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Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Irina Baronova papers**

1928-2008

(S) \*MGZMD 276

Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2011

## Summary

**Creator:** Baronova, Irina

**Title:** Irina Baronova papers

**Date:** 1928-2008

**Size:** 6.79 linear feet (19 boxes)

**Source:** Purchased from Victoria Tennant, 2011

**Abstract:** Irina Baronova (1919 -2008) was a Russian born ballerina who rose to fame with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and enjoyed a successful career as a dancer, movie star, educator, and writer. The Irina Baronova papers contain correspondence, programs, photographs, scrapbooks, writings and other materials from the ballerina's extensive and varied career.

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**Preferred citation:** Irina Baronova papers, (S) \*MGZMD 276. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

**Processing note:** Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2011 Collection rehoused and organized. Information on post-it notes transferred to folder titles or to the backs of photographs. Some materials removed from binders for preservation purposes.

### Related Materials:

David Lichine and Tatiana Riabouchinska papers. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York

## Creator History

Irina Baronova (1919 -2008) was a Russian born ballerina who rose to fame with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and enjoyed a successful career as a dancer, movie star, and teacher. She created roles in Léonide Massine's *Jeux d'enfants* (1932) and *Les Présages* (1933); and in Bronislava Nijinska's *Les Cent Baisers* (1935).

Baronova was born in St. Petersburg, Russia and escaped the revolution to Romania with her parents in 1920. She began dance lessons at the age of 7 in Bucharest. In 1928, her parents moved her to France to begin serious ballet study with Olga Preobrajenska, the ex prima ballerina of the Marinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. Baronova made her professional debut at the age of 12 with the Paris Opera in a special performance created to showcase young dancers. Immediately following her debut, she began a concert tour of France and Belgium with the Count St. Martin, a famous organist. She also spent a season at the Theatre Femina in Paris in a play with dancing, Francois le Bossu.

In 1932, she was engaged by George Balanchine as a soloist in the operetta *Orpheus in the Underworld* at the Theatre Mogador in Paris. Following this performance, Balanchine and Colonel de Basil offered her a contract to join a new company they were forming to fill the void created by the death of Serge Diaghilev. The company was to be called The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. In later years the company was known as Colonel De Basil's Ballet Russe.

The writer Arnold Haskell dubbed the Ballet Russe's trio of Baronova, Tamara Toumanova and Tatiana Riabouchinska the "Baby Ballerinas," and the three girls were a sensation with audiences around the world. Baronova danced her first *Spectre de la Rose* at the age of 13 opposite Serge Lifar. She danced *Odette* in *Swan Lake* at age 14, partnered by Anton Dolin. At 17 she eloped with Gerald Sevastianov, a manager of the de Basil troupe.

During the Second World War, Baronova was invited to join the American Ballet Theatre where ballets were created for her by Michael Fokine and Bronislava Nijinska. She also toured as a guest ballerina with Leonide Massine and his company. She was used as inspiration for the ostrich ballerina in Disney's *Fantasia* in 1939. Between 1940 and 1951, Baronova appeared in several films and plays, including *Train of Events* (1949) and *Florian* (1940).

Baronova's marriage to Sevastianov ended in divorce, and in 1946 she met the British agent Cecil Tennant, who asked her to marry him on the condition that she would give up ballet. At age 27, she agreed, and retired. She had three children with Tennant and began to return to work after his death in 1967.

She resumed teaching full time in 1976. She also gave mime and master classes for the Teacher's Training Course at the Royal Academy of Dancing on the invitation of Margot Fonteyn. In 1986 she staged Fokine's *Les Sylphides* for The Australian Ballet. In 1996 she received a Nijinsky Medal from Poland and an honorary doctorate from the North Carolina School of the Arts. Baronova traveled the world participating in seminars in Italy, Yugoslavia, Australia, Hong Kong, and Russia. In 2000 she moved to Australia to be closer to her daughter.

In 2005, she published her memoirs *Irina: Ballet, Life and Love* which she wrote entirely in longhand. She also appeared in the documentary *Ballets Russes*. She remained active in lecturing and teaching up until her death in 2008, and was a patron of the Australian Ballet School.

## Scope and Content Note

The Irina Baronova papers contain correspondence, programs, photographs, scrapbooks, writings and other materials from the ballerina's extensive and varied career.

Baronova's correspondence reflects the many lifelong relationships she cultivated during her years traveling with the ballet and is sorted into personal, professional, and student and fan letters. The bulk of the correspondence is personal and includes letters from Laurence Olivier, Lucia Chase, Jerome Robbins, and many others. The personal correspondence is arranged by name. Her professional correspondence is primarily from the latter half of her career and contains letters inviting Baronova to speak or hold a master class, attend a ceremony or event, or to accept an award. Correspondence with her publisher regarding her book was kept separately with her writings, and can be found there. Student and fan correspondence holds thank you letters and notes from many of Baronova's students, as well as a few fan letters written later in her career. There is an increase in fan mail post-2005 regarding her book.

Baronova's press clippings are loose and bound. Her clippings include reviews and human interest stories regarding the dancer, including beauty tips, many pieces about how "all-American" and down to earth she is, and a 1940 incident where she punched (and knocked out) a 180 pound man.

The collection of programs, both ballet and theater, is just a sample of Baronova's hundreds of performances across the globe. Ballet programs are arranged by year and include examples of programs from the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Ballet Theatre, and Leonide Massine's *Ballet Russe Highlights*. The theater programs are arranged by title.

Baronova's collection of photographs contains professional press release shots and personal photographs. The photographs taken before 1950 depict Baronova as a working dancer. Of interest are the many non-professional photographs taken (presumably by Baronova's mother) of her performances. While the action shots are often blurry, they offer a raw glimpse of the actual ballets in performance that the posed press photographs do not. There are also pictures of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo troupe on their various tours, aboard ships, lounging on the beach, and exploring new cities. The photographs are arranged by year and most have identifying information. As Baronova repeated roles year to year in her repertoire, to see all the pictures of an individual ballet one should consult all folders during her working years. Some ballets, such as *Aurora's Wedding*, have new shots for each year she performed the role.

Photographs from 1950 to 2005 are all personal and document Baronova's travels as a teacher and lecturer, as well as her attendance at various awards ceremonies and galas. There are few family photographs.

Baronova's scrapbooks contain small books created when she was dancing at Covent Garden from 1938-1939. They are all non-professional shots of the ballets as well as dancers backstage warming up. There are also two scrapbooks she made during the movie *Florian*, as well as a scrapbook of her 1986 lecture tour in Australia.

The writings hold Baronova's correspondence, work and drafts relating to her 2005 book *Irina: Ballet, Life and Love* as well as writings by friends and co-workers, including unpublished memoirs by ballet conductor William McDermott and her ex-husband, German Sevastianov.

**Arrangement:** Alphabetical by subject

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Ballerinas

Ballet -- History -- 20th century

Dance in motion pictures, television, etc.

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings

Correspondence

Photographs

Programs

### **Names**

American Ballet Theatre (New York, N.Y.)

Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 American Ballet Theatre 35th Anniversary Gala 1975
- b. 1 f. 2 Anton Dolin Memorial 1983
  - Awards
  - b. 1 f. 3 1945-2008
- b. 19 f. 1 1945-2008
- b. 1 f. 4 Ballet Russe Celebration 2000
  - Correspondence
  - Personal
  - b. 1 f. 5 General 1945-2005
  - b. 1 f. 6 Atkins, Harold 1976
  - b. 1 f. 7 Buckle, Richard 1979-1995
  - b. 1 f. 8 Chaliapin, Boris undated
  - b. 1 f. 9 Chase, Lucia undated
  - b. 1 f. 10 Crisp, Clement 2006
  - b. 1 f. 11 Danilova, Alexandra 1977-1983
  - b. 1 f. 12 de Cuevas, George undated
  - b. 1 f. 13 de Valois, Ninette 1978
  - b. 1 f. 14 Doboujinsky, Mstislav 1941
  - b. 1 f. 15 Dolin, Anton 1970-1983
  - b. 1 f. 16 Dorati, Antal 1988
  - b. 1 f. 17 Elizabeth, Queen Consort of George VI 1999-2002
  - b. 1 f. 18 Ewing, Alexander undated
  - b. 1 f. 19 Finch, Tamara Tchernicheva 1978
  - b. 1 f. 20 Fonteyn, Margot 1958-1989
  - b. 1 f. 21 Genee, Adeline 1964-1967
  - b. 1 f. 22 Hillman, June 1973-1975
  - b. 1 f. 23 Joukowsky, Anatol and Yania 1995
  - b. 1 f. 24 Karsavina, Tamara 1962-1966
  - b. 1 f. 25 Kelly, Grace 1957-1958
  - b. 2 f. 1 Leigh, Vivien 1949
  - b. 2 f. 2 Marquez, Vicente Garcia 1981-1987
  - b. 2 f. 3 Martin, Steve 1991
  - b. 2 f. 4 McDermott, William 1976-2006
    - Contains Baronova's letters to McDermott which he returned to her for reference.
  - b. 2 f. 5 Nijinska, Bronislava undated
  - b. 2 f. 6 Olivier, Laurence 1949-1973
  - b. 2 f. 7 Pelly, Noel undated
  - b. 2 f. 8 Plowright, Joan undated
  - b. 2 f. 9 Riabouchinska, Tatiana 1981-1982
  - b. 2 f. 10 Robbins, Jerome 1978-1989

Correspondence (cont.)

Personal (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 11 Ross, Herbert undated
- b. 2 f. 12 Rowles, Polly 1948
- b. 2 f. 13 Southey, Marigold undated
- b. 2 f. 14 Tikhonova, Nina 1962
- b. 2 f. 15 Toumanova, Tamara undated
- b. 2 f. 16 Vasnetov, Viktor 1976
- b. 2 f. 17 Zoritch, George 2005

Professional

- b. 2 f. 18 1940-1979
- b. 2 f. 19 1980-1997
- b. 2 f. 20 1998-2006

Students and Fans

- b. 2 f. 21 1947-2005
- b. 3 f. 1 2005-2007
- b. 3 f. 2 Fantasia 1939-1940
- b. 3 f. 3 Houston Ballet Tribute to the Ballet Russe 1983

Lectures

Australian Tours

- b. 3 f. 4 1986
- b. 3 f. 5 2001
- b. 3 f. 6 "Dancing for de Basil" undated
- b. 3 f. 7 Notebooks
- b. 4 f. 1 Olga Preobrajinskaya Fund 1962
- b. 4 f. 2 Passports 1934-1989

Photographs

- b. 4 f. 3-4 1928-1934
- b. 19 f. 3-4 1933-1945  
oversized
- b. 4 f. 5 1935
- b. 5 f. 1 1936
- b. 5 f. 2 1937
- b. 5 f. 3 1938
- b. 5 f. 4 1939
- 1940
- b. 5 f. 5 General
- b. 19 f. 2 *The Balletomane's Art Book: Pictorial Parade of Russian Ballet*
- b. 5 f. 6 *Florian Movie Stills*
- b. 6 f. 1 1941
- 1942
- b. 6 f. 2 General
- b. 6 f. 3 *Yolanda Movie Stills*

Photographs (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 4 1943-1947
- 1948
- Dark Eyes*
- b. 19 f. 5 Oversized
- b. 7 f. 1 Production Shots
- b. 7 f. 2 *Follow the Girls*
- b. 7 f. 3 *Train of Events* 1949
- b. 7 f. 4 1950-1969
- b. 7 f. 5 1970-1979
- b. 7 f. 6 Lichine Academy Summer Seminar 1980
- b. 7 f. 7 1980-1989
- b. 8 f. 1 1990-1995
- b. 8 f. 2 Queen Elizabeth Award from the Royal Academy of Dance 1996
- b. 8 f. 3 1996-1999
- b. 8 f. 4 2000-2005

Press Clippings

- b. 8 f. 5 1935-1940
- b. 16 1940
- b. 17 1940
- b. 8 f. 6 1940-1949
- b. 8 f. 7 1957-1987
- b. 9 f. 1 1987-2006

Programs

Ballet

- b. 13 f. 1 1933-1934
- b. 13 f. 2 1935
- b. 13 f. 3 1936
- b. 13 f. 4 1937
- b. 14 f. 1 1938-1939
- b. 14 f. 2 1940-1941
- b. 14 f. 3 1942-1946

Theater

- b. 9 f. 2 *Bullet in the Ballet* undated
- b. 9 f. 3 *Dark Eyes* 1947
- b. 9 f. 4 *The Farm of Three Echoes* 1948
- b. 9 f. 5 *Follow the Girls* 1946

Scrapbooks

- b. 9 f. 6-10 Covent Garden 1938-1939
- Florian*
- b. 10 f. 1 Movie Stills 1940
- b. 10 f. 2 Press Clippings 1940

Scrapbooks (cont.)

- b. 15 *Follow the Girls* 1944
- b. 18 Lecture Tour of Australia 1986

Writings

*Irina: Ballet, Life and Love*

- b. 10 f. 3-4 Correspondence 2003-2005
- b. 11 f. 1-4 Drafts

Other's Writings

- b. 12 f. 1 General undated
- b. 12 f. 2 McDermott, William undated  
unpublished memoir
- b. 12 f. 3 Osato, Sono - American Ballet Theatre History 1988
- b. 12 f. 4 *Rose, Stephanie - The Baby Ballerinas* undated
- b. 12 f. 5 Sevastianov, Gerald undated  
unpublished memoir
- b. 12 f. 6 Troyanoff, Semyon undated  
memoir (translation)