Guide to the Mary Desti Collection on Isadora Duncan, 1901-1930

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Note
Arts and Humanities --Performing Arts --Dance
Guide to the Mary Desti Collection on Isadora Duncan, 1901-1930

Collection number: MS-P 5

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Laura Clark Brown
Date Completed:
1997
Encoded by:
Brooke Dykman Dockter

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Mary Desti Collection on Isadora Duncan,
Date (inclusive): 1901-1930
Collection number: MS-P005
Collector: Desti, Mary
Extent: Number of containers: 2 boxes, 1 flat box
Linear feet: 1.25
Repository: University of California, Irvine. Library. Special Collections and Archives.
Irvine, California 92623-9557
Abstract: The Mary Desti Collection focuses on the dancer Isadora Duncan. Materials include incoming correspondence from or relating to Duncan, photographs, ephemera, clippings, programs, artifacts and a scrapbook of newspaper clippings. Mary Desti was Duncan's close friend and biographer.
Language: English.
Access
Collection is open for research. Researchers must use microfilm or photocopies of fragile restricted items in boxes 3 and 4.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Mary Desti Collection on Isadora Duncan. MS-P 5. Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine, The UCI Libraries.
Acquisition Information
Gift of Albert Dukow via Professor James Penrod in 1971 or 1972.

Processing History
Preliminary processing by Special Collections staff; completed by Laura Clark Brown in 1997.

Biography
Mary Desti (1871-1931) left Chicago for Paris in 1901 with her year-old son Preston Sturges. In Paris, she met and befriended dancer and choreographer Isadora Duncan. Desti undertook various enterprises in Europe, including a cosmetic business. She frequently accompanied Duncan in her travels, and occasionally Duncan lived with her. Duncan was staying with Desti in Nice at the time of her sudden death in an automobile accident on September 14, 1927.

Following Duncan's death, Desti, a casual writer of both fiction and non-fiction, wrote a Duncan biography, The Untold Story: The Life of Isadora Duncan (New York: Liveright, 1929). Isadora Duncan's autobiography My Life (New York: Liveright, 1927) recorded events through 1921, prior to the period when she opened a dance school in Moscow. Desti intended to tell the rest of the story.

Scope and Content
The Mary Desti Collection focuses on the dancer Isadora Duncan. Materials include in-coming correspondence from or relating to Duncan, photographs, ephemera, clippings, programs, artifacts and a scrapbook of newspaper clippings. Mary Desti was Duncan's close friend and biographer. Although the majority of correspondence was received by Desti, the collection does not comprise her personal papers.

Materials are organized in three series: correspondence, printed items, and other materials. The internal arrangement within series is based on format, such as clippings and programs, and chronology. Dates are provided in the container list, when known.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects
Duncan, Isadora, 1877-1927--Archival resources.
Dance--Archival resources.
Modern dance--Archival resources.

Genres and Forms of Material
Dance programs.
Photographic prints.
Artifacts.

Occupations
Choreographers.
Dancers.

Index Terms Related to this Collection
Dukow, Albert, former owner.
Online Archive of California.

1. Correspondence

Scope and Content Note
Series is organized in three subseries which are arranged chronologically. Items date from ca. 1921 to 1930. Many correspondents did not sign full names, and brackets indicate unidentified persons and conjecture by staff. The series includes two letters from Duncan to Desti expressing her need for funds to keep her dance school in operation. Other letters are addressed to Desti from Duncan's friends, including Mary Fanton Roberts, Ruth Mitchell, Mercedes D'Acosta, and French actress Lottie Yorska, all revealing aspects of Duncan's personality and business dealings during the later years of her life. Telegrams primarily express the condolences of friends to Desti upon hearing of Duncan's death.
2. Printed Items

Scope and Content Note
Series is organized in three subseries which are arranged chronologically. Newspaper clippings and a scrapbook of clippings (many from French, New York and European newspapers) illustrating public response to Duncan's performances and career, as well as reporting her death; items date from 1901 to 1929. A small group of programs document several Duncan performances in Europe, including her last dance recital at the Théâtre Mogador in Paris (July 8, 1927) and a memorial recital danced by Maria Theresa. Items date from 1908 to 1927, and a few are undated. Other printed items include a brochure in Russian (presumably for Duncan's dance school), an article proposing a Duncan monument, and a pamphlet concerning Duncan's brother Augustin Duncan.

3. Other Materials

Scope and Content Note
Fragments of a dress and a shawl, reputedly worn by Duncan at the time of her death, as well as the last note she wrote before her death (reproduced in Desti's biography of Duncan). Two photographs depict Duncan alone and with young students. Other items are manuscript notes and ephemeral items.

1. Correspondence

1.1. Letters to Isadora Duncan
Box 1, Folder 1  Mary Desti (ca. 1921)
Box 1, Folder 1  William Aspinwall Bradley (1927)

1.2. Letters to Mary Desti
Box 1, Folder 2  Joe A. Milward (1922)
Box 1, Folder 2  Isadora [Duncan] (1925 and undated)
Box 1, Folder 3  Louis La Chard (August 5, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 3  Louis K. Anspacher (August 23, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 3  Mary [Fanton Roberts] (September 2, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 4  Juliet B. Rublee (September 10, 15, 23 and 24, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 4  Eddy [?] (September 15, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 4  Glenway W[estcott] (September 16, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 5  Elizabeth Henderson Fischer (September 17, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 5  Hottoi [?] (September 17, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 5  Marion Spigarn (September 21, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 5  Tommy S. Bradley (September 21, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 5  "Dougie" [Allan Ross Macdougall] (September 23, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 6  R. Sornin (September 25, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 6  Lottie Yorska (September 28 and 30, 1927 and undated)
Box 1, Folder 6  Jose Clara (September 29, 1927)
Box 1, Folder 7  Alice Spicer (1928 and undated)
Box 1, Folder 8  Clem[ence Randolph]
Box 1, Folder 8  Douglas Rigby
Box 1, Folder 8  H. G. S.
Box 1, Folder 8  [unidentified sender]
Box 1, Folder 9  Yvonne [?]
Box 1, Folder 9  Mario Meunier
Box 1, Folder 9  Edith S. Heald
Box 1, Folder 10  Ethel [?]
Box 1, Folder 10  Augustin Duncan
Box 1, Folder 10  Adeline Mallet
1. Correspondence

1.2. Letters to Mary Desti

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 11</th>
<th>Form letter from Les Amis d'Isadora (1927)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 12</td>
<td>[Mary Desti] to [?] (1930)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3. Telegrams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 13</th>
<th>Received by Desti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isadora Duncan (July 28, 1927)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paris Singer (July-September 1927)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Telegrams dated September 15, 1927</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adelina Mallet</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dougie [Allan Ross Macdougall]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Juliet Rublee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Preston [Sturges]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aimée Gafitzine</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cecile [Sartoris]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Raymond [Duncan]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Helen Freeman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Telegrams dated September 16, 1927</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mario Meunier</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Carlton Hill</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Christine [?]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paula [?]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ralph [?]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[unidentified sender]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mercedes [D'Acosta] (September 18, 1927)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kerstrat (September 24, 1927)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[Juliet] Rublee (September 24, 1927).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Louis [?] (September 26, 1927)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From Villaneuva</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To Raymond Duncan (September 15, 1927)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To Ruth Mitchell (September 15, 1927)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From Boncour to &quot;famille Isadora Duncan&quot; (September 15, 1927)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Printed Items

2.1. Clippings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2, Folder 13</th>
<th>Microfilm of scrapbook of newspaper clippings (1901-1911)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 4, Folder 13</td>
<td>Original scrapbook of newspaper clippings (1901-1911)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access Information

[Restricted due to extreme fragility; researchers must use microfilm in box 2.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 4, Folder 13</th>
<th>Newspaper clippings from Argus de la Presse agency (photocopies for researcher use)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 14</td>
<td>1909-1927, January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 15</td>
<td>1927, September 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 16</td>
<td>1927, September 17-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 17</td>
<td>1927, September 22-27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 18</td>
<td>1927, September 28-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 19</td>
<td>1927, October 1-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 20</td>
<td>1927, October 10-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 21</td>
<td>1927, October 21-1929 and undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 3, Folder 1-6</td>
<td>Original clippings of photocopies in box 1, folders 14-21. (1909-1929 and undated)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access Information

[Restricted due to fragility; researchers must use photocopies in box 1.]

2. Printed Items

2.2. Programs

Box 1, Folder 22
- Isadora Duncan in her "Celebrated Classical Dances" at the Criterion Theatre (1908)
- Dionysion (1915)
- Metropolitan Opera House
  - Isadora Duncan Dress Rehearsal (November 1916)
  - Isadora Duncan (March 1917)
  - Isadora Duncan and pupils of her school (April 1917)
- Box 1, Folder 22
  - Isadora Duncan Dancers (April 1920)
- Program der tänze, Miss Isadora Duncan walzer mit Begleitung Orchester und Klavier
- Récital Listz donné par Isadora Duncan et Irakli Orbeliani (1926)
- Récital Isadora Duncan et Albert Wolff au Théatre Mogador (July 1927)
- Dance festival in memory of Isadora Duncan...

2.3. Other Printed Items

Box 1, Folder 24
- Brochure Isadora Duncan (in Russian) with illustration by Van Deering Perrin (1921)
- Book of verse (in Russian, 1923)
- "There Should be a Duncan Monument," Dance Magazine (1928)
- Advertisement for Isadora Duncan by José Clarã and Georges A. Denis (1928)
- Card for Studio d'Isadora Duncan, Nice
- Pamphlet concerning Augustin Duncan and play, The Breaks

3. Other Materials

Box 1, Folder 26
- Photograph of Isadora and young students
- List of charges at Le Grand Hotel, Juan-les-Pins (August 1927)
- Printed card to Studio d'Isadora Duncan, Nice, containing (on verso) the last note written by Isadora Duncan. Reproduced as illustrations in Desti’s The Untold Story, p. 278. (ca. 1927)
- Manuscript note with caption: "Semaine memoriale Isadora Duncan. Paris, Printemps" (1928)
- Photograph: snapshot of Isadora Duncan in dress given her by Desti. Inscribed by Isadora: "Thank you for the lovely dresses and shawl."
- Manuscript note indicating persons possessing parts of Isadora Duncan's memoirs: Madame Sartoris, Mr. Bradley, Hughes Massie, D. Nickson. Stationery has printed heading: Studio-Appartments Hotel, Paris
- Manuscript note on verso of blank hotel receipt
- Manuscript note (by Desti?) on cardboard
- Manuscript list of names
- Ephemera from restaurants in France
- Envelopes containing fragments of dress and shawl, reputedly those worn by Isadora at the time of her death
- Scarf fragment (Reputedly the scarf that strangled Isadora; published descriptions of the scarf do not coincide.)