



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Felix Fibich papers

1940s-2009

(S) *MGZMD 364

Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2014

Summary

Creator: Fibich, Felix

Title: Felix Fibich papers

Date: 1940s-2009

Size: 1.55 linear feet (5 boxes)

Source: Purchased from Felix Fibich, 2011.

Abstract: Felix Fibich (1917-2014) was a Polish-American classical and modern dancer, choreographer, actor, and instructor best known for his expertise in Jewish traditional dances. Fibich often danced with his wife Judith Berg Fibich (1912-1992), who performed under her maiden name, Judith Berg. The collection documents the dance careers of Fibich and Berg, and Fibich's additional work as an actor and instructor.

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Preferred citation: Felix Fibich papers, (S) *MGZMD 364. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2014

Related Materials:

Felix Fibich collection. Museum of Jewish Heritage A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.
Letters, (S) *MGZM-Res. Fib F. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Creator History

Felix Fibich (1917-2014) was a Polish-American classic and modern dancer, choreographer, actor, and instructor best known for his expertise in Jewish traditional dances. Fibich often danced with his wife Judith Berg Fibich (1912-1992), who performed under her maiden name, Judith Berg. Fibich was born

in Warsaw, Poland as Fajwel Goldblat. His mother ran a restaurant and his father was a cantor. As a young adult, Fibich had ambitions for the stage, and took dance classes with Judith Berg, who would later become his wife. Fibich initially took dance classes because he thought it would help his acting; though he did return to acting later in his life, the majority of his career was in dance.

Fibich and Berg both left Poland at the start of World War II, and performed with a troupe in Yiddish comic reviews across the then-Soviet Union. While in the Soviet Union, Fibich also studied ballet. Fibich and Berg were married in 1946, and returned to Poland shortly after to find a country radically altered by the war. Most of their family members had perished in concentration camps. Initially unwilling to stay in the country, they soon became involved in teaching traditional Jewish dances to children in the Jewish orphanages, and later toured with a company composed of the orphans. While in Poland, Fibich and Berg starred in the Natan Gross documentary *Mir, lebngelibene* (The Jewish People, Live).

In 1949, the couple moved to Paris where they lived and performed for a year, before moving to the United States. Fibich and Berg made their home in New York City, but performed extensively across the United States. Fibich studied modern dance with Doris Humphrey and began applying modern interpretations to the more classic Jewish dance forms. Fibich also taught students at Yiddish Theater workshops and at Klezkamp, an annual Yiddish folkarts program. In addition to dancing, Fibich choreographed the musical *Let's Sing Yiddish* at the Brooks Atkinson Theater in 1966, and *Light, Lively and Yiddish* at the Belasco Theater in 1970. He also choreographed dance sequences for the movie *The Chosen* (1981), and for the television specials *Lamp Unto My Feet* and *If Not Higher*. In 1997, he choreographed and toured with *Planet Lulu*, an avant-garde production with a set designed by Marina Abramovi_.

Fibich returned to acting at the age of fifty two. In 1969 he played the part of the matchmaker in *The Song and the Silence*, and the role of a holocaust survivor in the French movie *XXL*. In 1988, he acted in the revival of the comedy *Café Crown* at the Public Theater, and later moved to Broadway. Fibich also appeared in two episodes of *Law and Order*.

Fibich died in New York City in 2014. Berg predeceased him in 1992.

Custodial History

The collection was maintained by Fibich prior to donation.

Scope and Content Note

The collection documents the dance careers of Fibich and Berg, and Fibich's additional work as an actor and instructor. The collection contains articles about Fibich, correspondence, programs and news clippings, photographs, and production materials. There is a small amount of personal material that consists of citizenship papers of both Fibich and Berg, a two-part biographical account Fibich wrote about Berg, condolence letters regarding Berg's death, and resumes. The citizenship papers denote the official change of Fibich's name from Fajwel Goldblat as part of the naturalization process, though he had been using Fibich throughout his entire professional career.

The articles about Fibich consist of published articles and typescripts of articles that the authors sent to Fibich for review. Correspondence include invitations and holiday cards, and letters of commendation and recommendation regarding Fibich's dance instruction. There is a small amount of letters from Berg, though most are illegible due to her decline from Alzheimer's disease.

Photographs in the collection document Fibich and Berg's dance performances, and also include publicity shots and snapshots. The photographs span from 1946 to 1997 and document the couple's career from Poland to the United States. A homemade flip book for *Lamp Unto My Feet* was created by fastening small photographs together. Also included are snapshots from vacations; of family, friends, and former students; and Fibich instructing dance workshops at Klezkamp. Fibich's acting career is documented by photographs from the sets of *XXL*, *The Chosen*, and the Public Theater production of *Café Crown*.

The programs and news clippings include productions that Fibich choreographed, danced, or acted in, as well as productions he attended. The latter are heavily annotated with his observations of the performances. The Folkshiene Yiddish Theatre and the Jewish Repertory Theater are particularly well represented. The programs also include screenings of *The Dybbuk*, a 1937 film that Berg choreographed which was restored and rereleased in 1989. Production material includes production files for *XXL*, scripts for *Planet Lulu* and *Solomon and Ashmedai*, and drafts of a script for *East Side Story*, an unproduced play that Fibich was writing on the lives of Lower East Side immigrants.

Teaching materials consist of lectures, including a lecture Fibich gave at the Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow on his experience returning to Poland after World War II. Also present are a lecture and planning documents from Klezkamp.

The majority of the collection is in English with materials in French, German, Polish, and Yiddish.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged by document type.

Key Terms

Subjects

Choreography
Dance -- Study and teaching
Dance -- United States
Jewish dance

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Photographs

Names

Berg, Judith

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Articles 1987-2004
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- b. 1 f. 3-6 Production Material 1951-1972, 1996-1997
 - b. 2 f. 1 Production Material
- b. 2 f. 2-5 Programs and News Clippings 1950-2005
- b. 3 f. 1-2 Programs and News Clippings 1979-2008
- b. 3 f. 3 Teaching Materials 1997-2004