



# The New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

## **Pryor Dodge collection**

1890-2009

(S) \*MGZMD 558

Processed by Emily P. Dunne in 2022.

### **Summary**

**Creator:** Dodge, Pryor

**Title:** Pryor Dodge collection

**Date:** 1890-2009

**Size:** 5.25 linear feet (11 boxes)

**Source:** Donated to the New York Public Library by Pryor Dodge in 2021.

**Abstract:** Pryor Dodge (1949-) is an author and collector and the son of Lyena Barjansky and Roger Pryor Dodge. Roger Pryor Dodge (1898-1974) was an American dancer. Roger Pryor Dodge's work was focused on the intersection of ballet, vaudeville, jazz, and film. The collection illustrates Roger Pryor Dodge's collaborations with other dancers and jazz musicians through photographs, film footage, scrapbooks, manuscripts, and correspondence. The majority of the collection consists of an eclectic range of film footage of Roger Pryor Dodge's dance routines, many of which were created in collaboration with his partner Mura Dehn.

### **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:** Pryor Dodge collection, (S) \*MGZMD 558. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Emily P. Dunne in 2022.

### **Creator History**

Pryor Dodge was born in New York in 1949. He grew up in New York City with his parents, Lyena

Barjansky and Roger Pryor Dodge. Early in life, he photographed and documented downtown New York, including musicians on the Bowery.

Roger Pryor Dodge (1898-1974) was an American dancer and choreographer whose work blended ballet, vaudeville, jazz, and film. Dodge was also a writer and critic, publishing essays and manuscripts on architecture, art, jazz, and classical music.

The son of muralist William de Leftwich, Dodge was born in Paris during one of his father's artist residencies. In the 1910s, Dodge became inspired to study dance after a dance partner introduced him to ballet, particularly Vaslav Nijinsky's performances in Les Ballets Russes. Back in America, Dodge studied with dance partners Fokine and Fokina and attended performances of the Isadora Duncan Dancers. Dodge returned to Paris to continue his studies with one of Nijinsky's former teachers, Nicol Legat, and other prominent French ballet dancers and choreographers.

After Vaslav Nijinsky's last performance in 1917, Dodge began collecting photographs of the dancer to preserve documentation of his legacy. Dodge became one of the earliest donors to the Dance Division of the New York Public Library, gifting this collection in 1937. The collection included previously unpublished images of Nijinsky and was the first extensive collection of portraits of the dancer.

Dodge returned to the United States in 1921, where he began creating choreography and collaborating with other dancers. His practice during this time was highly collaborative, and interdisciplinary, involving dance, film, and costume design. In 1930, Dodge started dancing with Mura Dehn, often performing their choreography to jazz music and recording film footage of these performances. During this time, Dodge purchased a studio on 8th Street in New York City, where he continued to film himself and other dancers, including Mura Dehn, Isadora Duncan, Léonide Massine, Arthur Mahoney, Lisa Parnova, and others.

Dodge's career is marked by his interest in jazz, and he often performed dances accompanied by the music of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and other prominent jazz musicians of the 1920s and 1930s. While his appreciation for jazz music was evident throughout his career, Dodge also performed and filmed many of these dance pieces in blackface.

Shortly before his death in 1974, Dodge planned to choreograph, design, and film himself performing five traditional Baroque court dances. He intended to create costumes based on traditional characters, including the Faune in *Le Triomphe de Bacchus*, and designed and built white papier mâché masks to accompany the costume. However, Dodge passed away in 1974 before filming the project.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The materials in this collection were gathered and organized by Pryor Dodge, Roger Pryor Dodge's son.

The collection includes glass plate negatives, photographs (including prints from glass plate negatives), several types of audio and video material, illustrations, scrapbooks, clippings, papier mâché face masks, and Dodge's Ensign Auto Kinecam camera which was used to record several performances present in the collection.

Film recordings include documentation of Roger Pryor Dodge's solo performances as well as footage of Dodge with other dancers. Footage of other dancers' solo performances created in Dodge's dance studio is also included. This footage includes performances by Isadora Duncan, Arthur Mahoney,

Léonide Massine, Lisa Parnova, and others. The collection also contains footage of Dodge's 1941 trip to Cuba, including Dodge's documentation of local Cuban dancers. Dodge's more candid footage includes a film of jazz musician Bunk Johnson playing the trumpet in Washington Square Park and footage of Dodge's wife, Lyena Barjansky. The collection also includes audio and video recordings of *Ris et Danceries*, filmed in 1993, February 26-27. This film was produced by Dodge's son, Pryor Dodge.

Notes on the audio recordings indicate that they were recorded in synch with some of the 16mm film footage present in the collection.

Photographs present in the collection are primarily of Roger Pryor Dodge in traditional vaudeville costume, often in blackface. Other photographs include documentation of duets with Dodge and other dancers. The original collection also contains photographs of solo performances and commercial headshots of various performers, including Adolph Bolm, Mura Dehn, Joze Duval (Dodge's second wife), Vera Fokina, Michel Fokine, Maria Gambarelli, musician James "Bubber" Miley, Vaslav Nijinsky, and others. The collection also includes photographs from a 1941 trip to Cuba, where Dodge researched Cuban dance.

Two handmade papier mâché masks are included in the collection. These masks were intended for use in an unfinished film project in which Dodge performed traditional solo baroque court dances. The collection also includes illustrations of the Faune in *Le Triomphe de Bacchus*, which inspired the costumes intended for the unfinished film project. Other illustrations include the following characters: Furie from *Iphigénie en Tauride* and a Demon from *Danse Arminde*.

Dodge purchased a 16mm camera in Paris in 1929 that was subsequently used to record film clips of himself and others in his studio. Many of these recordings are contained in the collection.

Two scrapbooks, likely created during the 1920s and 1930s, contain newspaper clippings and programs from performances starring and attended by Roger Pryor Dodge. There is also a group of loose clippings of costume design, and clippings about other ballet dancers within Roger Pryor Dodge's circle.

Several articles and manuscript drafts by Roger Pryor Dodge are present in the collection, many of which were unpublished. Topics include jazz, dance, Martha Graham, Nijinsky, art, perception, and architecture. Dodge was writing critically about jazz as early as 1929.

Other papers contain writing and correspondence with other dancers and Dodge's professional associates, featured in this correspondence include dance curators and academics. Individuals include Anne Bacon, Maurice Willson Disher, Joze Duval (Roger Pryor Dodge's second wife,) John Gruen, Brian Harker, Frances McClernan, Genevieve Oswald, and Mario Praz.

## Key Terms

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Albums (books)  
Correspondence  
Ephemera  
Filmed performances  
Manuscripts (documents)  
Negatives (photographs)

Photographs  
Sound recordings  
Video recordings

**Subjects**

Ballet -- Costume  
Ballet dancers -- Photographs  
Blackface -- United States -- History  
Vaudeville -- United States

**Occupations**

Cinematographers.  
Dancers.

**Names**

Dehn, Mura  
Dodge, Pryor  
Dodge, Roger Pryor  
Duncan, Isadora, 1877-1927  
Johnson, Bunk, 1879-1949  
Nijinsky, Vaslaw, 1890-1950

## Container List

### Photographs

- b. 1 f. 1     **Various Photographs 1906-1966**  
Includes photographs of Dodge's childhood home in Long Island, New York; assorted performances and studio portraits; Dodge's first wife, Anne Bacon; and a business card from Dodge's studio, "8th Street Dance Studio."
- b. 1 f. 2     **Paintings and Portraits 1917-1950**  
b. 3 f. 1     Includes photographs used as a reference for paintings, as well as photographs of finished paintings. The files also includes two original illustrations of Dodge, an unsigned watercolor from 1933, and an ink portrait by Jane Wilson from the 1950s.
- b. 1 f. 3     **"Duncan-esque" 1922**
- b. 1 f. 4     **Leopard-Skin 1923**  
Probably taken in Setauket, New York. One photograph is with Dodge's sister, Sara Dodge.
- b. 1 f. 5     **With Adolf Bolm in "Russian Costume" 1925**  
b. 3 f. 2     Taken at the Club Americano de Buenos Aires.  
b. 6
- b. 3 f. 3     **Skyscrapers 1926**
- b. 1 f. 6     **Black Costume, New York City 1928**  
b. 6
- b. 1 f. 7     ***Lilies of the Field, United States* 1928**  
With Arthur Mahoney and Jack Nile.
- b. 1 f. 8     ***Lilies of the Field and Fly Swatters Ballet, Walent, Paris* 1928-1929**  
b. 6
- b. 1 f. 9     ***Lilies of the Field and Black Costume, Paris* 1929**  
b. 6     Photographed at Photo-Studio-Torcy, Paris.
- b. 1 f. 10    **With James "Bubber" Miley, Arthur Mahoney, and Jack Niles 1931-1932**  
b. 3 f. 4  
b. 7 f. 1
- b. 1 f. 11    **With Maria Gambarelli ("Gamby"), Alps Castle, New Jersey 1931**  
b. 3 f. 5
- b. 1 f. 12    **White Costume 1932**  
b. 3 f. 6
- b. 1 f. 13    **Black Costume for Bubber Painting 1932**  
b. 3 f. 7
- b. 1 f. 14    **No Jacket, Suit Costume, Clown 1933**  
b. 3 f. 8
- b. 2 f. 1     ***King of the Zulus* 1933-1934**  
With Barbara Williams and Mura Dehn.
- b. 1 f. 15    **Blackface in White Coat 1935**  
b. 3 f. 9
- b. 2 f. 2     **Cuba 1941**  
b. 3 f. 10    Includes photographs of Dodge holding the movie camera also present in this collection.
- b. 2 f. 3     **"Tramp Costume" with Joze Duval 1943**  
Includes photos of Dodge with Joze Duval (Dodge's second wife) dressed as "tramps." Love letters from Duval to Dodge are handwritten on the back of four photographs.

### Other Dancers

- b. 2 f. 4     **Various 1900s-1940s**  
b. 3 f. 11    Includes headshots and individual portraits of several dancers in Dodge's circle, including Vera Fokina and Michel Fokine, Léonide Massine, Ruth Page, Lisa Parnova, Nikolai Legat, Vincente Escudero, and many unidentified dancers. Dodge took several of these photographs in his 8th street studio. There are also photographs by Martha Swope and various professional photography studios.

Photographs (cont.)  
Other Dancers (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 5 Vaslav Nijinsky 1890s-1910s
- b. 3 f. 12
- b. 7 f. 2
- b. 2 f. 6 Mura Dehn 1910s-1970s
- b. 3 f. 13 Also includes some photographs of Dehn in a dance class with fashion designer Sara Ripault.
- b. 7 f. 3
- b. 2 f. 7 Jack Nile and Anita Avila 1910s-1940s
- b. 2 f. 8 Susanne Remos 1910s-1937
- b. 2 f. 9 Photography Inventory 1970s-2000s

Dance Performances

- b. 2 f. 10 Dance Performance Inventories 1970s-2000s  
Notes on film materials by Roger Pryor Dodge with annotations by Pryor Dodge. Separated from audio moving image materials.

Recorded Dance

Recorded footage contains various solo and group performances with Dodge, including *Black and Tan Fantasy*, *Lilies of the Field*, *Lion Act Quintet*, several performances with his partner Mura Dehn, and more. Dodge would also record other dancers, often in his studio and during his travels. There are several recordings of Arthur Mahoney, Chester Hale, Elsie Dufour, Isadora Duncan, Jack Nile, Anita Avila, Léonide Massine, Nikolai Legat, Lisa Parnova, Lyena Barjansky, Tony Waltz and dancers Dodge met on a trip to Cuba. One recording does not include footage of or taken by Dodge. *Ris et Danceries*, was a filmed ballet produced by Dodge's son, Pryor Dodge on February 26th and 27th, 1993.

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Baroque Solo Court Dancers 1974

Dodge died before filming this project. Includes masks created for the performances and illustrations that inspired the costumes for the unfinished project.

- b. 4 f. 1 Sheet Music 1970s  
Contains scores for *Apollon*, *Les Nation L'espagnol* by François Couperin, and *Menuet*.
- b. 10-11 Masks 1970s  
Two masks made out of Papier-mâché and painted white, each with two holes for the eyes, and sculpted details of the nose and lips.  
Researchers must schedule an appointment in advance to view these items.
- b. 8 f. 1 Costume illustrations 1940s
- b. 9 16mm Ensign Auto Kinecam Camera 1929  
Researchers must schedule an appointment in advance to view these items.

Writing

Published Articles 1929-1955

- b. 4 f. 2 "Negro Jazz" and "The Importance of Dance Style in the Presentation of Early Western Instrumental Music" 1929-1955
- b. 4 f. 3 "Nijinsky's Pictures" 1930s-1970s

Unpublished Manuscripts 1940s-1960s

Includes drafts of *Illuminations by Martha Graham: The Poverty of the Contemporary Dance and the Inadequacy of Choreography*; *Jazz Dance -- Jazz Music* (introduction and book outline); *Architecture Criticism*; *Byzantine Art: Its Origin*; *Nijinsky Pictures*, #14, 15, 17; and *Nijinsky Photographs*.

- b. 4 f. 4 *Illuminations by Martha Graham and Jazz Dance - Jazz Music* 1940s-1960s
- b. 4 f. 5-8 *The Comedian Theatre: The True Art of the Theatre Volume 1-2* 1940s-1960s
- b. 5 f. 1-4 Architecture Criticism 1940s-1960s  
Includes chapters two, five through eleven, and an appendix.

Writing (cont.)

About Roger Pryor Dodge

- b. 5 f. 5      **Biographies** 1970s  
Contains a remembrance by Mura Dehn and the *New York Times* obituary.
- b. 5 f. 6      "Louis Armstrong, Eccentric Dance, and the Evolution of Jazz on the Eve of Swing" by Brian Harker 2008
- b. 5 f. 7      "Nijinsky: Photographs from the Roger Pryor Dodge Collection" by John Gruen and "The Jazz Writings of Roger Pryor Dodge" by Ann Bacon 1970s

Press and Clippings

- b. 7 f. 4-7      **Scrapbooks** 1920s-1930s
- b. 8 f. 1      Includes news clippings, programs, and reviews of Dodge's work.
- b. 5 f. 8-9      **Costume Designs** 1900s-1960s
- b. 5 f. 10      **Nijinsky** 1900s-1950s
- b. 5 f. 11-12    **Correspondence** 1940s-1975