsicano to Hymovitz)
  - b.1 f.14 Oser, Wendy, undated
- b.1 f.15-16 Notebooks
- b.1 f.17 Press, 1970-1976
  - b.1 f.18 Programs and Posters, 1963-1982

### Writings

- b.1 f.19 Biography Material, undated
- b.1 f.20 Speech - Henry Street Playhouse, 1957
- b.1 f.21 *Thoughts On Dance*, 1957