



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Jerry Ames papers

1945-2009

(S) *MGZMD 404

Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2014

Summary

Creator: Ames, Jerry

Title: Jerry Ames papers

Date: 1945-2009

Size: 1.72 linear feet (5 boxes)

Source: Donated by Patrick Spencer, executor of the Jerry Ames estate, 2012.

Abstract: Jerry Ames (1930-2011) was an American tap dancer, choreographer, and teacher. The papers document Ames' career as a dancer and teacher, and consist of correspondence, photographs, programs, scores, and scrapbooks.

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Preferred citation: Jerry Ames papers, (S) *MGZMD 404. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Susan Malsbury, 2014 The scrapbooks were removed from their bindings, but received order was maintained.

Creator History

Jerry Ames (1930-2011) was an American tap dancer, choreographer, and teacher. He was born in Queens, New York as Jerome Abrams, but legally changed his name to Ames when he began performing professionally. Ames started tap dancing at the age of four under the tutelage of Jack Hayes at a local dance school. At thirteen, he began his professional training with Jack Stanley and later with Paul Draper. He made his Broadway debut in *Are You With It?* in 1945. He went on to appear in *Panama Nettie* and *Anything Goes*, and regularly performed in concerts, on cruise ships, and in nightclubs. Ames became known for his expertise in Irish gig-and-tap, as well as blending tap with waltzes, ballet, and traditionally African American dance forms.

In 1969, he was one of the stars in the review show *Tap Happening*. This production evolved into *The*

Hoofers, a long-running show credited with revitalizing American interest in tap. In 1976, he formed his own company, the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company. He also began work on the *Book of Tap: Recovering America's Long Lost Dance*, which he co-wrote with Jim Siegelman and published in 1977. In 1980, Ames was featured in the documentary *Tapdancin'*. Ames closed his dance company in the early 1980s. While he still occasionally performed solo, he began to focus more on teaching. He taught master classes in the United States, Europe, and Russia, and frequently judged dance competitions. Ames won a FLO-BERT award in 2006 which honors outstanding figures in the world of tap, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Dance Library of Israel.

He died in New York in 2011.

Scope and Content Note

The Jerry Ames papers (1945-2009) document his career as a dancer and teacher, and consist of correspondence, photographs, scores, scrapbooks, and personal materials. His work on the *Book of Tap* is minimally represented in the collection by a small amount of correspondence and news clippings.

The correspondence spans 1945 to 2000. Ames' popularity as both a dancer and instructor is demonstrated with recurring requests to perform at theaters and festivals, as well as letters from former students. There is one file of correspondence with noted tap dancer Eleanor Powell, who wrote the introduction for *The Book of Tap*. Ames and Powell corresponded until her death in 1982, after which Ames continued to receive letters from her daughter Eleanor Debus. The programs represent his performances at national and international theaters and festivals as well as his appearances in productions like *Tap Happening* and *The Hoofers*. Programs from the 1990s and later are generally for events honoring Ames rather than dance performances. Also present with the programs is a souvenir program and match book for the Copacabana nightclub in 1948; both contain a photograph of Ames and a companion. The photographs consist of publicity shots of Ames throughout his career, photographs of the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company, and photographs of Ames teaching. The scores consist of holograph scores of "Manhattan Night Life" and "The Old Soft Shoe," and unidentified song lyrics. There are four scrapbooks in the collection which are composed of news clippings, photographs, programs, and tickets. The fourth scrapbook contained loose material that has been filed separately. There is one subject file on Ames' dance teacher and noted tap dancer Paul Draper that contains news clippings and programs.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged alphabetically by format and subject.

Key Terms

Subjects

Dance -- History -- 20th century
Tap dancers
Tap dancing

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Photographs
Programs (documents)
Scrapbooks
Sheet music

Names

Powell, Eleanor, 1912-1982

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Cabaret and Public Dance Hall Employee Identification Card 1955
- b. 1 f. 2-3 Correspondence 1945-2000
- b. 1 f. 4 Draper, Paul 1946-1973
- b. 1 f. 5-8 Photographs 1950s-2006
- b. 2 f. 1-4 Photographs 1969-2006
 - b. 5 Photograph
- b. 2 f. 5 Programs 1948-2002
- b. 3 f. 1-2 Programs 1954-2009
- b. 3 f. 3 Scores 1961
- b. 3 f. 4-5 Scrapbook 1950s-1973
 - Contains material regarding *Anything Goes*, *The Hoofers*, *Panama Hattie*, the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company, and Ames' teaching.
- b. 3 f. 6 Scrapbook 1973-1974
 - Contains material regarding the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company.
- b. 4 f. 1 Scrapbook 1976-1993
 - Contains material regarding the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company and his teaching.
- b. 5 Scrapbook 1976-2006
 - Contains material regarding the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company, solo performances, and his teaching.
- b. 4 f. 2 Scrapbook 1976-2006
 - Loose material