Henrietta McDowell Memorial Photographic Collection

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Henrietta McDowell Memorial Photographic Collection

Dates: 1958-1979

Collection Number: 984.013

Creator/Collector: McDowell, Henrietta

Extent: Number of containers: 18 albums; 4 binders; 26 shoeboxes; 4 cartons; 15 hollinger boxes; 6 oversized boxes.
Linear feet: 28.0

Repository: Museum of Performance and Design, Performing Arts Library
San Francisco, California 94124

Abstract: Henrietta (Henri) Deming McDowell (1916?-1983) was a journalist and photographer. From the late 1950s to the 1970s, McDowell was the official photographer for the San Francisco Ballet, documenting nearly every ballet performed in that period of time. Promotional materials and souvenir programs often featured her photographs. Her photography and articles about ballet and Lew Christensen appeared in numerous publications. The collection at MP+D includes approximately 10,000 negatives, 5,000 mini positives, 221 35mm and 2 1/4 slides, 5,000 loose and bound black and white and color glossy 8 x 10 prints, 200 16 x 20 mounted and unmounted black and white prints, 100 11 x 14 black and white prints, and personal papers consisting of news clippings, manuscripts, publications, correspondence, and awards. Noted dancers and choreographers featured in the collection include individuals such as Lew Christensen, Michael Smuin, Carlos Carvajal, Robert Gladstein, Sally Bailey, and Jocelyn Vollmar.

Language of Material: English

Access

Entire collection is open for research use.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Henrietta McDowell Memorial Photographic Collection. Museum of Performance and Design, Performing Arts Library

Acquisition Information


Biography/Administrative History

Henrietta Deming McDowell, a native of Connecticut, was the daughter of painter William Edward Deming. Deming is famous for his Indian paintings, some of which are in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution. Henrietta's mother was a writer and a publisher of children's books about Indians. Henrietta, or Henri as she came to be called, graduated from Columbia University in New York with a degree in journalism. She worked for the "New York Herald Tribune" as a reporter and later married Army Colonel James V. McDowell. She continued her work as a journalist as she and her husband moved about to various army bases. As a member of the International Photographic Society and the Photographic Society of America, Henrietta often entered photographic contests. One of her photographs, taken while her husband was stationed in Darmstadt, Germany, won a national award. From the late 1950s to mid 1970s, Mrs. McDowell was the official photographer for the San Francisco Ballet. Nearly every ballet performed in that period of time was photo-documented by her. Promotional materials and souvenir programs often featured her photographs. A writer as well as a photographer, her articles about ballet and Lew Christensen have appeared in "Dance Magazine", "California Living", and other publications. Towards the end of her life, Mrs. McDowell began work on a book featuring her dance photography. Unfortunately, she was never able to see this project to completion. She died of cancer in 1983 at age 67.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Henrietta McDowell Memorial Photographic Collection documents the career of Henrietta McDowell, who served as the official photographer for the San Francisco Ballet from the late 1950s to the 1970s. It includes approximately 10,000 negatives, 5,000 mini positives, 221 35mm and 2 1/4 slides, 5,000 loose and bound black and white and color glossy 8 x 10 prints, 200 16 x 20 mounted and unmounted black and white prints, 100 11 x 14 black and white prints, and personal papers consisting of news clippings, manuscripts, publications, correspondence, and awards. Along with providing evidence of Henri McDowell's activities as a photographer and journalist, the collection also offers extensive documentation of the activities of the San Francisco Ballet, as well as of other local dance companies and ballet schools. The bulk of the collection covers the performances of the San Francisco Ballet between 1958 and 1979. Files of negatives and mini positives and of 8
x 10 prints document the various ballets presented by the company and also provide an illustrative record of the individual dancers, choreographers, and backstage personnel involved in each performance. The decade of the sixties is most thoroughly documented, although very little material exists for the year of 1969. Materials covering the 1970s are much sparser, but do provide a record of some of the major ballets and individuals involved in the company during that decade. Highlights of these photographic files include photos of rehearsals and performances by guest artists Maria Tallchief, Margot Fonteyn, and Rudolf Nureyev; television performances of "Beauty and the Beast" in 1966 and "The Nutcracker" in 1964; the American Ballet Theater's production of Swan Lake in 1967; and the participation of Robert Gladstein, John McFall, Tomm Ruud, Michael Smuin, and Kent Stowell in Choreographers' Workshops held between 1960-73. Performances given by Carlos Carvajal's Dance Spectrum during the seventies are also documented by photographs and negatives. A few folders of photos and negatives documenting the San Francisco Ballet School, the Ziceva Ballet School, the Lido Ballet, the Ballet Arts Center of Palo Alto, and the Ballet Celeste are also present. A small body of photographs and negatives of scenes of San Francisco offer an example of how Henri McDowell applied her photographic artistry to other types of subject matter. Researchers could utilize this collection to study the history of the San Francisco Ballet and of other dance companies and schools represented, as well as to locate illustrative materials on various individual dancers and other SFB personnel. Photographic materials could also be used to analyze costume and set design and choreography. Those interested in the career of a dance photographer will find extensive evidence of her photographic activities and methods of working, as well as examples of how she combined her photographic and journalistic skills to prepare promotional materials for the ballet and historical sketches of the company's activities and personnel. One of Henri McDowell's lifelong dreams was to publish a book of her ballet photography. Although she was unable to accomplish this goal before her death, the collection reveals her preparations for this work in the form of drafts of text and bound photo albums with captions. This collection complements the records of the San Francisco Ballet by providing additional evidence of the company's performances and performers. Researchers who are interested in studying a particular ballet will find that McDowell's photographs offer more extensive coverage of many ballets in the company's repertoire. Those who are studying Carlos Carvajal's Dance Spectrum will be able to use both the programs in the Dance Companies files and the McDowell collection to construct a printed and visual history of the company. The collection also enhances information located in the biographical files by providing additional photographic documentation in the form of portraits and dance performances.

**Indexing Terms**

Ballet -- California -- San Francisco -- 20th century.


Gladstein, Robert.

Smuin, Michael

Bailey, Sally, 1932-

Vollmar, Jocelyn

Loyd, Sue

Carvajal, Carlos, 1931-

Meyer, Lynda

Poindexter, Ron

San Francisco Ballet

Dance Spectrum

McDowell Memorial Photography Collection Container List