

**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

**Rosella Pianarosa collection of Ted Shawn materials**

1956-1972

(S)\*MGZMD 301

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

## **Summary**

**Creator:** Pianarosa, Rosella

**Title:** Rosella Pianarosa collection of Ted Shawn materials, 1956-1972

**Size:** .21 linear foot (1 box)

**Source:** Donated by Rosella "Zell" Pianarosa, 1990.

**Abstract:** The Rosella Pianarosa collection of Ted Shawn materials documents the personal and professional activities of modern dancer Ted Shawn from 1956 to 1972, primarily through a series of annual newsletters. Some personal correspondence highlights the friendship between the Pianarosas and Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis.

**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:** Rosella Pianarosa collection of Ted Shawn materials, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Prior to processing, non-archival materials were removed from the collection. The remaining materials were grouped by subject.

## **Related collections**

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archives. Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

Ruth St. Denis letters. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Ruth St. Denis papers. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Ted Shawn collection. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Ted Shawn papers. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

## **Creator history**

Rosella Pianarosa, or Zell, as she was known, was born in New York in 1902. From 1961 through 1972, she lived in Pittsfield, Massachusetts; Bonita Springs, Florida; and Becket, Massachusetts, the site of the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. With her husband Peter, the Pianarosas made donations to Jacob's Pillow and were friends of Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis. Zell Pianarosa died in 1995.

Modern dancers Ted Shawn (1891-1972) and Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968) met in 1914, married, and opened Denishawn, a dance company and school focusing on dance forms that incorporated theatrical and ethnic traditions. The Denishawn Company paved the way for the legitimacy of modern dance in America and fostered the early careers of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman. In 1929, Shawn and St. Denis parted both personally and professionally.

Ted Shawn formed an all male dance troupe called Ted Shawn's Men Dancers in 1933, which was showcased at his Berkshires farm, Jacob's Pillow. From 1933 to 1940, Ted Shawn's Men Dancers toured the United States, Canada, England, and Cuba. During this time Ted Shawn leased his farm to Mary Washington Ball, who produced the Berkshire Dance Festival. The festival became so popular with the town residents that they formed the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival committee, raised money to buy the farm and build a theater, and made Shawn director in 1942.

Ruth St. Denis went on to dance, teach, and choreograph independently. St. Denis and Shawn maintained a friendship and she presented many of her dances at the festival from 1940 to 1964.

Sources:

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archive. "Pillow History." Accessed July 3, 2012. <http://www.jacobspillow.org/archives/history>.

"Massachusetts Death Index, 1970-2003." Ancestry Library Edition. Accessed June 26, 2012. <http://www.ancestrylibrary.com>.

## **Scope and content note**

The Rosella Pianarosa collection of Ted Shawn materials documents Ted Shawn's activities as a professional dancer and director of the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival. The collection also highlights his and Ruth St. Denis's relationship with the Pianarosas, who were not only patrons but friends. The collection primarily consists of annual newsletters from Ted Shawn, from 1961 to 1972, the last of which was written by John Christian after Shawn's death that year. Sent to patrons and friends, the newsletter reported Shawn's activities throughout the year, including trips abroad to see dancers and companies perform, dinners with friends, award ceremonies, teaching activities, meetings with prominent people in the arts and government, as well as general items about the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and school. Most of the newsletters include inserts of black and white photographic clippings and some also include press releases from Ted Shawn's projects.

The 1969 newsletter includes text of a speech given by Edward G. Freehafer, Director of The New York Public Library, on the occasion of the unveiling of Ted Shawn's name carved into the Benefactor's Column at the main library, which acknowledges Shawn's and St. Denis's contribution to the Dance collection.

Other items from Ted Shawn include one letter that has a photograph attached of Shawn in his backyard in Florida. In addition, there is a commemorative napkin from Shawn and St. Denis's golden anniversary,

an invitation to the 1959 opening party of the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and a postcard from Shawn's trip to Denmark.

The Ruth St. Denis materials consist of a newsletter and three letters.

Books, interviews, photographs, sound recordings, video recordings, and additional materials can be found by conducting separate searches for author "Pianarosa, Rosella," as well as authors and subjects "Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival," "St. Denis, Ruth" and "Shawn, Ted" in the catalog ([www.nypl.org/catalog](http://www.nypl.org/catalog)).

## **Arrangement**

Alphabetical by subject.

## **Key terms**

### **Names**

Jacob's Pillow  
Pianarosa, Rosella  
Shawn, Ted, 1891-1972  
St. Denis, Ruth, 1880-1968

### **Occupations**

Dancers -- United States

### **Events**

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

## **Container list**

- b.1 f.1 St. Denis, Ruth, 1956-1959
- b.1 f.2 Shawn, Ted, 1960-1966
- b.1 f.3-4 Shawn, Ted--Newsletters, 1961-1972