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Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor papers

1911-1988

(S) *MGZMD 257

Compiled by Janine Veazue, Queens College, CUNY, 2012, June 2011

Summary

Creator: Laing, Hugh

Title: Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor papers, 1911-1988

Size: 1.68 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: Donated by Isabel Brown, 2011; two letters donated by Maude Gosling, 2004

Abstract: Intimate friends and professional associates Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor were key contributors to the modern, expressive interpretation of classical ballet. The Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor papers reflect a limited selection of Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor's personal written records, the bulk of which is represented through candid photographs, correspondence, and other small, personal artifacts.

Access: To request materials, please contact the Jerome Robbins Dance Division (dance@nypl.org) in advance.

Copyright information: Donor retains copyright. Library policy on photocopying will apply. For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

Preferred citation: Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor papers, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library

Processing note

The majority of the materials in this collection are in conditions suitable for public research. Proper handling procedures should be used when viewing Hugh Laing's baby book, due to board and page degradation. Researches looking for materials that provide a more general overview of Laing and Tudor's professional relationship and careers should refer to the Hugh Lang papers, the Antony Tudor papers, and the American Ballet Theatre Records, available through the New York Public Library's online catalog and the Performing Arts Research Collections.

Related collections

Antony Tudor papers, 1908-1987. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Hugh Laing papers, 1943-1988. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library

Creator history

Hugh Laing was born on June 6, 1911 in Barbados, British West Indies as Hugh Morris Alleyne Skinner. Laing moved to London in 1931, and enrolled in Marie Rambert's Ballet Club (later Ballet Rambert) in 1933. In 1938, Laing became a member of a short-lived troupe in the London Ballet, where he danced in his fellow dancer and choreographer Antony Tudor's *Gala Performance* and *Judgment of Paris*. The following year, upon the suggestion of fellow performer and director Agnes DeMille, Laing accompanied Tudor to New York City to dance for the first season of the Ballet Theater (later named The American Ballet Theatre), where they grew to be revered as two of the company's finest artists. Together with his wife Diana Adams, dance partner Nora Kaye, and Tudor, Laing left the Ballet Theater for a position at the New York City Ballet in 1951. He starred in the 1954 MGM film adaptation of *Brigadoon* and spent many years filling the leading roles in Tudor's ballets, including *Pillar of Fire*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Jardin aux Lilas*. He spent most of his later years as a professional photographer and set/costume designer for several of Tudor's final productions.

Antony Tudor was born as William Cook in London on April 4, 1909. He began formal training with Marie Rambert, the owner and head choreographer of the Ballet Club (now known as The Rambert Dance Company) in 1928, later meeting Hugh Laing in 1933. Upon moving to New York City in 1939 to dance in and help publicize the newly formed Ballet Theater, Tudor grew to be regarded as both a first-class choreographer and performer. After several years at the American Ballet Theatre, Tudor, along with dancers Nora Keyes, Laing, and Laing's wife Diana Adams, began performing for the New York City Ballet. Tudor was founder and choreographer of the London Ballet, 1937-1940, Artistic Director of the Royal Swedish Ballet, 1952-1964, and Associate Director of the American Ballet Theatre. He was a principal force in the *Jacob's Pillow Dance Festivals* from the 1940s to 1953, where he eventually worked with the then-recently founded National Ballet of Canada. He served as teacher for the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School and Juilliard School, and performed and directed several paramount ballets at the Ballet Theatre in New York from 1939-1950. Among his productions (many of which Laing played the leading role), several stand out as representative of his talent: *Jardin aux Lilas* (Ballet Rambert, 1936), *Gala Performance* (London Ballet, 1938), *Pillar of Fire* (Ballet Theatre, 1942) *Dim Lustre* (Ballet Theatre, 1943), and *The Leaves are Fading* (American Ballet Theatre, 1975).

Nora Kaye was born Nora Koreff in Brooklyn, NY in 1920. She was trained at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet and, at age 9, was a regular performer in their children's productions. After several years in the Radio City Music Hall corps de ballet, she joined the Ballet Theatre in 1939. The leading role in Antony Tudor's 1946 production of *Pillar of Fire* gained her the respect she deserved as a true prima ballerina. This role, along with others in Tudor's *Gala Performance*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Jardin Aux Lilas*, as well as in DeMille's *Fall River Legend*, earned her the title "Duse of the Dance." After a short marriage to Isaac Stern, Kaye wed Herbert Ross, film director and former choreographer for the American Ballet Theatre, and assisted in writing and producing many of his later films and Broadway musicals.

Scope and content note

The Hugh Laing and Antony Tudor papers are composed of correspondence, postcards, contracts, professional and personal photographs and several bound books. The bulk of the documents represent an intimate spectrum of Laing and Tudor's personal lives, their relationships with their immediate families, as well as dancers Diana Adams, Nora Kaye, Agnes DeMille, and critic/photographer Carl Van Vechten.

The items directly relating to Nora Kaye consists entirely of photographs. Candid shots include Kaye traveling abroad and an appearance for the British War Relief Society featuring fellow ballerinas Annabelle Lyon and Miriam Golden. Professional photographs include press shots and various stage

performances, the bulk taken by Fred Fehl.

The materials relating to the personal side of Hugh Laing consist of detailed personal correspondence, various personal artifacts and dozens of photographs, both candid and professional. Correspondence is a mixture of personal letters from family members and friends including a substantial amount of letters from Carl Van Vechten. The bulk of the correspondence is between Tudor and Laing and ranges from 1955 to 1980. Most of the professional photographs are prints from Carl Van Vechten's various shoots documenting nearly all of Laing's leading roles. (Van Vechten mentions in his correspondence that it was a pleasure to photograph Laing and that it was his intent to document all of his leading roles). Various professional photographs also featuring Tudor appear in this section.

The Antony Tudor section is composed of detailed personal correspondence, various personal artifacts and dozens of photographs, both candid and professional. An assortment of riders, contracts, and professional inquiries begin with the original 1939 contract requesting Laing and Tudor's appearance in New York City to produce and perform Tudor's *Jardin aux Lilas*. The bulk of the remaining forms originate from the corporate offices of The Ballet Theatre and The Royal Opera House, London, as well as various educational organizations and foundations. Correspondence to Tudor is slim, and originates from several various senders. Many are notes of praise and gratitude, with several more familiar notes from a MS Cook in New Zealand. Photographs commemorating his directorial work in Tokyo, Brazil, and various locations in Europe are held here, along with several from Carl Van Vechten's various ballet shoots. Also included are excerpts of personal, biographical histories with heading titles "Getting to Know Rambert" and "Jardin aux Lilas," both with hand-written notes.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in three sections by the name of the creator. Within that, files were arranged alphabetically by format.

Key terms

Subjects

Ballet -- United States
Choreographers -- United States --
Correspondence

Names

Adams, Diana, 1926-1993
American Ballet Theatre
Ballet Rambert
Kaye, Nora, 1920-1987
Laing, Hugh
Metropolitan Opera (New York, N.Y.) Ballet
Tudor, Antony, 1909-1987
Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964

Special formats

Appointment books
Baby book
Black-and-white photographs
Correspondence
Staged photographs

Container list

Kaye, Nora

b.1 f.1 Photographs, 1931, undated

Laing, Hugh

Correspondence

b.1 f.2 Adams, Diana, 1949-1953, undated

b.1 f.3 Family, 1957-1970

b.1 f.4 General, 1944-1965

b.1 f.5 Law Firm of Debevoise & Plimpton, 1987

b.1 f.6-8 Tudor, Antony, 1948-1980

b.2 f.1 Van Vechten, Carl, undated

Personal Artifacts

b.2 f.2 Baby Book, 1910s

b.2 f.3 Book, 1951 December (with gift inscription)

Photographs

b.2 f.4 Candid, 1910s-1940s

b.2 f.5 Professional, 1940s-1960s

Tudor, Antony

b.2 f.6 Business Forms and Contracts, 1939-1985

b.2 f.7 Correspondence, 1966-1986

Personal Artifacts

b.3 f.1 Date Books, 1965-1987

b.3 f.2 Passports, 1935-1988

b.3 f.3 Photocopy of Last Will and Testament, 1988

b.3 f.4 Record Books, 1938-1939

b.3 f.5 War Ration Book Two, 1940s

b.4 f.1 Personal Writing, undated

Photographs

b.4 f.2 Candid, undated

b.4 f.3-5 Professional, undated