



The New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

La Meri photographs

1898-1980s [bulk 1920s-1950s]

*MGZEB 21-0004

Processed by Amy Lau in 2021.

Summary

Creator: La Meri, 1898-1988

Title: La Meri photographs

Date: 1898-1980s [bulk 1920s-1950s]

Size: 1.67 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: Donated by William Adams, Jr. in 1993.

Abstract: The La Meri photographs consist of photographic material collected by La Meri throughout her career as a dancer, teacher, writer, and student of dance from India and other cultures. Spanning 1898 to the 1980s, the photographs reveal La Meri's professional and personal life.

Preferred citation: La Meri photographs, *MGZEB 21-0004. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: Multiple languages Materials in English, Spanish, and French.

Processing note: Processed by Amy Lau in 2021.

Separated Materials:

La Meri papers, 1912-1992

Creator History

La Meri (1898-1988), a dancer, teacher, writer, and student of dance from India and other cultures, was born Russell Meriwether Hughes in Louisville, Kentucky. At the age of twelve, La Meri moved to San Antonio, Texas and studied writing, dance, and theater. At San Antonio, she worked at local movie theaters for a few years before moving to New York City, where she worked in vaudeville and Maria Montero's Spanish dance company. While in New York City, La Meri met her future husband, Guido Carreras, a talent manager, and decided to become a dancer. After her first engagement in Mexico City, Mexico, La Meri adopted her permanent stage name when one of her interviewers shortened her name from Meri Hughes to La Meri.

Establishing a small company, La Meri toured the world to study and perform dance from 1928 through 1939. Her tours and studies brought her to Europe, North Africa, Australia, Southeast and East Asia, India, Hawaii, Central America, and South America. During her tours, La Meri learned the local dances, studying and performing with dance masters. The movements that she learned from the local dances influenced the choreography she created for her own company. One of La Meri's most famous dances was a Bharatanatyam interpretation of *Swan Lake*, which she created in 1944.

In 1940, La Meri established the School of Natya with Ruth St. Denis in New York City, where she taught East Indian dance. The school was renamed the Ethnologic Dance Center in 1943, and operated until 1956. In 1960, La Meri left New York City to retire to Cape Cod, Massachusetts with her sister, Lilian to write and raise champion show dogs. While La Meri did continue to write, she also lectured and taught extensively in addition to establishing Ethnic Dance Arts, Inc. The company produced an annual summer ethnic dance festival from 1970 to 1979. La Meri also served on the Board of Directors and faculty at Jacob's Pillow in Becket, Massachusetts.

In 1984, La Meri retired a second time and moved back to San Antonio, Texas. She died in 1988 at the age of 89.

Scope and Content Note

The La Meri photographs chronicle her professional and personal life from 1898 to the 1980s. The collection is composed of mostly black-and-white prints with some slides, negatives, and contact sheets. The bulk of the collection comes from La Meri's years performing and studying dance around the world. The photographs also detail her work as a founder and teacher at the Ethnologic Dance Center and Ethnic Dance Arts, Inc. A small portion of the collection features La Meri's personal photographs that document her childhood, home and tour life.

The International and National Tours grouping chronicles La Meri performing and studying dance. Most of the photographs depict La Meri posing in the local dress which she wore as a performance costume for her dance pieces. The photographs span the 1920s to 1980s and are filed by location, production, and type of dance. Heavily represented in the grouping are La Meri's pieces that were inspired by Spanish and Indian dances. Ram Gopal--La Meri's stagecraft apprentice, instructor, and dance partner--appears in some of these photographs. There are notes on the back side of some of the photographs which appear to be La Meri's observations about pace, gestures, and movements. This group includes some newspaper clippings and articles about La Meri's career. Of note are black-and-white prints of La Meri's hand, feet, and arm position studies.

The Schools and Companies grouping spans the 1920s to 1985 and contains mostly photographs of La Meri's work as a founder and teacher at the Ethnologic Dance Center in New York City. Most of this grouping depicts La Meri teaching dance classes. There are some candid photographs of La Meri with Ruth St. Denis and students. Aside from the Ethnologic Dance Center material, there are some slides of Ethnic Dance Arts company's performances, prints of La Meri teaching in her later years, and prints of students performing La Meri's dances, as well as signed photographs from former students.

La Meri's personal photographs span 1898 to 1984 and include prints and negatives from her private home life and work traveling the world as a dancer and student. This grouping is composed of mostly candid prints of La Meri's travels, dogs and home in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and professionally shot portraits. Of note in this grouping is a print from her infancy, and prints of her sister, Lilian Newcomer.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged alphabetically within the following three groupings: International and National Tours; Schools and Companies; and Personal.

Key Terms

Subjects

Dance -- Photographs
Folk dancing -- India
Folk dancing, Burmese
Folk dancing, Chinese
Folk dancing, Japanese
Folk dancing, Javanese
Folk dancing, Maori
Folk dancing, Mexican
Folk dancing, Spanish
Hula (Dance)
Indian dance -- North America

Occupations

Dancers.
Teachers.

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Negatives (photographs)
Photographs

Names

Adams, William, Jr.
Hughes, Russell Meriwether, 1898-1988
La Meri, 1898-1988
Ram Gopal, 1917-
St. Denis, Ruth, 1880-1968
Jacob's Pillow

Container List

International and National Tours 1920-1980s

- b. 1 f. 1 *Adoration of the Virgin* 1940s
- b. 1 f. 2 *L'âme du Jazz* 1930-1931
- b. 1 f. 3 *American Gesture Songs* 1942-1952
- b. 1 f. 4 Andalusian Dance 1938
- b. 1 f. 5 Arm Positions 1950s
- b. 1 f. 6 Australia and New Zealand 1936
- b. 1 f. 7 *Bach-Bharata Suite* 1946
- b. 1 f. 8 Backstage 1940s
- b. 1 f. 9 *Bailecito* 1928-1935
- b. 1 f. 10 *Caprice Viennois* 1930-1936
- b. 1 f. 11 *Caribbean Suite* 1940s
- b. 1 f. 12 *Chethat-al-Maharma* 1930-1947
- b. 1 f. 13 *Chethat-al-Selah* 1930s-1940s
- b. 1 f. 14 Chile and Cuba 1927-1928
- b. 1 f. 15 Chinese Dance 1927-1950s
- b. 1 f. 16 Cueca 1928-1929
- b. 1 f. 17 Cuzco, Peru 1928
- b. 1 f. 18 *Devi Murti* 1941
- b. 1 f. 19 *Drishyakava* 1953
- b. 1 f. 20 Ecuadorian Dances 1948-1950s
- b. 1 f. 21 *Faunesque* 1937
- b. 1 f. 22 Feet Studies 1941
- b. 1 f. 23 Florence, Italy 1928-1947
- b. 1 f. 24 *El Gato* 1929-1945
- b. 1 f. 25 Granada, Spain 1930-1950s
- b. 1 f. 26 Hand Studies 1947
- b. 1 f. 27 Hula 1926-1942
- b. 1 f. 28 *Humoresque* 1930s
- b. 1 f. 29 *Iberia* 1946
- b. 1 f. 30 India 1937-1954
- b. 1 f. 31-32 Indian Dance 1925-1953
- b. 1 f. 33 Japanese Dance 1927-1947
- b. 1 f. 34 Javanese Dance 1928-1945
- b. 2 f. 1 *Krishna-Radha* 1937-1939
- b. 2 f. 2 Last Show at Jacob's Pillow 1962
- b. 2 f. 3 *The Little Show* 1955
- b. 2 f. 4 London, England 1936
- b. 2 f. 5 Manila, Philippines 1937

International and National Tours (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 6 *Minstrel* 1939
- b. 2 f. 7 Mexican Dance 1936-1945
- b. 2 f. 8 Mexico City, Mexico 1926-1948
- b. 2 f. 9 Native American Dance 1927-1947
- b. 2 f. 10 Paris, France 1930-1952
- b. 2 f. 11 Peruvian Dances 1948
- b. 2 f. 12 *Preludes by Scriabine* 1928-1936
- b. 2 f. 13 Press 1978-1984
- b. 2 f. 14 Rotorua, New Zealand 1936-1937
- b. 2 f. 15 *The Russian Doll* 1923-1937
- b. 2 f. 16 *Scheherazade* 1945-1950
- b. 2 f. 17 *Sita's Journey* 1946-1947
- b. 2 f. 18-20 Spanish Dance 1925-1953
- b. 2 f. 21 Spanish Shawl Dance 1927
- b. 2 f. 22 Tamborito 1928-1948
- b. 3 f. 1-2 *Swan Lake* 1944-1953
- b. 3 f. 3 *Three Devil Dances* 1936-1945
- b. 3 f. 4 Tokyo, Japan 1937
- b. 3 f. 5-7 Various Dances 1927-1980s
- b. 3 f. 8 Vienna, Austria 1929-1934
- b. 3 f. 9 *The White Peacock* 1920-1937
- b. 3 f. 10 *Yien Pwe* 1937-1952

Schools and Companies 1920s-1985

- b. 3 f. 11 BCC Workshop 1969
- b. 3 f. 12 Ethnic Dance Arts 1952
- b. 3 f. 13 Ethnic Dance Arts Award--Bhaskar 1960s
- b. 3 f. 14 Ethnic Dance Arts Company 1970s
- b. 3 f. 15-16 Ethnologic Dance Center 1943-1956
- b. 3 f. 17 Former Students 1970-1985
- b. 3 f. 18 St. Denis, Ruth 1920s-1937
- b. 3 f. 19 Teaching in Later Years 1960-1970s

Personal 1898-1984

- b. 3 f. 20 Chic Photoshoot 1970s
- b. 3 f. 21 Childhood 1898-1920
- b. 4 f. 1
- b. 4 f. 2-4 Dogs, Cats, and Friends 1927-1982
- b. 4 f. 5 Dolly Ballet Toy Games 1940s
- b. 4 f. 6-7 Home 1950s-1984
- b. 4 f. 8 Newcomer, Lilian 1920s-1950s
- b. 4 f. 9 Photoshoot 1970s
- b. 4 f. 10 Portraits 1937-1970s
- b. 4 f. 11 San Antonio, Texas 1919-1927

Personal (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 12 Spanish Dance Book Illustrations 1940s
- b. 4 f. 13-19 Travel 1925-1954
- b. 4 f. 20 Von Hoff, Sadie 1915