



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre records**

1976-2007

(S) \*MGZMD 466

Compiled by Heather Lember, 2017.

## Summary

**Creator:** Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre

**Title:** Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre records

**Date:** 1976-2007

**Size:** .42 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Donated by Sheila Rohan, 2016.

**Abstract:** The Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre was a non-profit dance company that supported and promoted the work of dancers, choreographers, and theatre artists of color. The company's records date from 1976 to 2007, and consist of administrative papers, promotional materials, photographs, and video recordings.

### Conditions Governing Access:

Video recordings are unavailable pending digitization.

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**Preferred citation:** Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre records, (S) \*MGZMD 466. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Heather Lember, 2017.

## Creator History

The Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre (NBCDT) was a non-profit organization that supported and promoted the work of dancers, choreographers, and theatre artists of color. The company was founded in 1976 as the Chamber Dance Group by Nanette Rohan Bearden (1927-1996), and originated as a group of eight dancers that specialized in classical ballets, vignettes, and works-in-progress. The company's name was officially changed to NBCDT in 1977, and they opened a

professional dance school that provided training and scholarships for young and emerging dancers.

Bearden's husband, the artist Romare Bearden, helped design costumes for ballets, and created a limited edition lithograph logo for the company which helped to fund its operations. NBCDT went on to work with a number of African-American choreographers and dancers such as Talley Beatty, Fred Benjamin, Marla Bingham, Gary DeLoatch, George Faison, Louis Johnson, John Jones, Dianne McIntyre, Rick Odums, Carmencita Romero, Roumel Reaux, Walter Rutledge, Otis Sallid, and Bill Scott. Company productions toured all over the United States, as well as in Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean.

Nanette Bearden, who also served as the organization's artistic director, grew up on Staten Island and studied modern dance and jazz at the Martha Graham School, Clark Center for Performing Arts, and Luigi Dance Center; and ballet at the Dance Theatre of Harlem. From 1971 to 1974, she danced professionally with the New World Dancers. Bearden was a staunch advocate for black choreographers and dancers, and produced the series, Broadway Dance Festival, from 1975 to 1976, which promoted such companies as Eleo Pomare Dance Company, Joan Miller/Chamber Arts Players, Charles Moore Dance Theatre, Pepsi Bethel Authentic Dance Theatre, and the Jerry Ames Tap Dance Company.

Upon the death of Nanette Bearden in 1996, the NBCDT was dissolved. In 2004, the organization was revived by Bearden's sister, Sheila Rohan, who is also a dancer, choreographer, and instructor. The company continued to offer outreach programs in dance instruction and theatre arts to students in low-income neighborhoods; professional training through their dance school; and dance and theatre performances with an emphasis on works by artists of color.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre records date from 1976 to 2007 and contain administrative files, promotional items, photographs, and video recordings that document the history of the company. The records chronicle Bearden's tenure as NBCD's artistic director, as well as the organization's reestablishment under the direction of Sheila Rohan in 2004.

The administrative materials include financial documentation, the company's articles of incorporation, and a selection of meeting minutes. Also present are various lists of company members, descriptions of the organization, and biographies of Nanette Bearden.

The promotional items comprise a selection of programs from company productions, along with few press releases, newsletters, and flyers.

Photographs date from 1976 to the 1980s, and include captions that identify the year and the individuals depicted. The photographs primarily portray rehearsals and live performances.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American dancers

Choreography

Dance -- New York (N.Y.)

Dance companies -- New York (N.Y.)

Dance schools -- New York (N.Y.)

**Occupations**

Dancers

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Fliers (printed matter)

Photographs

Programs

Video recording

**Geographic Names**

Manhattan -- New York (N.Y.)

**Names**

Bearden, Nanette

Rohan, Sheila