

## Guide to the Popular Balanchine Dossiers, 1927-2004 (bulk 1927-1962)

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### Descriptive Summary

<b>Repository</b>	The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Jerome Robbins Dance Division. New York, New York
<b>Creator</b>	The George Balanchine Foundation
<b>Title</b>	Guide to the Popular Balanchine Dossiers,
<b>Dates:</b>	1927-2004 (bulk 1927-1962)
<b>Size</b>	40 boxes
<b>Abstract</b>	Popular Balanchine Dossiers document the Paris and London revues, Broadway work, and Hollywood films choreographed by George Balanchine, 1929-1954. This collection includes research by 20 principal researchers and includes binders with some original but mostly photocopied artifacts for the various titles, interviews with participants, and some scripts and music.
<b>Call Number</b>	(S)*MGZMD 146
<b>Languages Represented</b>	English

### Historical Note

Popular Balanchine was designed to document the works choreographed by George Balanchine for the popular stage and the movie screen. From 1927 to 1931, Balanchine staged dances and musical numbers for revues, variety shows, and operettas in London and Paris as well as creating choreography for *Dark Red Roses*, one of the earliest feature-length talking motion picture made in England. In the United States, from 1936 to 1954, he worked with Vernon Duke, John Murray Anderson, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, George Abbott, George Gershwin, Joshua Logan, Frederick Loewe, Irving Berlin, John Latouche, Felix Brentano, Alan Jay Lerner, Frank Loesser, and Harold Arlen - leading figures of American musical theater - to create two revues, fourteen musical comedies, four operettas, and five Hollywood films that are among the milestones of American popular culture. He also collaborated with Igor Stravinsky on the famous *Ballet of the Elephants* for Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Of Balanchine's enormous choreographic output, these popular works have received far less critical and scholarly attention than have his ballets, but we recognize today that they are an important part of his oeuvre and that they are, indeed, significant works in terms of America's cultural heritage.

To preserve what is possible of this heritage, the George Balanchine Foundation undertook a major research initiative in 1999, realizing that it was time to focus on Balanchine's popular works, while some of the people involved with these productions - onstage, backstage, and in the audience - were still alive. Nancy Reynolds, director of research for the foundation, originated the project and engaged Claude Conyers as project director. The mandate given him was to establish and supervise a team of dance and theater historians to research, assemble, and organize a collection of primary source materials on Mr. Balanchine's popular work. The results of this effort, conducted over a period of five years, constitute a unique collection of documents, printed materials, photographs, memorabilia, audio and video recordings, and transcripts of interviews with participants in a major period in the history of American musical theater.

#### Summary of Research Methods

Popular Balanchine was directed by Claude Conyers, a former publishing executive, who functioned as chief administrator of the project as well as director of research. Since the project covered a diverse body of material and required particular skill in doing original research, he was able to model it on similar projects in scholarly and professional reference publishing, adapting systems and procedures used in the development and production of large-scale historical dictionaries and encyclopedias to the documentation of popular theatrical works.

On behalf of the George Balanchine Foundation, Mr. Conyers formed a multi-tiered team of dance and theater historians and scholars to research and document some thirty-five productions that George Balanchine choreographed

#### Scope and Content Note

The materials collected for the "Popular Balanchine" project include essays written on individual works and summary essays on the project (see "Overview of the Project") or collected titles in a particular medium (see "Hollywood Films"). Included also are printed materials such as playbills, souvenir programs, reviews, articles, book excerpts, and correspondence; graphic materials such as photographs, drawings, set designs, and costume sketches; and other materials such as music (both published and unpublished, some annotated), production notes, prompt books, scripts, and scenarios. Almost every title includes oral history interview transcripts and some include typescripts of published or archival materials, interview summaries, sources of original materials, and compilations of notices and reviews. Most of the materials are collected in binders while some dossiers include additional oversize materials. The first item in most binders is an inventory of the dossier's contents. The bulk of the materials are reproductions (photocopies or digital scans) but the collection does include original artifacts such as playbills, souvenir programs, photographs, music, print excerpts, and some correspondence.

Original audiotapes and videotapes (both in digital and/or VHS formats) were included in the individual dossiers but these, and other audio/visual materials, have been removed from the dossiers and are available separately.

#### Organization

- Series I: Paris Productions: Vaudeville and Operetta, 1927-1931
- Series II: London Productions: Revues, Variety Shows, and Film, 1929-1931
- Series III: Broadway Shows: Revues, Book Musicals, and Operettas, 1936-1962
- Series IV: Hollywood Films, 1938-1944
- Series V: Circus, 1942
- Series VI: Overview of the Project, 2000-2004

## **Restrictions**

### **Access**

Collection is open to the public. Photocopying prohibited. Advance notice required

### **Restrictions on Use**

For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division.

## **Subjects**

### **Personal Names**

Aldrich, Elizabeth, 1947-  
Banes, Sally  
Caines, Christopher  
Chazin-Bennahum, Judith  
Conyers, Claude  
DeFrantz, Thomas  
Dorris, George E.  
Fullington, Doug  
Garafola, Lynn  
Genné, Beth  
Hardy, Camille  
Hill, Constance Valis  
Horwitz, Dawn Lille  
Hunt, Marilyn, 1937-  
Mattingly, Kate  
Newman, Barbara  
Palfy, Barbara  
Reynolds, Nancy, 1938-  
Ross, Janice  
Sommer, Sally R.

### **Organizations**

The George Balanchine Foundation

## **Administrative Information**

### **Custodial History**

### **Preferred Citation**

The Popular Balanchine Dossiers, (S)\*MGZMD 146. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

### **Source**

The George Balanchine Foundation

Administrative Information

The following items are available separately:  
CD recording of dance music, George Balanchine Foundation, 2002;

- Zip disc with writing of compiler Camille Hardy;
- Peter Deign interview audiotapes;
- Peter Deign interview VHS videotape;
- Peter Deign DVCAM videotapes;
- Michael Ellis interview audiotape;
- Michael Ellis interview VHS videocassette;
- Michael Ellis interview DVCAM videocassettes;
- Audrey Keane interview audiocassettes;
- Audrey Keane interview VHS videocassette;
- Audrey Keane interview DVCAM videocassettes;
- Patricia Poole interview audiocassettes;
- Jack Lawrence interview audiocassette.

Box  
35 - 36

Boxes 37-38 ?  
36-37 ?  
Dana Division call number  
M 62MD 146

*House of Flowers* compiled by Tommy DeFrantz. (1954),

Inventory, background materials (photocopies of print sources and one original symposium program), programs (photocopies and one original souvenir program), notices and reviews, photocopies of photographs, and transcripts of interview with Louis Johnson, Mary Louise, Mary Mon Toy, Walter Nicks, Margot Small, Rawn Spearman, and Glory Van Scott.

Also includes: photocopy of original working script, photocopies of music selections, and sheet music *Vocal Selections from the Off - Broadway Musical "House of Flowers"*.

The following items are available separately:  
Compact disc: CBS Special Products recording (A 2320), *House of Flowers* (1990);

- Louis Johnson interview audiotapes;
- Louis Johnson interview videotapes;
- Mary Mon Toy interview audiotape;
- Walter Nicks interview audiotapes;
- Walter Nicks interview videotapes;
- Margot Small interview audiotapes;
- Margot Small interview videotapes;
- Rawn Spearman interview audiotape;
- Glory Van Scott interview audiotapes;
- Glory Van Scott interview videotapes;
- "Dance session with Margot Small Barnes" audiotape.

\*MGZR  
Musical Comedy  
House of Flowers  
clipping

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Box  
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**Series IV: Hollywood Films, 1938 - 1944**

[Hollywood films] compiled by Beth Genné (1938 - 1942),

Binder entitled "Hollywood Films" (book 1), compiled by Beth Genné details all the materials collected concerning Balanchine's Hollywood films. Materials specific to the individual film titles were redistributed into binders labeled by film title; see binders for *The Goldwyn Follies* (book 2), *I Was an Adventuress* (book 3), *Star Spangled Rhythm* (book 4), and *Follow the Boys* (book 5).

Materials on the Hollywood film of *On Your Toes* (1939) are in Series III, Box 9-13, Binder 6.

Book 1 includes lists of related materials held by the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Warners Brothers Archives, University of Southern California, Regional History Center, University of Southern California, University of California at Los Angeles Special Collections, and the Dorathi Bock Pierre Dance Collection, Beverly Hills Library; photocopies of printed sources including reviews and notices, some original artifacts, and transcripts of oral history interviews with Ray

NPL Digital Collections

Walter Nicks

Dana - Margot Small Bourne  
Louis Johnson

Interview - Margot Small

Glory Van Scott

Gene  
H. Gascone

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## POPULAR BALANCHINE: ORAL HISTORY

**Interviewee:** Mary Mon Toy (identified as MMT)  
**Interviewer:** Thomas DeFrantz (identified as TD)  
**Subject of Interview:** *House of Flowers* (1954)  
**Date:** 7 September 2001  
**Place:** Mary Mon Toy's apartment in New York City  
**Number of Audio Cassettes:** 1  
**Transcriber:** Katherine Myers  
**Copyeditor:** Claude Conyers

**MMT** A lot of things are confidential, though. I don't want to be quoted. I don't want any bad feelings.

[Tape stops, then resumes running]

**MMT** Balanchine knew that I wasn't a dancer, so he was very nice to me. But he did say that I had to dance, and I'm not a dancer. And these people are graduates of Katherine Dunham and Syvilla Fort and Jack Cole, and I told you confidentially on the phone, they were mean. I was the only white girl, Caucasian, non-black, they gave me a hard time, because they were kids. I was a little older. I'd been around. But they used to hide my hat for the "Mardi Gras" number, or they would take away the umbrella in the cockfight number, and I'd be late for my cues, and I wouldn't go on. I got help from the stage manager. I didn't complain, but the dresser told the stage manager, "They're giving Miss Mon Toy a hard time." So they gave me my own dressing room.

**TD** That is good for them. [Pause] Well, Miss Mon Toy, let me read my paragraph, so we can start.  
[Reading] My name is Thomas DeFrantz. I am interviewing Mary Mon Toy for the Popular Balanchine research project. Our subject is the show *House of Flowers*, produced on Broadway 1954. Ms. Mon Toy was an original member of the ensemble of *House of Flowers* in both the Philadelphia and Broadway productions. I am hoping that she and I can discuss many aspects of the show including its creation, its choreography, and how it was received by audiences. I'm especially interested in her memories of working with George Balanchine. Today is the seventh of September 2001 and we are in Miss Mon Toy's apartment in New York City, sitting at her table.

OK, that's everything they ask me to say at the beginning of the tape.

[Addressing MMT] Well, can you start by telling me a little bit about your background, where you started, where you were born, where you grew up, where you started dancing and singing?

**MMT** Is that all necessary for the documentary?

**TD** I'd love it.

**MMT** OK. I have a book. You know, the book that you take around to agents. I happen to have it out here instead of in the basement. [Looking for books and moving about] Then I have another, of when I got into show business. [Opening books, back at the table] This is the earlier book.

**TD** That one is earlier? Let me start with that one then.

**MMT** I don't know why I keep these things. But, you know, being in show business—

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for read  
Mary Mon Toy  
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[*Looking at clippings in book*] Well, these are some of the people I worked with, Joey Adams, Phylliss Sincere, Toy and Wing [famous Asian-American tap dancers]. These are résumés from friends. These are people I worked with when I did stage shows. I don't know where some of them have gone, but they were around. Here's how it all started.

My mother was Japanese and my father was Chinese and Hawaiian. I don't think this is important. Anyway, my mother came to visit her aunt in Hawaii and met my father and they fell in love. Of course in those days, Chinese and Japanese didn't get along. Objections from both sides of the family and so, they weren't disowned, but they weren't favorably considered. But when the kids came, we lived with my Chinese grandmother and she said "Speak Chinese." And so she would talk to me [in Chinese]. I was eight when my father died. Then my Chinese grandmother died and my Japanese grandmother came over from Japan. She said "Don't speak Chinese. Speak Japanese!" So to this day I get the two confused, but I manage to get around.

TD So were you in Hawaii, then?

MMT We were in Hawaii at the time. Then, my mother said we should move over to her sister's, who lives in Seattle, Washington. So just myself and my older brother came to Seattle. Then Pearl Harbor came.

We had to go to internment camp because my mother was Japanese, and I was half Japanese. So they put us in a state fair ground, where they weren't ready for us. There were barracks and stalls and stables, and it was just awful, with guards all around and barbed wire and everything. Then they shipped us to Idaho—Minidoka, Idaho. There they were ready for us. They had all the housing, and the bathhouses, and the kitchen and everything, but they still had the guards, you know.

They didn't put the Germans away; they didn't put the Italians away, but because we were Japanese [they put us away]. And they brought them down from Alaska—papooses [i.e., children]—because they were part Japanese. It was really unbelievable.

One day Mrs. Roosevelt came to speak to us. [*Imitating Eleanor Roosevelt's distinctive, high-pitched voice*] "I'm here on behalf of Franklin. We want to know if you are being mistreated or spoiled, but everybody must take an IQ test."

We all had to take IQ tests and then my brother got a scholarship to Syracuse, because he had maybe a year of university. And I got a scholarship to Juilliard, Institute of Music. But we had to have a sponsor. My sponsor was a Baptist minister. He and his wife lived in Ridgewood, New Jersey. And every morning I had to make their breakfast and catch that eight AM bus to New York and go to Juilliard. I was falling asleep because when I got home I had to help with the cooking, and then on the weekend I had to do the laundry. They had a wonderful maid. My instructor at Juilliard said, "You can't keep this up. I'm getting you a room in International House."

And she got me a room at International House, a little tiny room. You had to share the bathroom, too, you know, shower and everything. And then the school considered that I didn't have any money, [so they] let me have old music. I had to learn Italian—you learn Italian first—and French. And then there was a broken-down piano that I used to practice. At lunchtime and at supertime I got my meals free, because I was the cashier. I worked in the cafeteria.

So, one day there was an ad in the *Daily Mirror*. It said, "Wanted: Oriental show girls. Must be at least five feet six." Well I was five foot six, "and able to move." It didn't state that I had to dance or anything. So I went down and I got the job. And I still lived at the International House, but I had to live closer to my work, so I got a room at the Wellington, which is right near.

You see it is all gone now. It [the place where I worked] was called The China Doll, but now it is a motel or something. It was quite a place. We'd get celebrities come in: Lucille Ball,

Desi Arnaz. It was quite the place, and it was an unusual place because there weren't any Oriental nightclubs before.

TD When was this, about?

MMT 1946.

TD So, it was right after you came to New York?

MMT Yes, and then an impresario from Paris saw me in the show and offered me a job in Paris at the Nouvelle Aide [phonetic], which is on the left bank near Le Sacre Coeur. And so I went to Paris, from China Doll I went to Paris. And while I was there a very distinguished gentlemen named Mr. Lou Walters saw me, and he thought I was Indonesian and didn't speak any English. So he offered me a job at the Latin Quarter. He said it was a big cabaret. So he gave me a round trip fare and a contract and I came back to New York. Cause I got tired of pushing the lingerie and the champagne. We had to do two shows at Nouvelle and I was getting homesick. And so, one day [at the Latin Quarter] we were rehearsing, and he heard me speaking English to the stage manager, and he said, "You didn't tell me you could speak English." I said, "You didn't ask me." [Laughter] But he kept me anyway. ?

It was there [at the Latin Quarter] that Saint Subber, Peter Brook, Harold Arlen, Truman Capote—Balanchine wasn't with them—came to see the show. And that particular night that they came, Diahann Carroll had won a contest called, "Chance of a Lifetime." And her prize was to sing at the intermission between the two shows. And she'd never been on stage before. She had an Afro hair, nothing here [indicating her bosom], and big feet. I couldn't find shoes for her. He threw her into my dressing room and said, "Get her ready."

TD Who did?

MMT Mr. Walters.

TD Mr. Walters did.

MMT So then I found a pair of mules, I couldn't find any shoes for her, she had two big feet, two in ten and a half. So I put mules on her and I put little falsies in here, and I cut her hair into like a French hair cut and I put lashes on her and lipstick, and I fixed her up, and I pushed her onto the stage. She'd never sung before on a [stage], you know. So she sang with her arms behind her back. She sang beautifully—"Why Was I Born?" [a song by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, popularized by Billie Holliday]—and she got a wonderful hand. We didn't know that these bigwigs were sitting at the ringside table, and we had little pages like the Phillip Morris boy, dressed in that red uniform. They brought a note back saying that they wanted to see Miss Carroll and they wanted to see Miss Mon Toy.

So we went down and there they were. Saint Subber, Peter Brook, Oliver Messel, Truman Capote, and they said, "We're doing a musical called *Maison des Fleurs*, *House of Flowers*, and we'd like you to come and audition at the Alvin Theater. So we went.

She [Diahann Carroll] got the part of Violet. She was the draw for the Pearl Bailey House of Flowers because she was a virgin, and I was the attraction in Madame Tango's, which is Juanita Hall's house, because I handled "Oriental novelties" divinely. But I had competition [for the part]. I had Pat Suzuki; I had Miss Hong Kong, Miss Japan, Shirley Yamaguchi, but I got the part. They didn't even ask me if I could sing or dance. They just said "Lift your skirt up."

Higher, higher, higher," and they said "Great legs" and "What's your bust size?" and when I said "34 B," they said "Fine. You got the job." [Laughter]

So that is how Diahann and I became very good friends. When she got married to the agent, I was the attendant, more or less a maid of honor. And then our paths parted and she went on to bigger and better things, and then I went into *The World of Susie Wong*. And Josh Logan had seen me, and he liked the way I looked. He said, "I'm not holding auditions yet, but [come to see me] when you come back."

[Mon Toy reminisces about her career, recalling various incidents but confusing the chronology of events over two decades. She says that Gene Kelley asked her to audition for *Flower Drum Song*, a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that was directed by Kelly and produced on Broadway in 1958. She recalls that she refused his offer in favor of taking a role (Minnie Ho) in *The World of Susie Wong*, a play by Paul Osborn that was directed by Joshua Logan and produced by David Merrick in 1969. She then tells an anecdote about going to see David Merrick in order to get seats to his sold-out production of *42nd Street* in 1980.]

**TD** Let's go back to when Diahann Carroll came to the Latin Quarter. Now when do you think that was? That would have been right in 1954? Right around the time, just before rehearsals?

**MMT** Yes, before *House of Flowers* went into rehearsal. It's been so long.

**TD** Sure, that's why we are going to try to—

**MMT** I can't remember. It was in the 1950s.

**TD** Well, the show opened in December in New York, and in November in Philadelphia.

**MMT** I think it was New Year's Eve that we opened in New York. Wasn't it?

**TD** The thirtieth. The day before New Year's Eve. But right there, right at the end.  
So that was your audition,? Wasn't much to it, to your audition, really.

**MMT** Then they found out I could sing, and they were very happy. And then Balanchine said, "Can you dance?" And I said, "No. I'm a singer."

**TD** Now when did you see him?

**MMT** Well, he was there the first day of the reading rehearsal. And he and Saint Subber and Peter Brook and Balanchine, we were all seated on the stage in chairs with the script in front of us. And they came in and introduced themselves.

That is when Pearl Bailey said to me, "This here is a colored show, what for we need an Oriental chick?" And I said "I'm lending you atmosphere, madam." The whole bunch laughed. They said, "She's pretty witty." And she never liked me after that. And the curtain call, she didn't want me to take the curtain call bow. She had me stuck on the balcony of one of the sets and the scrim hid my face and everybody said "What happened to the Oriental girl?"

That's Pearl Bailey. She was real mean. And opening night, Juanita Hall gave each of us a dram of beautiful perfume, and the boys got pens. Pearl Bailey gave us a telegram that was stuck on the bulletin board, "Wishing you a happy opening." She was real cheap, real cheap. Even the stagehand and the dresser said that. She wasn't a nice person. I'm sorry. Wonderful



performer. I give her all that. But she was an unhappy woman.

**TD** That's too bad. So, but Balanchine was there at that first reading. And then—

**MMT** And then, we rehearsed in the lobby, we rehearsed, because everybody was rehearsing, in the ladies room. We were all divided, and the dancers, of course, we got to use the stage and Balanchine was nice, he said, "I know you are not a dancer. I'm taking you out of the "Turtle." There was a big number called "The Turtle and the Sea," a beautiful number, but I don't know how to do all those things that dancers do on the floor, so I didn't have to do that. But I was in the "Mardi Gras" and I was in the cockfight scene and all the other numbers.

[The "big number" Mon Toy remembers as "The Turtle and the Sea" was the "Voudou" scene (act 2, scene 3). Miriam Burton sang the role of Duchess of the Sea and male dancers represented various sea creatures, among them a turtle.]

And I was a principal. I had a wonderful line. The phone is supposed to ring. And Madame Tango, Juanita Hall, is supposed to be talking, but apparently it didn't work and so, I've forgotten exactly what happened, anyway, I'm supposed to knock on the door and say, "Madame Tango, the students are here for the lesson" meaning the men are here for their good times and—I forget, very vague, now—but the phone wasn't working so she made up something. I can't remember what it was now, but it brought up a big laugh.

She [Juanita Hall] was wonderful. She knew I was a professional, because she had heard that I was down at National Theater, and we had stage shows. She knew I had much more experience in show business than the other kids, who were just kids, just from dancing school. But Juanita was very good to us. She was like my big sister. She told me which of the guys that came to the stage to go with.

Then I became the big sister to Glory [Glory Van Scott]. Because she was just a kid. She didn't even eat right. She was always eating meat and potatoes and never vegetables. And she had this big black mole on her face and I finally got her to go to a dermatologist and have it removed. And it wasn't cancerous and she was lucky, but that thing distracted from her because she had a lovely face. This black mole. I was instrumental in getting her a good dermatologist. And I always told her about these guys that come on with gifts and flowers. I said, "Be careful." Big sister, even today I'm her big sister. And she called me "big sister" and she's my "little sister." So we've been friends all of these years. We go way back.

**TD** So the company was very young, huh? The dancers, the singers.

**MMT** Oh, yes, they were all young.

**TD** That's interesting. Now, this was your first Broadway show, is that right?

**MMT** Yes.

**TD** Good, so let's go back to rehearsals. So you were rehearsing all over the theater, in the theater. For about six weeks. Is that right?

**MMT** Yes

**TD** That is what Walter Nicks remembered. He said you started probably in October and the first

preview was at the end of November, just around Thanksgiving, the twenty-fifth.

**MMT** Didn't we go to Boston?

**TD** Philadelphia.

**MMT** We didn't go to Boston?

**TD** No, not Boston, just Philadelphia. And then that is when Mr. Balanchine left the production and then you came into New York with Herbert Ross.

**MMT** Yes, he flew in with Carmen de Lavallade and Alvin Ailey and that is how they and Geoffrey met, Geoffrey Holder. And she [i.e. Pearl Bailey] was instrumental in getting rid of Peter Brook, too. She was terrible. She got rid of Balanchine. But Herb Ross was smart enough to leave most of the numbers that Balanchine had choreographed.

**TD** He did?

**MMT** Yes, he left the cockfight number. He left the "Mardi Gras" number. He left "The Turtle and the Sea" number. It has been so long, I can't remember what other numbers we had except "Two Ladies in de Shade of de Banana Tree."

Josephine Premice threatened to quit, and Balanchine said, "Go, go. Quit, quit." And she was fired. She was causing trouble between Ada Moore and Enid Mosier, and those were the two ladies in the shade of the banana tree. Josephine Premice wanted that to be her number. She wanted to be the only one. And she began to cause trouble, so they fired her. She never made it to Broadway. On her résumé she claimed that she had. She did make the revival, off Broadway, but they replaced Mamselle Honolulu with a Hispanic girl, Claudia.

[Mon Toy originated the role of Mamselle Honolulu, one of the five Tango Belles.]

**TD** Harper?

**MMT** No, Claudia. It was a Hispanic girl. I was so furious because I wanted to play that part. They could have gotten another Oriental girl, but they didn't. They changed the role from Mamselle Honolulu to— I've forgotten what her name is.

**TD** Dolores Harper?

**MMT** No, Dolores Harper was in our original show. This is Claudia something. In the off-Broadway show. The revival.

**TD** Oh, I see, yes. So those rehearsals— Let's see if we can go back to the rehearsals a little bit.

**MMT** Gosh, it has been so long.

**TD** I know.

**MMT** Well, you got most of it from Walter and Louis [i.e., Walter Nicks and Louis Johnson].

*Note: Use Boston Supri Wang?*

TD Not at all, that is why I'm here talking to you, please.

MMT They didn't remember much?

TD Well, everyone remembers different things.

[Tape stops while Mon Toy answers the telephone.]

MMT [*Looking at materials displayed*] What is all that?

TD It is some photographs. Here are some programs from the first two. You have the program from Philadelphia that has the Josephine Premice's name still in it. And other people. She was Tulip, I guess.

MMT Who?

TD Josephine Premice.

MMT Oh, she was? She wasn't in the tango, though.

TD No, Tulip was one of the Fleurs. And then she was replaced by the time you got to New York.

MMT Yes, she was fired.

TD She was fired.

MMT I have all of my stuff in the basement, in a trunk, and I'd have to go to the super. But listen I can will it; I can leave it to you. If you want.

TD That would be fantastic.

MMT Oh, listen, have you seen this book? I think you'd be interested in it.

[Long pause. When conversation resumes, Mon Toy and DeFrantz continue looking at pictures and identifying people pictured, including Mon Toy, Water Nicks, Louis Johnson, Margot Small, Hubert Dilworth, Leu Comacho, Glory Van Scott, and Mary Louise. ]

[Tape stops while Mon Toy answers the telephone.]

TD So you were in the rehearsal, and Mr. Balanchine had said to you, "Are you a dancer?" or "I know you're not a dancer"?

MMT No. As he walked along he would say, [*imitating Balanchine's Russian accent*] "Do you dance?" And I said, "No. I'm a singer." And he said, "Oh, well, we'll make you dance." He was so nice. He was fair to everybody. He was considerably nicer to me because he knew I wasn't a dancer. But I got into it, and I paid my dues, and I gained the respect of the kids. I'm glad but I didn't snitch on them. I didn't complain. I just kept on being Oriental. You keep that stuff within you.

[*Laughing*]

But I really love that show. Well, we were really too risqué for that era. Because the

boys were topless, and we girls had costumes— For my entrance I had this beautiful— six of us were dressed in wonderful Dior costumes, carrying an umbrella. Marlene Dietrich helped sew the fringes on the umbrellas. One of the wardrobe ladies said, “Who’s that pretty lady?” I said, “That is Marlene Dietrich.” “The actress?” “Yes.” She was going with Harold Arlen at the time. So she was backstage all of the time.

[The five Tango Belles— Pearl Reynolds (Mamselle Ibo-Lele), Leu Comacho and Margot Small (The Sisters Meringue), Mary Mon Toy (Mamselle Honolulu), and Glory Van Scott (Mamselle Cigarette)— made their entrance dressed entirely in black. Each was wearing a chic afternoon dress and hat, designed by Oliver Messel, and was carrying a furled black umbrella.]

[Mon Toy’s next-door neighbor, Devin, stops in to say hello]

**TD** So Marlene Dietrich was around all the time?

**MMT** Yes, and she had her daughter with her, Maria Riva. She was backstage helping. One night she offered me a ride in her limo because I was waiting for a cab. People were standing, wandering all around, the minute we got in the car, she was [*demonstrating a strange posture, at which TD laughs*] I said, “Miss Dietrich, are you all right?” When we got in front of her home— she lived on the East Side— she perked up. That is the way she got her relaxation. I was scared, I thought something had happened to her. And she was very nice to me, too. When she did that one-woman show, she was spontaneous, just wonderful. She came down this long winding stairway. And she gets to the mike and she says [*imitating Dietrich’s deep voice*] “Hello.” [*Laughter*] She was wonderful.

Oh, I met some wonderful people. It has been a good life.

**TD** Now, you must have been in the tango number, yes? Madame Tango’s solo? And Mr. Balanchine staged that, so you have a lot of choreography there. Do you remember anything at all? That’s the one song that is not on the album, either. So I have no idea what that one sounded like.

**MMT** Isn’t that funny. I wonder why they didn’t put that one—

**TD** No, it’s not. I thought I had it somewhere.

**MMT** I know we did a lot of dance steps. Partly Spanish, flamenco. It was a wonderful number. Why isn’t it in the album?

**TD** It wasn’t recorded.

**MMT** What a shame. And we were all in unison. It was wonderful. We twirled our umbrellas. And then we closed them and danced with them on our shoulders. It was a wonderful number. I’m so sorry that didn’t record that number. I guess they couldn’t record it because it was more dancing than singing.

**TD** Maybe so. They don’t usually record all of the numbers. But one of the interesting things is that the tango number in [previews in] Philadelphia came very late in the show, after the “Voudou,” but then when you opened on Broadway, it was moved up to the top.

**MMT** Because the audience loved it. We got a terrific hand.

**TD** So that is why they moved it?

**MMT** They moved it up, yes. We did a lot of rehearsing.

[During the tryouts in Philadelphia, "Madame Tango's Tango" was performed in act 2, scene 4. By the time of the Broadway opening, it had been moved to act 1, scene 1.]

**MMT** That's all we went to was Philadelphia? I keep thinking we went to Boston. I don't know why.

**TD** No, you had a few weeks in Philadelphia, and then just a very short time in the theater. And then the new opening.

**MMT** The word around was "Don't take Aunt May to see the show. It is too risqué." I had a costume. I had pasties on my boobs, and a sheer silk white kimono, and a pink obi. It was gorgeous. They pulled my hair back, and they put flowers, cherry blossoms, on top. And no jewelry, I was supposed to be *au naturelle*. I remember on opening night they went [gasps] because they thought I had nothing on. And they saw these pasties. It is a good thing I had a bust.

I still have good legs, and that was important. It was unusual for an Oriental girl, in those days, to have good legs. Now, with the mixture of blood and everything, [it's not]. In those days for an Oriental girl to have good legs was unusual, because most of them had stumpy legs and were short. But I had long, slim legs and, as they said in *Chorus Line*, "tits and ass." That got me going.

It's all wonderful. I have no regrets.

**TD** The costume and set photographs are just gorgeous.

**MMT** Oliver Messel designed them. He is the famous British designer. You know who used to hang around with us? Tony Richardson, the director. He was always with us and ate with us and he later married Vanessa Redgrave. He is the father of Natasha. He was handsome. Oh what a dreamboat. There was a nice relationship with all the British. Peter Brook and Oliver Messel and Tony Richardson.

**TD** How did Balanchine seem to fit into that? Did he get along with Peter Brook, as you remember?

**MMT** Yes, very well.

**TD** What happened? Why did Mr. Balanchine's staging get redone? Why did he get let go?

**MMT** I think it was Pearl Bailey. She threatened to leave the show.

**TD** Did she? She must not have been in many of the numbers, though.

**MMT** No, she had one number, where she is introducing the planter, who is an Italian fellow. I can't think of his name. [It was Dino DiLuca.] Introducing the virgin, Violet [Diahann Carroll]. It was more a talking number. She didn't dance at all. But she did most of the talking. I think she sang one song, I can't remember it. Is that on the album? Does she have a number?

**TD** Yes, she has a couple. "One Man Is Not Enough." That is a great song.

MMT A good number.

TD But that must not have had much staging, I wonder why she didn't like Balanchine?

MMT I don't know, she was very hard to get along with. She sent her maid down; we dressed in the basement. She wore 10½ size shoes. She had old dresses and coats and stuff. She told the maid to ask if we wanted to buy them. And I said, "I have originals from Christian Dior," because I used to model Christian Dior in Paris, you know, between shows, in the morning. The maid went back and said, "Miss Mon Toy says she has originals from Paris and she doesn't want any." That made her madder then ever.

TD I guess so! [Laughter] That didn't help.

MMT She didn't even speak to me. I wasn't going to take that shit from her.

TD Good for you.

MMT Who does she think she is? I think she is wonderful, but personally I wouldn't want her to be my friend.

TD Well, she was wonderful in front of an audience. That's for sure.

MMT Yes, but she had a lot of hidden demons.

TD Stuff going on.

MMT Juanita Hall was just the opposite. Openly generous, loving. Oh, she was so wonderful. Such an opposite. And Pearl Bailey didn't like her either. She said that Juanita Hall had bad breath. She spread all of these rumors around. Juanita Hall would take us out to dinner and lunch. Pearl Bailey never took anybody out. She was so tight with her money. Even her dresser said she was lucky to get anything. Can you imagine? She was assigned by the management of course. I'm sorry, I hate to tell you these things, but they're true.

TD No, no. I've heard it before. It's not a surprise.

MMT Good.

TD I'm wondering, the Turtle number. I thought I had a tape of it of the music, that is what I was searching for. I'm really sorry, I don't seem to have it.

MMT Do you have the album?

TD Yes, I have the album. This photograph from "Voudou" number. Someone described that as the turtle thing they did; where they were a turtle.

MMT They all wore white and they were supposed to be under water. It was fantastic.

TD And that was Mr. Balanchine staging?

MMT Yes,

TD And they kept that?

MMT Yes, Herb Ross left that in. [*Looking at pictures*] How did you get these? Those are wonderful.

TD Well, those I found in a book. But we are very short on photographs, so I'll be very keen to see at some point whatever you have.

MMT Well, I'm sorry the trunk is in the basement. I can't. Why don't I will it to you? Leave you all these.

TD I would love that, of course. Can you tell me much about the rehearsing at midnight? When they brought in Herbie Ross.

MMT Oh, God, I think we rehearsed to three or four in the morning.

TD You really did.

MMT We got paid for it though.

TD But still that's—

MMT Well, we were exhausted. I slept all day. Herbert Ross, nice guy, more modern, but he was smart enough to keep Balanchine's numbers. He kept most of them. I don't think he introduced any new numbers. Did Walter or Louis—

TD Well, he added the "Slide, Boy, Slide" number. A whole new number.

MMT Oh, yes, that was his number. Just the fellows did that. You can't touch Balanchine's work. You can't compare. I was sorry to see Peter Brook go because we got along fine. And Oliver Messel was his close friend, British, and Oliver Messel did such beautiful work even the phonograph, you know the horn part, was in the shape of a flower. It was just wonderful. And he did a great job in our costumes. And the sets were wonderful. And so when they fired Peter Brook. Oliver Messel left the show. It wasn't the same. That wonderful feeling was gone. That camaraderie that was existing.

And Truman Capote, he's a character. On opening night he dressed like [inaudible]. [*Laughing*] And he bought the champagne. He was very generous. Of course, he speaks like a little boy, but I liked him. There was something about him, and when I opened in *Susie Wong* he sent me a telegram, "Always in a house" [*laughing*] because again [I was in] a house [of prostitution]. Those are wonderful memories. It is a shame. Brilliant. Even today some of his stories are filmed, like "The Grass Harp" and "Other Voices, Other Rooms." He could write. And then that thing with the murder, *In Cold Blood*. That was terrific.

TD Do you remember? Would Mr. Balanchine teach the choreography and then you would work on it, work on it, work on it? Or did someone else teach it? How did that work?

MMT Walter and Arthur [Walter Nicks and Arthur Mitchell], they stepped in when Mr. Balanchine wasn't available.

**TD** And they would show you, and you'd just review and review and review.

**MMT** Yes, they were worse than he was because they wanted it perfect. And they'd drive us crazy. But we got it. We did it. And when it was all over, we hugged each other. They finally accepted me. It was such a good feeling. Only after I got my own dressing room. Up to then they were very mean to me because they were kids. And I was a little older. But it was a wonderful experience. And I'm so glad I got the part because when you see the competition. Pat Suzuki, Miss Hong Kong, Miss Japan, Shirley Yamaguchi, the movie star. Wow, and I got it because I had nice legs and tits. [*Laughter*]

**TD** And a personality and talent too.

**TD** Do you remember something that Walter Nicks said, that you rehearsed one version and then two weeks before you went to Philadelphia there was a lot of restaging. A whole new version. Do you remember that? What happened?

**MMT** Well, Pearl again. Pearl put her two cents in, and in order to keep peace I guess Balanchine relented because there were a lot more difficult things, but she wanted this, she wanted that. Just to please her, because she threatened to leave. I think to keep peace they acquiesced. She was a bitch, I'm sorry to say. Wonderful performer.

I'll never forget she was in a musical with Gene Barry and she speaks to the audience, she says, "If you don't write a good review, I'm going to tell my father to send you a letter." That was when Truman [President Harry Truman] sent a letter to the paper because they said something bad about his daughter. Remember? Margaret Truman did some singing or something, and the reviews were terrible. So Pearl Bailey said "If you don't write a nice review, I'm going to tell my father to write you a letter."

**TD** That's funny.

**MMT** She was funny, but—

**TD** Off stage,

**MMT** Off stage. I liked her husband but he was a milquetoast, and she was the boss. He was just "Yes, dear. Yes, dear." A real milquetoast. Of course, he remarried, I understand.

**TD** I think so.

**MMT** I liked him, he was nice, nice to everybody. She was very possessive. If he stopped to talk to us then [*makes a funny noise and then laughs*].

[Pearl Bailey was married to Louie Bellson (né Luigi Belassoni), drummer, composer, author, and conductor.]

**TD** Do you remember much about the difference? Or was it just two different versions of the show? When he restaged, when Balanchine restaged, reworked.

**MMT** Gee, I don't recall. It is so long ago.



**TD** Sure it is, I know. And you've done so much since then.

**MMT** But I know that Nicky and Arthur, they stepped in and they were more severe than Balanchine. They really wanted it right now. [*Clapping hands*] Now! Now. Don't wait. They were much more strict. But he relied on them..

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A. BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.]

**TD** Did you see Mr. Balanchine again after he left the show?

**MMT** No, nobody saw him. He was missed though.

**TD** And that was in Philadelphia, yes? He stopped coming.

**MMT** What?

**TD** In Philadelphia, he stopped coming. Is that when he was fired?

**MMT** Yes. I'm not much help to you, am I?

**TD** Yes, you are. We're getting some nice stuff.

Can you tell me anything about his sort of style or his personality? He said some things in passing, Mr. Balanchine.

**MMT** Well, like when he was introducing himself, he said, "You dance?" I thought that was funny. I said, "No. I don't dance. I'm a singer." "We'll make you dance," he said. I thought that was kind of cute. Actually I was hired as a principal, but I really didn't have to dance, but then they found out that I could move and that I could sing and so they put me in, not the "Turtle" number and not the "Voudou," cause my face would stand out. As the "Voudou" was more or less relegated to the black people. Right?

**TD** Yes.

**MMT** I wasn't in that, but I was busy. All the costume changes in the wings. You couldn't go back to the dressing room. You had to dress in the wings, and change pretty fast. But it was fun. And I'll never forget closing night, Juanita Hall sat on stage left and Pearl Bailey sat on stage right, and we were packed. People were standing room only. And Juanita Hall says, "Where the hell were you the past few weeks? We could have used you." [*Laughing*] Jam-packed, you couldn't get tickets. When word came out that we were closing, headlines said "Flowers Fade" but Juanita Hall says, "Where the hell were you the past few weeks? We could have used you." She was wonderful.

**TD** You stayed with the show right through the end of the run?

**MMT** Oh, yes. And there was a rumor going around that the reason we closed-- We could have gone on. It wasn't a long time for a show to be running. We could have gone on, except that CBS owned that theater, and they had promised it to somebody that was coming in, and we had to get out. We were sort of forced out. We could have lasted longer. Because we were about to be in the spread. But you see we were kind of shocking. Bare chests and pasties and so on, I think in those days--

It isn't like today. But we lasted for six months, which is pretty good. We could have lasted another year, but there was some kind of rental problem. CBS owned the building they promised it to someone else coming in. We had to get out; we were more or less forced out. Did you hear that from anybody?

**TD** No, I hadn't heard that yet.

**MMT** You might, if you talk to some others. Whom did you talk to, Walter and Arthur and- ?

**TD** So far, to sit down and talk it's only been Mr. Nicks and Louis Johnson.

[Conversation continues about cast members whom DeFrantz might interview: Glory Van Scott, Margot Small, Mary Louise, Rawn Spearman, and others.]

**MMT** I'm afraid I wasn't much help to you, but I did the best I could.

**TD** I think you did fantastic, and I'd like to look through your album here, now.

**MMT** Oh, thank you. I don't need the book anymore. You might look through these and then put them back.

[Conversation continues about Mon Toy's career in the theater and on television.]

**MMT** It has been a good life. I have no regrets. I wish I could work more, but, you know, I'm disabled. But I'm determined not to get depressed. I think positive. I try to exercise as much as I can.

**TD** Good. That's important.

**MMT** So I can dance again. I miss dancing.

[Mon Toy and DeFrantz look at photographs.]

**MMT** This was *Susie Wong*.

**TD** That is a fantastic shot..

**MMT** Isn't it great? Great legs.

**TD** Good legs. I know.

**MMT** [*Indicating some of her memorabilia*] This is all junk. This is the collection.

**TD** Well, I want to thank you. Obviously.

**MMT** Oh, thank *you*.

[END OF INTERVIEW]