



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Carole Johnson Aboriginal Dance portfolios

1967-2001

(S) *MGZMD 313

Compiled by Valerie Wingfield, 2013

Summary

Creator: Johnson, Carole Y.

Title: Carole Johnson Aboriginal Dance portfolios

Date: 1967-2001

Size: 1.26 linear feet (3 boxes)

Source: Donated by Carole Y. Johnson, 2011.

Abstract: The Carole Y. Johnson Aboriginal Dance portfolios hold documents relating to her work as an activist, art director, choreographer and dancer. Johnson, of African-American descent, developed Aboriginal Islanders dance programs through the Black Theatre Arts and Cultural Centre, Aboriginal modern dance workshop, the Aboriginal Arts Board, the the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association Dance College (NAISDA), and the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT). The collection contains annual reports, articles, brochures, correspondence, dance reviews, memorandums, and posters.

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Processing note: Compiled by Valerie Wingfield, 2013

Creator History

Carole Y. Johnson (1940-) is an activist, arts administrator, choreographer, and dancer. Johnson, born in Jersey City, New Jersey, is of African-American descent. She spent most of her childhood in Philadelphia, where her father Fred S. A. Johnson had established a branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in North Philadelphia. Johnson grew up in a middle class background with an early exposure to classical ballet training. During her teen years, Johnson would study ballet at The Philadelphia Ballet Guild.

In 1960, Johnson's classical training culminated in acceptance to the dance conservatory of The Juilliard School. In 1963, Johnson graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and decided to remain in New York City. This decision allowed her to continue dance studies concurrent with a new career in dance. Around 1966, after some initial pursuits, Johnson became a member of the Eleo Pomare Dance Company.

The Eleo Pomare Dance Company was founded by Eleo Pomare (1937-2008), a Colombian-American. The style of the company was modern dance with a focus on the black experience through political expression. Johnson would achieve the position of a principal dancer within the company.

In 1972, the Eleo Pomare Dance Company performed at the Adelaide Arts Festival. This annual festival is considered one of the great annual arts celebrations. Johnson made the decision to remain in Australia, temporarily, to develop the Aboriginal/Islander or Black dance performances.

Johnson settled in Redfern, a suburb of Sydney, with the support of a government grant, and immediately set up an Aboriginal modern dance workshop. Euphemia "Phemie" Bostock and her daughter were among the participants. Bostock would eventually become a renowned artist. Johnson stated that "there was a basic similarity between the Negro in ghetto conditions in New York and the urban Aborigine. They need a central community activity and they can relate to music and dance." (The Advertiser, Thursday, June 15, 1972.) At the end of the three month workshop, Johnson left Australia.

In 1973, Johnson returned to Redfern because this was the center of social and political activity. The Black Theatre, a social and political action group for Aborigines, also established itself in Redfern (later renamed The Black Theatre Arts and Cultural Centre). Johnson became involved with the theatre. Concurrently, Johnson was appointed to the position of urban theatre consultant for the Aboriginal Arts Board. Johnson's objectives were to have the urban Aborigines reconnect to their roots, have Aborigines join their diverse communities in song and dance, and expose their culture to a wider audience.

In 1976, the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) was established, and Johnson was the founding executive director. From the NAISDA, the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT) developed. This was Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island contemporary dance company. Johnson, received some criticism from the community because she was not an Aboriginal Australian. In 1988, Johnson left and transferred the directorship to Raymond D. Blanco. In 1991, the AIDT became a separate dance company apart from the NAISDA. When Blanco departed the company in 1998, the AIDT folded.

In 1989, Johnson founded the Bangarra Dance Theatre, outside of the auspices of the NAISDA. In 1991, Stephen Page was appointed the artistic director. Page is a descendant of the Nunukul people from the Munaldjali clan of the Yujambah tribe from southeast Queensland. The Bangarra Dance Theatre (www.bangarra.com.au) is Australia's internationally renowned modern dance company. Johnson continues her work on behalf of Australia's indigenous people in related venues. She divides her time between Australia and the United States.

Johnson was recognized for her work on behalf of the Aborigine with two awards. In 1999, Johnson was elected to Australia Hall of Fame. In 2003, Johnson received the commonwealth Medal for Service to community through the arts (dance).

Scope and Content Note

The collection, dated 1967 to 2001, documents the work of Carole Y. Johnson in Australia to develop the arts program through dance of the Aboriginal/Islander people. The files mostly document the development of the Aboriginal Islander Theatre (AIDT), the first contemporary indigenous dance company in Australia. The files also include information about the the Black Theatre and Cultural Centre, the Aboriginal Arts Board and the NAISDA Dance College. The collection contains annual reports, articles, brochures, correspondence, dance reviews, memorandums, and posters.

Key Terms

Subjects

Aboriginal Australians -- Social life and customs
Dance -- Australia -- History

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Advertisements
Brochures
Clippings
Correspondence
Fliers (printed matter)

Occupations

Art consultants -- Dancers
Choreographers
Dance teachers

Names

Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre
Black Theatre Arts
NAISDA Dance College

Container List

- b. 1 Aboriginal Dance Portfolios 1967-1980
- b. 2 Aboriginal Dance Portfolios 1982-1987
- b. 3 Aboriginal Dance Portfolios 1988-2001