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Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Mary Wigman letters to Pola Nirenska

1932-1958

(S)*MGZMD 300

Compiled by Boni Joi Koelliker, Pratt Institute, 2013, July 2012

Summary

Creator: Wigman, Mary, 1886-1973

Title: Mary Wigman letters to Pola Nirenska, 1932-1958

Size: .21 linear foot (1 box)

Source: Donated by Jan Korsi, 1996.

Abstract: Mary Wigman is considered to be one of the founders of the modern dance movement. Her school in Dresden, Germany trained several dancers including Pola Nirenska, Harald Kreuzberg, and Hanya Holm. Nirenska toured with the Wigman troupe in the 1932-1933 tour of the United States and Germany. At the start of World War II, Nirenska, who was Jewish, emigrated to England. The Mary Wigman letters to Pola Nirenska document their relationship through correspondence written between the years of 1934 to 1936 and 1946 to 1958. A program from their 1932-1933 tour features Nirenska as well as a press clipping about the resurgence of German dance after the war.

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

Copyright information: For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division (dance@nypl.org).

Preferred citation: Mary Wigman letters to Pola Nirenska, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: The correspondence was re-housed into folders and arranged chronologically. The rest of the items were put into folders and arranged alphabetically by document type.

The collection was received with notes folded around each letter. Notes repeating information provided by the letters themselves were discarded; notes that provided new information were kept with the letters.

Related collections

Hanya Holm papers. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Katharine Wolfe papers. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Mary Wigman letters to Margaret Erlanger. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Mary Wigman letters to Margaret Gage. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Mary Wigman letters to Walter Sorell. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Shirlee Dodge collection of Mary Wigman materials. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Walter Sorell research files on Mary Wigman. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator history

Born in Hanover, Germany in 1886, Mary Wigman is considered to be one of the founders of the modern dance movement. Through her studies in Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's Eurhythmics school and with Rudolf von Laban in Ascona, Switzerland, she used dance as an expression of life and created her own style referred to as expressionist dance or "absolute" dance. Her early performances were silent or danced with percussion only. In 1920 she opened her own school in Desden, Germany where she taught her theories of movement. She died in Berlin in 1973.

Pola Nirenska was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1910 and insisted on dancing as a child. Although she had very little early training she attended the Wigman School and graduated with honors in music and dance in 1931. Nirenska performed in the 1932-1933 Wigman company tour through the United States and Germany. At the start of World War II, Nirenska, who was Jewish, emigrated to England. In 1949, Nirenska moved to the United States where she studied dance with leading modern dance choreographers and opened her own company in 1951 in Washington, D.C. Pola Nirenska died in Maryland in 1992.

Sources:

Dunning, Jennifer. "Pola Nirenska, a Choreographer And Teacher, Is a Suicide at 81." The New York Times, July 31, 1992. Accessed June 28, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/31/arts/pola-nirenska-a-choreographer-and-teacher-is-a-suicide-at-81.html>.

"Wigman, Mary (1886-1973)." Encyclopedia of World Biography. Detroit: Gale, 1998. Gale Biography In Context. Accessed July 3, 2012. <http://ic.galegroup.com>.

Scope and content note

The collection consists of fifty-five letters to Pola Nirenska from Mary Wigman from 1934 to 1936 and 1946 to 1958. Written in German and English, the letters may contain both languages.

The collection includes two letters not written by Wigman: one from Harald Kreutzberg in German, and one from Elizabeth Wigman, Mary Wigman's sister. One letter written by Mary Wigman to composer Preault regarding Pola Nirenska is in the collection. Also included in this collection are postcards depicting images of Wigman; an unsigned, typed poem; an unsigned note; black and white photographs; a press clipping; and a performance program for a dance choreographed by Mary Wigman featuring Pola Nirenska (1932).

Additional archival collections, books, interviews, press clippings, programs, and video recordings concerning both Wigman and Nirenska can be found by conducting separate subject and author searches for "Wigman, Mary" and "Nirenska, Pola" in the catalog (www.nypl.org/catalog).

Arrangement

Alphabetical by document type.

Key terms

Subjects

Dancers -- Germany

Occupations

Dancers -- United States

Names

Nirenska, Pola

Wigman, Mary, 1886-1973

Container list

Correspondence

- b.1 f.1 1934-1936 (Includes a letter from Elizabeth Wigman.)
- b.1 f.2 1946-1948
- b.1 f.3 1949
- b.1 f.4 1950-1955
- b.1 f.5 1957-1958
- b.1 f.6 undated
- b.1 f.7 Kreutzberg, Harald, undated
- b.1 f.8 Preault, 1949
- b.1 f.9 Note, undated
- b.1 f.10 Photographs, undated
- b.1 f.11 Poem, undated
- b.1 f.12 Postcards, undated
- b.1 f.13 Program and Press Clipping, 1932-1950