Finding Aid for the Elle Johnson papers LSC.2362

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URL: https://www.library.ucla.edu/special-collections
Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: UCLA Library Special Collections
Title: Elle Johnson papers
Creator: Johnson, Elle
Identifier/Call Number: LSC.2362
Physical Description: 0.8 Linear Feet(2 boxes)
Date (inclusive): 1949-2006
Date (bulk): 1950-1979
Abstract: Eleanor ("Elle") Johnson (1922-2006) was a Los Angeles based dancer, choreographer, and teacher known for combining motifs of Afro-Cuban dance with modern dance. The collection is comprised of her personal papers ranging in date from 1949 to 2006, consisting primarily of photographic materials, newspaper clippings, publications, programs, flyers, and dance company administration records.

Language of Material: Materials are primarily in English, one item in Spanish.

Stored off-site. All requests to access special collections material must be made in advance using the request button located on this page.

Conditions Governing Access
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Elle Johnson papers (Collection 2362). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Rollie Lawson; Gift; 2006.

Processing Information
Processed by Carolina Meneses in the Center for Primary Research and Training (CFPRT) in consultation with Genie Guerard, and under the supervision of Courtney Dean and Jasmine Jones.

General
UCLA Catalog Record ID: 8769475

Biographical / Historical
Eleanor ("Elle") Johnson (1922-2006) was a Los Angeles based dancer, choreographer, and teacher known for combining motifs of Afro-Cuban dance with modern dance. She was born in Buffalo, New York, and raised in Columbus, Ohio. She attended Ohio State University where she received a BA in Fine Arts. After graduating in 1942, Johnson moved to New York City to pursue a career in commercial arts. Awestruck by a Katherine Dunham concert she attended, she decided to change her trajectory and pursue dancing. Dunham was a choreographer, dancer, teacher, and social activist best known as one of the founders of the Dunham Technique, which combines traditional African and Caribbean dances with classical movement. Johnson received a scholarship to study under Dunham. She performed many times with Dunham's company and became involved with their costume design. She also took classes taught by José Limón. After three years with Dunham, Johnson moved to Los Angeles (late 1940s) and joined the Lester Horton Dance Group. She performed in Horton's choreographic works, including Another Touch of Klee (1951) and designed costumes for 7 Scenes With Ballabili (1952). Johnson spent six years with Horton's company before forming her own dance troupe (early 1950s), the Elle Johnson Trio with Bruce Bain and David Hebel. They mostly performed in nightclubs, which Johnson came to dislike. She found more satisfaction in teaching dance and as such, taught private lessons on the side. Her students included actors Ty Hardin, Neile Adams, Portland Mason, Sue Ann Langdon, Helen O'Connell, and Irish McCalla. During this time, Johnson was assistant choreographer for such films as, The Robe (1953), The Silver Chalice (1954), Désirée (1954), The Egyptian (1954), and Untamed (1955). She also worked with Ward Ellis on the television film, The Pied Piper of Hamelin (1957). In 1966 Johnson founded her own company, the Elle Johnson Dance Company, which she created "with the objective of providing performing outlets for California dancers as well as a chance for choreographers to experiment (Glass, 1971)." Many of the works Johnson created included motifs of Afro-Cuban dance, as seen in Swadeski.
Other original works like Soleus were more abstract and usually set to jazz music. Johnson’s group performed throughout Los Angeles, from high schools to small theaters. Johnson became part of the teaching staff of the Music Center Dance Academy in 1970. All levels of dance practice were welcomed and Johnson taught modern dance classes. In 1999, Johnson was awarded the Lester Horton Dance Award for her teaching contributions. She retired shortly after. Johnson died of natural causes on March 10, 2006. She was survived by her husband Rollie Lawson and three children.


Scope and Contents
This collection is comprised of the personal papers of Elle Johnson ranging in date from 1949 to 2006, consisting primarily of photographic materials, newspaper clippings, publications, programs, flyers, and dance company administration records.

Organization and Arrangement
This collection has been arranged at the folder level and is organized chronologically.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements
COLLECTION CONTAINS AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS: Audiovisual materials in this collection will require assessment and possible digitization for safe access. All requests to access special collections materials must be made in advance using the request button located on this page.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements
COLLECTION CONTAINS DIGITAL MATERIALS: Special equipment or further processing may be required for viewing. All requests to access special collections materials must be made in advance using the request button located on this page.

Related Materials
Dorathi Bock Pierre dance collection (1937). Available at UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Women dancers -- California, Southern -- Archives.
Johnson, Elle -- Archives
Elle Johnson Dance Company -- Archives

box 1, folder 1 Elle Johnson Dance Trio photographs circa 1950-1966
Scope and Contents
Black and white photographs of the Elle Johnson Dance Trio performing various works, including Calypso, El Pequino, The Blues, Rhumba, and Voodoo. Dancers include Elle Johnson, Henry Dunn, David Hebel, and Bruce Bain. Photographs are primarily 8 x 10 inches; some are 8.5 x 8.5 inches.

box 1, folder 2 Elle Johnson Dance Trio negatives circa 1950-1966
Scope and Contents
Negatives of the Elle Johnson Dance Trio performing various works, including Calypso, El Pequino, The Blues, Rhumba, and Voodoo. Dancers include Elle Johnson, Henry Dunn, David Hebel, and Bruce Bain. Negatives are 8 x 10 inches.

box 1, folder 3-4 Elle Johnson Dance Company photographs circa 1966-1979
Scope and Contents
Black and white photographs, proof sheets, and one color print of the Elle Johnson Dance Company performing live or in rehearsal. Dancers include Elle Johnson, Julia Tarnowski, Benn Howard, Brenda Lockhart, Edwin Brown, and Anthony Wheatly. Works include Vodoun Suite, Assembly, and Swadeski. Prints are primarily 8 x 10 inches; most proof sheets are produced from 35 mm negatives.
box 1, folder 5  Elle Johnson Dance Company negatives circa 1966-1979
Scope and Contents
Negatives of the Elle Johnson Dance Company performing live or in rehearsal. Dancers include Elle Johnson, Julia Tarnowski, Benn Howard, Brenda Lockhart, Edwin Brown, and Anthony Wheatly. Works include Vodoun Suite, Assembly, and Swadeski. Negatives mostly 8 x 10 inches and 2.5 x 2.5 inches, with some 35 mm.

box 1  Photo album of Elle Johnson's performances 1950-1979
Scope and Contents
Album contains mostly black and white 8 x 10 inch photographs of the Elle Johnson Dance Trio as well as the Elle Johnson Dance Company. Also contains clippings, programs, and flyers.

box 2, folder 1  Additional photographs 2000-2006
Scope and Contents
One color photograph of Elle Johnson at the Lester Horton Awards and two photos of Margaret Hills, Genie Guerard, and Anthony Wheatly at Johnson's memorial service.

box 2, folder 2  Additional photographs, undated
Scope and Contents
One photograph of Beatriz Gandara in Mexico; one photograph of a performance that is possibly attributed to Lester Horton; and two unidentifiable photographs. All black and white prints.

box 2, folder 3  Programs and flyers 1949-1979
Language of Material: One program in Spanish related to a performance by Elle Johnson Dance Company in Mexico City, Mexico.
Scope and Contents
Programs related to Elle Johnson performing with the Experimental Group of the Katherine Dunham School, the Lester Horton Dance Group, and the Elle Johnson Dance Company. Flyers advertising Elle Johnson Dance Company performances and dance classes.

box 2, folder 4  Elle Johnson Dance Company administrative records 1971-1974
Scope and Contents
Applications for membership in the Elle Johnson Dance Company; two write-ups about the dance company for promotional purposes; and a notebook with a series of class rosters.

box 2, folder 5  Newspaper and magazine articles about Elle Johnson 1951-2006
box 2, folder 6  Newspaper and magazine articles about Elle Johnson undated
box 2, folder 7  Funeral programs, drawing, African music booklet, Lester Horton exhibition booklet 1937-2006

box 2  Unlabeled CD, undated
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box 2  Elle Johnson video montage, undated
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