



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Ralph Gilbert papers

1938-1988

(S) *MGZMD 378

Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2014

Summary

Creator: Gilbert, Ralph

Title: Ralph Gilbert papers

Date: 1938-1988

Size: .67 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Donated by Sandra Kurtz, 1993

Abstract: Ralph Gilbert was an American pianist and composer. The Ralph Gilbert papers hold scores, lecture and course notes, and writings. There is also a note from Iris Mabry, along with some photographs and clippings documenting her career.

Conditions Governing Access:

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

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Creator History

Ralph Gilbert was an American pianist and composer who primarily worked with dancers. Born in Washington State, he received a Music and Art Foundation of Seattle fellowship to Bennington College, where he was appointed composer-in-residence for the summer school from 1938 to 1941. During this time, Gilbert moved to New York to become an accompanist at the Graham Studio. While working with Graham, he taught a weekly course on "Music for the Dancer." His work at the Graham Studio put him

into contact with many emerging modern dance talents, and he went on to accompany and compose for Erick Hawkins, Iris Mabry, and Nina Fonaroff, among others.

Gilbert married Iris Mabry and toured with her, serving as her accompanist and composer. He would often introduce each dance piece to the audience, explaining the dance's history or the inspiration for the dance or music. Gilbert composed for television, film and the concert stage and worked with Katharine Cornell, George Balanchine, and Margo Jones. In the 1970s, he taught music theory and history in Saratoga Springs, New York. He retired to Seattle in the 1980s, and worked as an accompanist at the University of Washington from 1985 to 1988. He remained in Seattle until his death in 1992.

Scope and Content Note

The Ralph Gilbert papers hold scores, lecture and course notes, and writings. There is also a note from Iris Mabry, along with some photographs and clippings documenting her career.

The scores are original compositions and arrangements of existing music for dance. A few are titled, but others are fragmentary or unlabeled. Occasionally the choreographer is listed. Gilbert's lecture and course notes are typed drafts of presentations for courses taught at the University of Washington and Saratoga Springs. Gilbert's writings are all fragmentary drafts of his unpublished dance theory and philosophy works. One piece in particular, "Two Dead Dancers, and Me," reflects on the career trajectories of Martha Graham and Mabry and describes the ordered destruction of all of Mabry's files, programs, costumes, and correspondence before her death.

Gilbert's files on Mabry include a small selection of photocopied photographs and clippings, as well as a handwritten note from Mabry describing her own idiosyncrasies.

There is an audio cassette of Gilbert performing his own compositions in 1988. Inquiries regarding audio material in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Audio material may be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

Arrangement: Alphabetical by file type.

Key Terms

Subjects

Composers -- United States
Dance music
Modern dance

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-3 Course Material 1975-1988
- b. 1 f. 4-6 Mabry, Iris undated
 - Scores
 - b. 2 f. 1 *Ceremonial* 1939
Choreography by Mildred Wile.
 - b. 2 f. 2 *Etude for Orchestra* 1948
 - b. 2 f. 3 *Femme Fatale* undated (Incomplete)
 - b. 2 f. 4 *I Wonder as I Wander* 1954
 - b. 2 f. 5 *Lamb of God* 1949
Choreography by Iris Mabry.
 - b. 2 f. 6 *Litany* undated
Choreography by Iris Mabry.
 - b. 2 f. 7 *Missouri Waltz variation* undated
 - b. 2 f. 8 *Piano Solo* undated
 - b. 2 f. 9 *Primitive Dances* 1938
 - b. 2 f. 10 *Sarabande* 1941
 - b. 2 f. 11 *Soldier in the South/Louisiana Lament* 1942
 - b. 2 f. 12 Untitled and Fragmented Scores undated
- b. 1 f. 7-11 Writings undated