



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Dawn Lille collection**

1932-2002

(S) \*MGZMD 557

Processed by Valerie Wingfield in 2022.

## Summary

**Creator:** Horwitz, Dawn Lille

**Title:** Dawn Lille collection

**Date:** 1932-2002

**Size:** 2.5 linear feet (6 boxes); 1003.0 kilobytes (13 computer files)

**Source:** The collection was donated by Dawn Lille in 2020.

**Abstract:** The Dawn Lille collection, dated 1932 to 2002, documents Dawn Lille (1934- ), a performer, teacher, and oral historian. Her collection contains oral history interviews she conducted with African-American dancers. Lille also taped an extensive interview with May O'Donnell, a dancer, choreographer and founder of the May O'Donnell Dance Company.

### Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audio and moving image materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division ([dance@nypl.org](mailto:dance@nypl.org)). Audio and moving image materials will be subject to preservation assessment and migration prior to access.

**Preferred citation:** Dawn Lille collection, (S) \*MGZMD 557. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Valerie Wingfield in 2022.

### Related Materials:

Classic Black, Black ballet companies and black dancers in white companies [video recording]  
Performing Arts Research Collection - Dance Call No. \*MGZIC 9-5173.

## Creator History

Dawn Lille (1934- ) was a performer, teacher, and oral historian. Lille held teaching position at the Juilliard School and was head of dance research at City College at CUNY. Lille conducted oral histories of African-American classical dancers that inspired the exhibit *Classic Black* displayed in the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library in 1996. She also conducted an oral history of May O'Donnell (1906-2004), a dancer, choreographer and founder of the May O'Donnell Dance Company.

## Scope and Content Note

The Dawn Lille collection, dated from 1932 to 2002, documents her work as an oral historian. The collection holds sound recordings; transcripts of interviews; notes; and printed matter.

This collection has interviews of pioneering African-American dancers and several dancers of Hispanic descent. The interviews focus on their family background; training as a dancer; the challenges that they faced as minorities; mentors; and experiences with dance companies. Interviewees include Consuela Gandara; Betty Nichols, the first African-American student at the School of American Ballet; Nat Horne; Walter Nicks, a choreographer, modern dancer and teacher; and Barbara Wright, a member of the New York Negro Ballet. Other interviews include one with Eugene Von Grona, the founder of the short-lived American Negro Ballet Company. Transcripts were generated from several of these interviews. Lille conducted most of the interviews.

May O'Donnell's career as a choreographer and dancer was also documented by interviews conducted by Lille from 1996 to 1997. The oral histories files hold transcripts generated for part of the year 1996.

Additional information about O'Donnell's career was located in the writing files which holds notes about her dance techniques. The printed matter files hold programs and playbills that feature her career as a dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company; as a solo performer; and the founder and choreographer of the May O'Donnell Dance Company.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged into the following groups: Oral Histories; Writings: Printed Matter; Assorted Files; Audio and Moving Image Materials.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American ballerinas  
African American dance teachers  
African American dancers  
Ballet companies -- United States -- History  
Dance -- United States  
Modern dance -- United States

### Occupations

Historians.

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Oral histories

Research notes  
Sound recordings  
Theater programs

**Names**

Hill, Constance Valis  
Horwitz, Dawn Lille  
O'Donnell, May, 1906-2004  
American Negro Ballet Company  
Martha Graham Dance Company  
New York Negro Ballet Company

## Container List

### Oral Histories 1989-1997

Do not remove the author's post-it notes.

Alphabetical.

#### *Classic Black Interviews*

- b. 1 f. 1     **Abelson, Delores Browne** 1989
- b. 1 f. 2     **Aul, Ronnie** 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 3     **Bearchell, Sharon Million** 1995  
Bearchell's professional name was Sharon Million.
- b. 1 f. 4     **Beatty, Talley** 1989
- b. 1 f. 5     **Bell, Arthur** circa 1989
- b. 1 f. 6     **Brown, Joan Myers** 1989  
Interviewed by Michelle Mose.
- b. 1 f. 7     **Campbell, Beryl Murray** 1990  
Interviewed by Michelle Mose.
- b. 1 f. 8     **Campbell, Sylvester** 1991
- b. 1 f. 9     **Carr, Ruth Ann** 1995  
Carr's professional name was Sammy Carr. Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 10    **Collins, Janet** 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 11    **Corvino, Alfredo** 1995
- b. 1 f. 12    **Cuyjet, Marion** 1989  
Interviewed by Constance Valis Hill.
- b. 1 f. 13    **Davis, Frances Taylor** 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 14    **De Lavallade, Carmen** 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 15    **De Mendez, Doris** 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 16    **Dickerson, Betsy** 1990
- b. 1 f. 17    **Gandara, Consuela** 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 18    **Grant, Kathleen Grant** 1996
- b. 1 f. 19    **Harris, Michaelyn Jackson** 1990  
Harris's professional name was Michaelyn Jackson. Transcript only.
- b. 1 f. 20    **Hinkson, Mary** 1996  
Transcript only.
- b. 2 f. 1     **Horne, Nathaniel "Nat"** 1990  
Interviewed by Constance Valis Hill.
- b. 2 f. 2     **Hurston, Sidney** 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 2 f. 3     **Jackson, Glorianne Greene** 1997
- b. 2 f. 4     **James, Beryl Clark** 1990  
Interviewed by Michelle Mose.

Oral Histories (cont.)

Classic Black Interviews (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 5 Jimenez, Frances 1990
- b. 2 f. 6 Johnson, Bernard 1989  
Interviewed by Constance Valis Hill.
- b. 2 f. 7 Johnson, Louis 1990
- b. 2 f. 8 Jones, Doris 1991
- b. 2 f. 9 Jones, John 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 2 f. 10 King, Sydney 1991
- b. 2 f. 11 Lee, Keith 1995
- b. 2 f. 12 Lewis, Elma 1996
- b. 2 f. 13 Nash, Joe 1990  
Interviewed by Constance Valis Hill.
- b. 2 f. 14 Nichols, Betty 1995
- b. 2 f. 15 Nicks, Walter 1995
- b. 2 f. 16 Pierson, Harold 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 2 f. 17 Pilcher, Evelyn 1991  
Interviewed by Lille and Mose.
- b. 2 f. 18 Queenan, Charles 1990  
Interviewed by Constance Valis Hill.
- b. 2 f. 19 Quitman, Cleo 1989
- b. 3 f. 1 Rich, Pola Dukes 1995  
Rich's professional name was Pola Dukes. Transcript only.
- b. 3 f. 2 Romero, Carmencita 1996  
Transcript only.
- b. 3 f. 3 Sagan, Gene Hill 1990
- b. 3 f. 4 Salis, Carmen 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 3 f. 5 Savage, Archie 1995
- b. 3 f. 6 Solomonoff, Henry 1995  
Solomonoff was the manager for the American Negro Ballet Company. Transcript only.
- b. 3 f. 7 Spencer, Marion 1995  
Transcript only.
- b. 3 f. 8 Tadlock, Robert 1996  
Transcript only.
- b. 3 f. 9 Thompson, Elizabeth Ann 1989
- b. 3 f. 10 Von Grona, Eugene 1994
- b. 3 f. 11 Waldron, Edward 1990  
Interviewed by Constance Valis Hill.
- b. 3 f. 12 Wilkinson, Raven 1989
- b. 3 f. 13 Williams, Ruth 1995
- b. 3 f. 14 Wright, Barbara 1991
- b. 3 f. 15-18 O'Donnell, May 1996
  - er. 1 Interviews of May O'Donnell 1996  
(13 computer files 1003 kilobytes)

Writings 1950s-1990s

Lille, Dawn

- b. 4 f. 1-5 "Classic Black" Biographies 1990s  
The files hold index cards with brief notations about the interviewees.

- b. 4 f. 6-9 May O'Donnell's Dance Techniques 1990s

O'Donnell, May

- b. 4 f. 10-11 Notes on Dance Techniques  
b. 4 f. 12 Remarks on Dance 1953  
Presentation at the "Evening With the Creative Dancer," Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences.  
b. 4 f. 13 Letter 1997  
b. 4 f. 14 Smith, Lida. Recollections About May O'Donnell 1981

Printed Matter 1932-2002

Programs, Playbills 1932-2002

- b. 5 f. 1-8 Martha Graham Dance Company 1932-1953  
b. 5 f. 9-16 May O'Donnell Dance Company 1940s-2002  
b. 6 f. 1-3  
b. 6 f. 4-6 Articles 1950s-2002

Assorted Files

- b. 6 f. 7 History of the May O'Donnell Dance Company  
The file also holds a list of the Company's performances.  
b. 6 f. 8 List of Tapes 1998  
The file refers to video tapes donated to the New York Public Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division.  
b. 6 f. 9 Photographs of O'Donnell

Audio and Moving Image Materials 1989-1997

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