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**Guide to the
Mikhail Mikhailovich Mordkin (1880-1944) Papers, 1885-1979**

(S) *MGZMD 98

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Mikhail Mikhailovich Mordkin (1880-1944) papers, circa 1885-1979

Call number: (S) *MGZMD 98

Creator: Mordkin, Mikhail Mikhailovich

Extent: 4 document boxes (237 items in 72 folders)

Repository: Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, New York

Language: Materials in English, Russian, and French

Administrative Information

- Source:** Gift of the Mordkin estate. Received August 1, 1980.
- Access:** Collection is open to the public.
- Restrictions on Use:** Library policy on photography and photocopying will apply. For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
- Preferred Citation:** Mikhail Mikhailovich Mordkin Papers, (S) *MGZMD 98, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
- Related Materials:** Researchers should note that other materials by and about Mordkin may also be found in the following collection:
- American Ballet Theatre. Records, 1936-circa 1967
(S) *MGZMD 49

Biographical History

Mikhail Mikhailovich Mordkin, Russian dancer and teacher, was born in Moscow on December 9, 1880 into the family of the violinist of the Imperial Theatres. At the age of nine he entered Moscow Imperial Ballet School. Upon graduation in 1900, he was accepted to the company as a soloist. Soon after, he was promoted to premier, the highest rank in the company, and was featured in practically every leading role of the company's repertory, especially character parts. At the same time, in his early twenties, he began his teaching career at the Ballet School in Moscow, and the first Russian private schools of dance and "plastic movement."

Even from his school days Mordkin established himself as an artist of an unusual expressiveness and passion. However, his technique was frequently criticized as not classical and even shaky. But the classical technique itself was not concern. His ambition was to render deep emotions that went far beyond the of ballet traditions of the time, and to make his technique serve the goal of portraying the character. In his performances he challenged dramatic standards of male dancing by enhancing his characters with deep feelings, rather gallant manners, and with detailed characterization, rather than beautiful posing partnering.

Mikhail Mordkin was among the first Russian dancers to perform outside Russia. At the invitation of Kaiser Wilhelm he organized a short season in Berlin in the summer of [?], even before Diaghilev's company opened its first season in Paris.

At the opening night of Ballets Russes in Paris in 1909, Mordkin danced the leading role in Michael Fokine's *Le Pavillon d'Armide*, and that same year he appeared as Pavlova's

partner in London and the United States. His personal success was equal Pavlova's and their partnership was one of the most significant of the century.

During the next several years Mordkin organized two major tours to the United States with the All-Star Russian Imperial Ballet company; retired from and came back to the Theatres; staged a number of concert dances and small [UNK]; opened his own ballet school in Moscow; and continued performing regularly.

After the outbreak of the October Revolution, Mordkin pursued many of the same activities. He danced at the Bolshoi Theatre, organized tours all over Russia, taught, and staged ballets and concert dances. However, the growing chaos and famine of the 1920s made him look for ways of escaping Russia. In the fall of 1924, he finally obtained permission to leave for a tour to the United States. He never returned to Russia.

In 1927, Mikhail Mordkin opened the Mordkin School of Dance in the Carnegie Hall building in New York City, offering "complete ballet training, mimo-drama classes, [and a] rehearsal group [that would] prepare ballets for performances." This group, the Mikhail Mordkin Ballet, was an outlet for advanced students (with Mikhail Mordkin himself dancing main character parts). On December 19, 1936, the company presented *Sleeping Beauty*, sponsored by the Woman's Club of Waterbury, Connecticut, with Lucia Chase and Dimitri Romanoff in the leading roles.

Plans for the student company became more ambitious. Advance Productions, with Lucia Chase as the major stockholder, was incorporated in March 1937, to sponsor the company. The Mordkin Ballet began to tour nationwide with a small repertory of ballets choreographed by Mordkin. In 1938, the company was reorganized under Advanced Arts, Inc., with Rudolf Orthwine as president. Richard Pleasant managed the school and was later made secretary of the organization. A more professional Mordkin Ballet emerged, hiring such noted dancers as Patricia Bowman, Nina Stroganova, Karen Conrad, Edward Caton, and Vladimir Dokoudovsky. The company continued to tour with Mordkin's ballets, however, many new ideas were developing. Chase and Pleasant began to plan a larger company, with more choreographers and dancers, and different artistic goals. In September of 1939, the nucleus of the Mordkin Ballet reorganized into Ballet Theatre. Mikhail Mordkin was informed that he was no longer needed to teach or choreograph for the company, and only one of his ballets was ever produced by Ballet Theatre. Mordkin returned to teaching at his Carnegie Hall studio.

Once his popularity as a dancer was enormous, he was one of the first male ballet stars of Russia, but it is as a teacher that he is best remembered in the United States. He possessed a "vivid personality" with the ability to "transmit something of the true spirit of the dance," and he tried to bring out special qualities in each of his students.

Mordkin died in New York City on July 15, 1944.

Mikhail Mordkin's wife, Bronislava Avgustovna Mordkin (née Pozhitskaia), was born in Warsaw, Poland, part of Imperial Russia at that time, some time between March 23 and April 4, 1881. She studied ballet at Moscow Imperial Ballet School, and upon graduation

in 1900 was accepted as a member of the Imperial Ballet Company. In 1912, she married Mikhail Mordkin. She performed as a soloist in his tour companies in London and US. Together with her husband, she came to New York in 1924. She worked as a teacher of mime and character dancing in Mordkin School of Dance, and after Mordkin's death in 1944 continued teaching up to the late 1960s, including at the Ballet Department of Riverside Museum in New York City.

She also outlived her son, Michael Mordkin, Jr., born in 1914 and died on March 3, 1978. Bronislava Pozhitskaia died in New York on July 27, 1979, at the age of 98.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Mikhail Mordkin cover the period from circa 1885 to 1979, the year of his wife's death. They pertain to both his family life and professional career. The bulk of the collection consists of official and private correspondence, and miscellaneous material related to Mikhail Mordkin's professional career

Of interest are papers of the Mordkin School of Dance and Mordkin Ballet, letters from Anna Pavlova, letters from Lucia Chase, and a letter from Richard Pleasant regarding his contract with Ballet Theatre.

Papers related to Mikhail Mordkin contain private and professional correspondence, contracts, Mordkin's autobiography, choreographic notes, souvenir programs and fan-mail.

Papers related to Bronislava Mordkin contain correspondence, some personal and professional material, yearbooks and notes.

Papers of Michael Mordkin, Jr. contain correspondence and some personal material.

Organization

The papers are divided into six series:

- I. Correspondence
- II. Mikhail Mordkin Professional Papers
- III. Personal Papers
- IV. Souvenir Programs
- V. Fan Mail
- VI. Bronislava Mordkin Yearbooks and Diaries

Separated Material

The following items were received with the original gift but have been separated from the manuscript collection. The current location of these items (as of April 1994) is indicated

Photographs and snapshots - Location: in process

Issues of *Radioliubitel* magazine and *Radio* newspaper - Location: in process

Container List

Series I: CORRESPONDENCE

Box	Fol.	
		A
b.1	f.1	Agadzhalov, Konstantin, Nov 3 rd 1 item
b.1	f.2	All Russia Pushkin Centennial of America, 1937 1 item
b.1	f.3	American Ballet Theatre, 1967 1 item
b.1	f.4	Association of the Graduates of the Corps des Pages of His Imperial Majesty Emperor of Russia, Mar 16, 1932 1 item Correspondence thanking Mordkin for his performance. Signed by Prince George of Russia and A.C. de Bodisco, Chamberlain to H.M. President of the Association of the Corps of Pages.
		B
b.1	f.5	Boleslawski, Richard, undated 1 item In Russian
		Chase, Lucia Letters and postcards to Mordkin and Bronislava Mordkin, mostly at the time when Chase was taking classes at the Mordkin School of Dance. Mordkin and Chase seem to be teaching each other their native languages. Chase was trying to write in Russian, which Mordkin apparently wrote to her in English.
b.1	f.6	Correspondence, 1934-1936 and undated 15 items
b.1	f.7	Christmas card, 1975 1 item
b.1	f.8	Poem dedicated to Chase, undated 1 item In Russian Poem appears to be composed randomly by several people, including Mikhail Mordkin.

- C**
- b.1 f.9 Chu, Else Harslem
1 item
Presumably Mordkin's student. Signed "Alias Martha Graham". Sent on word of Mikhail Mordkin's death.
- E**
- b.1 f.10 Eckman, E.A., Aug 28, 1929
1 item
See also Moser, Charles
- F**
- b.1 f.11 Fokine, Michel, Feb 3, 1941
1 item
In Russian
Regarding dancer and choreographer Kozlov.
- b.1 f.12 Froman, Max, 1950
2 items
In Russian
Letter and postcard
- G**
- b.1 f.13 Grechaninov, Aleksandr, Jun 20, 1936
1 item
In Russian
- H**
- b.1 f.14 Hepburn, Katharine, undated
1 item
- K**
- b.1 f.15 Khan, Otto, Jan 12, 1926
1 item
In Russian
- b.1 f.16 Komisarjevsky, Fedor, 1934, 1942
2 items
In Russian
- b.1 f.17 Kropotkina, Aleksandra, Princess, 1956
1 item
In Russian
To Bronislava Mordkin.
- b.1 f.18 Kshesinskaia, Mathilda, Jul(?) 12, 1912
1 item
In Russian
Offer to be partner at Krasnoe Selo. Mounted on a letter from Mordkin's student T. Siderova, dated Nov 27, 1916.

- L**
- b.1 f.19 Liukom, Elena, May 29, 1924
1 item
In Russian
Dancer with Mariinsky Ballet, Fokine's student.
- M**
- b.1 f.20 Miscellaneous: Letter fragments, undated
2 items
In Russian
Letter to Mikhail and Bronislava Mordkin.
- b.1 f.21 Miscellaneous: Cards, postcards, calling cards, announcements, 1938-1978 and undated
19 items
In Russian
Correspondents include Patricia Bowman, Natalie Rakhmaninoff and family, Dimitri Romanoff.
- b.1 f.22 Mathes, Rosa, 1979
3 items
To Bronislava Mordkin.
- b.1 f.23 McCaleb, Kenneth, undated
1 item
From Sunday Mirror Editor to Michael Mordkin, Jr. Includes photocopy of photograph of Mordkin family, published in Sunday Mirror, Nov 20, 1924.
- b.1 f.24 Mordkin, Mikhail, undated
4 items
Letters to Bronislava Mordkin. Letter on Congress Hotel and Annex letterhead presumably written during one of Mordkin's two tours to the United States in 1910.
- b.1 f.25 Mordkin, Michael, Jr., 1973, 1977 and undated
3 items
Postcards to Bronislava Mordkin sent from Brazil and Colombia.
- b.1 f.26 Moser, Charles, Dec 19, 1936
1 item
Informing the Mordkins of Mr. Eckman's death.
- N**
- b.1 f.27 New York American Christmas and Relief Fund, Inc., Dec 24, 1927
1 item
Thanking Mikhail Mordkin for cooperation at benefits given by the Fund.

- b.1 f.28 New York Public Library, Astor, Lennox and Tilden Foundation, 1951, 1978
2 items
First letter from Carlton Sprague Smith regarding Mordkin exhibit.
Second letter from Genevieve Oswald, Library and Museum for the Performing Arts, sending sympathy on Michael's death and offering to establish a Mordkin Memorial Collection with the library.
- b.1 f.29 Novoe Russkoe Slovo, Jun 11, 1925
1 item
In Russian
Receipt for money paid by Mordkin for land bought in Novy Petrograd.
- P**
- b.1 f.30 Parra, Maria and Juliette, 1935
1 item
- b.1 f.31 Pavlova, Anna, 1910-1916
2 items
In Russian
Photograph of Mordkin mounted on verso of letter from Pavlova. Letter reads "Dear Mikhail Mikhailovitch, Would you be so kind as to give a permission for the corps de ballet to dance your [remainder of text lacking]. Yours truly, Pavlova. Also photograph of Pavlova signed to Bronislava Pozhitskaia and letter from Pavlova to Pozhitskaia offering a contract to the latter.
- b.1 f.32 Pease and Elliman, Inc., Feb 6, 1934
1 item
- b.1 f.33 Petritskii, Anatolii, undated
1 item
In Russian
- b.1 f.34 Pleasant, Richard, Jul 14, 1939
1 item
To Michael Mordkin, Jr.
- R**
- b.1 f.35 Rim, Suli, Ron and Bea, Jun 9, 1952
1 item
- b.1 f.36 Roslavleva, Natalia, undated
1 item
In Russian
Fragment only.

- b.1 f.37 Russky Golos Publishing Corporation, 1925
1 item
Check and letter in Russian to Michael Mordkin. Annotated by Bronislava on verso: "The reward for Michael junior article of 1925 published in Novoe Russkoe Slovo."
- T**
- b.1 f.38 Tolstoy Foundation, Mar 29, 1978
1 item
In Russian
- W**
- b.1 f.39 Wayburn, Ned, Sep 2, 1929
1 item
Telegram to Mikhail Mordkin.
- b.1 f.40 Woodlawn Cemetery, Mar 9, 1971
1 item
Letter to J.R. Gutman with map, showing location of lot where Mikhail Mordkin is interred.

Series II: MIKHAIL MORDKIN PROFESSIONAL PAPERS

- | Box | Fol. | |
|-----|------|--|
| b.2 | f.41 | Choreographic notes for trio and pas de basque, undated
3 items |
| | | Contracts |
| b.2 | f.42 | Telegram from Maurice Rothschild to Mikhail Mordkin at the
Palace Theatre, London, [1909]
1 item
Invitation for Mikhail Mordkin and Anna Pavlova to dance on June 24,
1909, together with Zambelli at Baron Rothchild's house. Mounted on list
of dancers that seems to be a description of a missing photograph of
ballet Aziade. |
| b.2 | f.42 | Certificate issued to Mikhail Mordkin for "the right to decorate
himself with" the medallion of The Moscow Council of the
Children's Orphanages, undated
1 item |
| b.2 | f.42 | Letter from H.B. Marinelli, Ltd., Paris, Jun 11, 1912
1 item
In French |
| b.2 | f.42 | Contracts with the Director of the Imperial Theatres for September
1, 1912 to September 1, 1914, dated Mar 26, 1912
1 item
Certified copy. |
| b.2 | f.42 | Letter from impresario, L. Leonidoff, [pre-1917]
1 item
According to the letter, a contract for future work was attached [lacking]. |
| b.2 | f.43 | List of State Theatres dancers who were going to perform at the
Council of the Workers Deputies Theatre on October 17, 1917,
Moscow, Sep 27, 1917
1 item
In Russian
On Mikhail Mordkin Workshop letterhead. |
| b.2 | f.43 | Telegram to Mordkin from Tiflis, Sep 16[?], 1924
1 item
In Russian
Signed "Evlakhov." An offer to spend winter of 1924-1925 in Tiflis with
the ballet company. |

- b.2 f.43 Contract with The Special Committee for the tours and exhibits abroad, Sep 3, 1924
1 item
In Russian
Copy. Signed by the Chairman of the Special Committee and Mikhail Mordkin. Registered on Oct 1, 1924. Special Committee and Mikhail Mordkin made this agreement about [?]. Mikhail Mordkin is granted permission to go for a tour to the United States of America, from September 1, 1924 to March [or May - unclear IK] 1, 1925. Mikhail Mordkin is financing his tour himself, and is not granted any subsidies from the Special Committee. Mikhail Mordkin is under obligation to pay The Special Committee through Commission for Foreign Relief in the U.S.S.R. located in New York 10% of all his payments received from abroad [?] 2% fine is imposed for each day of payment overdue.
- b.2 f.43 Letters from the Commission for Foreign Relief in the USSR (New York, NY) to Mikhail Mordkin, Dec 4 and 27, 1924
2 items
Requesting payments due according to the terms of the contract.
- Legend of Aziade***
- b.2 f.44 Legend of Aziade: synopsis of Eastern "kinopoema" [film-poem] Aziade, undated
1 item
A copy of 18 pages of first copy of typescript in Russian, with editing and notes in handwriting, in graphite and ink by Mikhail Mordkin.
- b.2 f.45 Legend of Aziade: translation into English of Aziade. A Russian Ballet of Syria (?), undated
6 items
5 pages of typescript (last page lacking) and 5 Xerox copies (6 pages each). Rendered into English by Marchal Millholland.
- b.2 f.46 Legend of Aziade: Official correspondence regarding obtaining a copy of film Aziade (1918) from Gosfilmofond, [State Film archive USSR], 1970-1972
6 items
Photocopies. Correspondents include: Director of Gosfilmofond V. Privato to Mme Madeleine Gutman (December 2, 1970); Director of the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art, Willard Van Dyke to Mme Madeleine Gutman (January 18, 1971); Curator of the Dance Collection Genevieve Oswald to Mme Madeleine Gutman (March 4, 1971); Oswald to Mme Gutman (March 22, 1972); Genevieve Oswald to Madam Olga Froman (March 22, 1972); Genevieve Oswald to Professor J. Leyda, York University, Canada (March 4, 1971).

- b.2 f.47 Les albums du Pere Castor: Conte du petit poisson d'or [The story of the Goldfish] by Aleksandr Pushkin, 1933
1 item
In French
Inscribed inside, "Mikhail Mordkin, staged the ballet 'The Goldfish,' music by N. Cherepnin, scen. by Sergei Sudeikin, based on the Aleksandr Pushkin's tale. But my stupid old woman, being foolish, understanding nothing in art and being blinded by her wealth, didn't understand Pushkin. The day will come when she would be no better off than at the start, January 12, 1942."
- Mordkin School of Dance/Mordkin Ballet**
- b.2 f.48 Alexander Kahn correspondence, 1939
2 items
- b.2 f.48 Iris Mitchell correspondence, 1939
1 item
- b.2 f.48 Richard Pleasant correspondence, 1939
1 item
- b.2 f.49 Interview with Mikhail Mordkin, 1936
1 item
Questions are printed on the Mikhail Mordkin Studio letterhead, answers in handwriting. 4 pages. 2nd page missing. In a separate folder, 2 receipts from The Ballet Theatre for music for *Goldfish* and *Voices of Spring* received from Michael Mordkin Jr. Signed by Alexander Kahn and Iris Mitchell.
- b.2 f.50 Lease for Studio 819-823 Carnegie Hall, 154 West 57th Street, New York City, for period of Oct 1, 1936-Sep 30, 1937, Jul 1, 1936
1 item
Copy, signed by Mikhail Mordkin.
- b.2 f.51 Mikhail Mordkin Studio of the Dance Arts press-release, undated
2 items
Lists of ballets; costumes and set designs. 4 pages in ink and pencil, in Russian. 2 on the Mordkin School of Dance letterheads.
- b.2 f.52 Notation system, by V. I. Stepanov. Published by the Imperial Theatre School, undated
1 item
In Russian
- b.2 f.53 *The Story of My Life*
1 item
Typescript and photocopy of Mordkin's autobiography.

Series III: PERSONAL PAPERS

Box Fol.

Mordkin, Mikhail

b.2 f.54 Emigration papers, 1927-1929
4 items
Regarding Mordkin's stay in the United States and his citizenship. Correspondents include Department of Commerce, E.A. Eckman (Dec 7, 1927); US Department of Labor to Mr. E.A. Eckman of the Department of Commerce (December 21, 1927); US Department of Labor to Mikhail Mordkin (Dec 6, 1928); The Junior League of the City of New York to Mikhail Mordkin, Letter of support was enclosed (lacking), (Mar 20, 1929); US Department of Labor to Mr. E.A. Eckman of the Department of Commerce (Dec 21, 1927); US Department of Labor to Mikhail Mordkin (Dec 6, 1928); The Junior League of the City of New York to Mikhail Mordkin, Letter of support was enclosed (lacking) (Mar 20, 1929).

b.2 f.55 Poems, undated
4 pages
In Russian

Mordkin, Michael, Jr.

b.2 f.56 Autograph book, Jan 1929
1 item

b.2 f.57 Diary, 1924-1925
1 item
Pages from his diary, with clippings and photographs.

b.2 f.58 Correspondence with the *Brazil Post*, 1966, 1977 and undated
5 items
Photocopies

b.2 f.59 Fragment of letter, undated
1 item
In Russian

Mordkin [née Pozhitskaia], Bronislava

b.2 f.60 Legal papers: birth certificate. Issued in Warsaw, February 22 (March 6, 1985)
1 item
Original of birth certificate.

b.2 f.60 Legal papers: passport, Nov 9, 1923
1 item
Issued by Russian Soviet Socialist Federative Republic for Bronislava Mordkina-Pozhitskaia and her son Mikhail [Michael, Jr.].

- b.2 f.60 Legal papers: permanent resident of Warsaw identification. [UNK].
Issued, April[?] 28, 1896
1 item
Photocopy
- b.2 f.61 Medicare papers and receipts, circa 1969-1979
7 items
- b.2 f.62-63 Notes, miscellaneous, undated
7 items
Includes page from a notepad with various notes in ink in Bronislava Mordkin's handwriting, in Russian. Includes following note, circled by Bronislava Mordkin herself: March 3, 78. Death of Mishulia [Bronislava Mordkin's son. - IK]. And gardening notes.
- b.2 f.64 Riverside Museum, Master Institute of United Arts, 1964
3 items
Includes correspondence and certificate in appreciation of Bronislava Mordkin's nineteen years as Director of Riverside Museum Ballet Department and teacher of dancing (January 13, 1964); thank-you letter from Bronislava Mordkin to the Director of the Riverside Museum (January 20, 1964).

Series IV: SOUVENIR PROGRAMS

- | Box | Fol. | |
|-----|------|-------------------------------------|
| b.2 | f.65 | Mordkin and Pavlova, 1909
1 item |
| b.2 | f.65 | Mordkin Ballet, undated
1 item |

Series V: FAN MAIL

Box	Fol.	
b.3	f.66-69	Letters, drawings, and telegrams to Mikhail Mordkin, 1909-1938 49 items In English and Russian Includes 24 telegrams (1921-1938) from different people, companies, etc.; letters and poems; amateur drawings and portraits of Mikhail Mordkin in ink and colored pencil; newspaper clippings and photographs, 20 items. Also includes correspondence from Edwin T. Betchel to Mikhail Mordkin (July 22, 1937); and from students of Adashev School of Drama, Moscow (December 18, 1909).

Series VI: BRONISLAVA MORDKIN YEARBOOKS AND DIARIES

Box	Fol.	
b.4	f.70	Yearbook, 1974 1 item
b.4	f.71	Yearbook, 1978 1 item
b.4	f.72	Notebook, undated 1 item Primarily in Russian Contains various notes and addresses.